



# PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

The Depth and the Riches of God's  
Saving Grace  
(Chapters 1-11)



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24<sup>th</sup> Annual

West Virginia School of Preaching  
Victory Lectures



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(Chapters 1-11)

24<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**West Virginia School of Preaching**  
Victory Lectures

*Hosted by:*  
Hillview Terrace church of Christ  
Moundsville, West Virginia

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## Foreword

Many have mentioned in their lectures that someone said, “If you get Romans, God gets you.” While it is hard to know who originated this phrase, it was a favorite phrase of brother R.C. Bell (BibleSupport.com).

Bro. Bell is one of several within the church that has written a commentary on the book of Romans. It seems Romans has often grabbed the attention of our fellowship, probably because it explains the depths of what God did for all humanity when sacrificing His son and tells humanity what it needs to do because of that sacrifice. Romans has also caught the attention of many theologians in many different denominations and belief systems. The books written on Romans could take up many shelves in the library of the world.

Why would another volume on Romans be needed? Of course, this volume is full of authors who are attempting to correctly interpret and comment on the texts of Romans 1-11, which is needed to combat false ideas that have been suggested by others. The authors of this book have worked hard to make this information available and are thanked for what they have done.

Not all previous authors are incorrect, though; so, why is another book on Romans needed? Because the truth cannot be repeated enough! Romans proclaims how God wants us. Romans announces the grace of God being made available for every single person in the world, yet many in the world have still not responded to this message; “and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (10:14). This volume may repeat things that have been said before, but even if it does, it is another proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, which is always needed.

The elders of the Hillview Terrace congregation, who hosts these lectures, need to be thanked for making this proclamation possible. Their oversight of the school deserves recognition as they are doing everything they can to make the Gospel more available throughout this region, nation, and world. The lectureship committee also needs recognition and thanks for choosing the theme on Romans 1-11: *The Depth and the Riches of God’s Saving Grace*. They also have selected the speakers and topics and do much of the work to make sure this lecture continually runs smoothly. The elders



and the committee create an important infrastructure that supports the Gospel being taught.

In addition to these groups, the work of two individuals deserve recognition for making this lectureship, book, and reiteration of the Gospel of Christ available. Andy Robison continues to direct the West Virginia School of Preaching with grace and wisdom. His thoughtfulness in approaching everything concerning his ministry is appreciated, and when seeking his advice and encouragement, one is guaranteed that it will be based in Scripture.

Katie Gilchrist continues to produce high-end work. She started proofreading for me personally and then for students at WVSOP. She was then recognized for her efforts by Andy, who asked her to work on this book. Since she became the proofreader for these lectureships, she has been able to work with several editors, publishers, and authors, helping produce articles and books both in the field of theology and, recently, branching into fiction. She studies to improve her knowledge of writing and style and has earned the right to be appreciated for her contribution. She uses her abilities most of all to bring glory to God, not only in proofreading, but also in all she does.

With these thoughts, I pray you find this volume helpful to the growth of your faith and that it will help you to better get Romans so God will get you.

*Jack Gilchrist  
27 August 2018*



## **Dedication**

### **Charles and Sharon Pugh**

Inspiration instructs us to “[r]ender therefore to all their due . . . honor to whom honor” (Rom. 13:7). Charles C. and Sharon (Beeson) Pugh III met at Harding College (University) and were married 21 June 1969. There is a vivid, divine comparison between marriage and the church that all ought to imitate (Eph. 5:17-33). Scripture teaches that “children are a heritage from the LORD” (Psalm 127:3); subsequently, Charles and Sharon have been blessed with three faithful children: two daughters, Mrs. Mendy (Ben) Brewster and Mrs. Nicole (Brandon) Lack, and one son, Charles (Chip) C. (Nicole) Pugh IV. The Pugh family’s home and life have been an example of continuous Christian service in West Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, Mississippi, Colorado, et al. There are numerous disciplines in the life of Charles and Sharon Pugh III that make dedicating this year’s lectureship book to them all the more relevant. Their life together includes much more than described in the following disciplines:

## **The Discipline of Growing in the Knowledge of Jesus**

Charles graduated from Harding College in 1970 with a degree in Bible and speech education, as well as a certification as a secondary teacher. After graduation, Charles and Sharon began working with the late Jess N. Nutter and the Harmar Hill congregation in Marietta, Ohio. Realizing the need for additional biblical knowledge, Charles and Sharon moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where Charles enrolled in Harding Graduate School of Religion (Harding School of Theology), studying apologetics and philosophy under the late and beloved Thomas B. Warren. This additional training equipped Charles to be a better Christian, preacher, student, and servant of Christ, thereby fulfilling the Scripture to “grow in the grace knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

## **The Discipline of Servanthood**

For success in any endeavor, our mates are of great importance emotionally, spiritually, and physically. The attitude of Charles and Sharon is demonstrated in the words of Jesus, “[W]hoever desire to become great among you, let him be your servant” (Matt. 20:26a). They have served the Lord in various congregations in Marietta, Ohio; Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio; Parkersburg, West Virginia; and New Martinsville, West Virginia. No longer in located work, Charles is called to fill the pulpit for some congregation to preach the good news of the Gospel almost every Sunday.

Charles and Sharon have ambitiously followed the teaching of the great Apostle Paul, whose aim was to be well pleasing to the Lord rather than live by personal ambition. Charles has imitated the words “[D]o you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them . . .” (Jer. 45:5) and “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Just as those in the medical field seek to improve the health of others, Charles has ambitiously served others by making people’s lives more worthwhile here and helping to prepare them for eternity. They have followed many known and unknown Christians in the history of Christendom by helping others to handle the storms and trials of life, and at the same time, and often unknown to others, both have struggled with their own serious health issues. They have never quit. They are not going to quit until

called to a better home.

## **The Discipline of Teaching**

Ambition is healthy when one forgoes self-centeredness and lives the Christian virtues (2 Peter 1:5-11; Gal. 5:22-26). It was Charles' desire of wanting to train men to preach the Gospel, as well as God's providence, that he was one of the five founders of the West Virginia School of Preaching (Wirt Cook, Emanuel Daugherty, W. Terry Varner, and R. C. Oliver are the others). He has been able to utilize his earlier training in apologetics and philosophy to train other men by encouraging them not to be ashamed of Christ and the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), but to be serious, lifetime students of the Bible and servants of Christ. From the very first classes of WVSOP, Charles has continued to teach all apologetics courses. While filling the courses with the teaching of the Bible, He has supplemented them with rich and valuable additional information on Christian apologetics. His students have been able to reap richly from his dedication.

## **The Discipline of Apologetics**

Charles' desire of bringing glory to God, while influencing hundreds of Christians and non-Christians from all over the world, is evident in the work of the Warren Christian Apologetics Center (WCAC) in Parkersburg, West Virginia. As the executive director of the non-profit organization, Charles, along with the board of directors, has arranged debates with atheists and produced many resource materials faithfully affirming and confirming the existence of God, the Bible is the Word of God, and the deity of Jesus. Charles has tried to fulfill the words of the Apostle Peter, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear . . ." (1 Peter 3:15, KJV). His dedication in the work of the Warren Center, and I speak personally, is for no other reason than the cause of Christ. The response of brethren nationwide has been overwhelming. His graduate school mentor, the late Thomas B. Warren, would be more than well pleased with the tremendous success of WCAC and its work in the field of Christian apologetics. Anyone knowing Charles knows of the great influence

the late and beloved Thomas B. Warren has had upon him. While Thomas B. Warren's influence continues its effect on Charles and his work, he admits that other well-respected Gospel preachers, Jess N. Nutter and R. C. Oliver, "means more to me in my work than anyone." Charles' lecture "The Foundation of Civilization (Romans 1:18-32)" in this year's book is evidence of his apologetics ability and should be carefully read and studied by all. It is truly a masterpiece.

### **The Discipline of Writing**

"[M]y tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe" (Psalm 45:1, ESV). With his training, Charles has learned to reason logically and has armed himself with the ability to effectively proclaim God's Word. Proclaiming God's Word can take many forms. Charles uses the discipline of writing to great effectiveness. His two lectures in this year's lectureship book show the depth and richness of both his knowledge of the Bible and his discipline of writing. His two lectures are worth the price of the book. While Charles maintains a full speaking schedule, he has utilized the discipline of writing with the encouragement from many others. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) wrote in 1605: "Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and ability. . . . Crafty men condemn studies; simple men admire them; wise men use them." Charles fulfills Bacon's criteria by producing written lectures, sermons, syllabi, essays, tracts, booklets, books, et al. Charles thinks of the many books that could be and should be written with the desire to strengthen the faith of others. It is not that he wants to see how many books he can write and publish, but it is his deep desire that people come to know God and Jesus our Savior, to instruct the ignorant, to resolve those who doubt, to comfort the dejected and disquieted, and to admonish all to have the mind of Christ (Philip. 2:5). He ever encourages others to prepare themselves to think, to teach, and to write effectively, all for the cause of Christ. May we continue to be blessed, to enjoy, and to meditate upon the rich fruits of his thinking, writing, and labors.

It is more than fitting that the 2018 lectureship book on the doctrinal teaching of Paul's great epistle to the Romans be dedicated to this outstanding Christian couple who have demonstrated that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1

John 5:4, KJV). May their example of faithfulness ever be a beacon to all who read, study, and hope in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

*W. Terry Varner*

*1 August 2018*

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# INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

*Romans 1:1-7*

*Emanuel Daugherty*

It is good to be back in Moundsville with this great congregation of God's people at Hillview Terrace. It is a special treat for Judy and me because of our wonderful relationship with this church over the past quarter century. We appreciate the work that Brother Andy is doing as director of the West Virginia School of Preaching, as well as the labors of Scott Judge.

My assignment for this hour is an introduction to the book of Romans. All quotations will be from the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible unless otherwise specified.

In our beloved brother Gene West's opening paragraphs in his splendid commentary on Romans, he describes the writer of the book: "With all the skill of a polished logician Paul laid down eternal truths in the Book of Romans that will be found nowhere else in the New Testament. He moved smoothly and gracefully from one argument to the next in which he upheld the sacred principles of the Gospel" (iii).

Paul's letter to the Romans is an overview of God's Scheme of Redemption. It speaks of the Fall of Man, that though he knew the truth of God's existence, yet he abandoned Him in favor of idols. He speaks of the plunge into the depths of sin to which the whole human race fell. Even God's chosen people, the Jews, in spite of their advantages, were equally guilty before the righteous judgment of God. The Book of Romans speaks of the immense grace of God, which provided a way of escape from sin, and how men could live a life approved of God and in the end have eternal life with Him. Someone has said, "If you get Romans—God gets you!"

## **Authorship**

Interestingly, several persons may be identified with the actual

writing and delivery of the letter to the Romans:

- 1) The Holy Spirit is the divine author, who reveals the things of God to men.

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,  
Nor have entered into the heart of man  
The things which God has prepared for those  
who love Him.”

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Cor. 2:9-10)

- 2) The Apostle Paul is the inspired human author; so conclusive is this that there has never been any serious challenge from Bible critics that he wrote the book. He begins the letter with his name: “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ . . . [to] all who are in Rome . . .” (vv. 1, 7).
- 3) Paul dictated the letter to a man who speaks of himself as, “I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle” (16:22). Tertius, then, as Paul’s amanuensis, is the one who took the actual pen in hand and wrote.
- 4) Then, there is a woman identified as Phoebe, commended by Paul to be received by the church in Rome when she comes to them, who lived in Cenchrea, just nine miles south of Corinth; she is believed to be the person who hand-delivered the epistle to the church in Rome (16:1-2).

### **Purpose of the Letter to the Church of Christ in Rome**

First, Paul desired to see the Roman Christians in order to have a part in their edification and spiritual maturity. He wanted the saints in Rome to know of his intense personal desire to preach the Gospel in the city of Rome “that I might have some fruit among you also . . .” (1:13). As God’s chosen “apostle to the Gentiles,” this would be a great spiritual desire. He said by this “I [would] magnify

my ministry” (11:13).

Secondly, Paul evidently knew there was something lacking in the Roman church and expressed a desire to come to them that he might lay hands on them to “impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established . . .” (1:11; see 12:6-8). What was needed, we are not told, and what gift of the Holy Spirit he gave to them, we do not know, but we can surmise that whatever spiritual gift Paul could pass on to them would aid in the maturity of the church.

Thirdly, he had plans involving his work among the Gentiles to go on to the western end of the Mediterranean to Spain, where he could preach the Gospel. He wanted the church in Rome to help in this missionary effort (15:17-24, 28). Thus, he is writing to them in order to get more acquainted with them personally. Paul does not write to correct errors; there are no internal church problems dealt with in the book of Romans as in Corinth and among the Galatians. Merrill Tenney remarks that “Romans is chiefly didactic [instructive]” (305).

David Roper, in his introductory remarks, points out that Romans was not a simple, “first principle message” (9). Their faith was known throughout the world (1:8); and Paul says they were “filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another” (15:14). These statements show that the Roman Christians had a developed maturity. They were ready for the deeper things of the Gospel (cf. Heb. 5:12). As one writer points out, the Book of Romans is “*no light snack* for the soul,” but rather, “It’s a *full-course meal* . . .” (Swindoll qtd. in Bell).

Through the years, many have questioned Paul’s writing to a church that he had not founded (Colossians is another). The answer may lie in the listing in the last chapter of so many names of people that Paul knew in Rome. Since he had not ever been to Rome, his knowledge of so many brethren there may have resulted from his having met them in other places where he had previously preached. No doubt, some of them he had converted.

## **Establishment of the Church in Rome**

The city of Rome was the capital of the empire. It was the most important city in the world. It had a population of one to two million people in the first century. The church in Rome was already firmly established by the time Paul penned his letter. The church already had a reputation of faithfulness and obedience (1:8; 16:19).

The Roman Catholic Church has a long-held tradition that Peter established the church in Rome and lived there a quarter of a century, serving as the first pope from AD 42 until his death in AD 67. However, there are no facts to verify such a tradition. The facts show Peter could not have started the church in Rome: 1) Peter was imprisoned in Jerusalem in AD 44 (Acts 12). 2) Peter was an active participant at the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15. He is described as a pillar in the church in Jerusalem in AD 50. 3) At some time in that decade, he was in Antioch of Syria, where Paul rebuked him to his face in Galatians 2:11ff (Taylor 2). There is no evidence that neither Peter, nor Paul, nor any other apostle was ever in Rome until Paul came there as a prisoner (Acts 28). This simply means that neither Paul nor Peter nor any other apostle had established the church in Rome. If an apostle had started the church in Rome, there would have been no need for Paul to go to them to impart a spiritual gift to further establish them since spiritual gifts were imparted by the laying on of apostles' hands and he would have made sure they were lacking in nothing (Rom. 1:11; Acts 8:14-15).

Therefore, the question may be asked, "If an apostle did not found Christ's church in Rome, how did it begin?" Two thoughts are given as possibilities:

First, men and women who were already converted to Christ by apostles and evangelists in other countries and provinces moved to Rome and started the church. Such would have been people like Aquila and Priscilla, whom Paul met in Acts 18:1-2, who had been expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius. The church at Antioch in Syria was begun after this manner (Acts 11:19-21).

A second possibility comes from the list of Jews from many nations assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost, among whom were

“visitors from Rome” (Acts 2:10) who, hearing and obeying Peter’s answer to the question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37), they repented and were baptized (2:38). Upon returning to their homes in Rome after Pentecost, they started the church. By the time of the writing of the letter to the Romans, the makeup of the church consisted of both Jews and Gentiles.

The Roman Catholic Church has long made the claim that the Apostle Peter founded the church in Rome. There are several avenues of investigation that show Peter’s role in founding the church of our Lord in Rome to be an impossibility.

Paul claims that he did not build on another man’s foundation (Rom. 15:20). That would be a false statement if Peter had founded the church in Rome.

Next, there is no reference in the book of Romans or any other Scriptures to Peter being in Rome prior to the time Paul wrote the letter.

[I]t is difficult to imagine that Paul could have written as he did if Peter had in fact founded the church. . . . Acts 18:2-3 implies that Priscilla and Aquila, who came from Rome, were already Christians when they arrived at Corinth and became companions of Paul. If so the church existed before AD 49, since Priscilla and Aquila were banished under the edict of Claudius. But this date is before Peter moved from Jerusalem. (Gutherie 303-04)

Furthermore, Peter was still in Jerusalem at the time of the meeting of the apostles and elders in Acts 15 over the matter of circumcision of Gentile converts; this took place in AD 50. The reason for folks like Priscilla and Aquila being sent from Rome is stated in the writing of Suetonius, a Roman historian of the first century. It was because of rioting at the instigation of one Chrestus, Christ (Guthrie 393).

Therefore, Peter had no part in the establishment of the church of Christ in Rome.



## **Date and Place of Writing**

Late AD 57 or early AD 58 is the consensus of conservative scholars as the time of the writing of the epistle to the Roman saints. Corinth is the place of composition, based upon four lines of evidence from Paul's itinerary: 1) Paul was going to Jerusalem to deliver the funds collected from churches throughout Greece for benevolence to needy saints in Jerusalem. 2) He was in Corinth for three months prior to going to Jerusalem (Acts 20:3; 24:17). 3) This collection was still being taken up when 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 were being written. 4) The context of the book of Romans indicates that the collection had been completed and he was about to deliver that collection to the Jerusalem church (15:24-25). Thus, the city of Corinth provides the adequate time and place of writing for the Roman epistle.

## **Theme of the Letter to Rome**

Paul's epistle to the Roman saints was to show them that salvation from sin does not come from the Law of Moses or from one's personal merit (1:14-17). Also, he shows that salvation is not by faith alone—just mental agreement—but by obedient faith, as was the case with Abraham (chapter 4). He quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, telling them, “the just shall live by faith” (1:17; cf. Hab. 2:4). By this, he is telling them that the Gospel is the revelation of the faith by which a person could be just before God and how they should live. The system of faith was designed by God for all, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles, and for men of all ages until the Lord comes again.

## **Brief Outline of the Book of Romans**

- I. Paul's Salutation and Introduction—His Great Interest in the Roman Church (1:1-15)

### **PART ONE—DOCTRINAL (1-11)**

- II. Theme of the Epistle (1:16-17)
- III. The Universal Need of Salvation (1:18-2:29)

- IV. How Salvation is Acquired (3:1-5:21)
- V. Dead to Sin—Alive in Christ (6:1-23)
- VI. Judaism/The Law Is Not the Governing Factor of Redemption (7:1-25)
- VII. Christ Is the Governing Factor in Redemption (8:1-39)
- VIII. Gentile Acceptance and Jewish Rejection (9:1-11:36)

PART TWO—PRACTICAL (12-16)

- IX. Conformity and Transformation (12:1-21)
- X. Christians Are to Obey the Law of the Land (13:1-14)
- XI. Matters of Faith and Liberty vs. Opinion and Optional Matters (14:1-23)
- XII. Mutual Concern and Paul’s Plans for the Future (15:1-33)
- XIII. Greetings, Salutations, and Closing Admonitions (16:1-27).

**Developing the Text (vv. 1-7)**

“The first seven verses form one long sentence (93 words in Greek, 127 in the New American Standard Bible (NASB))” (Roper 28). [This ought to make my task easy—only one sentence to discuss!] However, this sentence is typical of what one finds in the letter to the Romans and in most all Paul’s letters, one thought leads to another thought, then another, and another. Following Paul’s train of thought can be a great challenge!

In the opening verse, Paul is introducing himself since he is unknown to the church in Rome. He humbly describes himself as “a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” He is a slave, one who is bound, not to any man, but to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He says he is “called to be an apostle” (v. 1) not what he was *to be*, but what he *already is*. Paul describes himself as separated or consecrated (Roper 30). Simply speaking, Paul is telling us that he is *set apart* for a specific purpose. When he was known as Saul of Tarsus, he was a Pharisee, a form of the same Greek word that is translated as *separated*. As a Pharisee, he was separated from others by prejudice and hatred, a part of the strictest sect of the Jews’

religion (Acts 26:5). Now, Paul is separated, consecrated, for a much nobler purpose, that is, “to the gospel of God” (v. 1). As such, he is the especially “chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

The apostle quickly shifts the attention away from himself and centers it on Christ, who is the “all in all” of Scripture (Col. 3:11).

The Gospel is divine. It is God’s Gospel because it originated with Him. The framing of the Gospel, the plan of salvation, began in eternity, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:11). The Scriptures are holy because they contain the promises of God and are the words of God faithfully recorded by inspired men. Whiteside gives this important note: the Gospel “was in no sense a product of man’s theorizing or philosophizing. It was not a mere addition to the law of Moses . . . Paul did not preach his conception of Christianity, but he preached the gospel as the Holy Spirit moved him” (8).

The apostle says what God promised before in the Old Testament by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerns His Son Jesus Christ (v. 3). “Of peculiar interest is the fact that both the first century Jew as well as present-day millennialists deny the gospel age was prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures” (Jobe 21). Jewish rabbis since the Middle Ages have contended that prophecies of the Old Testament were not addressing Jesus Christ but were speaking of the nation of Israel or some other notable personage, such as Abraham, or Moses, or one of the prophets.

Note these strange comments by a noted Premillennialist:

The New Testament makes plain according to the premillennial interpretation that God’s present purpose is not the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament . . . Premillennialism places the millennium after the second advent and therefore divorces it from the present church age . . . The present age is a parenthesis or a time period not predicted by the Old Testament and therefore not fulfilling or advancing the program of events revealed in the Old

Testament foreview. (Walvoord qtd. in Jobe 21)

The millennialists say that the Old Testament had nothing to say about the Gospel Age. However, the New Testament is packed virtually to the brim with fulfilled prophecies of the *first* coming of Christ and events of the Gospel Age and His church/kingdom! Note a sampling of Old Testament prophecies:

- *Isaiah* spoke of Christ predicting the Virgin Birth (7:14); the Son who would rule and govern (9:6-7);  
“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.” (11:1-2)
- *Jeremiah* calls our attention to the Christ in this manner:  
“Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD,  
‘That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;  
A King shall reign and prosper,  
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.  
In His days Judah will be saved,  
And Israel will dwell safely;  
Now this is His name by which He will be called:  
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’”  
(23:5-6)
- *Daniel* predicted the Messiah’s kingdom:  
“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand

forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.” (2:44-45)

- *Zechariah* prophesied of Him:  
“. . . Behold the Man whose name is the BRANCH!  
From His place He shall branch out;  
And He shall build the temple of the LORD;  
Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.  
He shall bear the glory,  
And shall sit and rule on His throne;  
So He shall be a priest on His throne,  
And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” (6:12-13)

Paul proves both Jews and millennialists in error as he affirms that the Old Testament Scriptures *did* speak of Jesus. Paul spoke of it as “the gospel of God which he promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures . . . who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh . . .” (vv. 1-3). In saying this, Paul addresses the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was a descendant of David according to the flesh through Mary (Luke 1:27). Matthew begins his Gospel account saying, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David . . .” (1:1). The Old Testament addressed the fact that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). Jesus was the “Word [that] became flesh and dwelt among us . . .” (John 1:14). He was fully man, as John emphasizes (1 John 1:1-3).

Moreover, Paul speaks of the divinity of Christ in verse 4 when he said He “was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” This is not saying that He *became* deity at the time of His resurrection, as

some of the Gnostics claimed (the Word was, and is, always deity). This passage of Scripture is saying that His deity was established beyond question by His resurrection from the dead. “His Sonship is proven by the resurrection and His resurrection is proven by *many infallible proofs* (Acts 1:3) . . .” (Winters 16, emphasis added). The resurrection is the ultimate, crowning proof of His deity (1 Cor. 15:1-4). What more could be done to prove His divinity than has already been done?

With this masterful introduction of the Christ, Paul now comes “full circle—back to himself” with a brief description of his calling to apostleship (Roper 33). God, speaking of Paul to Ananias, said, “[H]e is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Through Christ *we* (Christians), *have received grace* though we were unworthy and undeserving of it. Paul describes himself as the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:9). His apostleship was for “obedience to the faith among all nations for His name . . .” (v. 5).

Christians in Rome, Jews and Gentiles from all nations, are called (separated) to Christ by the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Just as Paul was a called apostle, so too are the beloved in Rome called saints. In other words, they were not *to be* saints, i.e, sometime in the future. Saints is what they already were. They had already been called; they were already saints. One is not dead, usually for hundreds of years, and then “canonized,” made a “saint” by a committee and vote of others, based on meritorious works. There were as many saints in Rome as there were Christians. Every baptized believer is a saint, set apart for God’s service.

The purpose of Paul’s apostleship was to bring Gentiles into the obedience of faith. This is the first time the word *faith* is used in this epistle. It is not describing a dead, sterile faith—saying, but not doing. James describes this kind of so-called faith as dead, being alone (2:24, 26). Rather, biblical faith is a faith that believes and obeys. It is the “faith [that] comes by hearing . . . the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). It is the faith of Abraham; “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (4:3; James 2:23).

This faith comes by hearing the faith (Gospel) “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). It is the faith that saves! This is the Gospel that Paul preached to convert the Gentile world. “[T]he Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). This is the faith that must be preached today to save men!

This faith is to be preached among all nations, every creature, for His name, Jesus Christ! By His power and in His name, men were healed of sickness and disease! In His name, demons were cast out! In His name, the dead were raised! This is the name that is above all names and to which every knee shall bow (Philip. 2:5-11). It is the name by which we are authorized to worship and serve (Col. 3:17). And it is in His name that men are saved (Acts 4:13). It is in His name that we are washed from our sins (Acts 2:38)!

To all that are in Rome, Paul sends his apostolic greeting. They are God’s “beloved” (v. 7). He could have simply said, “To the church,” or, “To the congregation,” at Rome. But look at the superlatives—they are His “beloved . . . called . . . saints” (v. 7)! How could any man or woman, boy or girl, in Christ ever doubt the love of God? Paul extends the Lord’s “Grace [His unmerited favor] . . . and peace [with God, self, men] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 7).

The Father and the Son hold out the benevolent hand of grace and peace to people lost and undone, except for Love—the Divine Condescension, the Plan of the Ages without which no person could be saved. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

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## **Biographical Sketch**

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He has preached for the Alkire Road church of Christ in Grove City, Ohio; the Dewey Avenue church of Christ in St. Marys, West Virginia; and the Salem church of Christ in Marshall County, West Virginia. Emanuel served as the first director of the West Virginia School of Preaching.

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# PAUL'S PASSION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

*Romans 1:8-15*

*Charles C. Pugh III*

The basic text of Scripture with which this assignment is concerned is a paragraph of eight verses in the first chapter of Romans. The text is set forth as follows:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. (Rom. 1:8-15) [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

At the invitation of the lectureship committee, Terry Jones and I were asked to craft the lectureship format for this series of lectures from Romans 1-11, including the texts and corresponding titles for the lectures to be delivered. Originally, we assigned the title for the lecture based on Romans 1:8-15 as The Praise, Prayer, and Passion of Paul. However, upon giving additional thought to this original

title I had attached to this text, the words “Paul’s Passion to Preach the Gospel” seemed to better summarize the thrust of this great passage.

### **Seven Descriptions**

With the above title, Paul’s Passion to Preach the Gospel, before us, I set forth seven key words to describe the nature of the content of this text. These words are 1) *substantial*, 2) *personal*, 3) *emotional*, 4) *spiritual*, 5) *prayerful*, 6) *purposeful*, and 7) *powerful*.

In describing this text as *substantial*, I mean it is extremely meaningful, significant, and valuable, because of two terms of great substance that anchor the text. These terms are *gospel* (vv. 9, 15) and *faith* (vv. 8, 12). To the Corinthians, Paul identified the Gospel he preached as consisting “of first importance . . . that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . .” (1 Cor. 15:3-4, ESV). Concerning *faith*, the book of Hebrews says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11:1). These two terms (*gospel* and *faith*) are, in one sense, as substantial as any found in the Bible. *Gospel* (good news) is the message reported, and *faith* is the manner the Gospel is received, which entails obedience from the heart (Rom. 6:17) to the form (pattern, mold) of the Gospel (death, burial, and resurrection of Christ) (6:1-7, 17). Thus, the New Testament speaks of obeying the Gospel (10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8-9; 1 Peter 4:16-17).

The text is *personal*. The first-person personal pronouns (*I, my, mine*) appear no less than eighteen times. The second-person personal pronouns (*you, your, yours*) are used some thirteen times. The text is *emotional*. Barclay says, “[T]he warm affection of this passage still breathes through it, and we can feel Paul’s great heart throbbing with love . . .” (15). The text is *spiritual*. Paul references how he served God “with [in] my spirit” (v. 9). He desired to “impart” to the Christians at Rome “some spiritual gift” (v. 11), the result of which would be both he and they being established (KJV,

NKJV, ASV, NASV), or strengthened (ESV) and “mutually encouraged” (v. 12, ESV), encouraged (NKJV, NASV), or comforted (KJV, ASV).

The text is *prayerful*, *purposeful*, and *powerful*. Here is a text that implies how great a prayer warrior Paul was. Paul’s prayers in reference to the church at Rome were hinged to the undergirding purpose of his life, (to preach) the Gospel—to preach Christ and Him crucified (Rom. 16:25-27; 1 Cor. 1:17, 21; 2:2; 9:16, 23; 15:1-11; 2 Cor. 4:1-14; 5:22; 10:3-5; 1 Thess. 2:4; 2 Tim. 4:1-8, 16-17; et al.). Paul’s passion for prayer and his passion for preaching were grounded in the love of God, revealed ultimately in the Gospel of Christ, the power of God, which Paul desired to preach at Rome (Rom. 1:16-17; 8:31-39).

### **Four Propositions**

In addition to the above seven descriptions characterizing the text, I submit four propositions to which Paul gives consideration. These four statements of fact by Paul provide introductory evidence to Romans supporting the conclusion that the Christian faith is ultimately all about the person and work of Jesus Christ revealed in the Gospel. This was the passion of Paul’s life (cf. Gal. 2:20; Philip. 1:21; et al.) in conjunction with the purpose “to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things . . .” (Eph. 3:8-9, ESV). These four propositions are stated as follows: 1) I thank God for you, 2) I pray to God for you, 3) I long to see you, and 4) I am ready to preach the Gospel of God to you.

### ***I Thank God for You***

Paul wrote, “. . . I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (v. 8). It was the practice of Paul as he began his epistles to express his gratitude to God for those to whom he was writing, whether congregations of the church or individual Christians (1 Cor. 1:4;

Eph. 1:16; Philip. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:3, et al.). Paul thanked “my God” (v. 8). Bell observed, “God is very individual and personal to [Paul]. Every Christian should meaningfully say, ‘My God’” (5). Paul was a man of God and a man of gratitude. Paul thanked God for both the existence and esteem of the faith of the Christians at Rome. They possessed faith and their faith was “spoken of throughout the whole world” (v. 8). Pollard says “their faith had been talked about by people everywhere (1:8), and it was this very faith which Paul wanted to know more about so that he could grow stronger” (42). “Although Paul had not been responsible for bringing the gospel to them, this did not inhibit him from giving thanks that Rome had been evangelized” (Stott 56), and through the influence of their faith, they were involved in world evangelism.

### *I Pray to God for You*

As Paul reminded his Roman brothers and sisters in Christ of how he thanked God for the existence and esteem of their faith, he called God as his witness concerning his prayer life. He says, “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you” (vv. 9-10).

Paul appeals to God as a witness in a court. Only God, of whom Paul said, “. . . I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son . . .,” could know that Paul always thought of the Romans when he prayed. This (v. 9) is a powerful reminder that in “Paul’s apostolic ministry, preaching and praying go together” (Stott 56). Such is an extremely sobering thought! It speaks of how earnest Paul is in what he is saying to this church. Morris explains it well: “This is a kind of oath, a very solemn affirmation of the truth of a statement which could only be known by God” (57). How many of us as Gospel preachers would be willing to call God as a witness to our prayerfulness (cf. 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Thess. 2:5)? Paul’s prayers for these Christians were *personal*—his personal

prayers that specifically mentioned *this* church. Paul's prayers were *petitionary*. "*I pray* renders a word which strictly points to petition from a sense of need . . ." (Morris 59). Paul's prayers involved "asking" (ESV) or "making request" (v. 10, NKJV, NASV, KJV). Paul's prayers were *persistent*. He describes his prayers for them as being "without ceasing" and "always" (v. 9). This can have application to 1) continuing constantly in the practice of prayer itself (Luke 18:1), 2) a consistent request in reference to a particular situation, or 3) (likely) both (cf. 2 Cor. 12:8). Paul's prayers were also *providentially* dependent. The specific prayers Paul was praying, in which he mentioned "all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints . . ." (Rom. 1:7), included his request that "by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you" (v. 10). Literally, the meaning here is for one "to be led along a good road, to cause one to journey prosperously, to make one succeed" (Rogers and Rogers 316) and that such be "in the will of God" (v. 10). Paul "presumes neither to impose his will on God, nor to claim to know what God's will may be" (Stott 56). He did want to come to Rome, but his "primary concern was to follow God's leading, not to fulfill plans of his own making" (Morris 59). Murray describes it as resting "upon the providential will of God" (21).

Several years ago, I read a statement written by a great preacher of the Gospel, the late Goebel Music, sent to another great Gospel preacher, the late Andrew Connally. The former (Music) was writing to the latter (Connally) to encourage Connally as he was seeking to recover from exploratory surgery concerning inoperable cancer. He wrote, "Andrew, I have activated the greatest power known to man in this world on your behalf, the power of God through Prayer." When you pray, you put it in God's hands! No one can tap into any greater power than that!

Barclay includes in his comments on Romans 1:8-15 the following eloquent passage about prayer from Gregory of Nyssa:

The effect of prayer is union with God, and, if someone is with God, he is separated from the enemy. Through prayer

we guard our chastity, control our temper and rid ourselves of vanity. It makes us forget injuries, overcomes envy, defeats injustice and makes amends for sin. Through prayer we obtain physical well-being, a happy home, and a strong, well-ordered society. . . . Prayer is the seal of virginity and a pledge of faithfulness in marriage. It shields the wayfarer, protects the sleeper, and gives courage to those who keep vigil. . . . It will refresh you when you are weary and comfort you when you are sorrowful. Prayer is the delight of the joyful as well as the solace of the afflicted. . . . Prayer is intimacy with God and contemplation of the invisible. . . . Prayer is the enjoyment of things present and the substance of the things to come. (7)

### *I Long to See You*

A third proposition Paul affirms regarding the church at Rome is, “. . . I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established . . .” (v. 11). Paul provides at least three reasons why he has desired so fervently to visit Rome: 1) fortification, 2) edification, and 3) evangelization.

First, he desired to see them so he might “impart to [them] some spiritual gift, so . . . [they] may be established.” What is the meaning of “some spiritual gift”? Murray addresses this question in the following:

It is not so certain . . . what specific kind of gift is in view, whether a miraculous gift such as was bestowed and exercised in the apostolic churches (*cf.* 1 Cor. 12:9, 10, 28, 30) or a gift of grace of a more generic character (11:29; 15:29; 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). We are not to take for granted that the former could not be in view. Miraculous gifts were given for the confirmation and edification of the church (*cf.* 1 Cor. 12:9-13, 28-30; 14:3-5, 20-33; Eph. 4:11-14; Heb. 2:4). However, the indefinite character of this expression used, “some Spiritual gift,” would not permit us to restrict the thought to a special or miraculous gift of the

## Spirit. (22)

Paul's initial reason for his desire to see them is "to strengthen" them (v. 11, ESV). *Established* is from *sterizo*, which is a term behind our English word *steroid*. His coming would be for their spiritual fortification.

Second, Paul himself desires to benefit spiritually from them. Therefore, he expresses that he wants to be "encouraged together" by the "mutual faith both of you and me" (v. 12). This is "an explanatory correction" (Robertson 326). Paul "wanted the edification which would take place when he came to be mutual and not one-sided on his part" (Pollard 42). Third, Paul says that he longed to go to Rome and "often planned to come to you . . . that I might have some fruit" among the Romans as he did with other Gentiles (v. 13). This "involved his evangelization of Gentiles . . . Paul wanted to bear fruit . . . that is, to gain converts to Christ" (Pollard 43). Paul is "thinking of converts" (Morris 62). "To the church he wished to impart a spiritual gift to confirm [strengthen] them; to the Romans he desired to preach the gospel to convert them" (Lard 37).

### ***I Am Ready to Preach the Gospel of God to You***

Pollard states, "Paul was not content only to write to the Roman church; he also wanted to preach to them orally and personally" (45). Weighing heavily on Paul was a sense of debt, a deeply felt obligation, to preach the Gospel to all. This included Greeks and barbarians; wise and unwise (v. 14). Greeks and barbarians are "*Greeks and non-Greeks* . . . the totality of mankind" while the wise and unwise are those "the world counts as wise . . . [and] those without understanding" (Morris 64). Murray gives one of the best summations of this when he writes:

[S]ince the stress falls upon *obligation* to be fulfilled it is more natural to take it, with the mass of commentators, as the obligation under which the apostle was placed by God to preach the gospel to all nations and classes (*cf.* 1 Cor. 9:16, 17). The close logical relation of verses 13 and 14 appears in



this that the apostle's repeated purpose to go to Rome in order that he might garner fruit from them was in pursuance of the very terms of his apostolic commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles without any kind of discrimination.

. . . The purpose of these classifications is simply that the gospel is for all without distinction of nationality or cultural development and that he as the apostle of the Gentiles is under divine obligation to preach the gospel to all. (24-25)

The logical conclusion to Paul's argument set forth in this paragraph is found in the final verse, where he says, "So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (v. 15, NASV). This was logical. It followed from the foundation of Paul's faith, which was scripturally based, Christologically centered, and intellectually sound, consisting of words of truth and reason (cf. Acts 26:22-25). However, there is also deep passion and emotion in this; "[t]he preaching of the gospel is in his blood, and he cannot refrain from it . . ." (Bruce 73). Here is a debt that he feels deeply, and it will never be fully discharged as long as he lives.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

With the eight verses that have been before us as the text of this lecture (vv. 8-15), we have handled a text that is brief—but marvelously substantial, personal, emotional, spiritual, prayerful, purposeful, and powerful. It is woven together with two major constituent elements—the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the mutual faith of Paul and the Christians at Rome. These two elements connect with the major proposition (thesis) of this text: Paul is passionate about preaching the Gospel, and especially about preaching the Gospel "to you who are in Rome" (v. 15). For "these many years" (15:23), Paul has had this passion but has been hindered "many times" and unable to come to Rome (15:22, ASV). To these people, the Romans, at Rome, the capital of the empire, Paul writes this book of Romans, called by some "the profoundest book in existence. . . . [The] greatest masterpiece ever conceived and realized by the human mind" (Bell 2). Paul himself describes it best

as he, writing under the claim of the “inspiration of God” (“breathed out by God,” ESV), as per 2 Timothy 3:16 (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16), exclaims the nature of his message as “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom. 11:33).

Did it ever happen for Paul to come to Rome? Bell summarizes the answer with basic details:

Paul besought his brethren in Rome to pray with him for two things: that the Jewish saints might accept the Gentile offering, and that he might be delivered from disobedient men in Judea (Rom. 15:31). His visit to Rome is so linked with these petitions that it is virtually a third petition. Were these petitions granted? The narrative in Acts 21-23 implies that the gift was accepted, and tells the story of Paul’s deliverance from disobedient men and voyage to Rome. . . .

After the Jews with murderous intent dragged Paul out of the Temple, the Romans rescued and held him prisoner in Palestine two years. After this delay, Paul despairing of trial there appealed to Caesar, and was taken as a prisoner in chains to Rome, where his imprisonment continued another two years. In his writing during this latter period, Paul interprets these seemingly barren years as follows: “These things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole Praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear” (Phil. 1:12-14). If God’s intervention, though delaying, probably cancelling, his long-cherished plan of evangelizing the West, and though subjecting him to extreme shame and failure, but increase the harvest of souls, Paul, no matter what happens to him personally, is grateful and cooperative. . . .

According to the book of Acts, many things occurred during Paul’s imprisonment in Palestine and voyage to Rome that seemed to blast all hope of his prayers ever being

answered, or of his ever seeing Rome. But the disobedient, stubborn Jews have been thwarted, and he is in Rome! As he views it all with Christian insight and hindsight, he sees divine purpose and overruling providence threaded through his many perils, sad delays, bitter disappointments, and crushed hopes. . . . Though his future is very uncertain, Paul feels no foreboding anxiety. If his long-delayed trial results in his death, he will go to be with Christ which is indeed “very far better” (Phil. 1:23). . . .

Most probably Paul’s long incarceration ended in his acquittal, and a few more years of freedom. . . . A second arrest and trial ended in Paul’s execution. During an interval between two stages of this trial, apparently, he wrote his “Swan Song:” “I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come . . . At my first defense, no man took my part, but all forsook me . . . But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be the glory for ever and ever” (2 Tim. 4). (203-05)

Paul had made it to Rome as a prisoner for Christ’s sake. As the years continued to pass, his passion to preach the Gospel was still burning. Nearing the end of his life, he was still writing about being ready to preach (2 Tim. 4:1-6). It reminds me of a series of sermons preached in 1955 by the inimitable N. B. Hardeman at the Nashville Road church of Christ in the Number One Community, between Nashville and Gallatin, Tennessee. One of those sermons was entitled “Paul’s Charge to Timothy.” I cite from it in my final words to you:

[A]n old man, the Apostle Paul, rich and ripe in the experiences of life, with his hair doubtless frosted, with his cheeks furrowed, and possibly, his form bended under the weight of all the years and all the responsibility. And with

him is young Timothy, just budding and bursting into the full flower of manhood, looking out upon a future bright with hope, and for whom fancy doubtless painted its brightest pictures. And here we have these two, youth and age, with the latter giving instruction and transferring responsibility to his son. Hence he said to Timothy, "Preach the word" . . . Friends, there never was a declaration clothed in human language or delivered to mortal man, fraught with greater moment to the human family that was this wonderful charge from Paul to Timothy. All gospel preachers are under the command as thus given.

Now, I'm going to raise the question, why did Paul want Timothy to devote his life to the preaching of the Word? Timothy, perhaps, could have attained to heights sublime in other fields of endeavor. Possibly he would have made a great politician. He might have been one of the best bankers, lawyers or surgeons in all the land. But Paul said: "Son, I'll tell you. The greatest work ever committed to mortal man and in which he has the privilege of engaging is to tell the story that never grows old to dying men and women, and to point them to that which transcends the realm of time and launches them out into the fathomless depths of that eternal and boundless Beyond. Hence, preach the Word." . . . "Timothy, preach the word. Bring comfort and joy and consolation to mankind, as on through life you journey." (38-41, 50)

"So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel . . ."  
(v. 15)

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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# THE FOUNDATION OF CIVILIZATION

*Roman 1:18-32*

*Charles C. Pugh III*

In the opening words of his acceptance speech for the Templeton Prize in 1983, the late Russian novelist and short story writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) summed up what can be set forth as a basic proposition implied in the first chapter of the book of Romans. He said, “More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this happened” (qtd. in Banescu).

The theme of the epistle to the Romans is “the gospel of Christ . . . the righteousness of God . . . revealed . . .” (1:16-17). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Stated another way, Romans argues that God makes man right through the Gospel. Man, the result of the creative power of God, was created good (Gen. 1:26-27), but by his own choice, man has gone the wrong way. Although God has revealed the origin and accountability of humans through evidence in the world (vv. 18-20), the human race has not lived up to its accountability to God the Creator. Such has resulted in the refusal of humans to acknowledge the one true God to whom all owe their origin. Paul wrote, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting . . .” (v. 28). Robertson observed, “These people . . . willfully deserted God. . . . The withdrawal of God’s restraint sent men deeper down. . . . [It is] *the loss of God in the life of man*” (330-31 emphasis added).

The purpose of the first chapter of Romans, as well as that of the following two chapters, is not *ultimately* to describe the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual degeneration of an anti-theistic culture. The first three chapters of Romans do that, but they also announce *good news*. They declare, delineate, and defend the proposition that there is a divine remedy for the alienation of humanity from God. The remedy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Solzhenitsyn said about his people's demise—so Paul implies about every nation of men. All this happened because men have forgotten God. What has been called “perhaps the saddest commentary upon the lives and characters of men which can be found in all of literature” (Warren 54) was written by Paul concerning 1) the alienation of man's mind and life from God, 2) the revelation of God's wrath upon man, and 3) the affirmation of the Gospel of Christ as the power of God unto salvation.

From the opening verse unto the final paragraph, Romans is ultimately about “the gospel of God” (1:1), or as Paul intimately calls it, “my gospel . . . the preaching of Jesus Christ” (16:25). The first chapter of Romans can be called *pivotal*, not only in view of the remainder of Romans, but also in view of the rest of the Bible before and after Romans. In a crucial sense, this chapter is one of the most pivotal chapters in the Bible.

From the thirty-two verses that compose the first chapter of Romans, one can pivot to 1) *The Proof of the Gospel* by a) the prophetic Scriptures, b) its place in history, and c) the person of Jesus Christ (1:1-7); 2) *The Passion to Preach the Gospel* as exemplified by Paul (1:8-15); 3) *The Power of the Gospel* (1:16-17); and 4) *The Paramount and Pressing Need for the Gospel* (1:18-32). The above points (1, 2, 3) are implied in Romans 1:1-17 while the last point (4) is implied in Romans 1:18-32.

The fifteen verses in the latter half of the first chapter of Romans establish, in conjunction with chapters 2 and 3, why it is the case that humanity needs the Gospel of Christ. These verses also imply an additional matter often overlooked but extremely crucial to the human situation. Although he did not reference this first chapter that introduces Paul's letter to Rome, the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, in the introduction to a 2014 speech delivered on civic education, quoted the Farewell Address of George Washington, who did say something very important that connects with a basic premise I have been assigned to address from the first chapter of Romans, especially verses 8-32. Scalia said:

Washington is my favorite of the Founders—the one I would most have liked to meet. Not just because he was the indispensable man—the man without whom the American Revolution would not have succeeded. But also because he

is a puzzlement. He was not a great intellect; indeed, he was quite sensitive about his lack of formal education. (He was not even, to tell the truth, that skilled a military tactician as The New York campaign demonstrated.) And he was surrounded by great intellects, who produced great writings—Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson, to name the most prominent. Washington himself wrote not much of note, beyond his famous First Thanksgiving Proclamation and his Farewell Address. . . . Yet all those well-published, intellectual geniuses looked up to, deferred to, stood in awe of George Washington. What *was* there about the man that produced that result?

It must have been character. Washington was a man of honor, of constancy, or steady determination. A man who could be believed, trusted, counted on. (64-65)

In his Farewell Address, delivered September 19, 1796, Washington speaks of what he called “*indispensable supports . . . great pillars of human happiness . . . firmest props of the duties of men and citizens*” (emphasis added). He asked, “Who that is a sincere friend to [free government] can look with indifference upon attempts to shake *the foundation of the fabric?*” (Avalon 299, emphasis added).

### **The Theological Foundation**

Long before Washington addressed what he called “the foundation of the fabric” of human civilization and society (Avalon 299), Paul wrote his letter to Rome with a beginning that implies with ultimate authority and clarity the true foundation of the fabric of human civilization. This foundation is God.

The *theological* is the *logos* about the *theos* (i.e., the logic of God). God is the foundation of the foundations. The remarkable first chapter of Romans implies how foundational the knowledge of God is to humanity and all of creation. When it comes to knowing, nothing is more foundational than God, except in the sense that one might ask, “Can we know anything?” Since it is obvious to rational individuals that it is possible to know something, then reason should cause one to conclude that giving much more than a passing moment to such a question as “Can we know anything?” is in one sense



absurd! To the question, “Can I know I exist?” a professor famously replied, “And who’s asking?”

According to Paul, knowing God, invisible and possessing eternal power and divine nature, actually exists is foundational to what every accountable human being can and should know. Paul wrote,

[W]hat may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [divine nature, deity], so that they are without excuse. . . . (vv. 19-20)

God is the ultimate reality, and every accountable human being is confronted with the evidence for God through one’s own inner self with consciousness, memory, rationality, conscience (a sense of ultimate, absolute good and oughtness); one’s own body, which is both contingent and teleological; other bodies; other minds; the physical universe, which is both contingent and teleological; and numerous additional constituent elements; all of this composes what can be called the one conglomerate argument (i.e., the total evidence warrants the deduction) for the existence of God. When properly deduced from general (natural) revelation in the world and in man, this is not merely a conclusion that is probably or simply assumed to be the case. The force of this is such that Paul says one is “without excuse” if one does not embrace the existence of God (v. 20). Paul’s use of *anapologetos* (“without excuse”) implies the conclusion necessitated by general (natural) revelation is more than just probable. *It is certain!* It means “the state of being without excuse in a legal sense” (Thiele 139). “The purpose of natural revelation is to leave man without a justifiable excuse before God . . . without legal defense. . . . Josephus uses the word in the sense of ‘unanswered,’ ‘without defense’” (Rogers and Rogers 317). Lusk summed up the situation with the following:

[M]an has rejected God; and consequently, the wrath of God stands awesomely and destructively before him [man]: and why does man stand judicially judged and pronounced ‘guilty’ before God? . . . Because he rejected God even though he had adequate evidence for [H]is existence as

deity . . . and he replaced him with the worship of idols . . . even though he had no evidence for their existence as deity. (12-13)

The first chapter of Romans implies, even in a world that is so anti-God—i.e., “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge”—(v. 28), the evidence in the world, in man, and in the Gospel still argues the unanswerable case for God.

### **The Rational Foundation**

Paul says men became “futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (v. 21). The word *foolish* (“senseless,” ASV) is translated from *asunetos*, which has its roots in the idea that means they were “not able to put together the manifest evidence about God” (Robertson 329). Lard says they either “set out from wrong premises or . . . conducted the process amiss, and reached unwarrantable conclusions; or they may have been at fault in both these respects . . .” (54). In other words, their premises were false and their argument was invalid. An argument, to be sound, must have true premises and the premises must demand the conclusion.

Rationality entails “putting together the facts and information and drawing conclusions and seeing relationships” (Rogers and Rogers 460). It is “an adding up . . . a collecting together” (Hamilton 279). Civilization will flourish to the greatest degree only when men are rational. The negation of God in the human mind is the result of irrationality in the sense of failing to honor the law of rationality. However, Christian theism honors the law of rationality (cf. Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; Acts 1:1-3; 2:22-36; Rom. 1:1-4, 20; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:1-19; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; 13:5; Philip. 4:5; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Heb. 3:4; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 1 John 1:1-4; 4:1, et al.). In making a defense before a number of prominent non-Christian leaders, Paul was accused of being out of his mind due to his higher education (Acts 26:24). In reply, Paul said, “I am not out of my mind. . . . I am speaking true and rational words” (26:25, ESV). The word used by Paul that is translated *rational* (ESV), *soberness* (KJV, ASV), *reason* (NKJ) and *sober truth* (NASV) means that which is “intellectually sound” (Luck 1097).

The late Princeton University atheistic philosopher Walter Kaufmann makes the observation in his *Critique of Religion and Charles C. Pugh III*

*Philosophy* that at the roots of all intellectual discipline and the foundation of civilization is the need “to grasp the distinction between a legal right and an intellectual right” (93). Kaufmann elaborates this distinction in the following:

Legally, I have the right to believe not only without sufficient evidence but even what is demonstrably false; and many of us are prepared to defend this right. But, intellectually, I have no such right; intellectually, it is not reputable: indeed, it is proof of my irrationality. And while a great deal can be said for tolerance of irrationality by the state, no less can be said against tolerance of irrationality by philosophers [and by New Testament Christians]. (93-94)

While we concur with Kaufmann’s conclusion, I would ask, given his atheism, on what objective, absolute basis would he—or anyone—be able to set forth sufficient evidence to prove that he or anyone else has the *obligation* to do anything?

I am reminded of Flew’s second affirmative speech in his debate with Warren, in which he (Flew) said, “It seems to me that the obligation is to pursue the truth as you see it. . . . That is the obligation which rests on all of us” (24). In his speech that followed, Warren replied:

Now he [Flew] says “. . . we have . . . an obligation to pursue truth.” On what basis does Dr. Flew conclude that we have an obligation to pursue truth? But now notice carefully in this question, he has admitted obligation—real (objective) obligation. You see on the one hand, atheists want to claim objective obligation and, on the other hand, they want to deny it. . . . Notice carefully, every time he speaks, he speaks about moral obligation, but then he *denies* real, objective moral obligation even though he has . . . admitted that there is such a thing as real, objective moral obligation. (Warren and Flew 30)

## **The Natural Foundation**

In addition to the basic foundation of God and reasoning to God through the process of fitting together the available information (evidence), a third pillar of civilization is implied in this biblical passage when Paul described those who “changed the natural use

into that which is against nature” (v. 26). There follows further description of these who, not having had the Law of Moses, did by nature the things of that law and, in doing such, “they show the work of the [Moral] law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness” (2:14-15, ASV). Thayer defines *nature* (Greek—*physis*) in these verses as the “nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature; as opposed to what is . . . abnormal, perverse” (660). One of the biblical references cited by Thayer where *physis* (nature) has this meaning is verse 26.

This foundation is also implied in one of the most foundational documents of the United States of America (i.e., the Declaration of Independence). In its very first sentence, the Declaration makes reference to “the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God.” John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States, explained the meaning of this phrase. Adams wrote:

“The laws of nature and nature’s God” . . . of course presuppose the existence of a God, the moral Ruler of the Universe, and a rule of right and wrong, of just and unjust, binding upon men, preceding all institutions of human society and of government. (13-14)

*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* includes the following in its discussion on *physis* (nature):

[*P*]hysis denotes the natural condition, quality or state (e.g. of the air, of blood, or the physical features of the land. . .). . . . One can read of the *koine physis*, the common moral nature of all human beings . . . the regular order of nature, which determines the distinction between the sexes. . . . [T]here are heathen who . . . do what the law demands *physei*, by nature, in so far as they live in accordance with their own nature. . . . [T]heir deeds prove the law of morality to be at work in their lives. . . . [T]hey fulfill the law which they themselves are by nature under the protection of the natural order (Harder 657, 660, emphasis added).

Today, there is much confusion about foundational words that are fundamental to the very nature of humans ontologically and existentially. By this, we mean foundational to the nature of our very being and existence as humans. It is no surprise moral confusion

runs deep in society when popular leaders are writing books in which they assert such propositions as the following:

Implied in its [the U. S. Constitution's] structure, in the very idea of ordered liberty, was a rejection of absolute truth, the infallibility of any idea or ideology or theology or "ism" . . . that might lock future generations into a single, unalterable course. . . . (Obama 93)

In response to the assertion that the Founders' view of "ordered liberty" was characterized by rejection of "absolute truth" (viz. the rejection of "the infallibility of any idea or theology or 'ism'") "that might lock future generations into . . . [an] unalterable course of action," one is inclined to ask: "Not even the absolute truth of the Laws of Nature and Nature's God? Not even moral law? Not even theism (the existence of God)?"

### **The Moral Foundation**

The moral law is a constituent element in the natural order of human existence and implies morality is foundational to human civilization. The late British diplomat Sir John Glubb, a military commander and prolific author of books, chiefly on the Middle East, wrote an unusual book titled *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival*. Glubb studied empires (super-power nations) in existence during the last three thousand years. He concluded that all such empires, or super-power nations, in human history during this period began with "the age of the pioneers, followed by the ages of conquest, commerce, affluence, intellect, and decadence" (57). Glubb says the final stage (decadence) and the final characteristic of this stage (a weakening of religion) involve moral and spiritual disease. Glubb summarized the essential connection between religion and morality in human flourishing:

*Decadence is a moral and spiritual disease.* . . . It has been shown that, normally, the rise and fall of great nations are due to internal reasons alone. . . . Politicians are unwilling or afraid to admit our decline is due to a loss of moral fibre. Yet there cannot be the slightest doubt that this is the case. No amount of intellectual cleverness can restore greatness to a nation which has lost its energy, its initiative, its honesty and, above all, its dedication to service. . . . I am convinced

that *moral standards can only be raised by a revival of religion.* (31-32, 53, 57, emphasis added)

C. S. Lewis, in response to the proliferation of literary filth and obscenity in culture, wrote, “I treat this development as a symptom, a sign of a culture that has lost its faith. Moral collapse follows upon spiritual collapse” (265). The loss of the metaphysical foundation (i.e., knowledge of God) results in the loss of the ethical foundation (i.e., absolute right and wrong). Again, Paul says it best in verses 18-32, making it clear that the irrational denial of God’s existence made known from creation results in a denial of what is seen clearly from the natural order. The denial of the truth metaphysically, rationally, and naturally results in the denial of absolute moral truth.

In her *New York Times* bestseller *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*, Ann Coulter begins on page 1 by citing the Apostle Paul’s statement: “[T]hey exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. . . .” (v. 25, ESV). In a later chapter on the fruits of evolution, Coulter again references the first chapter of Romans (vv. 21-23) and says:

Upon first reading *The Origin of Species*, Darwin’s mentor from Cambridge, Adam Sedgwick, wrote a letter warning Darwin that he was “deep in the mire of folly” if he was trying to remove the idea of morality from nature. If such a separation between the physical and the moral were ever to occur, Sedgwick said, it would “sink the human race into a lower grade of degradation than any into which it has fallen since its written records tell us of its history. . . .

Darwin’s theory overturned every aspect of Biblical morality. . . . Instead of enshrining moral values, the Darwinian ethic enshrined biological instincts. Instead of transcendent moral values, the Darwinian ethic said all morals are relative. (268-69)

## **The Heterosexual Foundation**

Romans sets forth the foundational element of heterosexual, monogamous marriage in conjunction with the total context of biblical teaching (cf. Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4). Paul wrote:

Therefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

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

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lusts for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (vv. 24-27; cf. 7:1-3)

Again, just how remarkably relevant this section of Scripture is, in harmony with reality, should be obvious to those who know the Bible.

In a dust jacket commendation of a 2015 volume of essays titled *The Thriving Society: On the Social Conditions of Human Flourishing*, Mary Ann Glendon, a Harvard professor of law, says, “There is no shortage of learned [volumes] on why great civilizations die, but . . . these essays tackle a challenge of far more immediate interest. . . . [T]hey ask: What can help a decent society to survive and thrive?” These essays about the thriving society include an essay titled “The Family as First Building Block,” written by Mark Regnerus, a professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. His research on the adult children of parents who have had same-sex sexual relationships was published in the July 2012 issue of *Social Science Research*. In his *Thriving Society* essay, Regnerus says:

Social scientists of the family until fairly recently noted *the comparative stability and social benefits of the two-parent (opposite sex) married household*. . . .

Can marriage be comprised of two men or two women? Few believed so prior to thirty years ago, and only in the past ten years has majority opinion in European countries asserted so. . . .

Few question that the family . . . is important for human flourishing. . . . [However] the cultural turning away from the biological family in the academy and the legal community is remarkable. . . . [T]he evidence for its strength is incontrovertible and the costs . . . in its absence obvious,

[but] it is increasingly politically unpalatable to go to bat for the nuclear family. . . . (49, 51-52, 64-65, emphasis added)

The anchor essay in *The Thriving Society* is “Five Pillars of a Decent and Dynamic Society,” which serves as the opening chapter in the book. This essay is by Robert George, Princeton University Professor of Jurisprudence and coauthor of *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life* (2001) and *What Is Marriage?: Man and Woman: A Defense* (2012). George states: “It is difficult to think of any item on the domestic agenda that is more critical today than the defense of marriage as the union of husband and wife. . .” (4). (For an additional scholarly treatment of these matters, see Lawrence S. Mayer and Paul R. McHugh’s piece in fall 2016 issue of *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society* titled *Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences.*)

### **The Social Foundation**

When civilization experiences ongoing disconnect with proper foundations theologically, rationally, naturally, morally, and sexually, the result will be social chaos. The loss of God in mind results in the loss of God in life, and it affects not only the individual, but also society as a whole. “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (v. 28, ESV). Stott presents a summary of verses 29-32 in the following:

Paul gives a catalogue of twenty-one vices. . . . All commentators seem to agree that the list defies neat classification. It begins with four general sins with which these people *have become filled*, namely *every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity*. Then come five more sins which they are *full of* and which all depict broken human relationships: *envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice* (29). Next come a couple on their own, which seem to refer to libel and slander, although [*The New Testament in Modern English*] offers a characteristically imaginative translation: ‘whisperers-behind doors’ and ‘stabbers-in-the-back.’ These two are followed by four which seem to portray different and extreme forms of pride: *God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful*. Now comes another independent couple of words,



denoting people who are ‘inventive’ in relation to evil and rebellious in relation to parents (30). And the list ends with four negatives, *senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless* (31), which [*The Jerusalem Bible*] rather neatly renders ‘without brains, honour, love or pity’.

Verse 32 is a concluding summary of the human perversity Paul has been describing. First, *they know*. Yet again he begins with the knowledge possessed by the people he is depicting. It is not now God’s truth that they know, however, but *God’s righteous decree*, namely *that those who do such things deserve death*. As he will write later ‘the wages of sin is death’ (6:23). And they know it. Their conscience condemns them.

Secondly, they nevertheless disregard their knowledge. *They not only continue to do these very things*, which they know deserve death, *but* (which is worse) they actively encourage others to do the same, and so flagrantly *approve* the evil behavior of which God has expressed his disapproval. (78-79)

Morgan sums up how the implications of the loss of a sufficient attachment to the true foundations of civilization play out in society: “The measure in which any people neglect the sacred means which express Divine relationship, is the measure which sooner or later they violate the principles of social relationship, and oppression and suffering take the place of liberty and prosperity” (125).

In his book *The Selfish Gene*, atheist Richard Dawkins asserts, “Today the theory of evolution is about as much open to doubt as the theory that the earth goes round the sun” (1). Dawkins then sets forth a proposition that includes two conjuncts: 1) We are only “machines created by our genes,” and 2) a “predominant quality to be expected in a successful gene is ruthless selfishness” (2). Notwithstanding his insolence, Dawkins, by implication, raises the white flag. He does this when he says:

[U]niversal love and welfare of the species . . . are concepts that simply do not make evolutionary sense. . . . *I am not advocating a morality based on evolution . . . . I am not saying how we humans morally ought to behave. . . . My own feeling is that a human society based simply on the genes*

*law of universal ruthless selfishness would be a very nasty society* in which to live. . . . [T]o build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. (2-3, emphasis added)

Dawkins implies that he must depart the biological and enter the metaphysical (which his doctrine denies the reality of) in order to invent some kind of ethical (moral) system in an attempt to weasel out of the implications that he admits he is “feeling.” His *philosophy* (not science) leaves “a very nasty society” in which to live. Dawkins’ conscience does not want that kind of society. He and other atheists and religious skeptics think in one world but actually live in another. They rise above the implications of their counterfactual assertions and engage their sense of ought (conscience), which involves the philosophical (metaphysical).

Civility is a basic thread that holds civilizations together. When civility goes, civilization goes. Today, the thread is unraveling before our eyes: From the rising tide of Islamic terrorism; racially motivated hatred and violence; mass shootings; secularism that has resulted in a degenerating decadence; vitriol that spews from various media; rancor that characterizes political campaigns, talk shows, reality TV, and street protests; epidemic litigation; all of this, and more.

Civility and apologetics connect because, as the Blaiklocks wrote in a 1960s book on the existence of God: “To imagine that love’s fundamental virtue . . . ‘civility’ . . . and all that makes life gentle, can survive the loss of their divine foundation calls for a hardihood of optimism not easy to achieve” (50).

## **The Biblical Foundation**

The book of Proverbs affirms, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint . . .” (29:18). Even with all of the preceding foundations or supports, society is lacking. The reason? No one of us perfectly lives up to the evidence he or she has. Even among the very best, there is no one who, accountable for his or her thoughts and actions, lives in *perfect* harmony with the content made known 1) within the self and 2) outside the self (cf. vv. 18-32). Furthermore, the content manifested through the above foundations (and all else

provided through general revelation) is limited.

There are answers—not provided in creation—to what are crucial questions about life. The Christian faith, as revealed in the sixty-six books of the Bible, makes the claim it is the complete and final revelation of God to man (Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:26; 16:13; Rom. 1:1-4, 16-17; 16:25-27; Gal. 1:6-9; Eph. 3:1-5; Col. 2:3, 9-10; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Heb. 2:1-4; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 John 1:9-10; Jude 1:3; Rev. 22:18-19; et al.).

There is a sense in which the history of Western Civilization provides sufficient evidence, in conjunction with biblical content, to establish the Bible as a constituent element in the foundations of civilization. The *Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World* describes the Bible with the following: “ONE BOOK STANDS OUT from all the rest because, in our tradition, it is—as the use of ‘Bible’ for its proper name implies—the book about God and man” (Adler 2:558). The Bible is further described as having “unparalleled influence upon western culture” (3:589).

The ultimate foundational explanation for the progress, prosperity, prominence, and power of the Western world in general and the United States in particular rests in the Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life (i.e., the revelation of the Judeo-Christian worldview that culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ). It does not rest *ultimately* in guns, government, or goods, but in God (Christian theism).

Great European and American leaders even argue the case. In his speech at Zurich University (1946), Winston Churchill said:

This noble continent [Europe] . . . is the fountain of Christian faith and Christian ethics. . . . If Europe were once united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and glory which its three or four hundred million people would enjoy. (qtd. in James 27)

During an interview in 1968 with David Frost, Ronald Reagan openly expressed his awareness of the place of the person Jesus Christ when he said Christ was the historical figure he admired most (qtd. in Kengor 121). In an earlier speech, Reagan asked, “Can you name one problem that would not be solved if we had simply followed the teachings of the man from Galilee?” and Reagan

affirmed “the answer to ‘each and every problem’ could be found in the ‘simple words of Jesus of Nazareth’” (121).

If it is the case, as affirmed by some of the voices of the greatest European and American leaders, that the heart of Western Civilization is the Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life, then attacks on the Christian worldview are attacks on the foundation of the western world, not the least of which is America. Such attacks occur daily in America from Hollywood to Washington, D.C., to high-level campuses of academia, health care agencies, churches, shopping malls, schoolrooms, living rooms, and numerous other places in Hometown, USA.

Christian values will not survive in a culture that rejects the divine foundation of these values (cf. vv. 18-32). As the chairman of the missions committee in one of America’s greatest congregations said to me: “This is not just a ‘religious’ issue. This is a ‘civilization’ issue—the very continued existence of our civilization.”

## **Conclusion**

The psalmist wrote, “If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?” (11:3). It must be remembered that there is the sense in which all the constituent elements that are foundational to what human life on Earth is truly about can never be destroyed. They may be forsaken by man on Earth, but as the psalmist also wrote, “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled [stands firm] in heaven” (119:89, NASV). As Scripture affirms in another context, “[T]he firm foundation of God stands. . .” (2 Tim. 2:19, NASV). The greatest person in the history of civilization is, and always will be, Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). He has delivered the absolute truth about the foundations of life 1) theologically, 2) rationally, 3) naturally, 4) morally, 5) heterosexually, 6) socially, and 7) biblically through His person, word, and work.

Ultimately, and beyond all that exists in the world for the benefit of man, He has by His appearing revealed His purpose and grace “given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” and “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:9-10). What a foundation He provides through the Gospel for your

life and mine! Amen!

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# THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

*Romans 2:1-16*

*Robert C. Veil, Jr.*

## **Introduction**

Judgment involves coming to considered conclusions, sensible decisions based upon available information. Man's decisions are often imperfect because he lacks the breadth of knowledge and integrity necessary for consistent accuracy. God's judgments, on the other hand, are faultless, impeccable. The only judgments a man can make that are infallible are those which faithfully mirror or repeat judgments already announced by God. "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever" (Psalm 119:160; KJV). [All Scripture references are from the ASV unless otherwise noted.]

In Romans 2:1-16, Paul provides valuable insight into the nature and extent of God's judgment as opposed to mankind's. The supremacy of divine, infallible judgment is contrasted with faulty human endeavors. In sixteen verses, Paul uses some version of the word *judge* nine times. It is an important theme elsewhere in the Bible as well. This passage is best understood by a consideration of the context and an expository examination of the text as informed by insights from related passages.

## **Context**

The church at Rome very likely dates from the time Jewish sojourners from there heard the Gospel proclaimed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff; especially 2:10) and brought it back to their home around AD 30-33. Although expelled from Rome by the decree of Tiberius and later by Claudius (cf. Acts 18:2), the Jews had returned, and there was evidently quite a number of them in the church when Paul wrote (cf. Rom. 11:18). These Jewish Christians had been influenced by the Pharisees and other religious leaders of their day who held the Gentiles at arm's length, substituting their own prejudicial traditions for God's expansive grace. There was a need for unification and an understanding that the Gospel is for all.



The apostle had just shown in chapter 1 that in their rejection of God, and by extension their rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gentiles were in a lost condition. His Jewish readers readily acknowledged this. In chapter 2, he turns his attention to the Jews although at first he states his case in terms applicable to all people.

### **Exposition of Text**

*“Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practise the same things.” (v. 1)*

The word *wherefore* is a conclusion word, linking what follows with what has just been established, namely that the Gentiles who left God’s way are lost. Paul’s Jewish readers readily accepted this fact, but they must now be led to acknowledge that the same reasoning applies to them. Although Paul does not at first identify the Jews as his subject, such will become clear as he proceeds. He enters the subject diplomatically, using a general statement with which they would agree. Paul is unfolding the argument that without obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, no one—not Gentiles and not Jews—can be saved. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). *Wherefore* advances the argument to show that the same reasoning by which the Jews understood that the Gentiles were lost applies to them: “thou art without excuse” (v. 1). The Jews could not sit comfortably back, confident of the Gentiles’ lost condition yet secure in their own salvation. They, like many others down through the years, needed the exhortation found in McCaleb’s famous poem from 1921: “Say not the heathen are at home, Beyond we have no call, For why should we be blest alone? The gospel is for all” (no. 632).

An understanding of our universal need for the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ prevents a condescending, racially-oriented view of our fellow man. The Jewish Christians of the first century were often slow and reluctant to accept the possibility of salvation for the Gentiles. Yet delivery of the Gospel to the Gentiles was Paul’s specific commission. The Lord had told Ananias that Paul was “a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles . . .” (Acts 9:15). Paul had acknowledged his mission when he recounted

the Lord's words, ". . . I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles" (22:21). He understood his role in carrying out the task, "how that the Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (26:23). Although his Jewish readers were reluctant at first to accept it, Paul is leading them to the conclusion that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek: for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him: for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:12-13).

Paul is addressing, "O man" (v. 1); i.e., "O Jewish Christian, who looks askance upon his fellow man. O Christian of any age who perceives the need for the Gospel in his own life, but would withhold it from others." He recognizes the sinful nature of the actions of others. He sees that they are living in violation of God's will, contrary to the Gospel. "Whosoever thou art that judgest" is able to judge or discern that a wicked lifestyle will lead to perishing because it is in opposition to God. But a moment's reflection should lead that same man to understand that without the Gospel, he would be in the same fearful condition. The power of God unto salvation is in the Gospel, not within oneself. There is no moral merit to a person's race or national origin, status factors over which he has no control.

"[F]or wherein thou judgest another," Paul says, "thou condemnest thyself . . ." (v. 1). If the one doing the judging is honest, he will recognize his own sinfulness too. It is not only the Gentiles who have departed from God's way, or who commit sin. Paul would later state it directly: "[F]or all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God . . ." (3:23). By identifying the conduct of the Gentiles as sinful, the Jews had to acknowledge sin in their own lives as well. By condemning others, they in essence condemned themselves.

In the Bible, the word *judge* is sometimes used by the same writer in different senses. In one sense it means "to recognize" or "discern." Paul uses it this way and then uses it to mean "criticize" or "condemn." The Jews *discerned* the sinful nature of the Gentiles' conduct and then *condemned* them. A failure to recognize the distinction between the ways the word is used has led to many errors in the understanding of this passage. Paul is not forbidding the making of any and all judgments. If he were, he would be in violation of his own teaching. [See Additional Note on Judging

Others below.]

Christians, and for that matter all people, make judgments every day. We discern that the weather is cool, so we put on a coat. We recognize that the road is slippery, so we slow down. We understand that a news account is biased, so we discount it. We judge that certain merchandise is defective, so we reject it. But we must not set ourselves above others who sin. Condemning others as morally inferior before God effectively condemns ourselves.

In truth, “[T]hou that judgest dost practise the same things” (v. 1). In other words, the Jew who prided himself on being able to recognize sin in the life of the Gentiles was affirming his own condemnation every time he sinned. If unforgiven sin could bring about the destruction of the Gentiles, it could do likewise for the Jews.

*“And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that practise such things.” (v. 2)*

Here, Paul directly introduces the concept of God’s judgment. God’s judgment should not be confused with man’s judgment. God sees and applies the entire body of truth. He has at His disposal all of the information and facts which exist. Man is by definition limited in scope and understanding: “O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). We must acknowledge that certain lifestyles or practices are sinful because God identifies them as sinful, not necessarily because we do. We know with a certainty that what God identifies as sinful is *in fact* sinful, whether mankind generally believes it, or understands it, or acknowledges it. That which God judges to be sin is sin even if people think they see some value in it. Even if a man thinks he is being loving, tolerant, or open-minded, he must honor God’s judgment in the matter. In taking God’s position, mankind is not being “judgmental” but deferential and faithful to God. On the other hand, when a man misidentifies as good and commendable that which God judges to be evil, he displays an arrogant disobedience toward God.

*“And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practise such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment*

*of God?” (v. 3)*

The judgment of God is a certain reality. It is inevitable. No one, neither Gentile nor Jew, will escape the judgment of God. “[I]t is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment . . .” (Heb. 9:27). To reckon is to consider, to ponder carefully. The question is posed for emphasis and is rhetorical. The obvious answer is that the Jews who have been judging Gentiles will themselves stand before the awesome judgment seat of Christ. The same immutable laws of God by which the Gentiles stand condemned will condemn the Jews. All men are judged by the same standard, the same God who is entirely holy and separate from sin.

*“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (v. 4)*

To attempt to maintain this running distinction between Gentiles and Jews even into the Gospel Age was to despise the grace of God. It was to deny that the Jews themselves owed their own repentance and salvation to the goodness of God, the same God. And to deny God’s goodness to the Gentiles was to despise or hold in contempt that goodness, suggesting that it was insufficient to reach any but Jews. God’s grace and goodness is not beggarly, but they treated it so when they regarded others as excluded because of race. They treated God’s grace and goodness as insufficient or impotent, and it did not produce repentance on their part, as intended. When people deny God’s blessings and favor to others, they deny it to themselves.

*“[B]ut after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his works. . . .” (vv. 5-6)*

Their sin of dissimulation or prejudice against the Gentiles would result in their own destruction just as surely as any other sin because it shows a hardness of heart and a lack of repentance. The “day of wrath and revelation” is the Day of Judgment, the “righteous judgment of God” (v. 5). The Day of Judgment will be an outpouring of wrath for all who reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the day on which God’s patience with sinful men finally comes to an end.

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A persistent refusal to repent of sin can produce a hardened heart, a conscience no longer sensitive to the serious nature of sin. In such a condition, people are no longer able to sense or judge danger or the pain of sin in their lives. The mere possibility that such a condition could occur should be a sober warning to us all:

Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. . . . (Heb. 3:12-13)

Christians who deny the reality of sin in their own lives, who proudly act as though they never make a mistake, are treasuring up for themselves wrath on the Day of Judgment (v. 5). It is crucial to maintain a tender heart throughout life, to allow our consciences to be pricked by the Word of God, and to repent of sins as we become aware of them in our own lives. Thus, we are trusting God and building up a treasure of confidence and boldness toward that Great Day (Heb. 6:13-20).

*“[T]o them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life. . . .” (v. 7)*

The Day of Judgment will be an outpouring of mercy and salvation for all who humbly accept and obey the Gospel. Their lives are characterized by “patience in well-doing” (v. 7). They are willing to endure the inconveniences and afflictions of the Christian life. They are longsuffering in their earthly pilgrimage, seeking the true “glory and honor” of what lies ahead. The eternal state of the redeemed is one of “incorruption,” no longer subject to corruption and decay. At the end of time itself, they will be raised incorruptible, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. . . . [T]his corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:50, 53). The state of eternal life to which Christians aspire is one of “glory and honor and incorruption” (v. 7).

*“[B]ut unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that worketh evil, of the Jew first,*

*and also of the Greek; but glory and honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. . . .” (vv. 8-10)*

Paul enlarges his point by emphasizing that the Day of Judgment will represent a meting out of “wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish” (vv. 8-9) to the “factious” (v. 8) and disobedient. Factions and divisions within the body of Christ are abhorrent to God (John 17:20ff; 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 12:12ff). Paul knew very well the dangerous evil of dividing members of the church based upon race, and he spent tremendous energy combating such a practice. He rebuked Peter to the face for such dissimulation “because he stood condemned” (Gal. 2:11). Such practices are condemned in the strongest terms and if persisted in will result in “wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish” (vv. 8-9).

*“[F]or there is no respect of persons with God” (v. 11).*

Such racial biases and prejudices are absent with God, and they must be unknown among His children. There *is no* such evil or wickedness with Him, and congregations such as that at Rome must rid themselves fully of such attitudes if they are to be His people. Respecters of persons are those who treat people differently for no good reason. They favor or respect some people over others merely by caprice or conditions totally beyond their control. It is the very picture of unfairness and cruelty.

When Peter was thrice shown that vision of clean and unclean animals and given the command to rise, kill, and eat, he had yet to bring himself to recognize that what God had made clean he must not call common (Acts 10:9-16). Only after a period of prayer and introspection could he recite the lesson, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him” (10:34-35). The even-handed and fair nature of God is a reality whether Peter recognized it or not. Although there may be with man, there *is no* respect of persons with God. If we wish to be in agreement and fellowship with God, we must purge out of our thoughts all remnants of such bigotry and prejudice.

*“For as many as have sinned without the law shall also perish*  
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*without the law: and as many as have sinned under the law shall be judged by the law. . . .” (v. 12)*

Sin is the thing that separates a man from God, not race or national origin. “Behold, Jehovah’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2).

*“[F]or not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. . . .” (v. 13)*

It was not enough that the Jews had heard or given an audience to the Law of God. Justification before God comes with obedience, with doing: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

*“([F]or when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them). . . .” (vv. 14-15)*

When the Gentiles respectfully did the things naturally consistent with fear and honor of God, God blessed them just as surely as He blessed Jews who complied with the revealed Law of God He had given them.

*“[I]n the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ.” (v. 16)*

Returning to the theme of God’s judgment, Paul refers directly to the great Judgment Day. He leaves no doubt that there will be a *day* of judgment, a particular time when men will be judged. From this and related passages, we learn a great deal about what the momentous day will be like. It would behoove us to consider carefully the information we are provided about the Judgment Day, because it is a certain appointment that none of us will miss. “[I]t is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment . . .” (Heb. 9:27).

## **The Day of Judgment**

In pondering that great event, we realize immediately that it is a day about which we can know nothing except what is revealed to us by God. Here are a few insights from God's Word:

### ***Every One of Us Will Be Present***

With human courts, it is not unusual for someone to fail to appear (FTA). It may be due to illness or some other unavoidable problem. It may be by deliberate choice, in which case a warrant will usually be issued for arrest. This causes many delays and inconveniences to the Court and others. But there will be no such problems on the Great Judgment Day. That summons, we will not refuse. There will be no continuances, no postponements, no FTAs. Everyone will be prompt and on time, present for court. Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word of Jesus Christ, who shall judge "the living and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1). That leaves no one out, "for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God. . . . So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10b, 12). Think of a vast meeting with everyone who has ever lived present!

### ***A Specific Day Has Been Set***

My judgment day is the same as yours. It is going to be the most efficient use of judicial resources we have ever seen because the entire inhabited earth will be accommodated on one court date: "[I]nasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained . . ." (Acts 17:31).

### ***The Judge Who Will Be Sitting That Day Has Been Selected by God***

Sometimes, in human courts, it is difficult to determine in advance who the judge will be. Sometimes, it is intentionally kept anonymous. But we all know who our Judge will be on the Great Judgment Day. The apostle Peter said, "And he charged us to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). "For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he has given all judgment unto  
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the Son . . .” (John 5:22; cf. 5:27).

### ***The Judge Will Be Competent and Prepared to Do His Job***

I have seen unprepared judges. They had not read the file or become acquainted with the procedure or posture of the case. Perhaps, it involved issues they had not studied recently or they were blindsided by unexpected events. None of that will be a problem on the Great Judgment Day. The Judge has “read the file” and is ready. He knows the law. Those who come before Him that day appear before a Judge who is “ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Peter 4:5). If there was any doubt before about the competency of our Judge, there can be no doubt now since he has been raised from the dead. “[H]e hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31b). This Judge is error-free, and He is going to do an amazing job.

### ***Some Defendants Will Fare Better than Others***

“Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city [that does not receive the teaching of Jesus Christ]” (Matt. 10:15).

### ***Secrets Will Be Revealed***

It is possible to go through much of one’s life hiding the way things really are. Sometimes, such secrets are successfully kept all through life. A person may die and go to the grave with deep, dark secrets that their friends never knew. But those who thought they were going to keep secrets from the great Judge have a rude awakening in store. “For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ . . .” (2 Cor. 5:10a) “in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ” (v. 16).

### ***The Sentence in Each Case Will Be Right***

“[T]hat each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10b). Nothing will be overlooked, neglected, or failed to be considered. All of the relevant evidence will be carefully taken into consideration by the Judge. There will be no distractions or red

herrings, no cases of mistaken identity or the wrong person being charged. According to what “he hath done.” “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds” (Matt. 16:27).

### ***There Will Be No Appeals***

There can be no motions for modification, requests to vacate the judgment, appeals, or petitions for review—the sentence is final because judgment will be pronounced by God.

### **Additional Note on Judging Others**

It is wrong to say that others are wrong or that certain religious teachings are wrong if our judgment is based solely on our own beliefs or opinions. However, we must be clear and swift to speak out against error that goes against the Word of God.

The passage most people think of regarding judging reads as follows: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you” (Matt. 7:1-2). From this passage, some draw the erroneous conclusion that any and all judging is wrong. But notice another statement of our Lord: “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Here, we are not only not prevented from judging, but also actually commanded to do so. But we are to be sure that our judgment is “righteous.” Jesus explains that “righteous judgment” is when we actually allow God’s Word (the Bible) to be the judge: “He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him” (7:18). Righteous or right judgments must be based upon God’s standard of right and wrong, His Word. When we make such judgments, we are essentially allowing God to be the judge. It is a perversion of this passage to conclude that it forbids recognizing or discerning (judging) sinful conduct.

When we simply submit to the teaching of the Bible and teach others to do so, we are not setting ourselves up as judges. On the contrary, we are deferring to the judgment of God Himself. Following His statement not to “judge” (Matt. 7:1), Jesus makes this clear. He does so in the context of false teachers, and He warns us

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that we must beware of them. We must carefully judge or distinguish between false teaching and the truth:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (7:15-20)

By observing and recognizing the sinful nature of practices and doctrines, we will know (judge) them to be false.

From these passages, we see that the kind of judging that is forbidden is the self-righteous, condemnatory conduct that was so typical of the Pharisees. They were quick to condemn others based upon their own man-made standards. They were hypocrites, judging and condemning others for violating their own traditions and opinions. Many of the Jewish people followed the erroneous teaching of such Pharisees, and they called out the sinfulness of others while failing to recognize their own. The fundamental flaw in such unrighteous judging is that it sets ourselves up to condemn others while excusing our own sin. It blinds us to God's view, which is the righteous view, and substitutes our own judgment for God's. Conversely, when a man misidentifies as good and commendable that which God judges to be evil, he displays an arrogant disobedience toward God. Again, he is substituting his own judgment for that of God.

An instructive illustration of this principle is found in 1 Corinthians 5, where the apostle Paul deals decisively with a case of incest within the Lord's church. Although personally absent, Paul received a report describing the situation and says that he has "already as though I were present *judged* him that hath so wrought this thing . . ." (1 Cor. 5:3, emphasis added). Note that Paul's judgment was not based upon his own personal opinion, but was the judgment of God Himself (He emphasizes that in the next verse: "in the name of the Lord Jesus . . . with the power of our Lord Jesus"). He would later explicitly affirm that "the things which I write unto

you . . . are the commandment of the Lord” (14:37). Paul’s rebuke in 1 Corinthians 5 is not aimed specifically at the incestuous man, but at the church itself because they were “puffed up” (5:2). They had proudly substituted their own judgment in the matter for the judgment of God.

Moses appointed judges to hear and decide disputes among the Israelites. But his instructions to those judges made it clear that they were not to act on their own preferences and opinions, but strictly in accordance with God’s judgment. “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the sojourner that is with him” (Deut. 1:16). Note that their judgment was to be done “righteously.” They were not to use their own opinions, biases, or prejudices. They were not to show respect to the wealthy or powerful: “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment . . . for the judgment is God’s . . .” (1:17; cf. Psalm 82:1-4). That is, it was not them, but God, who was actually making these decisions. When we faithfully apply God’s Word to life situations and identify truth and error in accordance with the Bible, we are allowing God to be the judge. Such judgment on our part simply discerns or recognizes what God has already established (cf. Matt. 18:18).

Christians must turn judgment over to God. We must humbly allow Him through His Word to settle religious differences. And we must carefully study that Word so we may be equipped to know right from wrong, not because we say so, but because God does. Only with such a deep understanding of God’s Word, an appreciation for the judgment of God, can we be in a position to lovingly point it out to others, who might otherwise be lost in sin.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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# ABRAHAM. THE CASE FOR JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

*Romans 4:1-25*

*Dan Kessinger*

## **Abraham and Imputed Righteousness**

In chapter 4, the inspired apostle examines the impact of Abraham and his faith on the world of Christian believers. The importance of Abraham can scarcely be overstated or perhaps even measured. To the Jews, he remains the progenitor, the original of the three Jewish patriarchs. To Christians, he is the father of the faithful; those who would please God are urged to live as father Abraham did. To followers of Mohammed, he was also the progenitor, the father of Ishmael. Thus, three of the world's major religions claim him as their spiritual father, with two adding bloodline kinship as well. Interestingly, all three groups continue to name sons after this giant of the faith.

Islam has rather twisted the history of Abraham by claiming that Ishmael, not Isaac, was the promised son. But even this bit of nonsense serves to remind us of the greatness of Abraham. Why bother hijacking a second-rate hero? Thus, the power of the name of Abraham was utilized to bring racial and nationalistic pride to those who were descended from rejected Ishmael. Ironically, had Mohammed and his disciples cared to do so, they could have laid claim on a far more important kinship to Abraham through Christ. And they still have that opportunity.

In Romans 4, Abraham's faith is the fulcrum of a larger discussion, one that is pro-faith and anti-first-century Judaism. An accurate reading of the book reveals that Judaism per se is not the problem, as it is affirmed to be a spiritual law (7:14) and one that had provided Paul's Jewish brethren with distinct advantages in having taught them certain foundational principles (3:1-2) and the essence of morality (7:7). These had gained this advantage because of their role as custodians and students of the Old Testament. At

other points in the New Testament, we are likewise reminded of the importance of the old Scriptures in being a guiding force (schoolmaster or tutor) in preparing men for the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). Thus, real, legitimate Judaism had ended as was planned; it was not the problem.

We remain grateful today for the glorious spiritual law of Sinai that brought such a blessing to those who obeyed it and continues to bless students today. The true essence of that law was not the source of the controversy; it was a perversion of that law. That grand Old Law was designed from the beginning to lead men to Christ, the New Covenant, and the New Law. What the Judaizers in the church were doing with the Old Law was attempting to bind only certain, preferred elements of that law on Christians. To Judaize the church is not exactly the same as an attempt to live by the Old Covenant. Likewise, it also differs from utilizing the law from Sinai to learn certain eternal truths and principles.

The specification “Abraham our father” (v. 1) does much more than simply identify the subject matter. [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] The relationship of Abraham to the Jewish nation was also a source of the problem. To the Judaizers, the Jews had a special claim on the promises given to Abraham because of two factors. First, they were the children of Abraham through the promised son. Second, they continued to honor the sign of that covenant with Abraham: circumcision. It is possible that these felt that they were being magnanimous and open-minded in being willing to share the inheritance with Gentiles, demanding only circumcision as a condition of fellowship.

Romans 4 has been the unwilling bondservant of many a Calvinist or Neo-Calvinist in supposedly supporting the notion of salvation by grace only or faith only, depending on the day of the week. These have no qualms about introducing *only* into the text as it suits them, even when multiple *onlys* result in absurd contradictions. F. F. Bruce pointed out the reformers’ theme was “*sola gratia, sola fide, soli Deo gloria* (‘by grace alone, through faith alone, to God alone be glory’)” (qtd. in Coffman 106).

The grace-only movement in churches of Christ has been troubling to us for a number of years. There are many who claim to be fellow Christians but who reject obedience as a requirement in

the New Covenant. These consistently misuse such texts as Romans 4, divorcing it from the real question at hand. Notably, Paul's discussion of the Old Law, particularly that of circumcision, is generalized into a rejection of obedience in Christ's Law. While it is true that God saves by a grace far exceeding the value of our service, it is important to understand that Paul's statements concerning "law" in this chapter refer particularly to the Law of Moses. Cecil Hook demonstrated the error emanating from ignoring the contextual definition of *law* here. "We are saved by grace; however under Moses' law men had sought justification by law, and there is a great tendency for disciples to seek righteousness through keeping of law also" (18). Notice further that in his definition of *law*, he carefully avoids the very definition of *law* demanded by the context. "Law has a range of meanings. Law may be a legal system which demands perfect obedience. Law also can be a principle of action" (20). But since the law in question was circumcision, it is tenuous at best to make grand statements about obedience based on this question. Paul was settling the matter of circumcision; thus, he is discussing the Law of Moses, not some general, vague concept of legality. This seemingly deliberate omission leads Hook to his conclusion: "So it is all by grace! If one is to be saved, it must be totally by grace. One cannot be saved partly by law keeping and partly by grace" (18-19). If only exclamation points could make it so. . . .

The context of Romans 4 makes it clear that the omitted third definition of *law* (that of Moses) is in fact the correct one. In the New Covenant, there are "laws," "works," and "law keeping" condemned. Just as clearly, there are "laws," "works," and "law keeping" commanded. How can this be? It must be that there are different kinds of law. To support a salvation by grace that is divorced from obedience, Neo-Calvinists allow for no legal demands in the New Covenant. Thus, they must read rejection of obedience and conditional salvation into every scriptural condemnation of law. This presents a problem when one realizes that Christians living in the covenant of grace also read of a law to which they are obligated. In Romans 8:2, "law" is cited with clear distinction, one law from the other, within the confines of a single verse: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me



free from the law of sin and death.” Obviously, *law* must have multiple definitions since a “law” freed Paul’s readers from a “law.” The grace-only doctrine demands ignoring the clear use of rejected law in reference to the Law of Moses, particularly circumcision.

Paul’s opponents did not just teach circumcision, they revered it; it was exalted beyond all other laws of God. Rabbis of the day claimed that God himself performed Abraham’s circumcision, that Isaac’s birth of “holy seed” referred to Abraham’s circumcision, and that no one in hell is circumcised. These believed God restores the foreskin to lost circumcised men to avoid the unthinkable (Sanday and Headlam 108-09)! Paul answers by citing their venerated father Abraham:

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has [something of which] to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” (vv. 1-3)

Since Paul here wishes to invalidate circumcision, the law in question is that of Moses. What then was the error of the Judaizers? It was failing to recognize the lawgiver’s superiority to His law. Supreme and Sovereign God may alter, amend, or abolish any law He had previously given. In a study of law, the lawgiver was forgotten. Circumcision had no virtue; the baptistery’s waters have no healing. But God still saves only the obedient. He does this, not because of Herculean deeds, but because He rewards real trust.

It was not the value of circumcision that saved Abraham; it was his faith. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. But are we to conclude that this nullified God’s commandments to Abraham? If so, why did God bother giving him those commandments? Would Abraham have been justified had he refused to obey those commandments? Again, we remind ourselves of the point that Paul is making. When men asked, “What shall we do?” in the New Testament, they were given understandable answers. Paul was once one of those men. Acts 9:6 reads, “So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’”

Paul did not find the Judaizers guilty of obedience. Their error was in teaching circumcision when it was no longer a matter of faith. Not only was it invalid as a command after Christ and the New Covenant, it had never been a viaduct of virtue, as they supposed. God saved those who believed, not the circumcised. It is important that one not misconstrue this proposition to say, "And it did not matter whether or not they practiced circumcision." One might consult Moses and Zipporah to see if circumcision mattered to God (Exod. 4:24-26).

If it were faith that saved, not the law of circumcision, then the law of circumcision can be abrogated with no reservation. Abraham was saved by his faith before circumcision was a law. To many first-century Jews, the notion of a saved uncircumcised man was unthinkable. But that was exactly what their father Abraham had been, and thus it is possible for others to be, as well. Aside from the discussion of circumcision, there are some general principles in this section, as well. Paul reminds us of the difference between debt and grace and of the importance of imputed righteousness. Once again, one ought to exercise care in avoiding the untenable position of having Paul say, "We do not have to obey." But his argument in verses 4-5 suggest that the Judaizers believed that their reward was earned by keeping the Law. It reads, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. . . ." There is a world of difference between arguing that our obedience fails to qualify as earning God's gift and arguing that obedience is optional. If the Judaizers believed that their obedience to the Law of Moses indebted God to saving them, then their view of that law was as corrupt as their view of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Keeping those commands had never earned such a thing, nor were they thus intended.

While the Law demanded obedience, it was the lawgiver who saved and covered men with His own righteousness. It is not the Law that loves us, it is the lawgiver. But men frequently take the easy way out, forgetting God in a nominal pursuit of His law. Thus, the Ark (of the Covenant) was used as a talisman; the brazen serpent became Nehushtan the idol. In the same sense, circumcision never justified Abraham, God did. But Abraham had to be circumcised

once God gave the law; if he had not been, he would not have trusted God. Paul proved God was Abraham's savior before circumcision existed, and thus the uncircumcised may be saved after it ceased to be. While laws do not save, God saves only those whose faith moves them to obey. God's grace is worlds apart from the cheap, irresponsible brand of Calvinists and Neo-Calvinists.

The notion of imputed righteousness must be explored. What is this? The quotation is from Psalm 32 and is introduced by Paul's commentary in verse 6: "[J]ust as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. . . ." Rather than affirming a salvation that requires nothing of the saved, it is thus stated to emphasize the nature of true faith (and its constant companion, obedience). The works do not themselves save. Their value before the great Judge is not to convince Him of innocence, but to cause Him to declare righteousness through His mercy. We are not righteous. But those who believe (and, as always, obey) are clothed in a blanket of forgiveness.

It has been stated that some of the most beautiful words one might ever hear are these: "I forgive you." Persons such as this author have desperately needed to hear those words many times and felt the relief of knowing that the wronged one was willing to forgive. How much sweeter must it be when we stand before the great Judge, knowing that our case is doomed on its merits, only to hear Him say to the faithful that they are forgiven! David had experienced that very thing. We suspect that he, while guided by the Spirit in writing this text, may have had a personal stake in what was written in Psalm 32. David had no right to claim vindication by law, but he served a loving master who could forgive and impute righteousness upon him.

### **Abraham, Faith, and Circumcision**

In the section that includes verses 9-16, Paul shows how Abraham's salvation by faith has implications for both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. He pointedly asks when Abraham was first justified by faith in verses 9-10:

Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was

accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

If Abraham were justified by faith *before* he was circumcised, what does that imply about believers today?

Faith-only advocates jump to the conclusion that this statement demonstrates that obedience is secondary and optional—it is no condition of salvation at all. For instance, baptism cannot be said to save in any sense but serves only as a covenant sign of previous salvation. There is one major problem with such a conclusion: When Abraham was saved by faith, circumcision had not yet been commanded. It is hard to make that case with baptism since it was commanded two thousand years ago. It would be a better parallel if one could find evidence that Abraham was saved by faith in Ur but was given the option to stay rather than leave as he was commanded. One also wonders regarding Abraham’s reaction to God’s command to be circumcised. Did he feel that he could wait weeks or months until a convenient time to be circumcised? It was a sign of the covenant; it was a matter of faith. As such, faith demanded that he comply. One does not demonstrate one’s faith in God by ignoring His commands.

In verse 11, circumcision is called the “seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised. . . .” This observation demonstrates that Abraham can be a father to all faithful, including those who are uncircumcised, even as he himself was when justified. The uncircumcised (Gentiles) were always intended to be potential heirs of the promises and faith of Abraham. They have that opportunity because of imputed righteousness granted to believers in Christ.

What does this say about Jewish Christians? In verse 12, they are also declared to be children of Abraham but not because of their circumcision. It is because they walk in the faith of their spiritual father Abraham. Like their Gentile counterparts, they also are saved by imputed righteousness. In neither case are they absolved or excused from God’s commands. In both cases, their obedience is a matter of faith in the Lawgiver, not an undue trust in any particular act of obedience. While obedience to God is always a condition of blessing, it is not the value of the obedience, but the faith it

demonstrates in the Lawgiver.

In verses 13-16, we learn that the Abrahamic promise was not made through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. Again, we are confronted with the nature of the Law from Sinai. To say that God's grace is not evident in the Old Testament is to go far beyond the truth. If what Paul argues in this chapter is true, then there never has been any salvation apart from the mercy of God in any covenant. But there has to be a reason that the two laws are contrasted in 8:1-2: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." The spiritual law from Sinai had no real provisions for an ultimate propitiation; that would come with Jesus. Its purpose was to guide, teach, prepare, and punish disobedience.

While the Law did all of these things perfectly, it is, at the very least, inappropriate to suppose that God's promise of coming forgiveness was tied to the specifics of the Law of Moses. And especially in the case of the Jewish perversion of God's covenant with them into a system of merit, such an arrangement would have, as Paul states, nullified the promise. This was a promise of faith. It was a promise that those of faith in every age and in every nation had anticipated with great yearning. The coming of Jesus was the age of true forgiveness, not condemnation. This certainly did not rule out as heirs those who had lived faithfully under the Law. But it did argue against those who elevated that law above the lawgiver.

At first glance, verse 15 may be a puzzle to readers: "[B]ecause the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression." It is rather easy to remove this verse from the context and have it only affirming the postulate that where no law exists, there is no violation of law. While true, one wonders why it would be necessary to affirm this; it would appear to be a non sequitur if this is its meaning. Others may claim that this is the proof that there is no legal requirement in Christ's law since there could be no promise today if there is a law. The third alternative has the advantage of honoring the meaning of *law* in the context of this chapter. The law in question is the Law of Moses, in particular, that of circumcision. Violating the law of circumcision had

consequences for those under the Law. In Paul's day, there was an attempt to bring consequences also on those who refused it. Paul's point here is simply to say that circumcision had been done away. Thus, since there was no longer such a law, there could be no consequences for violating it.

In his conclusion in verse 16, it is affirmed that this grand promise was of faith through grace, not the Law. Thus, it is available to those of every race. Rather than utilizing Abraham to prove that there are no conditions of salvation, the faith of Abraham provides the most challenging condition of all: to live as Abraham lived. While Abraham lived centuries before Sinai and while he was justified by faith before circumcision, his life stridently contradicts do-less faith. Abraham believed God regarding his life's direction (Gen. 12:1-3). At age seventy-five, he left the comfort and convenience of home in order to travel to a new land, led only by the word of God. He was permanently separated from his family, never to see them again. He lived in Canaan among strangers for twenty-five years before seeing his son born according to God's promise. He was willing to sacrifice that son a few years later. It would appear that there is much confusion regarding what the faith of Abraham really was.

### **Children of Abraham**

In verses 17-25, we find not only the conclusion of the chapter, but also the conclusion of the arguments that Paul has made throughout chapter 4. It is important to recall the impact of the simple phrase *children of Abraham* to the Jewish mind of the first century. Yes, they had descended from Abraham, as they had also all descended from Adam, Seth, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and Shem. But it was the iconic name Abraham that was the source of nationalistic pride and identity, as evidenced by Luke 3:8: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." Interestingly, even though they as a nation wore the name of Jacob, they identified as children of Abraham even though he, unlike Jacob, had fathered other nations. Had there been an ancient Jewish Mt. Rushmore, it might have had only Abraham's face!

The section begins with an affirmation of the promise to Abraham in verse 17 that he would be a father of many nations. This promise, originally recorded in Genesis 17:4-5, coincides with God's renaming Abram as Abraham ("father of multitudes") at ninety-nine years of age. It is important to recall the significance of the ninety-ninth year of Abraham's life as the year of Isaac's conception. In this conversation with God, it is confirmed that Sarah would bear a son a year from that date, that Ishmael was definitely not the promised son (though God would bless him as a favor to Abraham), and that circumcision would begin with Abraham's family as a sign of God's covenant. Incidentally, this incident survives in Islamic doctrine, although in a corrupted fashion. Since the males were then circumcised (including Ishmael at age thirteen), Islam teaches that thirteen years is the proper age for circumcision. Having committed themselves to Ishmael as the promised son rather than Isaac, this represents a misguided slavish consistency. It would have been equally absurd for one to be circumcised at age ninety-nine in honor of Abraham.

As to Paul's argument in Romans 4, we are confronted with not only the history of Abraham, but also the implications as it pertains to real faith. In the first place, we must consider the power of Him who graced Abraham with His presence on this occasion. Paul reminds us that this was no idle declaration; it was a formal resolution adopted by one who had the power to give life where there had been none and to call things into existence merely by speaking them so. In particular, it was the power of the caller to both cause pregnancies in dead wombs and to resurrect the dead back into the land of the living. If God is then defined as one "who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did . . ." (v. 17), then He also has the power to do as He wills regarding His children. This includes replacing His previous law with the ultimate Law through Christ. This includes imputing righteousness on believers. This includes resurrecting the dead at the second coming of Christ.

In addition to the power of the one who declared Abraham's righteousness, we are also confronted with the power of hope for Abraham—and thus all believers. It is said that he hoped contrary to hope. We take this to mean that from an earthly standpoint and

perspective, there was no evidence that Abraham and Sarah would have a child in the normal way. The situation was, as we would say, hopeless. But this was not a purely earthly situation, because there is yet one piece of evidence to consider: the testimony of God on the matter. We who attempt to defend the faith in today's world utilize much time proving that the Christian faith is a reasonable one. The non-biblical evidence that God is real is overwhelming; the evidence that the Son of God walked on this earth, died, and was resurrected is more than compelling. To examine and analyze this evidence is far from wasted time and demonstrates that ours is not a blind faith, but one based on evidence. But there comes a point in the controversy when we concede that our hope is ultimately based on God's testimony. Rather than concede, we glory in that fact. While we have the utmost confidence that every word of Scripture is true, ultimately we are relying on heavenly testimony regarding what remains after this life. Against hope, we also believe in hope.

But for what was Abraham hoping? Was it only for his descendants to grow from a single family into a prosperous nation? If that were the extent of his hopes, then they had been dashed to pieces by the Jews' departures from God and their path from servitude to eventual utter ruin at the hands of the Romans. God's promise to Abraham contained a hope for all nations, and a conclusion in the heavenly realm, as affirmed by the Hebrews writer: "for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (11:10). Verse 17 also reveals that Abraham's hope was for nations other than Israel. His hope was for God's promise regarding many nations. That hope of Abraham continues to bloom in the form of faith in Christ. His was no nationalistic religion but fulfilled the promise to Abraham by blessing all the families of the earth and calling to those of every nation to receive God's declared righteousness through Jesus Christ.

The case of Abraham's faith also reveals the true nature of his faithfulness. It is interesting that Paul claims that Abraham was not "weak in faith" (v. 19) since the Bible so unflinchingly reveals the mistakes made by both Abraham and Sarah. Abraham and Sarah adopted Eliezer as a possible heir. They contrived to have Abraham father a son through the ancient handmaiden system. Twice, Abraham lied regarding Sarah's being his wife, evidently lacking



trust in God to protect them. And when Sarah heard that she would get pregnant and deliver a son at age ninety, she responded with disbelieving laughter. So, how can we characterize Abraham (and Sarah) as “not being weak in faith”? The text reads that he did not consider his own and Sarah’s physical condition, nor did he waver. But it would seem that on several occasions he did indeed consider those things and then wavered, forming alternative plans to God’s.

The answer illuminates what true faithfulness is; it is not perfection. The life of Abraham is revealed in the penetrating spotlight of Scripture with all of his errors clearly exposed. Seemingly not one transgression is glossed over in an unwavering presentation of all of the facts of his life. It is, in the habit of Scripture, a biographical style that we ourselves would decline to authorize of our own lives. But the true picture of Abraham’s faithfulness is not defined by these errors, but in how he recovered from them. Abraham was not perfect—he was faithful, even as God requires faithfulness of us, not perfection. What is the difference between faithfulness, unfaithfulness, and perfection? The faithful follow God; the unfaithful stay in Ur; the perfect never doubt. The perfect need no help; the unfaithful reject it; the faithful say, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). The perfect have no concerns over sacrificing a son; the unfaithful refuse; the faithful say, “The Lord will provide” (cf. Gen. 22:8). The perfect never sin; the unfaithful depart; the faithful repent.

A proper understanding of Abraham’s faithfulness must include the power of his ultimate obedience to God. In the end, in spite of all of the doubts that he may have had, he decided to put his trust in God’s promise. There is no way to know exactly how, but in the final analysis of Abraham’s faith, it is said that he was fully convinced. Perhaps it was a matter of growth through all of his trials. Perhaps it was how God had led him. Perhaps it was the additional testimony he received in Genesis 18 or seeing the power of God in destroying Sodom. Whatever the case, God had carefully overseen the growth of Abraham’s faith to a state of being fully convinced. His fully convinced mind resulted in his complying with God’s commands, even as true faith always begets obedience.

So, the power of obedience cannot be sensibly divorced from faith and faithfulness. Those who attempt to turn this chapter into a

justification of the doctrine of faith only must ultimately ignore the case of Abraham. Abraham was saved before circumcision was a law, not as one who considered that law (or any other) as optional. Had Abraham refused God's command on this matter, he would have demonstrated his own faithlessness. Had Abraham refused to leave Ur, the same would have been true as would have been the case in the sacrifice of Isaac.

As the chapter ends, Paul ties the arguments together by noting that the justification of Abraham was recorded that we might understand that all of us are also saved by imputed righteousness. The "us" and "our" under consideration in verses 23-24 (who have received imputed righteousness) include both Jew and Gentile believers. It is interesting to see the power and centrality of the resurrection of Christ cited here as it applies to imputed righteousness. Not only is the resurrection itself vital to that justification, but also the individual's trust in that resurrection. This is yet another difference between the covenants: While those under the Law and those preceding the Law (such as Abraham) were men and women of faith, they did not live under the ultimate system defined by faith in a risen savior. No view of justification through faith is complete without the resurrection of Christ.

At first glance, the NKJV translation of verse 25 appears problematic in translating *dia* as "because of." It reads, "who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." The KJV, ASV, RSV, ESV, and a host of other translations use the ambiguous *for* in both instances. Was Christ raised because we were justified? While this is clearly not the case, to have *for* here mean "in order to receive" is equally problematic in the first proposition. That is, he certainly was delivered up because of sin. As the verse presents a two-part parallel, whatever *dia* means in the first case must also be the meaning in the second.

But the justification considered here is not that of the individual. Rather, it is the concept of justification. In other words, God planned a grand scheme of justification for mankind. The divine plan required that Jesus both died and was raised. In that sense, Jesus was raised because of justification.

"We sinned, therefore He suffered: we were justified, therefore He rose."—To this it is objected that the thought is

not doctrinally true; justification being, for each believer, *dated* not from the Lord's death, but from the time of faith (see ch. Romans 5:1). But the answer is obvious: the Apostle here states the Ideal of the matter; he means not individual justifications, but the Work which for ever secured Justification for the believing Church. (Moule)

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## Biographical Sketch

Dan was unfortunately born in a place other than West Virginia, son of the late Bob and Doris Kessinger. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West, have two boys. D.J. is a graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching, and Thomas is a college student.

To the surprise of all concerned, Dan graduated from Walton High School in Roane County, West Virginia, and attended Ohio Valley College. There, the administration was faced with the hard choice of graduating him or having him stay longer. This explains his associate and bachelor degrees in Biblical Science.

Dan has been preaching the Gospel of Christ since 1982, serving congregations in Belle, Long Valley, Gandeeville, Proctor, and St. Marys, West Virginia. He now preaches for the Mt. Alto, West Virginia, church of Christ and is working for WVSOP as an instructor.

Dan conducted a weekly radio program for twenty years, preaches a number of Gospel meetings in various locations, has been a contributor to religious journals, and is the author of *A Cloak of Malice*. He has worked with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp for thirty years and WVSOP for eighteen. Since 2011, he has been involved with mission work in Kenya.

# FROM A SLAVE OF SIN TO A SLAVE OF GOD

*Romans 6:15–23*

*Mark Day*

In studying the profound book of Romans, I often encourage students—as I was encouraged by one of my instructors—to read the first eleven chapters in one sitting. This large section stands as one major argument for the Gospel as God’s means of justifying man; the length and abstract nature of it make it difficult to cover in one lesson and to grasp if it is broken up over several weeks. Rather than lifting individual verses out of the context as fodder for one’s previously held religious persuasions, employing enough care to consider the entirety of Paul’s point and its background brings a glorious explanation of salvation. What a blessing it is then to set aside time to come together and concentrate on these chapters as the theme of this year’s West Virginia School of Preaching Victory Lectures—to notice how each part fits together to serve the main purpose of the book. I am humbled to be a part of this in considering Romans 6:15-23. Paul’s questions in this passage will serve as our main points, his contrasts as subpoints.

## **Is Grace a License to Sin? (v. 15)**

“What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (v. 15). [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted]. Rather than a flawless performance of the works of the Law, the Christian stands before God in the grace provided by the Lord Jesus; He provides the means to stand justified before God, as Paul wrote in Romans 5:2, “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” In verse 15, the apostle Paul again pursued the question he anticipated from those who misunderstood the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He began with, “What then?”—similar to his question in 6:1—both questions introducing Paul’s clarification of the implications of being under

grace. Some had slanderously accused Paul of teaching that we should do evil in order that good may come (3:8). Since sin seemed to prime the pump of God's grace, those who rested in the Law (2:17) suggested that Paul's teaching implied that we should sin more in order to produce more grace. To correct this caricature, Paul affirmed the ethical living of those under grace and their complete submission to God. Yes, it is true that God's grace abounded the more sin abounded (5:20), but those who are saved by grace have died to sin (6:7); thus, they have undergone a radical paradigm shift in their relationship to sin and would not have the mindset to sin more. The repulsiveness of the consideration to sin more is communicated forcefully by the response, "God forbid," in the KJV and ASV; however, this translation is considered by some to be "semi-profane" because it invokes the name of God when it is not found in the underlying Greek (McGarvey 593). "By no means!"—as the ESV renders it—or "Far from it!" are alternative translations of *me genoito* in verse 15 (Bauer et al. 197).

### ***Law vs. Grace***

To be "not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14) does not mean there are no laws in the Christian age. The question being entertained in verses 1 and 15 of this chapter is whether or not we should sin. On this basis, Lard makes the point, "For, although we may not be under law, we can sin nevertheless, which implies that we are still under law *in some sense*" (211). It stands to reason that if there were no laws whatsoever, then no sin would be possible, for no law could be transgressed (1 John 3:4; cf. Rom. 5:13). Sin is still possible for the Christian. Paul makes reference to fulfilling the law of Christ in Galatians 6:2; thus, there are courses of action that the Lord expects Christians to pursue. The law of Christ provides the ultimate grace that makes righteousness possible, but the law alone could not. Deaver articulated this truth:

Christians live under the law of Christ. In previous ages men were under law. In the early chapters of Romans Paul showed that the only way one could be saved by a law system would have been to have kept law perfectly. This, no one ever did. Law specified sin. Law made sin clear. But, law did not provide forgiveness. Now, in the dispensation of

ultimate grace, God has provided for complete, actual, forgiveness. In baptism into Christ all alien sins are forgiven. After baptism, the Christian can pray for forgiveness of sins committed. This dispensation of ultimate grace makes it impossible for sin to have “dominion” over us, *if* we present our “members as instruments of righteousness unto God” [Rom. 6:13] (204).

With all this discussion on the law of Christ, we must remember that Paul’s statement of emphasis is not that we were under one law (Moses’) and are now under another law (Christ’s). The clearly-stated contrast is between law and grace as systems of justification, “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (6:14). The point is that law-keeping is not the ultimate basis of one’s justified status before God. At its root, salvation results from God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

Far from being a license to sin, grace, properly understood, motivates one to live so as to please God, the provider of grace. The proper mindset of a Christian is, “How can I turn my back on God’s good grace?” (cf. Rom. 2:4). Paul previously showed how the Christian follows the example of Christ’s obedience to righteousness rather than Adam’s example of disobedience (5:19). Paul would go on to show how law did not ultimately subdue sin and death (7:11ff) but those in the grace of Jesus Christ who walk after the Spirit can break free from the cycle of sin and death to have life and peace (8:1-6).

### **Whom Do You Serve? (vv. 16-19)**

Paul’s next question was, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (v. 16). Paul assumed that the Christians in Rome knew how slavery worked; while estimates vary as to what percentage of the people in the Roman Empire at the time were slaves, it is certainly safe to say that slavery was not uncommon. If a man became a slave, he was to give obedient service to his master. Describing the background Roman readers would have in coming to this text and slavery’s various means of entry in the first century, Pollard wrote, “Some people became slaves by being taken as captives, while others were

born into a slave family. Still others voluntarily placed themselves in servitude to pay their debts. This last scenario seems to be the imagery used here” (216). Fortunately, the decision is ours whom we will obey: sin to death or obedience to righteousness.

Men may maintain that they are slaves to no one, but the spiritual reality is everyone serves something. Even Jesus had to deal with this denial in His conversation with the Jews in John 8. When Jesus offered to make them free (8:32), they maintained that they “were never in bondage to any man” (8:33). At that moment, they were in subjection to Rome. While the Jewish people were allowed certain liberties and their own limited jurisdiction in regard to the Temple, it could hardly be said that Israel was a free nation. They certainly did not exist as an independent, free nation since the time of the captivity. They had been in subjection to the ruling world powers for centuries. But more to Jesus’ point, they were servants of sin because anyone who continues to practice sin is the servant of sin; only the Son, not a servant, can make a man free from the captivity of sin (John 8:34-35). Paul reminded those in Rome—and reminds us today—of this key truth of spiritual servitude.

Many, perhaps most, of Paul’s readers were free legally and politically; but he wanted them to know that, spiritually, every man is a slave to something. Every person *obeys* something—even if it is only his own whims and desires. In so doing, he becomes enslaved to that thing. (Roper 392)

Thus, we must serve a master: one master (Matt. 6:24). Barth and Blanke have delineated the complex landscape of Greco-Roman slavery in Paul’s day; the life of a slave varied drastically depending on the character of the master (9-18). The same is true spiritually. One’s earthly and eternal existence will vary drastically depending on one’s master. What master will we place ourselves under to serve and obey?

### ***Sin vs. Righteousness***

An interesting word appears in the question, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (v. 16). The word *yield* is from *paristemi*, from *paristano*, meaning to present, proffer; i.e., “to place a person or

thing at one's disposal" (Thayer 489). A servant presenting himself to his master and, in effect, saying, "Here I am, what would you have me to do?" is the image. Paul used this word twice in Romans 6:13 and now again here a few verses later to communicate the thinking of servants to their respective masters. There is a marked difference between the way a servant of sin lives and the servant of righteousness lives. Do I present myself open to yield to sin and its directions? Or do I present myself ready to yield to God's commands? The Christian is not one who is sinless, who never even has a bad thought; however, the Christian is making a consistent effort to present the mind and body as instruments of righteousness befitting a servant of God. Many want Jesus to be their Savior, but He will be Savior only to those who make Him their Lord (Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 6:46). Righteous thinking will lead to righteous living (Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:21-23). Sinful thinking will lead to sin and, finally, if not checked, death (v. 23; James 1:13-16).

### ***The Turning Point: Obeying the Form of Doctrine***

That a Christian has changed masters is reiterated by Paul in the next verse, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (v. 17). Paul seemed always keenly aware of his need to be thankful to God for the change obeying the Gospel works in the lives of the saved. The change in his own life was drastic, and he was ever thankful to be forgiven of his previous life of persecuting Christ's church (1 Tim. 1:12-16).

A key phrase in this verse is *form of doctrine*, from *tupon didaches* (Hodges and Farstad 623). The word *form* is from *tupos* in the Greek; it means "pattern" (Bauer et al. 1020). Of *tupos* in Romans 6:17, Thayer writes, "the teaching which embodies the sum and substance of religion and represents it to the mind" (632). Thus, this phrase could be translated "pattern of teaching." How have Christians obeyed a pattern of teaching? Baptism is a pattern of the redemptive teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again; these are the fundamental facets of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The doctrine they had received obviously filled out more than these bare facts (v.n17), but that salvation is through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was the focal point of the doctrine.



The culminating act in obeying the Gospel is baptism (Mark 16:15-16). The beginning of this chapter delineated what happens at baptism—how one dies to sin, buries the old man of sin in the water, and is raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). Those who say that baptism is an outward sign of an already-possessed inward grace do not recognize the meeting place of the benefits of Christ’s death and the one being saved. God’s Word says baptism is that meeting place, where one is united with Christ’s death and becomes a recipient of the blessings His death affords (6:3-4). In baptism, one puts on Christ and becomes a child of God (Gal. 3:26-27). While death to sin is absolutely necessary, and some of our religious neighbors thankfully agree with us on this, the point at which the old man is buried and newness of life is given is baptism (Rom. 6:4-7); few, sadly, recognize this plain truth of the Scriptures.

Notice this pattern of teaching is “obeyed from the heart” (v. 17). Those who do not understand why they are being baptized or have the wrong motives in being baptized are not obeying from the heart. One’s conscience prompts one to obey God, to be saved by submitting to Jesus as Lord in baptism; when one is baptized, one responds to the promptings of a good conscience and can have a conscience clear from past sins (1 Peter 3:21). Merely dunking in the water a man who does not have the proper thinking in his heart will not have any spiritual efficacy; it will just make a dry sinner wet. This is why faith is emphasized before baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:37); any act done without faith will not please God (Heb. 11:6). While Romans 6 is one of the strongest chapters in the New Testament for the necessity of baptism to salvation, it also makes one cautious in rushing a possible candidate into the water. The death of the old man and utter commitment to God must be grasped. The purpose for baptism must be understood. A proper candidate for baptism does not have to know everything. Nobody does. Certainly, a Christian will grow much in knowledge every day after baptism, but if there is a misunderstanding in what one is doing in baptism, then obedience from the heart cannot take place. Even John’s baptism—a previously authorized baptism in water for the remission of sins, which looked toward Him to come—was not accepted once it had been replaced by the Lord’s baptism (Acts 19:3-5). The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ were not in John’s baptism for they

were yet to come. An understanding of these significant facts of the Gospel is essential to those who would be baptized today. Infant baptism, proxy baptism for dead relatives, sprinkling, and pouring are not only unauthorized by the Scriptures, but also completely unheard of in the first-century church. Can we say they have “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine” (v. 17) who have participated in such man-made practices? Certainly not.

This means there is no power in the water itself. Just as there was nothing therapeutic in the waters of the Jordan to heal Naaman’s fatal disease, so there is nothing in the water itself that contains the power to remit sins (2 Kings 5). The power is in God, who remits sins when one obeys (Acts 2:38; 22:16); He operates to remove the sins of the flesh and give spiritual life (Col. 2:11-13). Thus, it is still a matter of God’s grace when one obeys the pattern of teaching; God’s grace does not exclude obedience. God provides the power of salvation (Rom. 1:16), but only the one who from a believing heart obeys the pattern of teaching is under grace.

### ***Free From One to Serve Another***

Verse 18 goes on to describe what happens at the point of obeying the pattern of teaching: “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” “Then” hearkens back to the previous verse where the pattern, described earlier in 6:3-4, was obeyed from the heart. The contrast of *then* and *now* picks up again in verse 19 to describe the before and after states relative to obeying the pattern of teaching in baptism; Paul writes, “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.” While slavery may have been an unpleasant image to some, especially if they had had bad experiences with physical slavery in their past, Paul explains his use of the image was necessary due to their carnal thinking—after the “manner of men.” Christians are not free to do whatever they wish, but have been set free in order to do what they ought: serve Christ. True freedom is only found in serving Him. It was absolutely vital that they grasped this spiritual truth, even if Paul had to use imagery that at first glance may seem slightly crass.

Because they were slow to comprehend spiritual relations, he uses the customs of men as an illustration to enable them to see that, though they were not under law, but under grace, they had no more liberty to continue to serve sin than a man had to continue to serve one master after he had been transferred to another. (Whiteside 140)

Paul mentions “the infirmity of your flesh” (v. 19). This phrase should not be regarded as teaching the physical body is intrinsically evil. The earlier exhortation, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof” (6:12), shows that it is possible to be in the body yet subdue fleshly lusts that would lead to sin. While sins of the flesh certainly may involve the physical body—Paul uses the term *members* in verse 19 to refer to the body as he did back in 6:13—“the flesh” in the New Testament is not exhausted by the idea of the physical body. The works of the flesh are listed in Galatians 5:19-21; some of them, such as envy or hatred, may not involve the physical body as much as others, e.g., fornication. The flesh is the desire for a man to become his own god, to put self on the throne rather than God; those in the Gentile world bent on doing this, God gave up to their own lusts (Rom. 1:21-25). The works of the flesh are contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The alternative to fleshly living is to follow the Spirit of God, giving one’s spirit priority over fleshly desires. Paul encourages Christians to live out the implications of their change in masters, to use their members as servants to righteousness rather than serving fleshly lusts; even Jesus noted the difficulty of this at times (Matt. 26:41).

Under their previous master, members were used as slaves to uncleanness (Eph. 4:19), but a Christian’s members are no longer to be so used (Eph. 5:3). *Uncleanness* is a word often associated with sexual sins in Paul’s letters (2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Col. 3:5). When sin holds a person captive, the result is “iniquity unto iniquity”; i.e., iniquity abounds. *Iniquity* comes from *anomia*, which means “lawlessness” (Bauer et al. 85). Sin is transgressing the law of God (1 John 3:4). It is progressive, getting worse and worse (2 Tim. 3:13). Christ provides the way to break free from the bondage of sin and death so that we can be righteous (John 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 2:14-15). Israel was in bondage to the Egyptians, who would kill

them in infancy or work them to death, but God used water to save Israel from bondage to serve Him as a son (Exod. 1:13-16; 4:22; 7:16; 14:13; cf. 1 Cor. 10:2). Our former master of sin was intent on bringing us to death; thanks be to God for He not only washed us so we can serve Him as sons, but also intends to give us eternal life (v. 23; cf. Gal. 6:6-7).

The two-fold nature of man characterizes these two masters. There is a fleshly, dying part of us, but also a spiritual, eternal part. God made man in His image (Gen. 1:26); the Lord God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The spirit within man is that part which is an image of God, who is spirit (John 4:24). The Father is not flesh and blood as man is (Matt. 16:17). While God is not forming men out of the dust of the ground today, He is forming spirits. Zechariah 12:1 describes the Lord as the one who “formeth the spirit of man within him.” God is the “Father of spirits,” who not only creates the eternal spirit of man at conception but also afterwards disciplines man so that his spirit may be fashioned to be more like his Creator (Heb. 12:9). Verse 19 tells Christians that our members should be “servants to righteousness unto holiness.” Holiness, or sanctification, takes place first when we are washed (1 Cor. 6:11), then continually, more and more, as we approach eternity (1 Thess. 5:23). We, as eternal spirits temporarily housed in physical bodies, are to glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are God’s (1 Cor. 6:20). Later, Paul will beseech the brethren to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). We choose which of these two parts—flesh or spirit—we shall prioritize (8:6). “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:8). The body is not intrinsically evil, but allowing the flesh to hold sway and cause us to violate the law of God is sin (1 John 2:16; 3:4). God has prescribed a right way to fulfill physical desires, but the flesh pulls us to go against God’s will. All that we do in the body ought to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31). What we do in the body will be judged by the Lord. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). We either pursue the works

of the flesh or produce the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:19-22; Rom. 7:25). The dichotomy between the flesh and spirit will be discussed more fully in chapter eight.

### **What Is the Fruit of Your Service (vv. 20-23)?**

The final question of our assigned passage deals with the outcomes respective to each of the two masters one may choose to serve. While the question is found in verse 21, our attention must span verses 20-22 to get the thought:

For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

The *then* and *now* contrast again presents itself with the words “when” (v. 20), “at that time” (v. 21), and “But now” at the beginning of verse 22. Back then under the previous master of sin, one was “free from righteousness.” Whiteside clarified, “This does not mean that there was no obligation resting upon them to do right, for in that case they would not have committed sin in not doing right. They were free from righteousness in the sense that they were not practicing righteousness” (141). Likewise, now that one is a servant of righteousness, one should be free from the practice of sin.

The question that drives the point is, “What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?” (v. 21). Sins of the past are a present source of shame, not pride, for the Christian. Eternal death is the fruit they would eventually bear if a change in masters had not taken place. There was no genuine advantage to practicing sin, so why would one now in grace go back to sin? The Christian knows where the road of sin leads. Its result is eternal death. Should a Christian leave the present path that leads to holiness and, finally, everlasting life to head in the direction of death? No way!

### ***Wages vs. Gift***

The final contrast Paul highlighted to bring the point of this chapter to a close is between wages and a gift, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 23). Wages are what is earned. Eternal death is the

deserved payment for sin. While many earthly-minded men cannot see it, because they lack God’s holiness, hell is a destination both chosen and deserved by its inhabitants. “Sin, the harsh taskmaster, always pays a handsome wage and never misses a payday” (Pollard 222).

However, eternal life is not a wage. It cannot be earned; it is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9) that produces good works (Eph. 2:10). The “gift of righteousness” reigns because of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17). The Gospel is God’s power to salvation, His means to make men righteous (1:16-17). We cannot stand before God by merit, but by exercising faith in Christ through obeying the faith (1:5; 5:1-2; 16:26). This wonderful gift propels us to lives of holiness and service to God. The Gospel is not some sort of addendum to the Law of Moses; nor is it just another set of laws that must be flawlessly kept. It is a wonderful gift of grace provided by Jesus Christ. What Paul has shown through his questions and contrasts in this chapter is those who receive this grace do so with a mindset that precludes a life of sin.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Mark Day is the minister at the Flatwoods church of Christ, where he has preached for nine years. Before coming to Flatwoods, Mark preached for five years for the Midway church of Christ in Spencer, Tennessee. Mark grew up in Indiana and became a Christian as a teenager after studying the Bible with a friend. He and his wife, Alissa, met at Bible camp and have been married twelve years. They have worked at Bible camps for young people in Indiana, Tennessee, and Ohio. They have two children. Their son, Noah, is seven years old, and their daughter, Amelia, is four. Mark earned his bachelor's degree from Tennessee Bible College and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Biblical Studies from Bear Valley Bible Institute in Denver. He has preached Gospel meetings in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia; he enjoys any opportunity to meet brothers and sisters in Christ in new places and spread God's Word.

# THE ACQUITTED LIFE

*Romans 8:1-4*

*Paolo Di Luca*

Romans chapter 8—a tremendous message for the Christian.

Chapter 8 is the high-water mark in Romans. This fact is generally conceded by all interpreters of this great epistle. Spencer said, “If Holy Scripture were a ring and the epistle to the Romans its precious stone, chapter eight would be the sparkling point of the jewel.” Godet labeled it, “this incomparable chapter.” Someone has added, “We enter this chapter with no condemnation, we close with no separation and in between all things work together for good to those that love God.” (McGee)

Timothy Keller (American Presbyterian pastor) writes:

The book of Romans is the most sustained explanation of the heart of the gospel, and the most thrilling exploration of how that gospel goes to work in our hearts. . . .

The great 20th-century Welch preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote of Romans:

“It is one of the brightest gems of all. Someone has said that in the whole of the Scriptures the brightest and the most lustrous and flashing stone, or collection of stones, is this Epistle to the Romans, and that of these [chapter 8] is the brightest gem in the cluster. The most moving [chapter in Romans] is this chapter 8.” . . .

I have always believed that at the heart of Romans 8 you have the secret to really using the gospel in your heart to change yourself in a profound way; and that the rest of Romans will show you what that change will look like in a practical way. (7-8)

The transformation of the Christian into the image of Christ is not an immediate, once-for-all event. It is a gradual, step-by-step process throughout the life of the believer. Paul mentions this process when he writes: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding



as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18, emphasis added). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] The process of progressive transformation is emphasized also in Colossians 3:9-10, where the apostle is inspired to pen: “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man *who is renewed* in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (emphasis added). Christians begin the transformed life, starting as *babes* or *newly born*, and then they grow into the fullness and stature of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13; 1 Peter 2:2). This spiritual growth is a need for all Christians until we see Jesus coming back from heaven, as Paul exhorts:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philip. 3:12-14)

The Christian is to become more, and more, and even more like Christ every day—that is the pilgrimage of the believer! Sometimes we call the process of being transformed or renewed to the spiritual image of Christ *sanctification*, meaning that we are becoming every day more holy. However, it is common experience of all the disciples of Jesus Christ that sin is still a problem that has to be dealt with daily in our life, even after we obtain our new spiritual identity! When we do sin as Christians, God’s adversary aggressively tries to instill in us doubts about our relationship with our Father and also about our salvation:

- “How do you know that your sins are really all forgiven?”
- “True Christians do not do what you just did! You are hopeless!”
- “You might as well admit your hypocrisy in claiming to be a Christian and quit trying to be holy.”

Charles H. Spurgeon answers this aggression by affirming:

The fact is, that believers are in a state of conflict, but not in a state of condemnation, and that at the very time when the conflict is hottest the believer is still justified. When the believer has to do his utmost even to hold his ground, when he feels that he cannot advance an inch without fighting for it, when he has to cry out in the agony of his spirit because of the vehemence of temptation, he may still lay his hand upon the word of God, and say, “And yet there is no condemnation to me, for I am in Christ Jesus.” (1)

### **Verse 1—No Condemnation**

The first verse of Romans 8 is the declaration of hope and rejoicing that is unfortunately broken by the chapter break. In chapter 7, Paul is describing the Christian’s conflict that is present in every sincere believer. We delight in the law of God, and we desire to serve God, but at the same time, the members of our body are waging war against that knowledge. The flesh, with its passions and lusts, is tempting us to obey it and ignore God’s will. In chapter 6, we have learned that the Christian is set free from the slavery of sin through baptism in Christ Jesus, as the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write:

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Rom. 6:3-7)

However, soon we realize that there is still the continuing battle for purity and sanctification for the Christian. Paul is not an exception, and he is not immune from that struggle. Humbly, he confesses:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform

what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. (Rom. 7:18-21)

Robert Taylor correctly notes:

Paul begins with a contrast between what WAS under Judaism (Romans 7) and what IS under Christianity (the gospel or the faith) or in Christ Jesus. The “*therefore*” links what he is about to say with premises skillfully laid out earlier. There is no condemnation (sentence of death) charged against the fortunate ones who are in Christ. To be in Christ, though, is conditional in nature. There is initial obedience in hearing, faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and immersion in water for or unto the remission of sins (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:9, 10; 6:3, 4; Acts 2:38). Permanent loyalty to the Lord is then required to retain salvation and avoid condemnation again. The clear implication of the Pauline introduction in this chapter is that condemnation (sentence of death) does rest upon all accountable people outside Christ. (120)

In Romans 7:24, Paul poses the crucial question: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” and here, in verse 1, he gives the answer. When we live according to the Spirit of God, He supplies us with the power needed to be able to escape all and any condemnation (and consequent guilt) that life throws our way. Because of our being in Jesus, there is no condemnation and it is the reality of the Christian life—unless we refuse this amazing gift by “stepping out” of Christ!

So, thankfully, there is hope for the Christian. Paul shouts loud and clear that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and walk according to the Holy Spirit. Even though we must fight against sin and even though sometimes we may slip and fall, there is no condemnation as long as we remain in Christ Jesus and we continue to walk in the Spirit. It is important to reflect on the clause that Paul is teaching about the spiritual condition of those who are not condemned even though the flesh serves sin at times.

He affirms that there is no condemnation “for those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). Only those who are in that special connection and relationship with the Lord are the ones who have no condemnation! So, the implication is that those who follow the Old Law are still under the possible doom of condemnation. Pollard suggests:

Another way to translate the verse is “there is no death-sentence for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The idea is identical to the reconciliation of sinners with God by faith. Paul’s point is that the condemnation and doom brought by Adam has been ended by Christ. Not to be under condemnation is the same as the setting aside of sin, and it is possible only for those who are “in Christ Jesus.” . . . One can do nothing for the Father unless he is first “in Christ.” One cannot approach the Father unless he is “in Christ.” The only way for one to be in the body of Christ, the church, is “in Christ.” The only way to live in the Spirit and not the flesh is “in Christ.” The same is true for being a new creature, being renewed, and having hope of future resurrection. (262-63)

Paul has plainly instructed earlier that those who are baptized in Christ are united with Him (6:3-5). But the inspired apostle is not teaching that those who have been dipped in water, no matter what they believe or do, have no condemnation. Biblical baptism is symbolizing our death to sin and is the personal declaration of our commitment to not practicing sin anymore as a habit and that sin is no longer the ruler over our lives (6:7, 11, 13). It is not just to have been baptized, but rather our baptism has meaning by being the moment when we start living for Jesus and we have stopped living for sin. Those who are in Christ Jesus are those who are fighting sin and continuously striving to serve Jesus. To those who have their allegiance to Jesus, there is no condemnation.

When is the moment in which we are not condemned? The reassuring answer is, “[N]ow” (v. 1)! This adverb emphasizes the new relationship and identity with Christ. Right now, in this precise moment, as faithful Christians we are standing spiritually before God justified and not condemned. We are not the target of the wrath of God. He, as the supreme Judge, does not condemn us because in

Christ, life replaces the condemnation and the death that every person deserves right now. By our own choice, we are sinful creatures and deserve condemnation. We have separated ourselves from God because of our decision to sin. In Christ, life through His sacrifice has replaced that condemnation. God has fulfilled His covenant promises, offering life rather than condemnation. How is this possible? How can God do this great act of mercy for us? Verse 2 illustrates and explains.

### **Verse 2—New Covenant**

In this verse, Paul formulates the primary reason why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The apostle affirms that there is no condemnation because the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death. What is “the law of the Spirit of life” (v. 2)? The answer has been given to the readers earlier, in 7:6, where Paul taught that we serve the new way of the Spirit, and not the old way of the written code: “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” The “letter” is used by Paul as a reference to the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses. Reese notes: “[T]he ‘law of the Spirit of life’ is what Paul will go on to describe in the following verses, namely, living the new life as the Holy Spirit directs our human spirit” (330). The contrast is clear: the Law of Christ (the New Covenant) was promised by the Holy Spirit in which those who are in that covenant will obey God from the heart. God’s people will have the *heart of obedience* under the New Covenant instead of the *formal legal obligation* of the Old Covenant. We are now set free from the Law of Moses, which condemned us for our sins, and we are now under the New Covenant, the Law of Christ, which justifies us not for our merits but because of God’s saving grace!

Let us not be mistaken: the Law of Moses is holy and good, but our disobedience to it produced sin and death. Paul explains that the Law of Moses is not the problem of our condemnation. The fact is that we are condemned under the Law because no human has ever obeyed it completely and perfectly. Interestingly, when Paul writes that he serves the law of sin (Rom. 7:25), he is not affirming that he

is condemned as he serves the Law of Moses. His condemnation is because he was not obeying the Law of Moses fully, and for that reason he became enslaved to sin. For that reason, the Law of Moses is identified as the law of sin and death. The result of the partial observance of the Law of Moses was, and still is, sin and death of every person. Paul sees this as a universal problem, because it condemned every person that was under the Law (that is Israel), and also excluded the Gentiles from the hope of salvation. Sin and death were not the purposes of the Law, but they became the result of the Law. However, in Christ and through His new law of life, we now have been set free. While the Law of Moses did not offer justification, Jesus Christ and His covenant does offer justification.

### Verse 3—God Has Acted

Part of the encouraging message of this section of Romans is the proclamation that God has done what the Law of Moses could not accomplish. The Law of Moses was insufficient for “the righteous requirement” (v. 4), not because of possible intrinsic imperfections in it, but because of men’s sinful application and lack of obedience to it. The effect of the Law was weakened by our failures and our sins. So, God sent His own Son to come “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (v. 3) to deal with the consequences and penalty of our sins.

The phrase **in the likeness of sinful flesh** should be carefully considered. . . . Paul stressed that Christ really was a man; He had a body that in all outward appearances was the same as any other man (see Phil. 2:7, 8; Heb. 2:14). The key distinction is that Paul did not say He came “in sinful flesh,” but rather “in the *likeness* of sinful flesh.” By this, he showed that while Christ came to earth in a body similar to ours, there was an essential difference: Christ was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15). . . . Paul’s use of the word “likeness” accomplishes two objectives: (1) It establishes Jesus’ likeness in appearance to humanity, and (2) it maintains a distinction in His essence. (Pollard 264-65)

Jesus came to solve all the problems of sin by becoming a sin offering for us. This event has been written about in the Old New Testament, as we can notice the prophet Isaiah reporting God’s announcement:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;  
He has put Him to grief.  
When You make His soul an offering for sin,  
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,  
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.  
He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.  
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,  
For He shall bear their iniquities. (53:10-11)

Jesus came with a new law and as a sin offering sacrifice to give the possibility for all mankind to be set free from spiritual slavery. The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to highlight the reality that all of us have the problem of sin in our lives: “For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .” (Rom. 3:22-23). John was moved to remind us that, even as followers of Jesus, the problem of dealing with sin continues:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

However, the good news is that there is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ, because they have been set free through Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins, which resulted in our opportunity to live a new, acquitted, and sanctified life.

#### **Verse 4—The Righteous Requirement of the Law**

God sent His Son so that sin could be dealt with in the body of Jesus so “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (v. 4). The difficulty is that “the righteous requirement of the Law” must refer to something good and positive because it is fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit.

The Apostle Paul believed living the Christian life in the Spirit was best compared to the concept of *walking*. This idea is not original to Paul (even if he used the word *walk* at least thirty-two times in his letters), but comes from God Himself. For example, we can notice in the Old Testament that “. . . Enoch walked with God . . .” (Gen. 5:24). Also, “Noah walked with God” (6:9). God told Abraham, “[W]alk before Me and be blameless” (17:1). To

Israel, the Lord said He would establish them as His holy people “if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways” (Deut. 28:9). David asked, “Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth . . .” (Psalm 86:11). We read the psalmist proclaim, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD!” (119:1). God promised Solomon, “So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days” (1 Kings 3:14). The Lord told His people, “[A]sk for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16). To His people, God prophesied, “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek. 36:27). To the prophet Micah, God asked, “. . . And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8).

When we walk according to the Spirit, we are recognizing that Jesus has fulfilled the Law and has paid the price for our sins in the offering of His body on the cross so that we would do what is right. The Messiah did not die so that we would remain in or return to sinful living. He died so that we would be justified and consequently live for what is right. To the Galatians, Paul writes, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*’” (5:13-14, emphasis added).

Clearly, the righteous requirement of the law is attained by a life that manifests our loving the Lord God and His Word with all of our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus offered Himself for our sins to enable and motivate us to live righteous lives, not sinful ones. It is not enough to have the correct knowledge of the will of God. It is required to live acquitted lives, according to the result of the acceptance of the sacrifice of the Messiah. We have been set free to serve God and one another, not to serve sin. Reese comments:

Here we are told the purpose God had in mind when He condemned sin in the flesh. He wanted to make it possible for men to live the kind of holy life which the Law all along



had revealed as being pleasing to God. Paul has already written much on the temporary nature of the Law of Moses, how it was nailed to the cross, and how it is no longer a binding code of statutes for those in Christ; therefore, unless we suppose Paul is now contradicting what he wrote earlier in this very letter, this verse must not be explained in such a way as to imply that Christians must obey the Law of Moses. Furthermore, he did not write “fulfilled by us” but “fulfilled in us.” It is the human spirit, alive because of righteousness (verse 10), aided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, that produces the holy living the Law aimed for, but which it could not achieve because it was “weak through the flesh [v. 3].” (334)

## Conclusion

Every civilized country has laws to prevent evil men from injuring other people, and if anyone breaks these laws, he or she is a criminal and is going to be punished. God has ordained laws for the men whom He created to discourage them from doing evil and to guide them in doing good. When Jesus Christ was asked about which the greatest commandment is, He replied:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matt. 22:37-40; cf. Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27)

Who has ever been able to keep these commandments perfectly? Paul answers, “[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .” (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, everyone who has broken these, or any other of the commandments of God, is a criminal sentenced to eternal death.

However, the Righteous Judge is both *just* and *merciful* and does not desire that anyone who breaks His holy laws should perish. Rather, He wants to forgive and save them from death, as Peter writes: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). For that reason, Jesus died in the place of the sinners and took on

Himself the punishment for their sins, and now there is no condemnation for those who repent and are in Christ.

New Testament Christians never forget that they are spiritual criminals who have been forgiven by God, and for that, they live lives of transformation and holiness.

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## Biographical Sketch

Paolo Di Luca was born in Milan, Italy; was raised in Ferrara, Italy; moved to the States in 2007; and received his US citizenship in 2010. He preached for various congregations in Italy from 1983 to 2007. Since June 2007, he has served the Bridge Street church of Christ in New Martinsville, West Virginia, as pulpit minister and since April 2009 as one of her elders. He is an instructor at the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he teaches Romans and Galatians.

Paolo's education and training have come from various courses of study in Italy and the United States and from working with his father, Gilberto (who preached the Gospel for fifty years in Italy), and other missionaries in Italy.

Paolo is married to the former Cindy Inman, daughter of the late Clifton and Pauline Inman. Clifton was a well-known preacher of the Gospel for fifty years in the Ohio Valley. Paolo and Cindy reside in New Martinsville, West Virginia, and have one son, Marco, who received a master's degree in economic leadership from Freed-Hardeman University and is now living in Los Angeles, California.

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# THE ASSISTED LIFE

*Romans 8:26-30*

*W. Terry Varner*

The theme for our lecture is The Assisted Life, suggesting that Christians ought not to be overly disturbed by the difficulties of life. Romans 8:26-30 is part of a larger section (8:14-39) showing God promises to bring His children through earthly trials. Our earthly sufferings and difficulties are not evidence against our hope (8:24-25).

Our inheritance is the fullness of glory (v. 30). How do we know that our sufferings and difficulties will not overwhelm us and rob us of our victory in Jesus over sin and the world? Inspiration teaches that God the Father has not left us alone to cope with our weaknesses, but He has given us His power, providence, and the Holy Spirit.

Our text for our lecture is Romans 8:26-30:

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to the His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Our lecture divides as follows: (1) The Holy Spirit Assists the Christian (vv. 26-27) and (2) God's Power and Providence Assist the Christian (vv. 28-30).

## The Holy Spirit Assists the Christian (vv. 26-27)

*“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered.”* (v. 26)

“Likewise,” or “In like manner” (ASV), and “also” are indicative of a comparison. The comparison is with our Sonship (8:16-17) and our marvelous hope that sustains and saves us (8:24). As “we ourselves groan within ourselves” (8:23), just so, the Holy Spirit sustains us in our weaknesses.

“[T]he Spirit also helps in our weakness” (v. 26). There are several matters to be noticed in this phrase. *First*, Paul includes himself in the pronoun *us*. As an apostle, Paul had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not help Paul’s prayer life; however, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the Word of God helped Paul’s prayer life.

*Second*, the verb *helps* is a most uncommon verb. It occurs only here and in Luke 10:40. The Greek word for *helps* is *sunantilambanetai* and is composed of *sun* (with), plus *anti* (against), plus *lambano* (I take, I receive). In commenting on these two texts, the late Guy N. Woods exegetes its use:

It is of interest to observe that this verb occurs only one other time in the Greek Testament—in the narrative of Luke 10:40, when Martha, vexed and cumbered with much serving, and annoyed because of Mary’s uncooperativeness, asked Jesus to bid Mary to help, *sunantilabetai*, literally to “Stand over on the opposite side from me, and take hold of the work, so that the two of us working together can get the job done.”

Was Martha attempting to move a heavy table at the very moment she addressed these words to the Savior? Did she also point to the table when she requested Jesus to bid Mary to take hold on the other side and help her? We may believe that such was so, for this is the picture drawn for us in the Greek word. The Spirit helps us—he stands over against us, as it were, and lifts with us until by our united efforts our burdens are lifted. . . . Our translation, slightly expanded, to indicate the full significance of the terms, runs: **“Likewise also the Spirit takes hold along with us, and helps us bear**

**our earthly afflictions.” (59-62)**

Similar interpretation and application of *helps* (*sunantilambanetai*) abound in commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, lexicons, translations, vocabulary studies, theses, and journals. A listing in excess of sixty plus works may be found in Goebel Music’s invaluable resource volume on the Holy Spirit (972-94), and many additional references could be added to his research.

The Holy Spirit is stated to assist in our “weaknesses” (v. 26), or “infirmity” (ASV). *Weaknesses* means “without strength, weak” (Deaver 288). It is the concept of being “powerless” (NIV). It is used earlier by Paul: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The enemies of Paul claimed his bodily presence appeared as “weak” (2 Cor. 10:10). The question arises: What is the Christian’s weakness, or infirmity? One answer is: “For we know not how to pray as we ought . . .” (v. 26). Christians are to be a people of prayer. We are instructed to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), “for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1), to “obtain mercy and find peace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16), and “for wisdom” (James 1:5). On the other hand, surely any Christian will acknowledge that at times in life knowing *how* to pray in certain situations and circumstances is most difficult, often leaving us searching for the right words, God’s grace, and the inner strength to pray with perspicuity. How do Christians know that our inability to pray as we ought will not overwhelm us and perhaps rob us of our ultimate victory in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:7)? The text shows that the Holy Spirit helps us. Our heavenly Father does not expect us to cope alone in our inadequacy of not knowing how to pray in certain situations and circumstances.

*Third*, “but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (v. 26). As Christ makes intercession in heaven *for* the Christian (Heb. 7:25-26; 9:24), so the Holy Spirit makes intercessions *within* Christians, in conjunction with the Word, by assisting in their prayer lives. It is the case that the Scriptures affirm that both Christ and the Holy Spirit function as intercessors between the Christian and God. “It is Christ . . . who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 9:34), and “the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us . . . for the saints according to the will of

God” (vv. 26-27). *Intercession* means “to make an appeal to someone on another person’s behalf.” The fact that the Holy Spirit intercedes for the Christian does not negate the unique role of Christ as intercessor. It is Christ who stands between us and God’s wrath (1 Tim. 2:5-6) and secures for us justification (Rom. 3:26; 8:30). God also justifies us (8:33).

*Four*, the Spirit intercedes for us “with groanings which cannot be uttered” (v. 26). What this means and how the Spirit does this is controversial. “[G]roanings which cannot be uttered” is also translated as “but through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us” (NEB), “groanings too deep for words” (NASB; ESV), and “unuttered yearnings” (Vaughan 161). Controversy exists among interpreters whether the “groanings which cannot be uttered” are the words of the Holy Spirit or the words of the Christian. We affirm from the context and proper exegesis that the groanings are the Christian’s rather than the Holy Spirit’s.

[T]here are urgings and longings in the heart of a sincere child of God that he cannot express. He has a feeling of helplessness, or of a deep need, without knowing what that need really is, or what would meet that need. It is what Paul calls “unutterable groanings.” (Whiteside 185-86)

Thomas defines the groanings as “untranslatable into human terminology but yet they are deep and meaningful” (65). Have you always and in all situations been able to articulate your prayers? If so, shame on you.

*Five*, the Holy Spirit takes our inarticulate thoughts, changing and refashioning our prayers, and presents them to the Father. When the Holy Spirit functions in this manner, He intercedes on our behalf.

They are the deep real wants of human nature, our wants not for time merely, but for eternity. The groanings which give inarticulate expression to these wants are not the Spirit’s groanings. They are our groanings. But the Spirit . . . so forms and directs them as to make them express our true wants and in strict harmony with the Father’s will. (Lard 277)

Neither are the groanings a reference of speaking in tongues or ecstatic worship. Winters writes: “The groanings of the Spirit . . .

[are] our own inner needs and longings which we cannot express in words. . . . Which we are unable to verbalize or express” (98).

*“Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”* (v. 27)

The verse helps to explain the Holy Spirit’s intercession. The verse references three persons: (1) the Christian, (2) God, and (3) the Holy Spirit. The Christian at times prays with untranslatable groanings because he does not know how he ought to pray (v. 26). The Holy Spirit intercedes on behalf of the Christian by carrying our untranslatable prayers and presenting them before the throne of God. In our redemption by the Trinity, God has chosen to divide the various aspects of redemption among the persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit, along with Jesus (1 Cor. 1:30), is responsible in assisting Christians in their sanctification; i.e., the life of holiness “without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). In the weaknesses of our prayer life, the Holy Spirit’s intercession is part of His distinctive work.

God “searches the hearts” of man (v. 27). God is described as One “who knows the hearts of all” (Acts 1:24) and “who tests [searches] our hearts” (1 Thess. 2:4). “If God knows what is in the minds of created beings who are qualitatively different from him and relatively independent of him, then surely he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit himself, who is qualitatively equal with God and one in nature with him” (Cottrell 498). 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 says the Holy Spirit also knows the mind of God.

We have questions as to exactly *how* the Holy Spirit presents our groanings to God; the Scriptures say He does. Likewise, I do not know and understand fully *how* the Holy Spirit strengthens our inner man (Eph. 3:16); the Scripture says He does. I agree with Roper, “No human illustration is perfect, but of this we can be sure: When we pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf” (110). His intercession in the prayers of the Christian is always “according to the will of God” (v. 27).

### **God’s Power and Providence Assist the Christian (vv. 28-30)**

*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who*

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*love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (v. 28).*

Romans 8 sets forth a number of things that assist the Christian in living the holy life as God expects of us: 1) walking according to the Spirit (8:1-4), 2) having the mind of the Spirit (8:5-8), 3) the indwelling of the Spirit in conjunction with the Word (8:9-11), 4) the spirit of sonship (8:12-17), 5) the sufferings of this life (8:18-23), 6) the wonderful hope (8:24-25), 7) the intercession of the Holy Spirit (8:26-27), 8) God’s power and providence (8:28-30), and 9) the assurance of God’s love (8:31-39).

“And we know” (v. 28) is a great affirmation setting forth God’s power and providence. It is the case that Christians being “the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (8:17), Paul can state the fact: “that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (v. 28). How do we know? “Partly by experience but primarily by revelation” (McGarvey and Pendleton 365). This is based on the understanding of God’s attributes and especially His omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omni-benevolence. He works all things “for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (v. 28). The omniscience of God ought to give every Christian confidence in His promises as well as His omnipotence gives us confidence in His power to work all things for good. “All things” must be restricted, as sin works no good to any. Romans 8:28 is one of the great providence passages of Scripture.

[T]he concept of providence presumes that God is still at work in the world He created. “Provide” is at the root of the word “providence.” God does provide good things for His people, and His loving care is always behind His every action on our behalf. We are to cast all our anxieties on God because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). . . . We have observed that we can believe confidently, based on God’s promises in Scripture, that God is at work, providing for us. However, we are generally not able to say with certainty whether His providential hand has been directly involved in a specific instance. So also, while we can know through Scripture that the Spirit does certain things, we will not always know how, when or whether He was working in a specific instance.

(May 17, 97)

McGarvey has two tremendous sermons on providence. The first is “Divine Providence: Joseph” (*Sermons* 215-31), and the second is “Divine Providence: Queen Esther” (232-46). These ought to be read and studied for the great insight to the marvelous biblical doctrine of God’s providence. McGarvey shows how “God overrules our own acts, both good and bad, and those of our friends, and brings us out at the end of our lives shaped and molded as he desires we shall be” (222).

“[W]ork together for good” (v. 28) does not necessarily mean that “all things” are pleasant. Experiences of life can be good without being pleasant; yet they can be pleasant and good at the same time. “Behold, how good and pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1). The stories of Joseph (Gen. 37-50) and Mordecai (Esther) show their experiences were not pleasant, but eventually resulted in good for each. Joseph told his brothers that “God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5). How much is involved in “all things” (v. 28)? The context suggests it refers to “the sufferings of this present time” (8:18; 33-39); i.e., weaknesses, adversities, and trials of our earthly life, as well as the consequences of the sins of our neighbors (Godet 322).

“To those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (v. 28) refers both to the primary and remote context. Those who love God and keep His commandments live “according to His purpose.” “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments” (2 John 1:6). “If you love me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). The phrase *to those who love God* is the emphasis in the Greek text, indicating that Paul is writing about Christians, not the general public (Morris 331; Lard 280).

God’s redemptive scheme from eternity (Eph. 1:11; 3:10-11; 2 Tim. 1:8-10) is described elsewhere as “according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (1:9). It is important to understand that no biblical text teaches God *causes* all the circumstances of life, but rather that He causes good to *come out* of them. This ought to give the Christian assurance and comfort. “God causes all things to work together for

good” (v. 28, NASB). In all of God’s workings, man’s free will is not inactive. God’s sovereignty runs behind and through it.

*“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”* (vv. 29-30)

Whiteside calls these two verses “the most difficult passages in the Roman letter” (188). Before creation, God knew His plan of redemption. Paul develops in a nutshell God’s plan. While verse 28 is the great *affirmation* that God’s providence helps the child of God, verses 29-30 set forth *explanatory evidence* of this affirmation. *For* is a causative conjunction connecting verses 29-30 to verse 28.

Paul argues that God “foreknew” (knew beforehand; v. 29) “those who are the called according to His purpose” (v. 28). God “predestined” (appointed, determined the destiny; vv. 29-30) that the “called” (v. 30) would be “conformed to the image of His Son” who is “the firstborn among many brethren” (v. 29). “Conformed to the image of His Son” refers to our final inheritance in heaven and not to the Christian’s new birth. The context of Romans 8 emphasizes our final state—inheritance, glory, and the resurrection (8:11, 23). The phrase is a reference to the Son in His glorified state (McGarvey and Pendleton 367; Deaver 298; Whiteside 190; Cottrell 508; Lard 283). This is the language of Philippians 3:21, in which “the Lord Jesus Christ . . . will transform our lowly body.” “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Cor. 15:49). “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

“The called” (vv. 28, 30) are those who have answered God’s invitation; i.e., “the saints” (v. 27). Calvinism understands verses 28-29 as an inward, selective, and irresistible enabling by the Holy Spirit, separate and apart from the Gospel. Calvinism calls this “irresistible grace.” However, the Scriptures are clear that faith comes from hearing and obeying God’s Word (Rom. 10:17; cf. 2 Thess. 2:14). The biblical reason Christians are described as “the

called” (vv. 28, 30) is that others, in hearing the identical message of the Gospel, reject it for numerous reasons. This also helps explain how Christians are “called according to His purpose” (v. 28). Deaver renders a great summary of these two verses:

To those who would accept the invitation, God purposed to grant *justification*—complete forgiveness of sins. In Acts 2, Peter announced the invitation. The people asked what to do. Peter said: “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (verse 38). To those who would accept the invitation, and thereby come to have *justification*, God purposed (in His mind, in Eternity) to grant ultimately the *glorification*—the glory that shall be revealed. This “glorification” is “conformation to the image of God’s Son.” “Good,” “conformed to the image of His Son,” and “glorification” all mean the same thing in this present section. (299)

There is a chain in God’s Scheme of Redemption—foreknow, predestined, called, justification, and glorification. “Each of these is a distinct act, and in the redemptive process they do follow one another in this sequence” (Cottrell 511).

God has promised that He will assist the Christian through the work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the Word and God’s power and providence. God has promised to the faithful “everlasting life.” God has warned man of the punishment awaiting him for rejecting His redemptive process. The divine record states: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46). We would that all serve God faithfully.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

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# THE PRECIOUS STONE

*Romans 9:30-33*

*Rick Kelley*

*“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” (Rom. 9:30-33) [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.]*

## **Introduction**

Barclay labeled this section “The Jewish Mistake” (141). Reese called it “a striking paradox” (461). The Jewish people received many privileges that the Gentiles did not (Rom. 9:4-5; Eph. 3:12-22). Despite this and evidence to the contrary, most Jews rejected Jesus while Gentiles flocked to Him. This paradox is the basis of our study.

First, let us define a couple of terms. The word *Jew* refers to someone who is a descendent of Abraham. A Gentile is anyone else. The terms *nations*, *heathen*, *peoples*, and *Gentiles* are used interchangeably in Scripture (Psalm 2:1; Isa. 2:2).

Second, let us qualify that not all Jews rejected Jesus and not all Gentiles accepted Him. The first church of Christ was comprised of Jewish converts (Acts 2). These converts faced persecution from other Jews and dispersed back to the regions of the empire (and beyond) from which they had traveled for the Pentecost Feast (Acts 8:1-4; 1 Peter 1:1). However, when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans decades later, churches throughout the Empire were overwhelmingly Gentile in composition (Acts 13:46; Eph. 2:18-19).

Yet the contrast between Jew and Gentile in our text relies less upon sheer numbers (i.e., more Gentiles than Jews accepted Jesus)

than on the unlikelihood, given the circumstances, that *any* Jew should have missed Jesus or that *any* Gentile should have found Him (cf. Rom. 9:4-5; Eph. 3:12-22).

## **Background**

The four verses under our consideration (Romans 9:30-33) begin with a question, “What shall we say then?” (v. 30). This question, and the answer Paul gives to it, relies on the previous arguments he has made. Others are covering that material in this lectureship, but we must at least briefly review them to let this lecture stand on its own. We will give a brief outline of Romans 1-11 and then discuss the specific arguments of chapter 9 as they lead to the question that introduces our present text.

Here is a simple outline of Romans 1-11:

1. *Condemnation*: All (Jews and Gentiles) are guilty sinners, sentenced to die (1:18-3:20).
2. *Justification*: All guilty ones can have their sentences overturned by becoming faithful ones to Jesus Christ (3:21-5:21).
3. *Sanctification*: Faithful ones are led by the Spirit in holiness and hope (6:1-8:39).
4. *Vindication*: God is right to accept anyone—Jew or Gentile—by faith (9:1-11:36).

Our text, Romans 9:30-33, appears in the section titled Vindication. Paul is vindicating God for accepting Gentiles and rejecting Jews. As Stott put it, “Forced with the unbelief of the majority of Israel and the minority of status of believing Israel, how have these things come about?” (275-76).

## **The Unlikely Result (v. 30a)**

Again, here is Paul’s question, which introduces this section: “What shall we say then?” (v. 30). This question is “used by Paul only, and by him only in this Epistle . . .” (Vincent 50). It “often marks the beginning of a new line of reasoning in Romans (see: 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14), and the thought introduced in 9:30 seems to

continue through 10:21” (Pollard 343). Reese explained it, “What summary could one give of the message presented by Paul thus far?” (460-61).

Since Paul is writing and not conversing, he asks the question only to continue his argument. It serves as a bridge between Paul’s prior reasoning and his subsequent statements about Israel and the Gentiles. We now turn our attention to chapter 9 to understand Paul’s reasoning thus far.

In 9:1-5, Paul sorrows over his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3). They had rejected Jesus. But he “knew the Jewish mind. He knew their thinking, and he anticipated their objections” (Deaver 330). In 9:6-29, Paul presented the following four arguments to counter these implied objections, objections which revolved around God accepting Gentiles while rejecting Jews:

1) *Physical lineage never was the only basis of God’s acceptance* (Rom. 9:7-13). Paul notes that Ishmael was a son of Abraham but he was rejected (9:7-9). For that matter, God also rejected Esau (9:13). Lineage was not nothing, but it also was not everything. Both John the Baptist and Jesus warned against this thinking (Matt. 3:9; John 3:7). Deaver wrote:

The Jews knew perfectly well that not all the fleshly descendants of Abraham were reckoned as a part even of fleshly Israel. Ishmael, son of Abraham by Hagar, and his descendants were no part of Israel. If the Jews could see that being a descendant of Abraham did not make one a part of fleshly Israel, then they should have been able to see that being a descendant of Abraham would not necessarily make one a part of spiritual Israel. (331)

2) *God can and does utilize unrighteous people and nations for His purposes* (Rom. 9:14-18). Would God dare work through the unrighteous Gentiles? Such was the case with the Pharaoh of Egypt.

This argument was a setup not only for Paul’s statement in verses 30-33, but also for his continued reasoning in chapters 10-11. There, he argues that God used the Jews’ unbelief to benefit the Gentiles and used the faith of the Gentiles to provoke the Jews (11:11-24).

3) *God’s condemnation of the nation (Israel) is not a failure of God’s promises* (Rom. 9:25-26). Again, as Deaver wrote, “[Paul]



knew that the Jews would reason that if they were condemned of God, then God had failed in his promises made to them and to Abraham” (330). But as Paul notes, not only is God justified in doing so, it was predicted by the prophets. Hosea said God would call some people His children that had never been called His children (2:23). Who could Hosea have meant but the Gentiles? Paul wrote to the Gentile converts in Ephesus, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God . . .” (2:19).

4) *That only a remnant of fleshly Israel accepted Jesus actually proved the case* (Rom. 9:27-29). Only a small portion—a remnant—of fleshly Israel had accepted Jesus. This meant to some that the Way must be a fraud, but it actually proved the opposite. Isaiah predicted that only a remnant of Israel would be saved (10:22). It happened before, and it was happening now.

The idea that any Jews would miss their Messiah—or worse, reject and murder Him—was preposterous to the Jews, if not an insult. It was certainly insulting to suggest that Gentiles, who had abandoned the true God (Rom. 1:18-32), had actually discovered Him. Stott rightly called “the whole situation . . . topsy-turvy” (276). Yet Paul’s argument was irrefutable.

The life of Jesus and the subsequent preaching of His Gospel produced what appeared to many as unlikely results, but God’s purposes often contain such improbabilities. What if the results were in line with what seemed more likely? If the Gentiles had rejected Jesus, *would the Jews have taken notice?* If the Jews had accepted Jesus, *would the Gentiles have cared?* Would Calvary have occurred?

### **The Pursuit of Righteousness (vv. 30b-32)**

Following the question of verse 30 comes the first part of Paul’s answer to it, “That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith” (v. 30).

The key word in this text is *righteousness*. It comes from the Greek *diakonos* (here, *dikaionen*). Some translations use *righteousness*, some *justification*. Lard preferred the latter (317). In his translation, Barclay inserted this phrase for every instance of the

word *righteousness*: “a right relationship with God” (141-42). This is correct but can stand further development. Thayer said it was “the doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God.”

The doctrine of justification permeates every part of the Bible. It is the key term of the passage before us. It is used thirty-four times in Romans, twenty-three of which are in the first nine chapters (including our passage, verses 30-33). Paul develops this doctrine especially in Romans and Galatians. In due time, when Christ came (Rom. 5:6), the doctrine of justification was given its fullest expression.

*Diakonos* is a legal term “referring to a person’s right standing or acquittal before a judge in a courtroom” (Pollard 344). God is the righteous judge (Gen. 19:25; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). How can a righteous judge pronounce guilty people innocent? Lard called it a “radical fact” (317), and so it is. What is more, the Jews who pursued it missed it, and the Gentiles who did not pursue it found it. This is the basis of Paul’s argument in Romans 9. Now, we turn our attention to Paul’s answer, our assigned text (vv. 30-33).

The contrast Paul pictures between Jews and Gentiles in verses 30-32 is as follows:

Verse	Who?	What?	Result	How?
30	Gentiles	followed not after righteousness	have attained righteousness	(by) faith
31-32	Israel	followed after the law of righteousness	did not arrive at that law (ASV)	not by faith, but by works of the law

***The Gentiles Seized It***

Paul says that Gentiles “followed not after righteousness” (v. 30). “Followed not after” means “to pursue (in a hostile manner)” (Thayer), but the negative implies they were doing just the opposite, at least by comparison. Lard translated it “were not seeking justification” (316) and said they were “not in pursuit of it, and therefore were not expecting it . . . because they knew in effect

nothing about it . . . or because they had sunk down in indifference . . . or . . . both” (317). Yet, they still “attained” it (v. 30). Stott said the term *katelaben* implies that “they laid hold of it almost with violence” (276). As Orbison noted, “The Gentiles were not running after righteousness, but when it was made available to them, they seized upon it.”

### ***The Jews Shunned It***

By contrast, in verse 31 Paul says that “Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.” The word *attained* (*epthasen*) comes from the Greek *phtano* and means “to obtain an object of pursuit” (Deaver). The ASV says they “did not arrive at that law.” Reese said the phrase “expresses the idea of continually failing to reach what was continually being pursued” (463).

What did Paul mean by “the law of righteousness” (v. 31), which the Jews were said to have pursued? Carefully note the difference between Jews and Gentiles here: the Gentiles did not pursue “righteousness,” while the Jews pursued “a law.” Again, we cite Reese: “In contrast to how the Gentiles lived, not pursuing righteousness, Israel had pursued a ‘law.’” He then adds, “If we allow 10:3 to guide us, ‘law of righteousness’ must be understood as expressing the same thing that ‘going about to establish their own righteousness’ does; something different from actually ‘subjecting themselves to the righteousness of God’” (462).

The Law was holy but presented these two obstacles for those who lived by it: first, all who tried to obey it transgressed it. Being perfect and holy (Rom. 7:12), man’s violation of it was inevitable.

This created a second problem, which was that the Law “could not make righteous the one who transgressed it” (Whiteside 212). The Law was designed to make men more aware of their guilt (Rom. 7:11-13), but the Law did not contain the answer; it only highlighted the problem. Spurgeon wrote, “[The law] was not the cure of the disease, much less the creator of it, but it was the revealer of the disease . . .” (qtd. in Cole).

### **The Precious Cornerstone (vv. 32-33)**

In verse 32, Paul asks another question, “Wherefore?” which

means, “Why did Israel not arrive at that law?” He answers, “Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone. . . .”

Back in verse 30, Deaver noted that the phrase “which is of faith” is literally “which is out of *the* faith” (360, emphasis added). He wrote, “Out of the faith” signifies “the faith” as the source (ablative case). The righteousness that is produced by “the faith,” the Gospel of the Christ—that is righteousness that results from obedience to the Gospel (360).

Thus, when Paul says that the Jews “sought it [righteousness] not by faith” in verse 32, it implies they sought it (righteousness) not by *the* faith. When Paul says the Jews were seeking righteousness through “works of the law,” it means that when they were presented with the Gospel, they chose the Law instead. What they did with the Law is not nearly as important as the fact that they rejected Jesus. Paul’s immediate concern is to demonstrate that God is justified in rejecting those Israelites who rejected Jesus.

Paul argued both here and elsewhere in Scripture that the Law was the inferior system—that the Gospel system, that Jesus, was that to which the Law pointed (Gal. 3:24). It was not exactly a news flash that no man was ever justified by the Law. Lard wrote, “Not one of them had ever been justified by it; nor was one of them ever to be” (318). Jesus the Messiah should have been a welcomed sight for a weary nation, but instead, all but a remnant

maintained that justification could not be obtained except by their law. Accordingly, they repudiated Christ. Their disastrous argument ran thus: The law alone is for justification, and we are sure of justification by it. Therefore we will have nothing to do with Christ. We will never abandon the law for him. This decided their fate.

. . . Israel is viewed as pursuing justification so erroneously and eagerly as to stumble at Christ, the very object in whom they should have sought it. They followed the illusion of the law, and so missed the reality in Christ. (Lard 319)

Being justified by the Law was like trying to fix a car, having only the repair manual but not the car, “an impossible goal” (Stott 276). The Law, instead of leading them to their Messiah, became many

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Jews' excuse not to accept Him. Contrariwise, Gentiles, without the Law, had no bias for it. Weary in sin, many of them welcomed Jesus heartily.

Even among the remnant of Jews who did obey the Gospel, the inclination to return to the Law persisted. Some thought certain aspects of the Law, like circumcision, must still be adopted (Acts 15:4-5). Some, when they began to face persecution, began to slide back to the familiar trappings of Judaism (Heb. 10:38-39). Paul warned that no one could be justified by the Law (Gal. 2:16), and if they tried, they would forfeit the grace of God (5:4).

We imagine one of the reasons God obliterated the Second Temple via the Romans in AD 70 was to further drive home the point that Judaism's purposes had been accomplished in Jesus Christ and was rendered unnecessary. Persisting in Judaism was a derision of God, trampling on the blood of God's Son and despising His grace (Heb. 10:29).

Paul finishes this portion of his argument in verses 32b-33. His argument now turns on evidence from the Scriptures: "For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

This quote is partially from Isaiah 28:16, ". . . Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" ("be disturbed" in the NASB), and 8:14, "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

Isaiah 8:13 says this stone (against which the Jews stumbled) was "The LORD [YHWH] of hosts. . . ." Contrary to the notions that many Jews had about their Messiah, He was God Himself. What was more preposterous to the Jews was that He was God in the flesh (John 1:14; Philip. 2:5-8, Col. 2:9; 1 John 1:1-3). Of course, in Romans, Paul argues that this was Jesus, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

The NASB translation of Isaiah 8:14 is "a rock to stumble over" rather than "rock of offence." That is not strong enough. Orbison quoted Lenski, who wrote, "This is not a stone over which one may merely stumble and recover oneself but one against which one runs

with his entire body and smashes it entirely; it is like knocking one's brains out. The stone itself is of such a size, and its very character produces such a dire result." Orbison added:

The word for "offence" is the Greek term *scandalon* from which we get our English, "scandal." However, it does not mean what we generally think of as a "scandal" today, it literally means a death trap . . . So, this stone became for the Jews this "snare" or death trap. The Jews did not accept what God sent among them . . . they did not believe in Him . . . they did not believe that He was their means of salvation . . . they did not believe that He could effect their salvation . . . they became ensnared because of Him.

The Psalmist also wrote, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes" (118:22-23, NASB). Jesus applied this passage to Himself (Matt. 21:42-44; Mark 12:10). In Matthew's account, Jesus adds, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you [Jews], and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (22:43-44).

Peter also applied this passage when preaching about Jesus (Acts 4:11) and later when writing about Jesus by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 2:6-8). In 2:8, Peter, a Jew, explains, "They [the Jews, or anyone else] stumble because they disobey the word [the Gospel] . . ." (ESV).

Israel traveled the road that led them straight to their justification, but strikingly, only a remnant arrived. They came upon a rock in the road (Jesus Christ) and rejected it. As Paul explained in Romans 10, they sought "to establish their own righteousness" and refused to submit "themselves unto the righteousness of God" (10:3). They heard the Gospel of Christ and refused to obey it. Consequently, they left themselves with no choice but to stay with the Law, which, as Paul argued, was a death trap.

In contrast, the Gentiles did not tread the same privileged road of the Jews. Yet, in due time, they intersected the road at precisely the same time and place as the Jews, and there was that same rock, Jesus Christ. When presented with the possibility of justification,

they pursued it by faith—they obeyed the Gospel. The Jews stumbled—and the Gentiles submitted.

## Applications

It is good for us to make a few points of application:

1) *Just as then, it is still often easier to reach the religiously uninitiated than the religiously biased.* The Jews developed their own concepts of Messiah. The Gentiles had no vision of such. The Gentiles were more objective. This does not mean that all Jews were not. Some of them were objective. Some obeyed the Gospel, but for most, traditions and self-righteousness shrouded their objectivity.

2) *Preferences and traditions are things about which we must be cautious.* Like the Jews, we all have preferences and traditions. Provided these neither subvert nor contradict the Word, these preferences are just that and can be taken as such.

However, any number of Christians and congregations have heaped more than enough trouble to themselves by confusing preference for regulation or by substituting traditions or preferences for God’s Word. The continued advance of musical entertainment in worship (mechanical instruments) and the press to eliminate the clearly defined gender-based roles of men and women in marriage and in serving the church are current examples.

3) *Faith and obedience are not contradictory, they are complements.* In our study, we found those who continually repudiated [no surprise] the idea of obedience as part of God’s plan under the Gospel. It was noted that “works of the law” (v. 32) meant “attempting to obey the law perfectly,” while the phrase “by faith” implied no obedience. Thus, it was inferred that the Gentiles obtained justification *without obedience* while the Jews failed to obtain justification *through obedience*.

This is preposterous. The Jews under consideration here rejected Jesus. Of course, they continued obeying the Law; what else were they to do? Whether or not they tried to obey it perfectly is irrelevant.

On the other hand, when Gentiles accepted Jesus, did they not obey Him? This is not difficult to understand. It is not that one group was obeying and one group was not. It is not that one group obeyed and one had faith. One group had faith in and obeyed the Law, and

one group had faith in and obeyed the Gospel. Both had faith. Both obeyed. One found life. One found condemnation. It was the object in which each placed their trust that mattered. Therefore, the Gospel is superior to and supplants the Law. Obedience to it contains a proper provision of grace through the person and work of Jesus. Obedience to the Law leads only to condemnation.

Faith and obedience are not mutually exclusive. Faith and obedience are complements. One cannot have faith without obedience, nor can one have proper obedience without faith. Obedience is the proper response of faith. Faith motivates proper obedience (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; cf. Heb. 11 and James 2), but only faith in Christ results in justification. Winters wrote, “God chose the Gentiles because of their faith; He rejected the Jews for lack of it. God thus chooses to save believers in Christ and no one else” (116).

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## **Biographical Sketch**

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Rick married the former Samantha Emerson in 1997. The couple has six children: Christian (21), Hannah (18), Noah (15), Emma (14), Evan (12), and Leah (10).

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Rick enjoys spending time with family, reading, writing, and playing/writing music.

# THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

*Romans 1:16-17*

*Phil Sanders*

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” (Rom. 1:16-17) [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]*

The term *gospel* occurs frequently in the New Testament in both noun and verb forms, literally meaning “good news” or “proclaiming good news.” The noun form, *euangelion*, occurs seventy-five times, and the verb *euangelizomai* occurs fifty-six times (Mathis 670–71). This passage contains a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, which encourages Judah to fulfill the task of rebuilding the temple; but it speaks here of God’s blessing to those who believe the glad message of salvation.

Paul wrote this passage in the earliest days of Christianity, when the Roman society had little knowledge of the Lord Jesus or His church. Salvation is the basic theme of Romans (vv. 16-17). This salvation comes by faith and results in life. He notes that all men are sinners and stand in need of God’s grace through faith in Christ. Paul is interested in bringing people to the obedience of faith, to heeding or obeying the glad tidings, the Gospel (Rom. 1:5; 10:16; 16:26). Paul regarded the preaching of the Gospel as a duty, and he was ready and eager to do it. “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also” (1:14–15).

The work of preaching is primarily persuading men to believe in Jesus Christ and His teaching by telling the story of the Gospel. Preaching is by its very nature persuasive; it consciously attempts to influence the behavior of the listener through the delivering of a message from God. Persuasion moves the will to the point where a

desire for change is created, a desire that becomes dominant to other desires. Gospel preaching must be persuasive. The Lord Jesus requires people to deny themselves, to take up their crosses daily, and to follow Him (Luke 9:23). Such devotion demands the heart, the mind, and the will to believe and obey.

Thankfully, some Romans were obedient to the faith and became servants of God. Paul argued people could decide whom they would serve and how they would live. Paul cited the Romans as an example of people who changed their allegiance from sin to God:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (6:16-18)

The Apostle Paul took seriously the challenge to persuade men because he knew their souls were at stake. He wrote, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I trust are well known in your consciences" (2 Cor. 5:11). Persuasion is essential to convincing, convicting, and converting the individual. We preach to persuade men to believe, and the power of persuasion lies in the message wherein one soul speaks passionately to another soul. He speaks a message in which obscurity is overcome by clearness, and doubt by faith, and narrowness by breadth, fantasy by fact, partiality by comprehension, and hesitation by decision.

Effective persuasion takes place when the individual who preaches looks to the Word of God and remembers his own place as a servant and messenger. Paul admonished Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24-26:

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

The attitude of the messenger affects how the message is delivered

and how the message is perceived by those who hear. Preachers must learn to show gentleness and patience with the weak and the lost. They must give them biblical and relevant reasons for change in a belief or a practice. Solomon advised, “By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, And a gentle tongue breaks a bone” (Prov. 25:15).

## **The Gospel**

The Gospel is the power of God to salvation to the believer. Where does that power lie, and what makes it powerful? Perhaps we can best understand why the Gospel is powerful when we understand the nature of the Gospel. For this, we turn to 1 Corinthians 15:1–5:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

The Gospel had a power in the lives of the Corinthians just as it did throughout the Roman Empire. Paul had preached the Gospel to them, and they received it. The word *receive* means they formally received the Gospel as an authoritative teaching. They accepted it, agreed with it, and embraced it. Because they received it, they took their stand upon it in a pagan society that either knew nothing about it or rejected it. Taking a stand meant they would or could suffer persecution but were willing to sacrifice themselves for their faith (Rom. 12:1; cf. Luke 9:24). They were willing because they believed in the Gospel and loved the Lord Jesus. They knew they had to hold fast to what Paul preached if they would gain their hope.

This inspired message focused on four aspects of Jesus’ time upon the earth. First, the Lord Jesus died for our sins in fulfillment of the inspired Scriptures that divinely prophesied His death. Second, the Gospel tells of His burial, which testifies Jesus really died upon the cross. Third, Jesus arose again, as the Scriptures

prophesied and as He prophesied, on the third day. This miraculous event reveals the power of God and the veracity of Scripture. Last, the Lord Jesus gave proof of His resurrection by appearing to the disciples for forty days and providing “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3).

### ***Power to Produce Faith***

The good news, backed with evidence and promises, has the power to produce faith within those who listen. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). We must never underestimate the power of God’s Word; its primary source is not of man, but of God. Peter said:

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19–21)

The empty tomb, the stone rolled away, the grave clothes, and the devotion of the disciples all give evidence that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. The testimony of the disciples and their willingness to die for their faith speaks loudly that the Gospel is true. We can place our faith and our souls into His hands. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30–31).

### ***Power in Truth***

The Gospel rings true, and it is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12–13). Truth pricks the heart (Acts 2:37), convinces the mind, and persuades the will to believe and to obey. Truth tells what sinners most need to know in the most loving way. Truth can be painful, but no one can ignore it with impunity. Only the truth can give us hope and life.

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one

another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because

“All flesh is as grass,  
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.  
The grass withers,  
And its flower falls away,  
But the word of the LORD endures forever.”

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:22–25)

The Lord Jesus Himself is the source of truth: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (8:31–32). Jesus answered Pilate, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (18:37).

The truth about sin convicts hearts. Peter pointed to Jews for their guilt in the crucifixion of Christ:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:36–37).

I fear sometimes we expect to convert others with a dry-eyed response. Godly sorrow brings about repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

The Lord Jesus gave proof of His resurrection to His disciples. Their faith in Him came from the truth of both His specific prophecies of His resurrection (Matt. 16:21; 20:17-19) and the convincing proofs of His resurrection and led His disciples to speak with confidence as eyewitnesses. Luke records that the Lord Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Jesus came full

of truth (John 1:14) to bear witness to the truth (18:37); He promised His disciples would “know the truth”; and the truth would set them free (8:32).

God’s revealed truth has the power to expose the fraudulent and the humanly manufactured traditions. The more one knows the Bible, the easier it is to detect the unscriptural and the underhanded. Paul says, “But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2). Knowing faith and repentance are necessary before baptism rules out the baptism of infants and small children. Knowing that baptism is immersion rules out the practice of sprinkling and pouring. Knowing that the musical worship of the church is singing, one sees the error of going beyond the Word to employ instruments.

### ***Power in Love***

Love provides a tremendous vehicle to influence others; love strikes the heart with kindness and goodness. Love is able to move the will. The Gospel is God’s love message to sinful man, touching his heart, his life, and his soul. The Lord Jesus said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32). We believe because of the evidence; we lovingly convert because of His love:

- “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:13)
- “We love Him because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)
- “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been

reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Rom. 5:6–10)

- “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:8–10)

### ***Power in Grace and Forgiveness***

The conscience nags and accuses (Rom. 2:14-16). Few experiences in life are more miserable than a guilty conscience. Jeremiah wrote, “‘For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,’ says the Lord GOD” (Jer. 2:22). Apart from the blood of Christ, people cannot find salvation; the unredeemed man is “without strength” to save himself (Rom. 5:6). We need saving, rescuing, and transforming! Paul said Jesus “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father . . .” (Gal. 1:4). God wanted something better for people than a life enslaved to sin and bound for wrath:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11–14)

The Lord God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13–14).

The Apostle Paul never forgot that he had once been Saul of Tarsus; he realized that he had been saved in order to lead others to salvation. He spoke as one delivered from the jaws of sin. He understood what it meant to be saved and desperately sought for the



salvation of everyone:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (1 Tim. 1:12–15)

### ***Power in Peace***

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1–2). A clean conscience brought about by love and obedience to the Gospel brings peace of heart and mind. Peter reveals how baptism not only is the time of our salvation, but also brings about a good conscience: “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Peter 3:21, NASB). Put another way: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . .” (ESV).

### ***Power in Hope***

As a fish without water and a human without air, so is the soul without hope. Jesus is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1), and without Him we have no hope (Eph. 2:12):

- “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Col. 3:1–4)
- “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Rom. 5:1–4)

Everything in the Gospel brings life and hope; there is no promise in anything else. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

### **Power in Joy**

After David sinned with Bathsheba and had Uriah slaughtered in battle, he felt the sting of his conscience. David recognizes the weight and pain of unresolved sin in his life in Psalm 32:3–4, “When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.” In another psalm, he cried out:

Make me hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. (51:8–12)

The New Testament also provides occasions of joy when one obeys the Gospel and becomes a child of God in Christ: “Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39; cf. 16:34; Matt. 13:44).

## **Every Person Has Three Problems**

### ***First, a Sin Problem***

Every person has a problem with sin “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .” (Rom. 3:23). The Lord says, “Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). We must realize how spiritually desperate we are as sinners and the wrath-filled fate awaiting us without Christ:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Eph. 2:1–3)

### ***Second, a Physical Life Problem***

Job asked in 14:14, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” His question enters into all our hearts at some point, perhaps at the grave of another or perhaps when we face our own mortality. In the quiet of the night, we ponder whether this life is all there is. Moses wrote in Psalm 90:10, “The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” Moses asked God, “So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom” (90:12). What we do in this life greatly affects our life to come, so we must live with wisdom toward the only one who can bless us after this life on earth is over.

### ***Third, a Spiritual Life Problem***

Every Christian realizes his or her own imperfections; one’s conscience nags over one’s sins. John wrote to Christians, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). The Hebrew writer warned, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the

living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (3:12–13). Christians must find God’s answer to their problem of new sins and ongoing sins in their lives after they are baptized.

## **The Gospel Has the Power to Solve These Problems**

### ***Jesus Died to Solve Our Sin Problem***

The Lord Jesus “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). The Lord Jesus did not redeem us with silver or gold, but with His precious blood. He could easily have manufactured silver and gold just as He did the loaves and fishes (1 Peter 1:18-20; John 6:10-13). He gave His body for our sins; He died so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. He died to release us from an old way of life, to heal us, and to transform us into a new and righteous life. He gave us a righteous life, freed from sin, so that we might have a relationship with God and live with Him forever. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit . . .” (1 Peter 3:18). Because He was a sinless sacrifice for our sins, “the just for the unjust,” we can come to God alive. As our atoning sacrifice, we have the gift of redemption and reconciliation.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:18–21)

### ***Jesus Arose to Solve Our Physical Life Problem***

Jesus will come again to receive us to Himself and give us a mansion so that we may dwell with Him forever (John 14:1-3). When He returns to earth, He will raise the dead and change those

who are alive. Those who are “in Christ” (1 Thess. 4:16) will rise to meet Him in the air to live with Him forever (4:13-18). Jesus promised, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28–29). “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). Clearly, there is more than this life on earth. Jesus answers Job’s question, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14).

### ***Jesus Returned to Heaven to Solve Our Spiritual Life Problem***

Paul noted that Jesus “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father . . .” (Gal. 1:4). Christians must live in a world that has not repented; we cannot leave this world (1 Cor. 5:10). This means Christians must continue the good fight of the faith, to put to death the deeds of the flesh and of the mind, and to devote themselves to the Lord during all their days.

The first epistle of John gives hope and direction to the Christian: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1:7). The Lord knows we are imperfect people as Christians who, even as we walk in the light, need His cleansing blood. He offers to those who walk in the light His fellowship and His ongoing cleansing. This blessing is not available to the Christian who turns from the light and walks in darkness (1:6). John does note this condition: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). This reassurance encourages us to remain in the light, to be honest with God, to repent of our sins, and to pray to God for forgiveness (Acts 8:20-24; James 5:16).

Thankfully, we also have the promise in 1 John 2:1–2, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” Jesus is not only the

atoning sacrifice for our sins, but also our only mediator (1 Tim. 2:5-6), our intercessor (Heb. 7:25), and our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1-2). The very one who died for us is now standing up and interceding for us with the Father. The Lord Jesus does not give up on us, even when we have sinned as Christians. We must not stop serving Him.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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# THE JEW AND THE LAW OF GOD

*Romans 2:17-29*

*Bruce Daugherty*

Religiously, one of the perils of privilege is to approach God's blessings and favors as earned or merited. This can lead to another peril, where one becomes elitist in attitude or believes oneself superior to others. As a people chosen by God, the Jews were constantly threatened by the perils of privilege. It was this attitude in the Pharisees that Jesus exposed and condemned in His earthly ministry. It was also an attitude that Paul, a former Pharisee, addressed in his letter to the Romans.

In the New Covenant of Jesus, Christians are the people of God today, "among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:6; cf. Eph. 1:4; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] As such, Christians should not think of themselves as entitled to salvation or blessings but instead should gratefully and humbly take up the responsibilities of being chosen by God. With great privileges come great responsibilities. As the people of God, Christians too are exposed to the temptations of privilege. Because of these constant perils, it is imperative to hear Paul's instructions in Romans 2:17-29.

## **Some Introductory Matters**

Since the time of the Reformation, the purpose of Romans has been overshadowed by Luther's personal struggle to understand the righteousness of God. This point of view has designated Romans as a "timeless compendium of the Christian faith" (Donfried xliii). But for all its help in understanding the doctrine of justification, this approach has obscured Paul's purpose in writing Romans.

With the ascendancy of the historical-critical method of interpretation in the nineteenth century, old Protestant assumptions have slowly given ground to new ways of looking at Romans. This newer method has seen Paul's epistles, including Romans, as "an occasional letter stemming from issues, problems and situations, in the life of Paul and the Roman recipients" (Oster, "Congregations")



29). But despite this progress, a consensus of modern scholarship on the purpose of Romans is still debated (Donfried xliii).

Why did Paul write Romans? There is probably more than one reason. Paul had a missionary purpose in writing to the Romans. He told his readers that he was planning to visit them as a stopping-off point on his way to Spain (15:23-24). He proposed that the Roman Christians assist him on this missionary journey—“and to be helped on my way there by you” (15:24). To become, in essence, partners with Paul, they must know the message he is preaching.

Paul had an apologetic goal in his writing to the Romans also. Before he could come to Rome, he was going to Jerusalem to bring the great collection of the Gentile churches for the poor saints in Judea (15:25-31; Acts 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; Gal. 2:10). Paul coveted the prayers of the Roman Christians in the defense of his ministry to the Gentiles, and so the letter informs Roman Christians of how they can “strive together in prayers to God” for Paul (15:30).

There is a pastoral motive in the letter as well (Dunn, *Romans* iv-lviii). In Romans 16:1-2, Paul commends Phoebe to the Romans. This introduction is followed by a long list of coworkers and contacts in Rome that are known to Paul. The greetings to these individuals are not filler at the end of the letter, but they are the key sources who would have made known to Paul the situation of the churches in Rome (16:1-16). This situation was one of conflict. Jews from Rome had been present on Pentecost to hear the first Gospel sermon (Acts 2:10). While it cannot be known for certain whether any of these Roman Jews had responded to the Gospel, what is certain is that there was a Jewish Christian community in Rome who experienced an expulsion from the city by an edict of Claudius about the year AD 49. The Roman historian Suetonius provides the reason for that expulsion. “The Jews were expelled from Rome because of constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (Dunn, *Romans* xlviii). If “Chrestus” means Christ, as is generally conceded by scholars, this indicates strife within the Roman synagogues between those who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and those who did not. This understanding is strengthened by the information in Acts 18:2, which says that Priscilla and Aquila came to Corinth because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Their relationship with Paul in Corinth would indicate that they were already

Christians.

Jewish Christians who returned to Rome following the death of Claudius in AD 54 found a new situation. Gentile Christians had remained in Rome in the intervening years and now were predominant in the makeup of the house churches (Rom. 16:4-5, 14-15). These Christians were less attached to the synagogue, the Law, and Jewish dietary scruples than the earlier “God fearers” found in the synagogues and presumably in the earlier church before the expulsion of Claudius. The very existence of “house churches” would indicate a break with the synagogue (Acts 18:7). Thus, these returning Jewish Christians find a “new Christian congregation completely different in organizational structure and spiritual outlook from the old one which had existed in the synagogue. Now they are only a minority in a congregation which previously they had shaped” (Wiefel 96).

Part of Paul’s purpose in writing is to unite these polarized elements between “churches of the Gentiles” (16:4) and a minority of Jews within these congregations. In Romans, and only in Romans, does Paul use the terms “Jew first, then the Greek” (Oster, “Congregations” 46-47). Part of the reason for this designation is to gain Gentile appreciation for their Jewish brethren. Anti-Semitism had long been prevalent in Rome. Paul wanted to discourage this from becoming a factor dividing the church (Wiefel 97-100). Paul uses this unusual way for designating “all” (Rom. 1:5; 3:22; 4:11; 10:4) as a way to tie together his diatribe-style discussion with the Jews (vv. 17-29) as well as his emphasis on the righteousness of God, which is available to all humanity (Dunn, *Romans* lxiii).

Another important but secondary theme found in Romans is Paul’s discussion on the Law (Dunn, “New Perspective” 307-08). *Law* in Romans must be seen as how Jews would have seen themselves, not as keeping the Law to enter the covenant or as a way of gaining merit with God, but as a way “of living within the covenant for people who had been freely chosen by God (Dunn, “New Perspective” 300). “Obedience to this law is Israel’s response to the divine grace, not an attempt to gain God’s favor conceived as grudgingly given and calculatingly dispensed” (303). The “Law” was basic to the identity of the Jews as the people of God. Jews were distinguished from Gentiles, who were by definition “without law

or outside the law” (304). But along with the sense of distinctiveness in having the Law came an almost inevitable feeling of pride and privilege. One rabbi was convinced that all of “Israel shall never see the inside of Gehenna” (Ferguson 539). The conviction of being among the privileged elect focused on those areas of the Law that reinforced Jewish separateness from the Gentiles—circumcision, dietary observances, and keeping of the Sabbath (Dunn, “New Perspective” 306). In the epistle, Paul is addressing the misunderstanding of the Law as a “boundary marking ritual” and a “focus for nationalistic zeal” (307). But Paul is also giving the Law a place in Christian “obedience of the faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Paul’s discussion on the Law in Romans frees it from Jewish nationalism yet allows it to have a role in shaping Christian behavior (13:8-10).

### **Analysis of the Passage**

#### ***Pride and Prejudice—vv. 17-24***

The section is a continuation of the argument Paul has been making in the first half of the chapter. He has asserted that the Jew needs the righteousness of God just as much as the Gentile (Denney 595). He has declared that there is no partiality with God (Rom. 2:11). Sinners without the Law (Gentiles) will perish, and sinners with the Law (Jews) will also perish, condemned by the law that they have not kept (Rom. 2:12-13). Both need the righteousness of God, which is found in the Gospel of Christ (Dunn, *Romans* 107).

The discussion in this section takes place in a debate style, as Paul is addressing a fellow Jew (Newman and Nida 46). This Jew is not a specific individual, sect, or Jews in general, but it is a representative of Jews who are confident in their special status before God as the chosen people and who emphasize those aspects of the Law that separate them from the Gentiles: circumcision, dietary foods, Sabbath keeping, etc. (Dunn, *Romans* 116).

Attention needs to be given to some of the terms that Paul utilizes in this paragraph. *Jew* originally had been the name that Gentiles used to designate the people belonging to Judea. From the Maccabean time forward, it became increasingly accepted and adopted by the Jews themselves, replacing the older designations *Israelite* or *Hebrew* (Dunn, *Romans* 109). The term came to be

applied not only to Judean natives, but also to Jews in the Diaspora, as well. The term was used by Jew and Gentile alike, and as Paul uses it in the passage, it is a lofty and honorable designation (Denney, 599).

*Law* without doubt signifies the Law of Moses even though it appears without the article (Lard 90). This refers to the Torah, or Pentateuch, and was known by this designation since the time of Ezra (Ezra 7:10, 12; Neh. 8:14; Jer. 32:23).

“His will” in verse 18 in the Greek is simply, “the will.” No specification as to whose will is given. That it belonged to God was understood. (For comparison, note “the Way” “the door” and “the name” in the book of Acts [9:2; 19:9, 23; 14:27; 5:41]. It is God’s Way, God’s door, and God’s name, though God is not specified in the verses [Denney 599].)

“The form of knowledge” (v. 20) is the NKJV translation of the Greek word *μορφωσιν* (*morphosin*). Older commentaries have explained this as being “the law in outline” (Denney 599; Lard 92). Modern scholars, having access to more investigation into *koine* rather than classical Greek, have reached general agreement that the word means “embodiment, complete expression” (Dunn, *Romans* 113). The Jew had more than an outline or a model of knowledge and truth. He was confident he had knowledge and truth fully embodied in the Law.

Bullinger classifies verses 17-20 as an extended alternation, in which a series of subjects are given, followed by a second series containing elements corresponding to the first series. He gives a diagram of these verses:

A—“rely on the law”

B—“and make your boast in God”

C—“and know His will”

D—“and approve of the things that are excellent”

E—“being instructed out of the law”

A—“and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind”

B—“ a light to those who are in darkness”

C—“an instructor of the foolish”

D—“a teacher of babes”

E—“having the form of knowledge and truth  
in the law”

The first series is how this Jew considers himself, and in the second is how he uses this in relation to others (370). Both parts climax in assertions about the Law that emphasize the pride held in regards to the Law (Dunn, *Romans* 109).

Paul punctures this pretentiousness with a series of four clauses that can be interpreted as statements or questions (Dunn, *Romans* 113). They all deal with Jews who violate the law and, in particular, are examples of breaking three of the Ten Commandments. Theft, adultery, and sacrilege of idols are the crimes mentioned. Paul is not doing something new in these questions. This hypocrisy by those who prided themselves in the Law had long been noted in the Prophets:

Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, “We are delivered to do all these abominations”? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” says the LORD. (Jer. 7:9-11)

Now hear this,

You heads of the house of Jacob

And rulers of the house of Israel,

Who abhor justice

And pervert all equity,

Who build up Zion with bloodshed

And Jerusalem with iniquity:

Her heads judge for a bribe,

Her priests teach for pay,

And her prophets divine for money.

Yet they lean on the LORD, and say,

“Is not the LORD among us?”

No harm can come upon us.” (Micah 3:9-11)

The charge of robbing temples (v. 22) is a bit puzzling. It is highly doubtful that Paul is talking about Jews who failed to pay the temple tax to Jerusalem (Newman and Nida 45). Pagan temples and their idols are more probable in the context (Dunn, *Romans* 114). Pagan temples served multiple functions. They were places of worship, but they could also be depositories of treasure in a culture in which banks did not exist (Oster, *Acts* 99). Pagan temples could be robbed of the images of their deities or of the deposits on hold within their doors. But the usage here does not seem to be in a literal sense.

Within Judaism of the first century, there existed a standard interpretation of Exodus 22:28 in which Jews were not to revile even the pagan gods (Oster, *Acts* 104). Jewish authors Philo and Josephus, as well as others, specified that the passage prohibited the disrespecting of idols (Krentz 436). “Paul uses this exegetical tradition to lodge his attack on Judaism. Jews have not done what the law demands. Thereby they have dishonored the name of God. Temple robbery means that there is no respect for the concept, the name, the honor of God” (437).

Paul drives home his point by quoting Isaiah 52:5. In the original context of Isaiah, when Israel’s sin caused them to be carried into exile, Gentiles blasphemed God’s name as a god who could not protect his own people. This is also the thrust of God’s statement in Ezekiel 36:20: “When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name—when they said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land.’” In Paul’s time, Jewish exclusivism caused Gentiles to despise God as the god of a small nation instead of acknowledging that He is the God of all, Jew and Gentile (Dunn, *Romans* 116).

### ***Who is a Jew?—vv. 25-29***

All that Paul had been arguing came down to one issue—circumcision. This was the sign of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14). This sign of covenant loyalty had been fiercely defended in the Maccabean resistance to Hellenism. To Jew and Gentile alike, the distinguishing feature that separated them was circumcision (Dunn, *Romans* 120). The Jew whom Paul is engaging would have

no problem with Paul's conditional statement, "if you keep the law" (v. 25). This individual more than likely would "see circumcision as a fundamental part of that practice of the law" (Dunn, *Romans* 120).

But the next thing Paul said would have shocked his Jewish listeners. Paul asserted that the failure to keep the Law rendered circumcision useless. Again, this was nothing new with Paul. The prophet Jeremiah had noted the need for a different kind of circumcision. "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings" (4:4; cf. 9:25-26).

Jesus also addressed His people and urged them to give up their confidence in the outward signs of their heritage. "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment," and, "You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one" (John 7:24; 8:15). Like His forerunner, John, Jesus attacked the confidence that they were the children of Abraham (Matt. 3:9; John 8:39). Jewish failure to believe in Jesus moved Him to declare, "You are of your father the devil . . ." (8:44). To be a true member of the people of God was not found in the outward signs and being able to claim to be a descendant of Abraham. It consisted in a person who would put their faith and trust in the one sent by God—Jesus!

In the passage, the contrast between the circumcised and the uncircumcised individuals is interesting. The circumcised Jew is characterized as a "breaker" (v. 25) and "transgressor" (v. 27) of the Law while the uncircumcised Gentile is one who "keeps" (v. 26) and "fulfills" (v. 27) the Law. This contrast is further explained as now the Gentile who is keeping "the righteous requirements of the law" (v. 26) will judge the Jew who, confident in his circumcision and concentration on outward rituals, judged himself better than the Gentile (2:3).

Paul concludes his argument by redefining *Jew*. The "true Jew" has a different law and a different circumcision. His circumcision is not outward, in the flesh, but rather inward, in the heart, and is accomplished by the Spirit. Moses spoke of this inward circumcision: "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut. 30:6).

Ezekiel echoed the words of Moses when he too spoke of the inner change God was going to bring on His people: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (36:26-27). Instead of observing a warped version of the Law, condensed into those few rituals that distinguished them from others, the true people of God will serve and fulfill the Law as they are led by the Spirit (Rom. 7:6; 8:4).

The final phrase of verse 29 declares that the “true Jew” finds praise not from men, but from God. “Praise” here is a reference back to Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and the source of the name Jew (Denney 602). Judah’s name meant “praise” (Gen. 29:35). Seeking more than the praise of men, which characterized the rulers who would not confess Christ (John 5:44; 12:42-43), this “true Jew” seeks the praise that comes from God.

Rather than seeing the passage as denying all the things held dear to Jews, Paul affirmed and claimed them for Jew first, but also for the Gentile. But it was not in an outward sense, separating Jew from Gentile; it was internal, with a circumcision of the heart created by the Spirit of God in Christ. This deeper understanding of the Law and circumcision could create a unified church among Jew and Gentile. The age that the prophets had foretold was now a present reality. And it could become a reality among the churches in Rome if they were willing to listen to the teaching of Paul (Dunn, *Romans* 128).

## **Applying the Passage**

### ***Preaching without Practice and the Perils of Privilege***

There are several similarities between New Testament Christians and Jews. We have a sacred designation, Christian. We have a sacred document—the New Testament. We have a sacred deity, the Lord Jesus. We have sacred responsibilities as given by Jesus and the apostles. And we can fall under the same condemnation if we fail to practice what we preach (Roper 183).

The parallels between the Jew described by Paul and ourselves should be a sobering “wake-up call” to all those who take New Testament Christianity seriously. In our confidence that we are



God's people, do we also fall prey to an elitist mentality by virtue of our keeping a few identifying marks separating us from the denominations?

We preach baptism for the remission of sins while denominationalists reject baptism. We call ourselves Christians while denominational people wear the names of men. We proclaim the one body of believers while denominational people divide into hundreds, even thousands, of separate religious bodies claiming Christ. We follow the New Covenant of Christ while other religious people make no distinction between the covenants. We sing in worship and reject instrumental music used by denominational churches. We partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday while denominational people observe the Lord's Supper monthly, quarterly, or biannually.

All of these things are important and right to be preached and practiced, but if my confidence before God consists primarily in that which distinguishes me from others, if it produces in me a spirit of feeling superior to others, then I have fallen prey to the perils of privilege and may even come under Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matt. 23:23).

Are we like the people of Jeremiah's day? They confidently boasted, "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD . . ." (7:4). God had previously destroyed Shiloh, the site of the Tabernacle, because of the sins of the people (7:12). Only genuine repentance could have averted disaster. Sadly, disaster came.

We take great pride in being people of the Restoration. We preach and practice a return to the ancient order of things: response to the Gospel, name to wear, worship of the Lord, organization of the church, etc. But have we restored the New Testament zeal for taking the Gospel to the whole world (Matt. 28:19-20)? Have we restored the new command of Jesus to love one another like Christ loves us (John 13:34)? Have we eliminated prejudice from the faith we hold (James 2:1-10)? Are we as unified as we should be (Eph.

4:4-6)?

Neal Pollard shared an interesting story of a woman whose husband was a longtime atheist. Her husband's father was a "pastor" for a denomination which forbade watching TV, listening to the radio, and even considered playing marbles a form of gambling. . . . One day, however, the boy found a room open normally locked. His father had always explained that this was the place where he studied for his sermons and did church work, but what the boy saw inside was a TV, radio, and so many of the things he had been told were sinful. The man would eventually leave the boy's mother for another woman.

Those who know us best know our claims to Christ. But they also see the details in our lives that speak louder than our preaching. How consistently are we living Christ? Do we have things in hidden rooms that would bring shame to us and would devastate the faith of those we want to influence the most? God help us to empty and destroy such hidden rooms!

## Summary

The Jews had been chosen by God, but it was a choice of God's grace, not their merit. Moses addressed this in his farewell sermon. "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples . . ." (Deut. 7:7). They were not loved because they were special, but they were special because God loved them! And they needed to live up to the obligations of being chosen by God.

But through the centuries, the perils of privilege had transformed how the Jews looked at themselves and how they looked at others. Jesus encountered this in His earthly ministry. Note how Luke framed the parable of the two men who went up to pray: "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others . . ." (18:9).

The Apostle Paul, "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee . . ." (Philip. 3:5), knew this attitude as well as anyone. Thus, he had an "inside" view on the problem (Dunn, *Romans* 108). He had experienced the pride and the prejudice of his upbringing,

but he had also seen the perils. As he admonished the Christians in Rome, his instructions speak to the “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people . . .” today (1 Peter 2:9).

How can we avoid the perils of privilege? We can avoid the tendency to elitist attitudes by always remembering our need for a Savior. Christians are in just as much need of the Savior as anyone else, so there is no room for boasting, pride, or looking down on others (Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 7:36-50; 18:9-13; 19:5). And we need to be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22).

Let us humbly tell men what God has done in Christ. Let us magnify the Savior, whose death and resurrection has redeemed us from sin and death. Let us gracefully proclaim the Gospel of how sinners can be made righteous. Let us be full of zeal to point all men to the gift of God. Let us speak as sinners who have received forgiveness to sinners in need of forgiveness.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Bruce was born in Warren, Ohio, in 1959. He married the former Gayle Gleaton of Fairview, Georgia, in 1981. He and his wife have two sons. Mike, age thirty-one, is married to Hillary, lives in Chicago, and works in advertising. Vince, age twenty-eight, is married to Tiffany and is a student at the Florida School of Preaching. Vince and Tiffany have one son, Ellis.

Bruce received his B.A. in Bible from Freed-Hardeman College in 1981. He received his M.A. in Church History from Harding Graduate School of Religion in 2006.

Bruce served as an associate minister for the Reynoldsburg (Ohio) church of Christ from 1981 to 1983. He was a missionary in Cervignano, Italy, from 1983 to 1990. He preached for the Beville Road congregation in Daytona Beach, Florida, from 1990 to 2000. He preached for the 10th & Clairmont church of Christ in Cambridge, Ohio, from 2000 to 2011. In November 2011, he returned to Beville Road to serve as their preacher. He has held Gospel meetings in Florida, Ohio, West Virginia, and Tennessee. He has participated in campaigns in Ohio and Virginia and in Italy and Africa. He has contributed articles to the *West Virginia Christian* and other publications. He teaches at the Florida School of Preaching and the West Virginia School of Preaching.

Bruce is administrator for the website *ohiovalleyrestorationresearch.com*. The website is dedicated to sharing the fruits of research in the history of the Restoration movement, especially concentrating on activity in the Upper Ohio Valley.



# THE RESULTS OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

*Romans 5:1-11*

*Ed Melott*

## **Introduction**

The book of Romans contrasts justification by grace through faith with the legalistic works of the Law. In one sense, the entire book is a book of contrasts. For example, Romans 1:16 is almost universally recognized as the key verse of the book. There, Paul concludes, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] This key verse contains no less than five contrasts that set forth the antithesis that exists between the grace of God available through the Gospel and legalistic morality (perfect law keeping) as the basis of justification (Grubbs 9-13):

- 1) “[T]he *power* of God” (emphasis added) may well remind us of the weakness of the Law (8:2-4).
- 2) “[T]he power of *God*” (emphasis added) shows us that salvation comes from God, not out of our own righteousness (10:3; cf. Philip. 3:7-9).
- 3) “[T]he power of God *to salvation*” (emphasis added) reveals the inadequacy of a mere legal system in the absence of grace when contrasted with the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24; Rom. 7:9-10; 2 Cor. 3:6-8).
- 4) “[F]or *everyone*” (emphasis added) contrasts Jewish exclusivity as God’s people with the universal offer of grace in the Gospel (Rom. 3:21-23; Titus 2:11-12).
- 5) “[F]or everyone who *believes*” (emphasis added) reveals to us the distinction between legalistic works of merit in perfect law keeping and belief (obedient faith) in man’s justification (Rom. 4; 5:1).

Our study will reflect upon those blessings available to the justified ones found in Romans 5:1-11. This section of Scripture is often referred to as the fruits of justification. We shall caption it as The Results of Justification by Faith. These resultant blessings for the justified ones are available only in Christ, through the Gospel. They are not available by means of the Law of Moses. Paul made this abundantly clear when he wrote, “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son . . .” (8:3). This writer feels that the above remarks of introduction are indispensable to understanding the proper context of the book and to a lesser degree the verses over which we shall meditate. Romans 5:1-11 gives the reader one of the most beautiful descriptions of the consequent blessings given to the child of God. At least eight results are listed in these eleven verses. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have . . .” (v. 1):

- 1) Peace with God (v. 1).
- 2) Introduction into the state of grace (v. 2).
- 3) Hope of ultimate glory (in heaven) (v. 2).
- 4) Perspicuity in tribulation (vv. 3-4).
- 5) The non-miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 5).
- 6) God’s ever-present personal love, as witnessed in the death of Christ (extended to us while sinners and therefore while enemies of God) (vv. 6-8).
- 7) Assurance of future blessedness and deliverance from God’s wrath (v. 9).
- 8) Reconciliation to God (vv. 10-11).

## **Overview of the Text**

### ***Possessions (vv. 1-2)***

*“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (vv. 1-2)*

The chapter division (added by man) begins with a conclusion—“Therefore, having been justified by faith. . . .” The apostle’s conclusion is based upon the first four chapters of the letter and especially chapter 4. He regarded the doctrine of justification by faith to be fully set forth and proven. Two outstanding Old Testament figures, Abraham and David, are used to prove the point that justification is by faith and not by works. These two men of God are listed in the first verse of the New Testament—“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham . . .” (Matt. 1:1). Paul uses these men of faith to show that one is not justified upon merit of one’s works; i.e., salvation cannot be earned by law-keeping. Romans 4 may be divided in the following way:

- 1) Abraham was justified by faith, not by meritorious works (4:1-8).
- 2) Abraham was justified before circumcision; therefore ordinance keeping (including circumcision) is not the means of man’s justification (4:9-12).
- 3) Abraham was not saved by law-keeping. The Law of Moses came 430 years after the promises made to Abraham (Gal. 3:17). Therefore, justification is not based in the Law (Rom. 4:13-17).
- 4) Abraham was justified and counted righteous because of his great faith, not because of his meritorious works (4:18-25).

The word *justification* is a legal term wherein God declares one innocent. “Justification may be defined as the divine process by which God acquits the sinner and reckons him as righteous” (Jackson 99). The words *justified* and *justification* are used more frequently in Paul’s letter to the saints in Rome than in any of his other writings. Other phrases carry the same idea or at least are equal in signification in Romans: “righteousness of God” (1:17), “accounted to him for righteousness” (4:22), “reconciliation” (v. 11), “set free from sin” (6:18), et al. One who is justified is saved presently, but “shall be saved” is yet a future consideration (v. 10).



In this very section of Scripture, we can see three reflections of salvation:

- 1) Past—“justified by faith” (v. 1).
- 2) Present—state of “grace in which we stand” (v. 2).
- 3) Future—“hope of the glory of God” (v. 2; 1 Peter 1:9).

Paul goes to great lengths to prove that we are justified by our faith as opposed to perfect law-keeping. However, he does not say that one is justified by faith *only*. Luther added the word *only* to his translation of Romans 3:28. The text should read, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Luther added one word and thereby added a doctrine that is not taught in the Scriptures. Satan added only one word as well, and mother Eve sinned (Gen. 3:4). There is only one occurrence of the words *faith only* in the Bible, found in the book of James. He wrote, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (2:24). The book of Romans itself teaches that faith includes our obedience to God and yet that obedience is not meritorious in nature. See the following verses:

- 1) “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith. . . .” (1:5)
- 2) “[A]ccording to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith. . . .” (16:26)
- 3) Those who will receive eternal life are those who “obey the truth.” (2:7-8)
- 4) We are exhorted to “walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had. . . .” (4:12)
- 5) “[O]bedience leading to righteousness.” (6:16)
- 6) Jackson explains:  
But “justification” is the equivalent of being “free from sin,” (Rom. 6:18), which results from one having been “obedient from the heart” to the “pattern” of gospel teaching (Rom. 6:17). Thus, justification is predicated upon obedience (cf. Heb.

5:8-9). “Justification,” or “being made free from sin,” occurs when one is “raised” to walk in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4b). The process of justification is therefore consummated when one is “buried with [Christ] through baptism” (6:4a). (100)

Commenting upon the issue of faith versus works and Paul versus James as to faith and works, Grubbs commented:

While energetically opposing a justification meritoriously grounded on works, and earnestly advocating a justification graciously conditioned on faith, would he advocate a justification *grounded on faith*, or oppose a justification which is merely *conditioned on works produced by faith*? The works of legalistic morality on the ground of which the Jews sought justification, had no Christ, nor grace, nor faith in them. “If they who are of the law be heirs, faith is made void and the promise of no effect.” (4:14). But the Apostle, both in the beginning and at the end of this Epistle, avers that the Gospel is “made known to all nations for *the obedience of faith*.” This obedience as springing from faith is never placed by the Apostle in antithesis with faith or represented as making it void. Of Abrahams’s obedience growing out of his faith, the Apostle James says: “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” Here, then are “works” by which faith is not “made void,” but rather “made perfect,” and on these justification may be graciously conditioned, as well as on faith itself, as a principle. The fact is, justification is thus conditioned on the obedience of faith by Paul himself, in the very argument under consideration. (4:12). From this passage we can see that those are reckoned as Abraham’s children by faith who not merely believe, but who also “*walk in the steps of that faith*” which he possessed—the faith which led him to step without faltering along the path of obedience. Thus, in Paul’s great antithesis of faith and works, faith includes more than the mere act of believing; it comprehends also its own manifestation in outward activity, its perfection in “the obedience of faith,” while the “works” standing in

opposition are the meritorious elements of a sinless life, on which alone legal justification can repose. (14)

The first result of our justification by faith is “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (v. 1). Peace “may derive from an original term meaning, ‘to weave together’” (Jackson 131). Peace is a blessing, not for which a Christian hopes, but that Christians presently possess. *Have* in our text (v. 1) is in the present tense. In Romans, Paul spoke of the Gospel as the “gospel of peace” (10:15) and God as the “God of peace” (15:33; 16:20). Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah as the “Prince of peace” (9:6). We may have peace with God only when the enmity between God and man, i.e., sin (cf. 59:1-2), ceases and its record cancelled. This peace is made available “through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20). Wuest made an interesting observation about the word *with*. We have peace “with” God (v. 1). “The word ‘with’ is *pros*, ‘facing.’ That is, a justified sinner has peace facing God. He stands in the presence of God, guiltless and uncondemned and righteous in a righteousness which God accepts, the Lord Jesus” (77).

A second result of justification by faith is “access by faith into this grace . . .” (v. 2). The three words which need our attention are *access*, *faith*, and *grace*. The Greek word from which we have *access* is a word “[u]sed only by Paul. Compare Eph. ii. 18; iii. 12. Lit., *the act of bringing to*. Hence some insist on the transitive sense, *introduction*. Compare 1 Pet. iii. 18 . . .” (Vincent 58). This introduction is through Jesus Christ; i.e., He is the one who places us into this state of grace (cf. Acts 2:47). *Faith* is preceded by the definite article in the Greek text, leading this student to understand “The Faith” as the Gospel system of faith. Therefore, we would see faith in verse 1 as personal faith, i.e., belief of truth (and the other attendant parts, including obedience), and the faith of verse 2 to be the truth that we believe, the Gospel. *Grace* is also preceded with the article. This corresponds with Ephesians 2:8-9, where Paul wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Both *grace* and *faith* have the article indicating that through the Gospel system of “The Faith,” we have access into “the grace.” Grace is to be understood as “the state of favor.” “*Charin* here denotes a state, a state of favor, the state of being justified, and

accepted of God” (Lard 154). Also of note is that the words *have* and *stand* are both in the perfect tense, indicating to us a permanent state. The emphasis is not on the impossibility of falling from grace (cf. Gal. 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20-22) but rather the firm position of the justified (cf. John 10:29).

The third result or possession of those justified by faith is “hope of the glory of God” (v. 2). Hope in the biblical sense is desire plus expectation. Price commented:

The hope we are to have is well expressed by Barclay (New Testament Words, p. 76): “The Christian hope is not simply a trembling, hesitant hope that perhaps the promises of God may be true. It is the confident expectation that they cannot be anything else than true.” A Christian’s hope should remove haunting fears concerning the future judgment. Saved believers have a hope that allows them to joyfully look forward to salvation. Hope is the Christian’s answer to anxiety, uncertainty, and worry about things in this life and/or the status of their soul. (100)

That the hope of the justified is future glory in heaven seems to be the most plausible understanding of Paul’s words. “‘The ‘glory of God’ signifies the honor and felicity of the future state, the distinction and happiness with which he will invest the redeemed when they stand in his presence” (Lard 155). This hope is one of the three rejoicings of the Christian life, as seen in Romans 5:1-11:

- 1) “[H]ope of the glory of God” (heaven) (v. 2).
- 2) “[T]ribulations” (v. 3).
- 3) “[I]n God” (v. 11).

### ***Perspicuity (vv. 3-4)***

*“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (vv. 3-4)*

In Pauline fashion, we see Paul expanding on the idea of hope. The justified one does not have hope of heaven just in good times, but even in times of tribulation. The word *glory* is the same as

*rejoice* in the previous verse. The justified rejoice in hope of the glory of God but also rejoice because of the benefits of tribulations. *Tribulations* has the article, perhaps indicating the tribulations that come upon all those living the Christian life.

Paul did not exult because of the tribulations themselves but because of their beneficial effect upon his Christian life. This the saint must learn to do. He must look at these trials and difficulties as assets that develop his Christian character.  
(Wuest 78)

Tribulations have a way of producing perseverance in the Christian life (cf. James 1:2-3). Peter wrote, “[T]hat the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Peter 1:7). Perseverance helps in the production of our character. *Experience*, as translated in the KJV, is not a good translation of this word. “The word means either *the process* of trial, *proving*, as in 2 Cor. viii. 2, or *the result* of trial, *approvedness*, Philip. ii. 22. Here it can only be the latter: *tried integrity*, a state of mind which has stood the test” (Vincent 58). The Christian life is one of hope (cf. Rom. 8:24; Heb. 6:19), knowing that in the face of tribulations Christians who pass the test may be sure of the genuineness of their faith, thereby increasing their hope. “*Dokime*, as applied to the christian life, denotes that it has been put to the test by affliction, has successfully endured the ordeal, and now stands purified and approved” (Lard 156). Tribulations, then, give clarity (perspicuity) of thought as one understands that trials do not nullify or void Christian hope, but make it stronger. In the next few verses, Paul gives his readers solid proof for such hope of heaven (the glory of God).

***Proof (vv. 5-8)***

*“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (vv. 5-8)*

The hope of the justified does not disappoint; i.e., “We will surely realize what we hoped for, and therefore will never have reason to feel ashamed that we hoped” (Lard 156). The love of God, which is contextually God’s love for us, as seen in verses 6-8, is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us. The Holy Spirit then is another blessing given to the justified ones. This phrase is difficult to completely grasp. In what sense does the Christian have the Holy Spirit and in what way does He pour out God’s love in our hearts? One writer opined, “By means of the indwelling Spirit we both possess and experience a fuller appreciation of divine love” (Moser 60). Lard commented:

The Holy Spirit is given to us by being sent into our hearts to dwell there. This is a fact asserted by the Apostle; and no false exegesis must be allowed to negative it. Inexplicable it is, I grant; but it must not therefore be rejected. The argument on hope, then, stands thus: The Holy Spirit is given to us as an earnest of future inheritance. Eph. i: 14, 15. By this Spirit our hearts are filled with love. In these facts we have both proof and pledge that God will invest us with what we hope for. (156-57)

This student understands the Scriptures to teach that the Holy Spirit is given at a certain time. *Given* is an aorist tense verb, indicating the Holy Spirit was given at a definite point and time. The Holy Spirit’s presence serves as a seal and a down payment for the redeemed (cf. Eph. 1:13-14). The possession of the Spirit is furthermore evidence that the Christian belongs to Jesus (Rom. 8:9). This indwelling is non-miraculous and is accomplished through the Word of God or in conjunction with the Word of God. There is no evidence that the Holy Spirit directly influences the Christian apart from the influence He exerts through the Word. How then can the Spirit pour out the love of God in our hearts? The evidence from Scripture seems to indicate that it is only through the Word of God, the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), The Faith (v. 2).

Paul now extends his thoughts as to the love of God. Following his progression: the justified ones have peace with God, have been introduced into a state of grace, and have hope of future glory in heaven. Perhaps anticipating the question of tribulations as somehow diminishing from the Christian’s hope, Paul shows that

tribulations do not negate our hope, but serve to reinforce and strengthen it. He gives his readers confidence in their hope by assuring them that hope is logical because of the great love of God. Verses 6-8 make up perhaps the finest section in the entire Bible for showing God's matchless love. Paul argued that God did not send His Son to die for the righteous or for Christians, but rather for the ungodly. This sets our God's love apart from mankind's love for one another or our love for God. Additionally, this shows the superiority of the Gospel System to the Mosaic Economy. Law cannot provide salvation for the weak and sinful, for when the Law is broken, grace is absolutely necessary. Paul shows God's personal love for all, Jew and Gentile alike. It is "His own love" (v. 8) that is demonstrated by the death of Christ.

"For" (v. 6) introduces a confirmatory statement regarding the statement, "[H]ope does not disappoint" (v. 5). Jesus' redemptive work on the cross makes it possible to have hope in a future inheritance (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4). Jesus did not die for the spiritually strong, but rather for those who were "without strength" (v. 6). He did not die for the righteous (i.e., perfect law-keepers) but for the "ungodly." Wuest commented:

He died for (*huper*) them. The preposition *huper* means "for the sake of, in behalf of, instead of." In John 11:50, we have, "It is expedient for you that one man should die (*huper*) instead of the people and not that the whole nation perish," and in Galatians 3:13, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse (*huper*) instead of us." Dana and Mantey in their *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* say, "In both of these passages the context clearly indicates that substitution is meant." Thus our Lord died instead of us, taking our penalty, and in behalf of us, in that His death was in our interest. (80)

". . . God demonstrates His own love toward us . . ." (v. 8). "[D]emonstrates" or "commendeth" (KJV) is in the present tense. "God *continuously* establishes His love in that the death of Christ *remains* as its most striking manifestation" (Vincent 60). The personal love of God as witnessed in the death of Christ is sufficient beyond comprehension to prove that the Christian's hope does not disappoint.

### ***Perspective (vv. 9-11)***

*“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” (vv. 9-11)*

Verse 9 gives the first of four times the writer uses the phrase *much more*. He uses it in verses 9, 10, 15, and 17. The point is strong! If Christ died for the weak and ungodly, “[m]uch more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (v. 9). This is Paul’s grand climax of his argument detailing the ground of the Christian’s hope. If while “enemies” of God (v. 10), we are reconciled to God and declared innocent (justified) by the blood of Christ, the justified ones can be assured of their ultimate salvation. Notice, we have been “justified,” but we “shall be saved” (vv. 9, 10). This is consistent with the three reflections of salvation seen in this context: past—“justified by faith” (v. 1), present—state of “grace in which we stand” (v. 2), and future—“hope of the glory of God” (v. 2). Peter agreed: “[R]eceiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9).

Only the blood of Christ can save us from God’s wrath (v. 9). In the first chapter, Paul wrote, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . .” (1:18). Both Jews and Greeks are under sin (3:9). In fact, “[A]ll have sinned [past] and fall short of the glory of God [present]” (3:23). “[T]he wages of sin is death . . .” (6:23). However, God, in demonstration of His amazing grace, sent “Jesus . . . [to be] “a propitiation by His blood . . .” (3:24-25). That blood is appropriated by obedient faith. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (6:3). This is why Paul could write, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus . . .” (8:1).

Now, as justified ones, Christians “rejoice in God” (v. 11). All glory belongs to Him, and the redeemed dare not boast in their own righteousness or their own law keeping (cf. 4:2). An appeal to God for salvation is an appeal to His grace. It is an appeal to the blood of



Christ as the propitiatory element that makes justification possible. Paul shows us in this great book that one is saved by the grace of God through an obedient faith, thereby contacting the precious blood of Christ. Let the Christian “rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (v. 11).

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## Biographical Sketch

Ed Melott and his wife, Kim, were married in 1996 and have been blessed with two children, Hunter and Kameron. After enrolling at the West Virginia School of Preaching in 1999, Ed began preaching every Sunday at the Proctor church of Christ in Proctor, West Virginia. After graduation in 2001, he worked with the congregation in Pike, West Virginia, where he worked for about two and a half years. Since January 2004, he has worked with the Steelton church of Christ in New Martinsville, West Virginia. Ed is on the faculty of WVSOP, where he teaches Bible Geography, 1 Corinthians, and New Testament Church.

# DEAD TO THE LAW—MARRIED TO CHRIST

*Romans 7:1-6*

*Ben Jones*

The book of Romans is Paul's masterpiece on the subject of justification by faith, and it contains several themes that overlap and repeat in the development of his thesis. One such theme is sanctification, which Paul addressed in both chapters 6 and 7. David Roper noted that Paul used three analogies in these chapters to emphasize his message: you are dead to sin (so act like it); you are slaves of God (so act like it); you are married to Christ (so act like it) (413). The selected text for this lecture concerns the analogy of marriage. While Paul's purpose was not a doctrinal discussion of the subject, he does presuppose an understanding of God's original design of the institution. Marriage is intended to be a monogamous, permanent relationship between one man and one woman. An appreciation for the permanence of marriage and the consequences of violating the marriage bond is necessary to understand fully Paul's message.

Some writers have suggested that the marriage analogy is a response to an anticipated objection to Paul's earlier assertion that Christians are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:15). Whether or not this is the case, such an objection would certainly be answered by Paul's discussion of the authority and limitations of law.

## **The Principle of the Law's Limitations**

### ***The Principle Stated***

*"Or do you not know brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?" (v. 1) [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]*

Paul addressed his readers as "brethren" (v. 1), his first use of the term since 1:13. Apparently, the apostle wished to remind the Christians at Rome of their common bond as he emphasized a

significant point of teaching. That point, simply stated, was that the law has authority over a man only while he is living. Death cancels the obligations of law. While the broader context of chapter 7 makes reference to the Law of Moses, Paul here seems to appeal to law in a broader sense. His parenthetical comment concerning “those who know the law” (v. 1) indicated that Paul expected his readers to be well aware of this legal concept. There are multiple ways to illustrate this principle from a practical standpoint. For example, a dead man is not required to pay taxes or to stand trial for alleged crimes. However, Paul chose the analogy of marriage, which is relevant under the laws of both God and man.

### ***The Principle Illustrated***

*“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.” (vv. 2-3)*

There are two points to be made about Paul’s use of analogy in this text. First, an analogy is a comparison between two things for the purpose of illustration. These verses should not be taken as an exhaustive statement on the Biblical doctrine of marriage. Paul does not mention the certificate of divorce permitted under the Law of Moses or the exception for divorce and remarriage of the innocent party in the case of adultery, as stated by Christ in Matthew 19:9. This is because these circumstances are exceptions to the general rule and Paul’s illustration is focused primarily on the truth of the general rule. Paul’s words neither contradict nor cancel the teaching of Christ or any other New Testament writer on the subject of marriage and divorce. As noted by Lenski,

the application which Paul wants to make requires an example in which the pertinent law concerns two closely connected persons and 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. (443)

Second, an analogy is different from an allegory, which is an extended illustration with multiple points of comparison. The figure

of marriage is used consistently in Scripture to describe the relationship between God and His people, and one could certainly make applications between such passages and the present text. But in this case there is a single point of comparison; death frees one from the previous obligations of the law. How could Paul assert that Christians are no longer under law but under grace? The answer is provided in the way that a previously married woman could take a new husband without committing adultery. In both cases, a death has cancelled the previous relationship and enabled a new relationship to be rightfully made. Again, Lenski's comments are helpful:

In order to understand any illustration its tertium comparationis must be clearly distinguished otherwise a confusion ensues. The tertium as we have stated it is extremely valuable for what Paul has in mind: a person may be entirely set free from a law without an overthrow of that law, a revoking of that law, without anarchism, antinomism, rebellion against that law; yea, a person may be thus set free without an effort or an act of his own, he may be altogether passive, his release accomplished by the death of another person who stood in a certain relation to the one set free. Of this nature is our freedom from the law . . . This valuable tertium is at the same time so exact because it refers to a death, one that ends one relation to open up another and to do that in the most legitimate way. (447)

Consider two parables of Christ which underscore this point. In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus told a parable about a persistent widow. She found justice by continually appealing to a judge, even though he "did not fear God nor regard man" (18:2). While the figure of the judge represents God in the parable, the application is made by a comparison of the lesser to the greater. In fact, God has nothing in common with the character or motivations of this judge. In 16:1-13, Jesus told a parable about an unjust steward. After being accused of wasting his master's goods, the steward reduced the debts of his fellow servants in an attempt to secure more favorable treatment after his termination. He is then commended by his master for his shrewd dealings. This steward was deceitful and untrustworthy from beginning to end. He is not to be admired, nor does his example

endorse such behavior. In both parables, these flawed characters illustrate the same points: first, that persistence in prayer will bring results, and second, that Christians must exercise prudence with those things entrusted to them by God. In the same way, Paul's analogy should not be extended beyond its primary purpose.

## **The Power of the Law Abrogated by Christ's Death**

### ***The Point of Death***

*"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." (v. 4)*

Paul completed his analogy by explaining that the Christian's freedom from the Law was the result of the death of Christ. A strict adherence to the form of the analogy reveals an apparent shift in the application. In the first part of the illustration, it is the husband who has died, but in the second part it is the collective *you*, meaning Christians, or the bride of Christ. Concerning suggestions about this shift, David Roper observed that "some avoid a change in the figure by pointing out that a wife 'dies as a wife' when her husband dies. In other words, she is still a woman but is no longer a wife" (417). While this may be true, it diverges from Paul's main argument. The change in relationship to the Law results from a death, and that death has occurred "through the body of Christ" (v. 4). Who then has died in Paul's application, "you" or Christ?

In response to the question, first consider two additional texts that address Christ's death on the cross and its particular consequences:

- "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace." (Eph. 2:14-15)
- "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having

wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Col 2:13-14)

In these verses, the enmity, or that which was against us, is described as “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Eph. 2:15) and “the handwriting of requirements” (Col. 2:14). The Law of Moses was written upon stone tablets and delivered to Israel as a covenant contained in ordinances and requirements. According to Paul, this law was “abolished in His flesh” (Eph. 2:15) by means of Christ “having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). These passages demonstrate that the Law was removed through the *physical* body of Christ in His sacrificial death on the cross.

Second, notice the language used to describe the death in this section. In verse 2, Paul wrote “if the husband *dies*,” [emphasis added] which is translated from a second aorist active subjunctive verb, *apothanēi*. In verse 4, Paul wrote “you also *have become dead*,” [emphasis added] which is translated from a first aorist passive indicative verb, *ethanatōthēte*. (By comparison, in 6:2, “we who *died* to sin” [emphasis added] is translated from a second aorist active dative verb, *apethanomen*) (Roberston 368). The tense change from active to passive in verse 4 is significant. The Christian’s relationship to the Law has changed, but it is the result of action taken by another. It is true that the Christian has died in baptism and been raised again into the spiritual body of Christ. But the “form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:17) obeyed in baptism is patterned after the physical death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and Christians’ newness of life is a direct result of their association with Christ. Therefore, it is not the death of the bride, but the Bridegroom, that brought an end to the obligations of the Law and legitimately conferred a change in status to the bride. Consider Coffman’s comments on this event:

The death of Christ (God come in the flesh) meant that all things whatsoever that pertained to God’s relationship with Israel (viewed scripturally as a marriage contract), including the law of Moses, circumcision, the sacrifices, and the whole theocratic system perished on the cross of Jesus and were

buried in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea; and don't forget to include the sabbath day in all that. Thus, not even Israel, much less Christians, had any further spiritual benefit to be procured through keeping the religious regulations of the OT. God was free of all prior obligations resulting from the covenants with Israel, free to be married to another; but this meant that Israel was also free of any further obligation or benefit in the law. The great promise to Abraham was not annulled, but was shown to have been upon a higher level and ultimately designed to include all the families of the earth, Jews and Gentiles alike, as the one new man "in Christ," and therefore Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. (238)

### ***The Purpose of Death***

Christ's death on the cross provided atonement for sin and a new and living way to salvation. However, man's reception of these benefits is not independent from his own response of faith. A wife whose husband has died is free to remarry, but she does not enter a new marriage automatically at the time of her first husband's death. The result of Christ's death was freedom from the Law; the purpose of His death was "that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead . . ." (v. 4). Christ's work of salvation was completed on the cross, but the benefits of His sacrifice are received only by those who have entered a new relationship with Him by faith and obedience. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul again used the figure of marriage to describe this unique relationship:

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (5:23-27)

In this passage, Christ is called the Savior of the body, and it is

only through baptism (the washing of water by the word—5:26) that one enters the spiritual body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27). Christ is also called the head of the church and the church said to be subject to Christ. It is a mistake to believe that freedom from the Law of Moses brings an end to all obligation and responsibility. Rather, the Christian has entered into a new covenant with Christ, one that contains its own special privileges and responsibilities. The superior nature of this new relationship is seen in the description of Christ as “Him who was raised from the dead” (v. 4). The truth of the resurrection establishes Christ’s identity as Lord and points to the Christian’s own death, burial, and resurrection into Christ. In the immediate context, it also emphasizes Christ’s own commitment to His spiritual body in that He gave Himself for her, only to be raised again to receive her as a glorious bride.

## **The Product of Being Joined to Christ**

### ***The Potential for Bearing Fruit***

*“For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” (vv. 5-6)*

It is this new identity in Christ that enables Christians to fulfill another purpose of their changed status—to “bear fruit to God” (v. 4). Fruit bearing is an expected activity of Christians, but such was not possible in their previous relationships. Before being joined to Christ, Paul’s readers were said to be “in the flesh” (v. 5). While in this state, their sinful passions brought forth “fruit to death.” In other words, their lives were barren of righteousness.

There is some difference of opinion as to the meaning of the phrase “in the flesh” as used in verse 5. Lenski wrote that it meant “our natural state of sin” (452). While there is much to be said concerning the Greek word *sarx* and the history of its biased translation, it is not the purpose of this lecture to explore such material. David Roper expressed a popular view that the phrase referred to “their former spiritual condition without Christ” (420). However, Coffman believed that it referred more specifically to “the



nature of the Mosaic covenant, primarily one of flesh” (239). While the latter two views each have merit, the context may better support Coffman’s argument. Sinful passions are characteristic of the old man apart from Christ, but these passions were said to be aroused by the Law. In what sense can that be true? Paul provided the answer in this very chapter when he wrote, “. . . I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said ‘You shall not covet’” (7:7). Wacaster described the progression of these sinful passions as follows: “When such ‘passions’ were discovered to be sinful by the revelation of the law, the Jew had the choice to either repent, or rebel. Failure to comply with the law and to bring those feelings into submission with the will of God produced ‘fruit unto death’” (320-21).

Man is incapable of producing his own righteousness, and the Law was incapable of imparting forgiveness. As a result, the inevitable “fruit” of every life was sin and death. By contrast, the fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ (Philip. 1:11). To say that Christians have gained the potential to bear fruit is not to excuse those who fail to do so. Rather, it is the recognition that the possibility of fruit bearing is rooted entirely in the new relationship with Christ. “I am the vine, and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

### ***The Position of Service***

Paul wrote that we have been “delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by . . .” (v. 6). Such language involves being released from a burden or yoke, which is how Peter described the difficulty of keeping the Law in Acts 15:10. Paul wrote that Christians who traded their freedom in Christ to return to the Law would be “entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). Those in Christ are still His servants, but they enjoy a superior position to those under the Law. Jesus illustrated this very truth by His great invitation: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

As a final illustration of the two relationships, Paul contrasted service in the “newness of the Spirit” with service in the “oldness of the letter” (v. 6). Paul was not comparing the “spirit” of the law to the “letter” of the law, as though God is more concerned with sincerity than obedience. As noted by Coffman:

[t]he insinuation that “oldness of the letter” has reference to obeying the commandments of Christ, and that “newness of the spirit” means being saved by “faith and nothing but faith” is unfounded, and such a construction of Paul’s words is an unjustifiable distortion. (240)

Rather, the oldness of the letter is a description of the Old Covenant, while the newness of the Spirit is a description of the New Covenant. The first is a system of works, which can never be kept by men; the second is a system of grace and faith, which requires faithfulness but provides justification through Christ. Those who have been joined to Christ serve Him in love, confidence, and hope. They undeniably hold a better position of service than those struggling under the Law. In fact, they hold the best position possible within the body of the Lord and Savior who died for them.

The modern abuse of marriage and the gradual erosion of civil law have negatively influenced society’s view of this divine institution. Spouses change partners capriciously with little thought or consequence to their action. This is unfortunate, not only because of the harm it brings to families, but also because it weakens the proper understanding of Paul’s analogy. Christ’s death was the pivotal event in the history of our world. It brought freedom from the Law, sin, and death, as well as hope and the promise of a new relationship with God. Amazingly, all of these blessings were made possible while still satisfying the demand for justice and wrath. The Law was not set aside, but fulfilled in Christ. Some in the first century undervalued Christ’s death because of an overemphasis on the Law of Moses. Modern man often errs on the other extreme, too easily dismissing authority, accountability, and commitment. To appreciate the death of Christ is to willingly and joyfully be joined in a new life with Christ.

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# THE ATTENDED LIFE

*Phil Sanders*

*Romans 8:5-11*

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

*“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom. 8:5-11) [All Scripture reference are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]*

God distinguishes those who belong to Christ from those who do not. There are but two paths that lead to two destinies. The Lord Jesus warned:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt. 7:13-14)

Whether one has the blood of Christ washing away sins or not matters greatly. The pagan, Gentile Ephesians differed greatly from the Christian Ephesians. Paul called them to remember their days before conversion. Remember “that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12). However, afterward they were washed in the blood of Christ. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the

household of God . . .” (2:19). Hopeless, ignorant strangers through grace became God’s family.

Paul never downplayed the disastrous effects of sin and never dismissed God’s disapproval of ungodly ways. Paul knew that a mind fixed on the flesh, set on sinning, would lead to death and could never please the Father. He realized sinful people often justify their wicked behavior and even scoff at God (Psalm 1:1-2). Paul warned, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:7–8).

Paul continually stressed that Christians must not continue in sin; they must not make it their focus and way of life. Christians must walk in newness of life, dying to sin and ceasing to let it reign in their lives. The thrust of their lives has no place for the darkness of sin. John contrasted walking in darkness with walking in the light:

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5–7)

## **The Carnal Mind**

### ***The Carnal Mind Is Death***

- “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 6:9–10)
- “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” (1 Cor. 15:33) [I much prefer the ESV here: “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”]

- “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15–17)
- “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. 5:19–21)

God has a track record of dealing with sin:

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:4–10)

The prodigal son would be a good example of someone who has set his mind on the flesh:

And the younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.” So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son

gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. (Luke 15:12–13)

### **Hebrews 12:14-17**

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. (Heb. 12:14-17)

### ***The Carnal Mind Cannot Please God***

The reason people who have a carnal mind cannot please God or find forgiveness is they do not want to please God with that kind of mindset. Brethren can become so hard-hearted they no longer believe or desire to serve God.

- “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. 3:12–13)
- “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” (Heb. 6:4–6)
- “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the

adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb. 10:26–31)

- "But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him." (Num. 15:30–31)

Cole, in his commentary on Numbers, observes that the defiant sin of the high hand, unlike the unintentional sin, has no prescribed ritual sacrifice:

The thrust of the entire passage reaches its climax in the broader context of Israel's rebellion in rejecting the Promised Land and hence rejecting God. The nation's defiance was an example of a sin of "a high hand" in that they had symbolically raised their fists in defiance of God, and for this there was no means of sacrifice that could deliver them from judgment. In the previous contexts of inadvertent infractions of the law by the community as a whole or by the individual, forgiveness was attainable through prescribed ritual sacrifices. But in the case of outright and deliberate rebellion, nothing could compensate for the people's sin, nothing could remove the impurity except the manifestation of the grace and mercy of God. (252)

We should not confuse deliberate, presumptuous, and willful sins with sins of weakness. Paul spoke of sin that deceived him by taking occasion of the commandment and killed him (Rom. 7:11). He



spoke of failing to do what he wanted but doing what he did not understand and what he hated (7:15). Sin dwelled in him: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice” (7:18–19). In spite of this, Paul recognized that God could deliver him from his body of death through Jesus Christ our Lord (7:24-25).

John observed, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that” (1 John 5:16). While prayer could be offered for some of the Christian’s sins (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9), there were other sins for which a Christian no longer had a sacrifice (Heb. 10:26-27). God has always refused to hear some prayers for forgiveness. God told Jeremiah not to pray for the people of Judah because they no longer cared how they treated Him:

Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you. Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. (7:16–18)

Their refusal to serve God and willingness to provoke Him to anger revealed a heart hardened against Him. God had decided their fate. “When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence” (14:12). When people willingly continue to refuse to repent, God removes His favor.

### **The Spiritual Mind**

The mind and heart set on the Spirit intends and wills to do God’s will. Paul urges the Philippians, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much

more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (2:12–13). God’s favor and support go to the one who loves Him. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chron. 16:9). The mind and heart set on serving the Spirit will lovingly keep God’s commandments with fear and trembling. The person who lovingly keeps God’s commandments with fear and trembling is walking in the light. Because he is imperfect, he will occasionally sin; but he does not give his heart to sin.

A righteous man may sin, but he despises what he has done and will not continue in it. Walking in the light is not sinless perfection for no one is perfect but the Lord. Those who walk in the light still need the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7). A righteous man may do a wicked deed, but he will not forsake the righteous path. A wicked man may do a righteous deed, but he will not forsake his wicked path. The mind set on the Spirit allows God to make His home in his heart (John 14:23).

### ***The Spiritual Mind Is Life***

Jesus is the life, and He is the way to life. Everything about Him gives life and light (John 1:4-5). He said, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (10:10). We are born again of water and the Spirit (3:5); we are saved “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit . . .” (Titus 3:5).

The Lord Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The Spirit imparts life and purification through the Word.

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. . . .(1 Peter 1:22–23)

The seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11).

John 6 reveals that many of those disciples who saw and perhaps experienced Jesus' miracles became offended by His teaching they must eat His flesh and drink His blood, a reference to following His teaching.

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (6:66–69)

There simply is no other source of abundant life or eternal life than the Lord Jesus. This is why we must know what the Spirit has revealed (16:12-13). "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:30–31). Life in Christ lies in stark contrast with the wages of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23). Everyone should desire the blessing of life with Christ and fear spiritual death, which means eternal separation from God and His favor.

### ***The Spiritual Mind Is Peace***

Setting our minds on the Spirit and obeying the Gospel brings life in Christ, which includes the grace or favor of God. This grace in the forgiveness of sins leads to peace with God. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1–2). Knowing that we stand in God's favor, that we are forgiven, that we have the privilege of prayer, and that He will supply all our needs brings peace of heart and soul.

The presence of sin brings hurt, chaos, and confusion. Sin leads to sleepless nights, guilty consciences, and great insecurity. Sin robs humanity of hope and leads only to destruction. The Lord Jesus "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. . ." (Gal. 1:4). We needed delivering, just as we need reassurance and peace. God's promises, revealed through the Spirit, bring us peace

with God and allow us to have peace with ourselves.

Paul instructed the Galatians, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (5:16-17). When Christians listen to the Spirit’s instructions in the Word, they are given a defense against fleshly sins. The psalmist wrote, “With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You” (119:10–11). The Lord Jesus battled the devil by appealing to what stands written in God’s Word (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; cf. Deut. 8:3; 6:16; 6:13).

When we obey the Spirit’s instructions found in the Gospel, God gives us peace and a clear conscience. This peace comes from the realization that we have been forgiven of our sins and saved from the wrath of God. Because one is at peace with God, one can also find peace with his own heart. This peace comes when we are justified by faith (Rom. 5:2), but this is an obedient faith (1:5). Since forgiveness takes place after one obeys, one does not have peace until one obeys. Paul noted in Romans 6:17–18, “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

This obedience includes both repentance and baptism (Rom. 6:3-7) and is an act of the heart for salvation and for peace of heart. Peter noted the role of baptism in providing a good conscience: “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Peter 3:21). The NASB translates this passage more accurately: “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . .” The word for *appeal* (*eperotema*) in the third edition of Bauer’s lexicon (Bauer et al. 362) is “a formal request, *appeal*.” This describes how in baptism one calls upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; 22:16).

One cannot underestimate the peace found in a clear conscience. Paul said, “. . . I myself always strive to have a conscience without

offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). He mentioned his conscience bearing witness with what he had to say, in order to press the point he was speaking the truth (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12). He noted that “the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith . . .” (1 Tim. 1:5).

### **If Christ Is in You**

Paul contrasted the flesh and Spirit by pointing out the blessing of having God’s favor and the Spirit dwelling within.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom. 8:9–11)

Our very relationship with God is dependent upon whether we have the Spirit of Christ. If the Spirit of Christ does not dwell within us, we do not belong to Christ. When Christ is in us, our bodies will die because of sin; but the Spirit will give us life because of our being right with Christ. Just as the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, even so the Spirit who dwells in us will give life to our mortal bodies at the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit’s presence in our lives means that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Therefore, we are not our own but have been bought with a price. We are to glorify God with our bodies.

Belief in the personal indwelling does not mean one must embrace Calvinism or charismatic beliefs. In conversion, the Holy Spirit acts only through the Word; we deny any direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion. This, however, does not mean that after conversion the Holy Spirit cannot intercede for Christians (Rom. 8:26-27) or cannot strengthen Christians in answer to prayer (Eph. 3:16). As to Calvinism and charismatic religion, Jividen observed, “We must not be guilty of reacting so strongly to error on one extreme that we fall into error on the other extreme” (86).

Belief in a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit gives room to the providence of God. While it recognizes the all-sufficiency of the Word of God, it realizes that the *Scriptures* point to the activity of God outside the Scriptures and in the normal walks of life. One does not deny the all-sufficiency of Scripture if one recognizes that angels are ministering spirits to saints (Heb. 1:13). It is true that we know nothing about this angelic ministry except what the Word teaches, but we do not deny that angels minister in some fashion we do not understand. In the same way, we understand the Holy Spirit dwells in us personally (1 Cor. 6:19). We do not know anything about how or what He does in that indwelling except what the Word tells us, but we do not deny it, either.

God gives us the Holy Spirit as a seal of our sonship. A seal was a mark of possession, ownership. It marks something as official and genuine. A seal also signified security and authority (Matt. 27:66). Paul wrote, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:21–22). He explains:

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:13–14)

He urges us, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). Consequently, the Holy Spirit functions as a seal that marks our relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

God also gives us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee or earnest of our inheritance. The Greek word for *guarantee* or *earnest* is *arrabon*, a first payment on a purchase which obligates the purchaser to make further payments. A payment made in advance, it secures legal claim to an article or validates a sales contract before the full price is paid. God has given believers the Holy Spirit in their hearts as an earnest or pledge of the salvation to come. “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:21–22; cf. 5:5; Eph. 1:13–14).

If we have the Spirit as our guarantee, then we can have confidence that God will keep His promise to bring us home to heaven.

The Spirit's influence should matter to us. When God is in our lives, instructing us through His Word, many blessings follow.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22–25)

To maintain these blessed qualities, we must walk in the Spirit. We walk in the Spirit in the same manner as we walk in the light; we do this by lovingly following God's commandments.

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2:3–6)

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## Biographical Sketch

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# PAUL'S PASSION FOR HIS PEOPLE

*Romans 9:1-5*

*Terry G. Jones*

## **Introduction**

In the forward of his commentary on Romans, Taylor states that “[t]he Bible has been called ‘the song of redemption sung to the tune of divine love.’ In that song Romans would be one of the loveliest of lyrics. It would be the ascending chorus filled with marvel, might and majesty.” Without doubt, the epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans is among the most profound books of the New Testament. It speaks of the righteousness of God and the redemption of man. It is both comforting and challenging. It condemns sin and calls to salvation.

This grand portion of inspiration is often characterized as having two major sections, the first eight chapters being seen as doctrinal, while the last eight chapters are practical. That being said, the last section clearly has two parts. Chapters 9-11 are somewhat of an interlude where Paul discusses Israel’s rejection of Christ and the soul-saving Gospel that He has given. Because Paul himself was an Israelite, this deeply stirred his emotions. As we examine the first five verses of chapter 9, Paul’s passion for his people is clearly seen in his honesty, his heartache, and his hope.

## **His Honesty (v. 1)**

God’s design for Paul was that he would primarily be an apostle to the Gentiles. This naturally occurred as a result of Paul being rejected by the Jews. It was certainly no mild rejection, as they relentlessly tried to demolish his character, disrupt his preaching, and destroy his life. Shortly after Paul’s conversion, the Jews turned ferociously against him. While still in Damascus, “the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket” (Acts 9:23-25). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] His return to Jerusalem was not met with a more

favorable reception. “So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him” (9:28-29). In 23:21, we read of forty men “who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him. . . .”

Though the plots of the Jews to kill Paul were unsuccessful, that did not keep them from following Paul from place to place in order to turn people against him. For example, during his second missionary journey, he faced opposition from the Jews in Thessalonica: “But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people” (Acts 17:5). The brethren sneaked Paul and Silas out of the city in the middle of the night, and they made their way to Berea. “But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds” (17:13). Considering the extreme opposition of the Jews, it is no wonder Paul said to them, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles” (13:46). It would seem that the incessant attacks upon the integrity of Paul by the Jews prompted his declaration of honesty in Romans 9:1.

### ***His Conversation (v. 1a)***

I am reminded of the old joke that asks, “How can you tell when a politician is lying?” The answer is “His lips are moving!” By the same token, one could discern that Paul was telling the truth simply because his lips were moving. Paul began this verse with the bold declaration, “I tell the truth . . .” (v. 1). Proverbs 12:17 says, “He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit.” When Moses needed help in judging the people, he was instructed to “select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Exod. 18:21). No matter the circumstance or potential

consequences, Paul was interested in declaring only the truth. He asked the Galatians, “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (4:16).

### ***His Criterion (v. 1b)***

Paul said, “I tell the truth in Christ . . .” (v. 1). That is, he was a Christian. The basis for everything in Paul’s life was that he was a Christian, and Christ dictated everything about him. He said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). When he wrote to the Ephesian brethren, he emphasized repeatedly the importance of being “in Christ” and the difference that makes in the way one lives. In Ephesians 4:25, he stated, “Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” Being “in Christ” (v. 1) serves as the criterion upon which everything in life is determined.

### ***His Contention (v. 1c)***

Here, Paul follows up a positive statement with a negative one. After affirming, “I tell the truth in Christ,” he contends, “I am not lying” (v. 1). God has been very clear in His condemnation of the sin of lying. In the expounding upon of the Law of Moses, the Bible says, “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another” (Lev. 19:11). In Proverbs 6:16-19, two of the seven things listed there that are abominations to God are “a lying tongue” (6:17) and “a false witness who speaks lies” (6:19). Paul himself instructed the Colossian brethren, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (3:9). Consistent with that, he now contends that he is not lying.

### ***His Conscience (v. 1d)***

Paul here calls upon the testimony of the first of two witnesses verifying his truthfulness when he said, “my conscience also bearing me witness . . .” (v. 1). His conscience had always been an important factor in assisting proper conduct in his life. He said to Timothy, “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience . . .” (2 Tim. 1:3). Before the Sanhedrin, he proclaimed, “Men and brethren, I have

lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). “His conscience had been trained to always tell the truth; hence it was a reliable witness to the truthfulness of what follows” (Winters 104).

### ***His Confirmation (v. 1e)***

The Holy Spirit is the second witness called upon to verify the truthfulness of Paul’s message. Perhaps, Paul is making the point that it is not possible for him to lie while writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “Paul calls upon both the witness of his conscience, and the activities of the Holy Spirit, as evidence he is telling the truth. The topic about which he is telling the truth is introduced in the next verse” (Reese 429). In view of that, the apostle affirmed that which he spoke was confirmed by the Holy Spirit. “The fact that Paul was speaking the truth was proved by his clear conscience, subject to the leading of, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit” (Deaver 323).

### ***His Heartache (v. 2)***

Paul now begins to introduce the subject of which he is being so truthful. It is not something that he cares little about or speaks of casually. He revealed “that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart” (v. 2). One of the most agonizing problems one can suffer is heartache. Paul’s heartache was evidenced by two severe symptoms.

### ***Intense Sorrow (v. 2a)***

Though he has not yet revealed it, the reason for his great sorrow was that his countrymen had rejected Christ. It must be remembered that just because Paul shifted the focus of his ministry to the Gentiles, it did not mean that he no longer had in his heart deep-seated affection for the Jews. He had already declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). That his countrymen had rejected that soul-saving Gospel was a source of intense sorrow for the beloved apostle. The word *sorrow* is from the Greek *odune*, which appears only here and in 1 Timothy 6:10, which says, “For the love of money

is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

### ***Infinite Grief (v. 2b)***

The second severe symptom of Paul’s heartache was “continual grief in my heart” (v. 2). The cognizance of his kinsmen in the flesh continuing in their lost condition when salvation was readily available was an unceasing source of pain in the heart of the apostle. Curtis Cates provides a good discussion of this:

Whereas the Gentile world was very receptive to the gospel Paul’s own people had rejected the gospel although it was preached first to them. Were the Jews to be written off as “*unworthy of everlasting life*” (Acts 13:46)? A thousand times “*no!*” However, their thrusting the gospel from themselves by contradicting the truth and blaspheming God brought about their unworthiness (Acts 13:45). But, how the great Apostle Paul desired genuinely to express to the Jews that no matter how great the reception of the gospel by the Gentiles, the anguish and agony of his massive heart over the Jews’ rejection of the gospel could not be quelled! (134)

### **His Hope (vv. 3-5)**

In these three verses, Paul states specifically the true cause of the heartache that he suffers. Furthermore, he reveals just how deeply troubling a matter it was for him.

### ***Paul’s Desire for Israel (v. 3)***

In this verse, Paul utters this very peculiar statement. “For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (v. 3). In the next chapter, he declares, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved” (10:1). This reveals the true heart of a soul winner. Paul did not see them as a people who had turned on him, despised him, beaten him, imprisoned him, and tried repeatedly to kill him. He saw them as lost souls in need of Jesus. So great was his desire for their salvation that he would willingly, were it possible, be banished from God if it meant that Israel would be

saved.

There are only a few passages in the New Testament which are as curious as is this one presently before us. That it can or should be interpreted literally is, without doubt, not possible. No man in his right mind could literally wish that he would be eternally condemned in order to save others. The text plainly says, "I could wish," not "I do wish." (Wacaster 410)

This statement of Paul is reminiscent of Moses, following the Israelites making and worshiping the golden calf. To God, Moses said, "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book'" (Exod. 32:32-33). McGarvey and Pendleton said:

Only the Christ can offer himself as a vicarious sacrifice for the lives of others so as to become in their stead a curse (Gal. 3:13), abandoned of God (Mark 15:34). But surely the true servant of Christ may so far partake of the Spirit of his Master as to have moments of exalted spiritual grace wherein he could wish, were it permissible, to make the Christlike sacrifice. (377)

Barnes added:

But it evidently means that he was willing to be devoted by Christ; *i.e.* to be regarded *by* him, and appointed *by* him, to suffering and death, if by that means he could save his countrymen. It was thus the highest expression of true patriotism and benevolence. It was an example for all Christians and Christian ministers. *They* should be willing to be devoted to pain, privation, toil, and death, if by that they could save others from ruin. (200)

### ***Paul's Description of Israel (vv. 4-5)***

Paul referred to his kinsmen in the flesh, "who are Israelites" (v. 4). They were descendants of Jacob, which had special significance to the Jews. In Romans 3:1, Paul asked the question, "What advantage then has the Jew . . . ?" In verse 2, he answered, "Much in every way!" Though he listed only one such advantage there, in this passage he lists nine, beginning with the blessing of being an

Israelite.

“Israelites . . .” is an extension of the word “Israel,” which means “prince of God,” or “one who contends with God,” the same being the name given to Jacob by an angel of heaven at Peniel (Gen. 32:28-30). This God-given name implied more than membership in the covenant race, imputing to them status as God’s children (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; Jer. 31:9); but the sonship of Israel was of an inferior kind, compared to that of Christians, although sufficiently significant to stand as a type of the latter. “Israelites,” as Paul used it here, included, by implication, the other privileges enumerated. (Coffman 314)

Paul’s description of Israel here focuses upon the special blessings of God that were peculiar to them: 1) “the adoption” (v. 4)—which emphasizes the sonship of Israel. God cared for the nation and nurtured it as a father would his own child. 2) “the glory” (v. 4)—Adam Clarke gave this description by saying, “The manifestation of God among them; principally by the cloud and pillar, and the Shekinah, or Divine presence, appearing between the cherubim over the mercy-seat. These were peculiar to the Jews; no other nation was ever thus favored” (1063). 3) “the covenants” (v. 4)—refers to God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-8), the Jews (Exod. 24:8), and King David (2 Sam. 23:5). 4) “the giving of the law” (v. 4)—“No one except the Jews had God’s laws *in writing*” (Roper 132). 5) “the service of God” (v. 4)—“This would refer to the entire priestly system, the religious ceremonies and feast days (Passover, Atonement, etc.). The particular ordinances, rites, and ceremonies of their religious worship, and especially the sacrificial system, were given to Israel alone (Wacaster 412). 6) “the promises” (v. 4)—Among the promises God made to Israel would be the Promised Land, the sending of the Messiah, the promise of salvation, and protection from enemies. 7) “of whom are the fathers” (v. 5)—The Israelites were of the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 8) “and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came” (v. 5)—The final, but most significant, blessing of the Jews is that from their ancestry came the Christ. God’s grand Scheme of Redemption included the separating of one nation to preserve a people through whom the Messiah would come. “Of all the privileges granted to



Israel, this was the crowning one—that they should be the channel through whom the Hope of the world, the long-expected Messiah, came into the world” (Reese 433).

Paul said of Christ, “who is over all” (v. 5). So, the question is, what is Christ over? Peter told Cornelius that Christ “is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 15:28, “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.” Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). After telling us that Christ is over all things, Paul then tells us *why* He is over all. Christ is over all because He is “the eternally blessed God” (v. 5). It is essential that all men know that Christ came in the flesh and that He is divine. Roper provides a good explanation of this phrase as a reference to the deity of Christ:

For at least two reasons, I believe “God blessed forever” should be understood as a reference to the deity of Jesus. First, early Christian writers applied the words to Christ. Second, something is needed in the sentence to balance “according to the flesh”: “According to the flesh,” Jesus was an Israelite; but “according to the spirit,” He is “God [who is] blessed forever.” (134-35)

Clarke profoundly stated:

These ancestors were the more renowned as being the progenitors of the human nature of the Messiah Christ; the Messiah “according to the flesh” [v. 5] sprang from them. But this Messiah was more than man; He is God over all; the very Being who gave them being, though He appeared to receive a being from them. Here the apostle most distinctly points out the two-fold nature of our Lord—His eternal Godhead and His humanity. (1064)

Paul concludes this paragraph with the sorely neglected word *amen*. With this affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ, he says, “So let it be.”

## **Conclusion**

The beginning of this ninth chapter of Romans is as revealing as it is touching. The Apostle Paul opens up and pours out his heart as he reveals the depth of love he has for his fellow Jews who had

rejected the Savior. “What Paul has been saying, then, may be summed up as follows, ‘It grieves me deeply that in spite of all the remarkable advantages which God has showered on Israel, it has failed to reciprocate’” (Hendriksen 316). Paul’s passion for Israel would seem surprising, considering the way they had mistreated him and that he had become the apostle to the Gentiles.

No indeed: they were his own people, and he neither would nor could dissociate himself from them. He too, like so many of them, had once opposed the gospel, but he had been arrested by the risen Jesus and set on the Christian way. How he longed that they too might have the scales removed from their eyes! Indeed, if their salvation could be purchased by his own damnation, right readily would he consent, if such a thing were possible, to be anathema from Christ’ for their sakes. (Bruce 172).

Israel had been blessed by God far greater than any other people of their time. Yet, they turned their back on the greatest blessing of all—*Jesus!* An aching heart filled with sorrow and grief revealed Paul’s passion for his people.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Terry G. Jones was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and was raised in Toll Gate, West Virginia. He is the son of Linda Jones and the late Glenn Jones. He married Melinda S. Hilvers on August 10, 1985. They have two sons—Austin (Jillian) and Quintin (Tabitha).

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# CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

*Romans 10:1-13*

*Andy Robison*

## **Introduction**

An incident in a Christian school Bible class, as told this author, is illustrative of a problem of wide significance. The instructor was going over the passages about baptism in his high-school-aged class. An angrily disagreeing young lady, after class, threw down a crumpled paper on the desk and stormed away. The instructor unruffled the paper to find it simply read, “Romans 10:13.”

The passage is readily memorized by the masses: “For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Thus it stands, ripped from its context, as the beacon of hope for many a faith only adherent. It is an impetus for the idea of a sinner’s prayer, which, in one paragraph, calls on Christ to save and thereby claims to assure an eternal salvation that can never be lost.

One of the best things that ever happened for Bible study is the division of the text into chapters and verses. One of the worst things that ever happened for Bible study is the division of the text into chapters and verses. Perhaps, if one phrase were not so isolated numerically, people would be less tempted to rely on a separated phrase on which to build a whole doctrine. Perhaps, they would give more consideration to the paragraph, the section, and the flow of the book.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with isolating a phrase for comment in a larger discourse. The New Testament writers did it regularly, citing Old Testament fulfillments and calling by brief phraseology some core Old Testament doctrines. Students must always be careful about context.

## **The Remote Context**

*Remote* is a relative term—how far out does one mean? Romans 9-11 is, of course, Paul’s masterful conclusion to the doctrinal portion of Romans, which began in chapter 1. If one dares

summarize briefly the awesome, inspired thoughts of the book to this point, it might be observed that in the New Law, in the age of the Spirit, salvation is by faith in Christ for both Jew and Gentile. Chapter 1 charges the Gentiles with heinous crimes against God and humanity. Chapter 2 alleges the hypocrisy of the Jews. Chapter 3 then confines all under sin—“[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .” (3:23). The end of 3 through chapter 5 defines justification by faith—that it was with Abraham prior to the Law of Moses, would have been by faith during the Law of Moses, and is by faith after the Law of Moses—in Christ. Never, ever did the Law of Moses—in and of itself—save anyone. As great as it was, it was never designed to be the end-all of salvation, but a piece in the puzzle, a section on the timeline of God’s revelation of the salvation He planned from before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:10-12, 20).

It is not as if that faith could even remotely be understood to be “faith alone.” Chapter 6 of Romans emphasizes obedience, first in baptism, then in lifestyle.

Then, chapters 7-8 start to draw a distinction between flesh and Spirit. The fleshly Law of Moses could not save; it only codified sin (cf. 7:7). But, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus . . . [makes] free from the law of sin and death” (8:2).

At this point, a wedge is driven between the law that led to Christ and faith in Christ itself. Since that is not the final intent, chapters 9-11 set forth the plea for Jews and Gentiles to be united in Christ. Paul so earnestly desires Israel to turn to Christ. He hypothetically would offer his own accursing if they would (9:1-2). He compliments them for the role they played in God’s plan (9:3-5). He elucidates on how they were used in the immutable purpose of sovereign God (9:6-29).

Then, he, in the style of the ancient diatribe (posing possible objections in the form of questions, then answering them), asks about how the Gentiles received salvation if the Jews were really so special.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written:

“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,

And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

(Rom. 9:30-33)

In the stubborn refusal to accept the Nazarene as the prophesied Messiah, the Jews lost out on righteousness by faith in Him.

Chapter 10 picks up with Paul’s deep desire for the salvation of Israel. They trusted in the tool of God (the Law of Moses) and not in God Himself. Through Christ, though, everyone—Jew and Gentile—would have access to God (more on this immediate context of verses 1-13 below).

The rest of chapter 10 relates how it was always God’s plan to call the Gentiles. They could not call without believing; they could not believe without hearing; they could not hear without a preacher. But God had sent messages that the Gentiles were always included. The Gentiles could know from those “who preach the gospel of peace” (10:15; cf. Isa. 52:7). They could know from natural revelation (10:18; Psalm 19:4; cf. Rom. 1:20). Moses, the revered human mediator of the Law, is quoted to show that God provoked Israel to jealousy by the inclusion of the Gentiles (10:19; Deut. 32:21). The Messianic prophet, Isaiah, is quoted to show that 1) God has been found by those who did not seek (the Gentiles), and 2) God kept holding out hope for the “disobedient and contrary” Israelites (10:21; cf. Isa. 65:1-2).

The image of the remnant is employed in chapter 11 to indicate that God will still accept anyone from Israel who will come on Christ’s terms. The illustration of a grafted tree is used to show the believing Gentiles became one with believing Jews.

The overriding theme of the doctrinal section of the book seems to thus be stated: Both Jews and Gentiles are sinners; both can be saved, freely justified through Christ (cf. 3:24).

(That most emphatically does not eliminate the necessity of obedience [cf. 6:1-2]. Indeed, from verse 13’s calling “on the name of the LORD,” Paul goes on to rhetorically ask how they can call on one in whom they had not believed [10:14ff.] “[T]hus, the calling is

an addition to believing, which excludes the notion of salvation by faith alone. There is more” [Jackson 284].)

### **Immediate Context**

In the midst of the unifying section is Paul’s plea for all—Jew and Gentile—to call on the name of the Lord for salvation. Paul desperately desired Israel’s salvation (v. 1). He compliments their zeal while rebuking their lack of knowledge, thus denying for all time the notion that sincerity only can save.

What if people sincerely believe in only mental assent as “calling on the name of the Lord,” and what if (to assume a point to be argued below) they are wrong? What if they are genuine, committed, zealous—but with a flawed knowledge? Will not their sincerity save them?

The brevity of verses 1-2 argues, “No.” The example of the remnant used in chapter 11 argues “No,” as well. The reference in 11:4 is to the seven thousand reserved in Israel after Elijah’s duel with prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18-19). That drama was heightened by the false prophets’ sincerity. After they had built their altar, laid on their wood, and called on their nonexistent deity from morning till noon, Elijah mocked them. The mocking did not deter them, but only made them more determined. Their zeal they showed in acts of self-mutilation: “So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them” (18:28). Note that this horrific scene was not just a one-time event; this was their custom. Can anyone question their sincerity? Then, could anyone actually affirm their salvation based on this sincerity?

Paul himself stands as an attestation that zeal alone does not save. As a tyrannical persecutor of Christians when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, he thought it was his duty to persecute Christians, even later affirming that he had lived all his life in good conscience (Acts 26:9-11; 23:1). When he was dragging off men and women to prison, and casting his vote against those who were put to death, was he a saved man because of his sincerity? Of course not. Zeal without knowledge is a deceptive device of the devil. Many who call on the name of the Lord in the wrong way will be lost in judgment (cf. Matt. 7:22).

These Jews were ignorant of God's righteousness—that is, the righteousness of faith in Christ (v. 3). They sought to establish their own righteousness—Judaizers would preach circumcision to be still necessary to baptized Gentiles, causing major upheavals in the early church (cf. Gal. 4-6; Acts 15). Desiring their own way, they did not submit to the righteousness of God.

There may be people who are sincerely misled, but sometimes there are people who willfully suppress the truth (cf. Rom. 1:18) in order to attempt to establish as truth their own ideas and imagine salvation by means of their own invented circumstances.

They should have let go of their Jewish ways, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes" (v. 4). The law was a tutor, a schoolmaster, who took the world by the hand to lead them to the knowledge of Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). That was the whole purpose of the Law of Moses. His life, death, burial, and resurrection was all prophesied in that law (Luke 24:44). Christ came to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17-18). Fulfill it, He did, and that brought the end to the Law. It was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). It, being the wall that stood between Jews and Gentiles, was taken out of the way (Eph. 2:13-16). The Jews had at one time a legitimate reason to keep themselves separate from Gentiles, but that reason was no more.

Further, if one were to be saved (have righteousness) by that Law of Moses, one would have to do absolutely everything right. "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them'" (v. 5). There was no room for error. There was no salvation in only knowing of sin (Rom. 7). The blood of animals shed was inadequate for the fullness of the atoning purpose which it foreshadowed (Heb. 10:1-4). The words here quoted from Leviticus 18:5

meant strict adherence to all that the law said—perfect obedience to all its requirements. This no man ever did. Righteousness would have been of the law if there had been perfect obedience to the law; and yet the law demanded just that. Its end, or purpose, is realized in Christ to all who believe. And that way of righteousness is not hard to understand, nor to practice. (Whiteside 215)

Christians ought to be ecstatic that the Law ended at Christ. Paul



wanted the Jews to realize it and come to Him so that they could be saved. For once an error was made in the Old Law, there was no means of complete forgiveness. Justification would have to be in Christ, and Christ alone. Thus, “. . . Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (v. 4).

The law demanded absolute righteousness, but could not free the transgressor of guilt. The law could not make the guilty righteous. It seems to me that commentators usually miss Paul’s point. It is true that the law ended at the cross, but it ended at the cross regardless of whether one believes or does not believe. The end of which Paul here speaks is attained by those who believe in Christ. The end, or aim, of the law was righteousness. The believer in Christ is made righteous, and thus the end of the law for righteousness is reached in Christ. When a man’s sins are all blotted out, when he is cleansed from all sin, he is righteous; that condition is reached in Christ by those who believe. The end, or purpose, of the law was righteousness; that end is reached in Christ by the believer. It will be noticed that Paul says: “Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth.” The modifying phrase, “to every one that believeth,” shows that Paul was not speaking of the abrogation of the law; that is taught abundantly elsewhere. And it was abrogated for all, believers and unbelievers alike. (Whiteside 214-15)

Therein is the importance of “calling on the name of the Lord.” Without such a call, however it is defined (see below), no one can be saved. The Law of Moses never provided salvation. The Law still cannot provide salvation; it is not even applicable anymore. The fulfillment of the Law in the person of Christ is the source of the salvation sought. These Jews of whom Paul wrote refused to believe in Christ, thus refusing to submit to God’s righteousness, trying to establish their own righteousness in the continuation of their revered, but divinely discontinued, Law. Their zeal was commendable, but their errant knowledge would cause them to lose salvation.

Paul wants to do away with any objection that the Jews might make to the effect that they were still waiting on the proper knowledge. Rejecting Christ, they claimed they were still waiting

on the Messiah. Some of them might retort to Paul's plea that they did not have enough revelation, they did not have enough knowledge to lead them to the conclusion of Christ being the fulfillment of the Law. To answer that, Paul brilliantly [what else would one expect from inspiration?] hearkens to a speech made by Moses.

After Moses had read the Law to the people a second time (*Deuteronomy* means "second law"), he, like a preacher offering an invitation, exhorts the people to keep it. These are some of the words he uses:

For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear and do it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear and do it?" But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. (30:11-14)

Moses was telling the people that they had no excuses. They had God's word given to them, and they knew it. They could not claim ignorance; they could not claim an anticipation of it arriving. It was already there, and they knew it.

That admonition, again, came on the tail end of the presentation of the first Law of God with His covenant people, Israel. There would be more history to write, but the Law was spoken and set—literally and figuratively—in stone.

Paul picks up that language and adjusts it for a similar situation. The New Law of Christ was being unfolded at the time that he wrote. Enough of it had been revealed that Jews and Gentiles all over the Mediterranean world were obeying the Gospel, believing in and obeying Christ. People in Rome had obeyed, and their faith was exemplary (Rom. 1:8). Now, at a juncture similar to that of the Moses' context, the similar wording invites people with the same challenge. The word was near them, and they should simply do it. Remember, the righteousness of the Law was all about doing the Law perfectly (v. 5).

But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is,

to bring Christ down from above) or, ““Who will descend into the abyss?”” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (vv. 6-10)

An inspired apostle has the right to make such a play on the words and meaning of an inspired text; an uninspired man does not. Note, then, what inspired Paul did. He used the beginning of the phraseology in the same way as Moses, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (v. 6). Moses asked who would go to heaven to get God’s word. Paul asked who would go to heaven to get the Christ. The Messiah would not be just any man, but would come from above. Jesus had noted to Nicodemus, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). In speaking of Christ’s ascension at another place, Paul would explain parenthetically, “(Now this, ‘He ascended,’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things)” (Eph. 4:9-10). Christ had already come down from heaven and ascended back there by the time he wrote these words (to Ephesus and to Rome). There was no need to send someone there to get Him, just as Moses had said there was no need to send someone to heaven to get the word of God. It had already been given.

Moses’ next question was about sending someone across the sea to get the word of God. They did not need to do that either. Paul changes that up a little, and in a powerful way. Instead of going across the sea, he speaks of sending someone into the abyss to bring Christ up from the dead. The word *abussos* is not used in Deuteronomy 30:13 to translate *sea*, but the thought is clear. “In Rom. 10:7, quoted from Deut. 30:13, the abyss (the abode of the lost dead) is substituted for the sea (the change in the quotation is due to the facts of the Death and Resurrection of Christ)” (Vine et al. 142).

The Hebrew speaks about crossing the sea to get the

commandment in order to hear and to do it. Since this thought is unsuitable for Paul's purpose, Paul writes a parallel to it: "Who shall go down into the abyss?" This is similar enough to the original to recall it and its idea of impossibility. By conserving no more of the original than a similarity Paul forestalls the idea that he is quoting or interpreting the original.

In his second parenthesis: "that is, in order to bring up Christ from the dead," he states to whom he refers with his second question. With the first he refers to Christ's coming from heaven on his mission of righteousness (his whole mission and not only the incarnation), and with the second he refers to the completion of this mission by his resurrection from the dead. Both show what God's righteousness, which is now ours by faith, costs (5:15, etc.).

"Abyss" is the extreme opposite of "heaven." Paul himself indicates in what sense he uses this term, namely as referring to Christ's death and resurrection. (Lenski 651-52)

Thus, the phraseology plays from the word of God (in Moses' case) to the Word made flesh (in Paul's case; cf. John 1:14). The striking and memorable parallel in comparison and contrast is fitting for the case in Paul's pleading to the Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Christ died and went to paradise in hades (Luke 23:43), or sheol (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27). He was raised from the dead, coming out of hades. But some one is saying if another will descend into the abyss, the realm of the dead, and bring him up, I will believe. (Hamilton 597)

They should not need others to so say. Christ had come and been verified by the miraculous. If they understood Moses, they would understand Him and His truly authoritative and commanding nature (John 5:36-47).

Moses' rationale in Deuteronomy concluded, "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (30:14). They had the Law and should obey it. No resources needed to be sent in searching for it; it was there and simply needed to be obeyed. Paul's rationale is appropriately, slightly adjusted:

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth

and in your heart” (that is the word of faith, which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (vv. 8-10)

They needed to send no one; they needed to spend no resources in searching anymore for the Messiah; they simply needed to admit it was Him.

The conclusion is bolstered by the summation of a prophecy concerning the precious cornerstone. Isaiah 28:16 had prophesied, “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.’” Paul’s reference in verse 11 is to the last line, no doubt calling to mind the entire prophecy for the studied Jew. He says, “For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’” The difference in wording is explained in that Paul was following the Septuagint (LXX), the popular Greek translation of the day. “The LXX has the reading, ‘and he that believes on him shall by no means be ashamed’” (Hamilton 602).

See the power of the argument! The Old Testament Scriptures, to which the Jewish people tenaciously clung, actually instructed them to accept the Christ who descended from heaven! He was near, in their mouths and hearts, and needed only to be confessed.

Again, the study of taking words out of context needs to be noted. It is simply unsound interpretation that would take verses 9-10 to say that all one has to do for salvation is believe and confess. What of Jesus’ own command of repentance (Luke 13:3, 5)? What of the command to forgive others, with its stated necessity for one’s own salvation (Matt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:26). What of all the other demands of faithfulness, not even to mention Jesus’ own words concerning baptism (16:16)?

No, in context, Paul is simply trying to get the Jews to admit that Jesus is the Christ. Believe it in the heart; confess it with the mouth: That is the beginning! As the Philippian jailer, having never heard of Christ, was told to believe on Him for salvation (Acts 16:30-31), but then went on to further obedience, so here the command for the

Jews is simply to get started! Indeed, Jews who already believed on Christ (2:36-37), were told to press forward with their spiritual lives by repenting and being baptized for the remission of sins (2:38).

The limitation of context, then, helps explain the statement at issue in verse 13: “For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” Verse 12 ties the rest of the chapter with it in explanatory tones, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.”

Recall the remote context. Paul, in Romans 1-11, is arguing that Greek (1), and Jew (2), indeed all (3), have sinned, and can be justified only in Christ (4-6). The Old Law could not accomplish such justification; the “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (8:2) can (7-8). Romans 9-11, then, are all about bringing Jews and Gentiles together. The plea for Israel is made in chapter 9. The grafting in of the Gentiles is illustrated in chapter 11. Here, in the middle, is the call that Jews and Greeks alike must submit to this Jesus of Nazareth as resurrected, all-powerful Savior. The direct connection to one of the opening verses of Romans, often considered the theme verse, is thus made: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (1:16).

The emphasis in the statement of verse 13 is on the *whoever*, not on the *believes*, as if it were belief only. The boldness of the statement is that Jew and Greek are now saved in the same manner. The Jews had the oracles of God for a long time, exclusively (3:1-2). They had the covenants and the service of God (9:3-5). But now, it was open for every one of every nation (Acts 10:34-35), and every person of every race and nationality had become subject to the same Savior and the same law (of Christ—1 Cor. 9:21; cf. Acts 17:30-31).

### **Calling on the Name of the Lord—The Bible Comments on Itself**

Joel had a prophecy about this new era in which everyone who would call on the Lord’s name would be saved. Full of apocalyptic indications of a great societal and spiritual change, 2:28-32 predicted the dispensing of the Jewish economy for the Christian age. It concluded, “And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved” (2:32). Peter, in opening the

Gospel to the crowd at Pentecost, quoted the passage, saying its fulfillment was what they were witnessing, and stopped at the same place, “And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). The great unification in the church between Jew and Gentile was beginning (Eph. 2:13-18)!

It is apparent that Peter never meant a simple mental assent. To say so would first be a denial of the Lord’s words in Matthew 7:21-23. Not everyone who called on His name, “Lord, Lord” (7:21) would be saved, but those who did His father’s will. To say simple mental assent was all that was required would also have Peter contradicting Himself in Acts 2, for he told those inquiring about salvation to “[r]epent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . .” (2:38).

To say that Paul was somehow appropriating the phrase for a belief-only doctrine would have him negating the terms of his own salvation! He was told, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). If he had to go through baptism to call on the name of the Lord, why would he advise others any less? He would not. He had instructed them about baptism back in Romans 6:1-6. It was the point at which the old man of sin was crucified and the new man in Christ was resurrected to walk in newness of life. Indeed, baptism is the reenactment of the core principles of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4). How could it not be a part of “calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16)?

Again, Paul himself wrote to the church at Corinth with these words, “. . . To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours . . .” (1 Cor. 1:2). He includes those who “call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” as a description of the saints in His church. When Paul went to Corinth, how were saints, Christians, made? “And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

There is ample and irrefutable evidence to assert and prove that “calling on the name of the Lord” was meant to be more than mental assent and would, indeed, include baptism. Though that doctrine (baptism) be oft-maligned in Christendom, in Scripture it is an indispensable part of “calling on the name of the Lord.” It does not,

to be sure, stand alone as the only item in such a call, but it is a part, and it is illustrative of how this simple phrase of verse 13 carries so much more requirement than a simple, “Lord, I believe,” or the so-called Sinner’s Prayer.

## Conclusion

That young lady who scrawled on scrap paper the words “Romans 10:13” in objection to the teaching on baptism is indicative of the view of many in the world. They would say that those who believe in obedience to the Gospel (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7-9) do not believe in Romans 10:13.

On the contrary, Bible believers would politely retort that there is more to the Bible than one verse, designated by men as chapter 10 and verse 13 of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Bible believers would cite the immediate context, the remote context, and the biblical overview to prove the point that “calling on the name of the Lord” is really a brief, powerful statement implying and encompassing obedience to the will of God. And they would further affirm that such a calling on His name is for the purpose of forgiveness and justification, knowing that full, complete obedience—as under the Old Law—is never possible. The difference in calling on the Lord and calling on Moses is that the Lord can indeed save when men and women are imperfect: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

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## Biographical Sketch



Andy Robison was raised in Moundsville, West Virginia. He has served the Lord's church in West Virginia in Pennsboro and Parkersburg (Camden Avenue) as an associate minister and as pulpit minister for congregations in Farmington (Oakhurst), Washington (Hopewell), Harrisville, and Moundsville (Hillview Terrace), his current work.

Andy taught Bible and directed choruses at Jackson (Tennessee) Christian School for two years. He has written and co-written several hymns, as well as produced several CDs of a cappella singing for West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. He serves on the board of directors for that camp. He manages the website *churchofchristongs.com*, which contains many of his compositions along with other originals.

He has been with the West Virginia School of Preaching since 2011, serving as director since 2012.

Andy is married to the former Marsha Giesler of Rolla, Missouri. Marsha teaches a preachers' wives class at WVSOP and serves as the librarian and is frequently called upon to speak at ladies' inspiration days. They are the parents of one daughter, Hannah, and a son, Andrew, who is married to Kaylynn (Wolfe).

# HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOSPEL

*Romans 10:14-21*

*Phil Sanders*

*“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?  
And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?  
And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they  
preach unless they are sent? As it is written:*

*‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel  
of peace,*

*Who bring glad tidings of good things!’*

*But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘LORD,  
who has believed our report?’ So then faith comes by hearing, and  
hearing by the word of God.*

*But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed:*

*‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth,*

*And their words to the ends of the world.’*

*But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:*

*‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation,*

*I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’*

*But Isaiah is very bold and says:*

*‘I was found by those who did not seek Me;*

*I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’*

*But to Israel he says:*

*‘All day long I have stretched out My hands*

*To a disobedient and contrary people.’” (Rom. 10:14-21)*

[All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

This passage leaves no doubt of the necessity of preaching and a preacher. God sends forth preachers with His own message. The message saves, but God honors the preacher for bringing the Gospel of peace, glad tidings of good things. The preacher’s message, which is not his own, brings the people who hear to faith. Some who

should have heard failed to believe or obey while others not sought found the Lord and His glad tidings and came to believe and obey. This passage falls within Paul's contrast of the unbelieving Jews with the believing Gentiles. One notes God's heartbreak of stretching His hands out to a "disobedient and contrary people" (v. 21). Preachers who love the Lord and love the souls of the lost feel that same heartbreak. Their love and their longing to see others enjoy the blessings of the good news leads them to sacrifice themselves to take up their crosses alongside the Lord.

### **Why Do You Want to Be a Preacher?**

J. W. McGarvey, president of the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky, gave a number of chapel talks to the preaching students in 1910-11. These are worth your reading more than once. In one of his talks, he asked the question "Why Do You Want to Preach?" In his talk, McGarvey lists several unacceptable reasons why a man might want to be a preacher and suggested that if men were doing it for those reasons, no one would want them after they found out. These unacceptable reasons include: to fill an appointment, to practice on it all he can, to have an easy life, to get rich, or to become popular.

McGarvey ultimately answered his question, describing what preaching is for:

The apostle Paul gave the purpose of the work of the preacher when he wrote to Timothy. He said, "By so doing you will save both yourself and them that hear you." How save himself? Because when a man has reached the conclusion no matter how it came into his mind, that it is his duty to preach and make that his business he will be lost if he does not do it.

McGarvey asked, "What would men and angels think of a man going home to heaven who has been a preacher and has not brought one single soul with him?" If it your purpose in preaching to save yourself and those who hear you, then that is a worthy reason. McGarvey noted:

I think that if I should be so fortunate as to find myself in heaven and look around and realize that I am here at last, that I have been able to pass and have obtained the grace of God

in the forgiveness of my sins, and here I am in heaven. Now that would be heaven to me. But if, while I am congratulating myself, some Christians whom I knew in the world should come up to me and greet me and say, “The fact that I am here in heaven today is due to you. It is what I heard from what you preached, from the example you set before me that turned me away from my sins to my savior.” Now that would be a higher heaven than the other. And if in addition to that, while I am receiving the congratulations of that brother, the Lord should pass by . . . and pronounce a blessing upon me, that would be the highest heaven of all.

Preaching for the love of our Lord Jesus and for the souls of men should fill our hearts with purpose and conviction. The Lord willed that His Gospel message be preached by His messengers, His preachers. The power is not in the messenger, but in the message. When a faithful messenger presents the message faithfully, then the full power of the Gospel will make a difference.

When I was a young man, I took on the task of building a bedside table to hold the books I read at bedtime. I have that very table now in my office to remind me of that task. My father had worked in prior years as a carpenter so I knew his help would be valuable. As I began to saw one of the boards, I gripped the handsaw tightly and tried to muscle my way through the cut. My father stopped me and gave me one of the best lessons of my life. He said I was working harder than necessary and ruining the cut. He showed me how to grip the handsaw with a minimum of energy so that the saw could do its work and keep a straight line. Using a handsaw properly mattered. It was easier than muscling my way through, and the cut was straight. God’s Word is like that. When we get out of the way and let God’s Word do its work, it is easier and cuts straight.

God’s Word changes lives. The Gospel has the power to open the eyes. “The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes . . .” (Psalm 19:8). The Gospel has the power to convict souls. The Lord Jesus promised the Holy Spirit as a Helper to His apostles. He promised, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment . . .” (John 16:8). This conviction would come through the message they preached. Jesus

promised, “[W]hen He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (16:13). The Gospel message will pierce the heart (Acts 2:37) and save those who believe (Rom. 1:16). “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21, NASB).

The more people hear the Gospel, the more they will believe (v. 17; John 20:30-31). God has so designed the Word that it feeds the soul (1 Peter 2:2). I believe in the power of the Gospel. I have seen the Word work in the lives of unbelievers and in hardened criminals. I know it will do what God intended.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.  
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,  
And do not return there,  
But water the earth,  
And make it bring forth and bud,  
That it may give seed to the sower  
And bread to the eater,  
So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me void,  
But it shall accomplish what I please,  
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isa. 55:8–11)

We believe the greatest need of our day is to hear the precious teaching of God. Nothing else can fill the spiritual needs of men; nothing else can replace the Gospel. The Gospel is God’s power to convict hearts and move spirits to leave sin and love the Lord. The Gospel gives the only real hope for eternal life.

### **The Nobility of Preaching**

God had only one son, and He was a preacher! Where would the

church be without faithful Gospel preachers who sacrificed much to proclaim the gospel? I would not be a Christian today were it not for a Gospel preacher who reached my family in 1918 and another Gospel preacher who reached me in 1961. Philemon owed himself to Paul (1:19); perhaps we too owe ourselves to men who brought us the Gospel.

Unfortunately, many people hold the work of the preaching in low esteem. Parents often steer their children into other professions than full-time preaching. Many faithful Christians prefer their daughters marry someone other than a preacher. Among some of our colleges, large numbers of our students train to be youth ministers or academics but have little desire to enter into full-time preaching.

Those who preach frequently hear they are to “cut the sermon short” because of some other event at the worship services. Hearing a preacher is just not that important. One might wonder if anyone ever tells prayer leaders, song leaders, or those who preside at the Lord’s Table to keep their parts short. Such attitudes reflect a heart too busy to listen to God. Those who enter preaching do so knowing they will often be the subject of many discussions at the noon meal. Sometimes, the discussion is positive, but sometimes, it is not. I wonder if in some of those discussions some talented young man’s heart is turned from the pulpit.

The work of preaching the whole counsel of God lends itself to the necessity at times of saying things people despise hearing. Jesus said the world hated Him “because I testify of it that its works are evil” (John 7:7). Gospel preachers must decide in their hearts whether they are willing to speak the truth at the cost of people’s admiration or speak things that tickle ears.

Three things have hurt Gospel preaching. First, it has become fashionable for some of those who want change to mock and bash preachers, especially older ones. People say one should not be “preachy,” showing little understanding of how it may hurt a young person’s attitude toward preachers. We should use caution with our words so that we may encourage the young to consider Gospel preaching as a life vocation. To hear some talk, this would be the last consideration. Such behavior reveals how the devil spreads his darkness and dulls the light through intimidation and mockery.

Second, with little hesitation some show they have little respect

for the sacrifices of Gospel preachers in former years. They slander their work, charge them with never understanding grace, and paint them as ignorant and unfeeling. It never occurs to some that these graceless, ignorant, brush-arbor preachers baptized more people in a year than some of today's ministers baptize in a decade. If they lack so much grace, why did people eagerly listen to them and respond? Oddly, during this period they criticize, the church grew fast and strong! How could these "mean-spirited legalists" have built so many churches? Their message of the cross was pure and true to the Book. Did they know of grace? How can any man preach the cross and not know of the grace of God?

Third, some have adopted a style of preaching that reminds me of a potato chip. It looks good and tastes good but has little nutritional substance. Everyone enjoys the message, but it helps no one take up their cross to follow Jesus. It tickles ears and sounds so good. When a faithful Gospel preacher comes along with a different style, he may find rejection because he dares to challenge their thinking, to condemn their complacency, and to convict listeners who would rather hear only pleasant things. However, only a faithful preacher, preaching a faithful message, can lead others to deny themselves, to take up their crosses daily, and to follow the Lord.

David Decker, faithful Gospel preacher and the director of the Georgia School of Preaching, left a career in music in order to preach the Gospel. Decker noted:

There is no thrill like coming out of the baptistery, and no audience like brethren who are passionately gathered to hear Truth. There is no ovation like the one given by the angels when even one sinner repents. And, no endorsement of one's performance when the show is finally over like those blessed words, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . ." Would I do it again? There is no doubt.

As with Paul, The Lord, "laid hold of me . . ." a long time ago for this very thing. The lifelong challenge is to keep on putting one's hand to the plow while refusing to look back (Luke 9:62). (7)

### *A Gospel Preacher*

A Gospel preacher realizes that his life and purpose is to serve

the living God and to tell the story of Jesus again and again. As a Christian, a preacher belongs to the Lord, who bought him with His precious blood. A Gospel preacher is a man who prays and studies God's Word in the morning, ministers to the hurting and lost during the day, studies with both the erring and the saints in the evening, and meditates on God in the night. He speaks the truth in love and will not compromise his faith or his lifestyle. He weeps over the lost and rejoices at conversion. He shares himself that he might touch the most intimate places in the hearts and spirits of those who hear him.

His foundation is truth, his life is faith, his love is the Lord and people, and his hope is heaven. There is a fire in bones that pushes him to speak when others remain silent. There is urgency in his message, passion in his voice, and zeal in his heart. God is his passion, his source, his energy, his rock, his friend, and his life. He never forgets Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He realizes God has entrusted him with the power of God unto salvation. A Gospel preacher must reveal the unsurpassed love and grace of God while he exposes the ugliness and tragedy of sin. His work demands fearless conviction, unfailing faith, unchanging love, and inspiring hope.

The work of preaching the Gospel may be the hardest and most needed task on earth. Nothing else can change the lives of sinners into saints or melt hardened hearts. Gospel preaching demands great prayer, great wisdom, great commitment, and great love. Weak men need not apply. The Lord Jesus, who bore the cross in Golgotha, asks faithful men to deny themselves and bear a cross daily for Him. Gospel preachers do take up their crosses to find a crown for themselves and for all that will listen to them.

### ***What Makes Preaching Noble?***

*Preaching is noble because it is God's work.* God is the One who commissioned men to preach the Gospel.

- “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you



always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” (Matt. 28:19–20)

- “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’” (Mark 16:15)
- “How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,

Who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (vv. 14-15)

Paul held in high esteem those who took the good news to others who needed it. He knew their value, the blessing they brought those who listened. The ugliest part of them, their feet, was indeed beautiful for having brought a life-saving message to people lost in sin.

*Preaching is noble because its message is most important.* The world is in desperate need of the Gospel of grace; salvation is impossible without it. When Paul entered Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city full of idols (Acts 17:16). Paul was greatly distressed, irritated, and grieving, because the people did not know the living God. They needed God’s commissioned message he would deliver, but they did not know it. He yearned to tell them, to save them from ignorance.

*Preaching is noble because its results are far-reaching.* Mack Lyon said, “Preaching is the one single work or calling that deals with man’s eternal destiny, man’s soul.” Though doctors are called to heal bodies and teachers to educate minds, preachers touch men’s eternal souls. Preaching affects both this life and the life to come. The preaching of God’s Word comforts, converts, convicts, and encourages. It lifts, motivates, shapes, and stretches. Through listening to the preaching of the Gospel, one who hears becomes better, nobler, richer, and purer. When a person is touched with the Gospel, who knows how many others he or she will touch? Preachers do not merely teach their immediate listeners; they reach beyond to those their listeners teach as well. Who knows in the

future what some bright young man will do with his life to serve the Lord?

*Preaching is noble because its activity is essential to salvation.* It is in obedience to the preached truth that a man is born again (1 Peter 1:22-25). God chose “the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21); He realized man by his own wisdom could never reach heaven without His help. God chose preaching as the means to lead souls to Himself and to salvation.

*Preaching is noble because its motivation is honorable.* Those who preach do so, for the most part, out of love for God and people. While some may preach out of envy and strife (Philip. 1:15-16), others do it from goodwill and out of love. Many preachers have a deep burden for the lost and great compassion for the brethren. Paul admonished the Ephesians with tears for three years (Acts 20:31). He made himself a slave to all that he might win the more to Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

*Preaching is noble because it takes a strong and faithful character to do it.* Effective Gospel preaching requires a high price from those who do it. They must be honest, courageous, compassionate, and virtuous. As men of integrity, preachers must faithfully deliver God’s message to people who do not always want to hear what they have to say. The weeping Jeremiah often grew discouraged with impenitent Judah, but the fire in his bones would not allow him to remain silent about sin (20:7-10). Gospel preaching demands godly men who will not compromise and will not discredit the name they wear.

### ***What Can We Do to Restore the Nobility of Preaching?***

Preachers can do several things to boost their image, but they need the help of all who love the Lord’s cause. Do not take your journey alone. Preaching is often a lonely ministry. Preachers who enjoy a faithful and supportive wife are indeed blessed. Young preachers need the counsel and support of older preachers. Prayerfully pursue mentors, people with whom you can pray and confide.

*Preachers must primarily preach with visible love.* People who love the Lord will listen to godly men if they know their preacher loves them. Good preaching starts with loving ministry and care

day-to-day. Hospital and home visits help preachers pack power into their messages. People love those who faithfully minister to them. People will listen to one they love even if he is a mediocre preacher. People will only tolerate a poor minister even if he is a talented speaker. People will tolerate rebuke from men they respect when they feel he has their best interest at heart. We must preach the truth with love (Eph. 4:15) if we are to recover an esteem for the pulpit.

*Preachers need to hear themselves.* Some preachers have adopted a style that appears unloving. Should they preach on hell, some conclude by his attitude he wishes they would go there. Preachers would do well to listen to the sound of their voices. What does their tone of voice communicate? One preacher I admire seems always to be angry. One woman remarked she was tired of church because she got a spanking every Sunday from the preacher. His attitude or tone of voice could have spoken things to her he never meant. Most preachers love their congregations and mean well, but some are not good at showing it. Many preachers would do well to evaluate themselves for more than content.

*Preachers need to rediscover joy.* The Gospel is glad tidings, not sad tidings, and many preachers wear depressing and discouraging faces. We cannot impart what we do not possess, and it could be that our churches reflect a joyless gospel. Preacher, show the joy of your salvation (Psalm 51:10), the unspeakable joy of your inheritance (1 Peter 1:6-8), the joy of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17; Gal. 5:22), and your joy in the Lord (Philip. 4:4). Infectious smiles radiate who you are and whose you are. Many preachers need to learn to laugh again.

*Preachers need to live lives free of reproach.* Paul encouraged Timothy, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:12, NASB). He urged Titus, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (2:15). Preachers must speak with authority at times, but they forget that their best ally is moral authority. Such authority comes from blameless lives, filled with love and purity.

Gospel preachers have a responsibility to live the life they preach and to maintain wholehearted dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who challenge others to take up the cross of Christ daily ought themselves to live devotedly to His cause. Romans 2:21-

23 should speak to every person who determines to preach the gospel:

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, “Do not commit adultery” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?’

James warns, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (3:1). We cannot lead others where we are not willing to go. Our behavior speaks louder than our words. We must become what we ask others to become.

Finally, every preacher faces a discouraging day now and then. *He should remember what he does is vital to the Lord’s work.* God needs faithful men, who will be able to teach others; men of courage, who will stand in the gap; watchmen, who will warn of danger; and evangelists, who will take the great news to a lost and dying world. Paul reminded Timothy to

stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who 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 given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. (2 Tim. 1:6-11)

Preaching is noble because the Gospel is a divine message. How privileged it is to be a clay jar and to carry such a precious and needed message! Preacher, you have such a privilege.

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## Biographical Sketch

Philip D. Sanders was born in 1951 in Shawnee, Oklahoma, and now lives in Edmond, Oklahoma. He married Jackie Dodgen in 1974, and the couple has four daughters—Christa, Chara, Tara, and Laura—and twelve grandchildren.

Phil graduated from Oklahoma Christian College (1974) with a B.A. in Bible and Biblical Languages, Harding Graduate School of Religion (1983) with an M.A.R. in Christian Doctrine, and Theological University of America (1998) with a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies.

A speaker for *In Search of the Lord's Way*, a nationally broadcasted television ministry of Edmond church of Christ, since 2009, Phil has been involved in active ministry for more than forty-seven years. He is also an adjunct professor for the Georgia School of Preaching in Marietta, Georgia, and for Asian Christian University in the Philippines. He served as an instructor for the Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies for eleven years and at Amridge University for six years. He is also a board member of Lads to Leaders.

Phil is the author of several books and a frequent speaker at lectureships, Gospel meetings, and seminars. In addition to having published articles in *Gospel Advocate* and *Spiritual Sword*, he is the author of *Adrift: Postmodernism in the Church* (2000), *Let All the Earth Keep Silence* (2006), *Evangelism Handbook of New Testament Christianity* (2009), *A Faith Built on Sand* (2011), and *A New Life* (2015); several of these books are online, courtesy of *In Search of the Lord's Way*.

# WHAT ADVANTAGE HAS THE JEW?

*Romans 3:1-20*

*Jack Gilchrist*

Romans chapter 3 is continuing the overarching argument that Paul is making in the theological part of his letter. Overall, Paul is being inspired to explain how the salvation of mankind has been played out through Jesus Christ. In doing so, he has made Jews and Gentiles equal, or at least in equal need of the Gospel. This message may not have been welcomed by all in the Roman congregation of the church, especially Jews. Therefore, Paul is going to get out ahead of the objections that Jews may have by answering six questions in chapter 3. “Paul used the diatribe format to interact with an interlocutor, that is, an imaginary dialogue partner. It was a method of teaching and exhortation used in ancient philosophical schools” (Pollard 105). The first four questions of this chapter are the assigned text for this lecture.

The first question is, “What advantage then has the Jew . . . ?” (v. 1a). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] After discussing the guilt of the Jews and that circumcision by itself does not indicate salvation, the Jewish consumer of this letter may feel attacked. So, this first question introduces an advantage that the Jew has. “Advantage” can refer to what would make the Jew superior (Vine et al. 15). It can also mean that the Jew has preeminence (Vincent 31). “Paul was here anticipating an objection of the Jew” (Whiteside 68). The Jew is not better than the Gentile, but the Jew did have something the Gentile did not.

Before the coming of Christ, the Jew had the oracles of God. This is a huge, or chief, advantage. This advantage in every way gave the Jews something that was profitable. The phrasing in verse 2 “means the overplus of the Jews is much from every angle” (Robertson 341). The term *oracle* was used early to refer to pagan messages from Delphi (341). *Oracle* is adopted by the New Testament writers several times (Acts 7:38; Heb. 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11). Each of these references is to the Old Testament. The Jews had the

word of God given to them 1,400 years before Christ came. The Jews had the standards for what God wanted written down and collected so they could know what God wanted them to do.

The Gentiles were still under the Patriarchal Age while the Jews had the Law of Moses. The pagans were left guessing on what God wanted as it was only limitedly revealed to them from God. There are only a few interactions after Moses in the Old Testament with Gentiles. Jonah was sent to preach to them, Balaam was called to curse Israel by them, and Naaman apparently became a believer in the one true God. If there are interactions between God and pagan people outside of the Old Testament during that time, they are unknown to modern mankind. Pagans had to rely on ignorance of the written law and God's gracious "wink" to have some type of connection to God and a hope of salvation before Christ came (cf. Acts 17:30, KJV).

The Jewish advantage was having the Law. It was having knowledge of exactly what God wanted. The Word of God is a blessing, especially to those who follow it. It is a blessing to have a God that is willing to tell what He wants and to preserve that by writing it down through inspired men so that now it can be known. The Jews were the custodians of this word and, therefore, were responsible for making sure they did what God wanted. Today, all men are responsible for what God has made known because the New Testament has been completed and, especially in modern time, is more available than ever. Mankind now has an advantage because he has the Word of God. It is an advantage to know exactly what God wants. The Jews had this for 1,400 years before all mankind could share this advantage.

The second question is "[W]hat if some did not believe?" (v. 3a). This question is asking, "What if some of the Jews, not Gentiles, did not believe?" What if the Jews failed in faith? The Jews did fail in faith. Throughout the Old Testament, the Jews combined true worship of God with idolatrous worship of foreign idols. While there are bright moments of faith recorded, the majority of the history of the Jews is about coming short.

Robertson points out that not believing could also imply the Jews were faithless, "especially concerning the Messianic promises and Jesus" (342). The news Paul is sharing is that the faithfulness of

the Jews does not affect the fulfillment of the promises of God. Even though the Jews did not believe enough to obey the Law of Moses and some Jews rejected the message of the Messiah, the Law remained true and the Law fulfilled what it was meant to do. The Law was to be a tutor that led to the coming of Christ.

In verse 3, Paul compares the faithfulness of God to the faithlessness of man, and God wins. God will remain faithful in spite of the Jews' and mankind's failures. So Paul can say, "Certainly not!" (v. 4) to the question of unbelief making God's faithfulness without effect. Paul makes it clear that God is true and compared to Him, all men are liars. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). However, men fail, sin, and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). The principle of God's perfection is used here to illustrate how His will cannot be stopped.

Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4 to bolster his point: "That you may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged" (v. 4). This psalm is from David's psalm of remorse, figured by most to have been written after his sins in connection with Bathsheba. "God is here depicted as being judged by men. When the words and actions of God are thus judged, He always stands justified" (Winters 38). So, unlike David and the rest of mankind, God stands justified while everything else fails.

Again, Paul seems to be anticipating questions as he carries out a one-sided conversation. He states the next hypothetical question as, "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?" (v. 5) Using the phrase *what shall we say* makes the question rhetorical (Robertson 342). Paul also seems to be using progressive parallelism. He is asking progressive questions that are related to each other and can be answered at once.

The first part of the question is, in other words, "What can be said about the unrighteousness of man demonstrating the righteousness of God?" It should be remembered that contextually the unrighteousness being spoken of is the unrighteousness of the faithless Jews. "'Our injustice' is the exclusive injustice of the Jews; and it consisted in their unfaithfulness to the revelations of God. The Jews did not obey these revelations, and herein were unjust" (Lard



103). This demonstration is comparing the unrighteousness of men and the righteousness of God to see how they compare (cf. vv. 3-4).

This leads to the primary question: Is God unjust for demonstrating His wrath against men? “If God’s faithfulness is displayed by the Jews’ disobedience, thus giving Him the opportunity to reveal His plan to save all through the gospel, would not God be unjust to their disobedience” (Winters 38). This question is echoed by skeptics today in the guise of “How can a perfect God be wrathful and punish people?” or “How can a loving God throw people into hell?” Paul is about to give an answer, but it is interesting that he states that this is a question from a human standpoint. He was speaking as a man with objections or even putting himself in the seat of the skeptic. Again, inspiration is anticipating how men will react to the information Paul is giving about salvation and grace.

How does Paul answer this difficult question? “Certainly not!” (v. 6a). This is the same phrase as in verse 4. That God’s will still happens despite and even through the imperfections of His creation does not negate that God is still just and can punish the unjust. This leads Paul to another question: “[H]ow will God judge the world?” (v. 6b).

God can still judge the world as unjust because He created it to be just. He set a standard for mankind to follow but also created humanity with free will. Therefore, there is a right way for people to live, but they choose to fail. While mankind fails, God decided from the beginning to make a way for the failure not to continue or condemn mankind for eternity. That is, He extended grace by letting someone else take the penalty for all of humanity’s shortcomings. Could this have been done a different way? Could mankind have been made a robot that always did what it was programmed to do? Possibly, but God did it this way so mankind can freely choose to devote itself to God and accept the salvation He provides. This makes God both just and gracious, and as the creator, He is also allowed then to judge according to His justice and grace.

Paul personalizes his question by asking why he, Paul, would be judged if God is glorified by his lie. Paul’s Jewish opponents would have thought he traded the truth for a lie, which may be why Paul uses this example. He may also be restating objections that had been made against him by some of his opponents. Paul may be trying to

“prove that your reasoning is false. In order to do this I take my own case, and show how you view me” (Lard 105).

Paul also brings up another accusation in verse 8. He has been accused of saying, “Let us do evil, that good may come.” The grammar here is apparently very difficult and could bog down this lecture, but if one wants to get bogged down, one should look at commentaries and word studies (Robertson, Lard, Winters, etc.). Staying the course of his message, later in this same letter Paul asked, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (6:1). Paul answers this much the same as he is answering the questions in this chapter, “Certainly not!” (6:2). Paul is trying to get across the point that the doing of evil cannot be justified, even if it might bring about good. He is going against the Machiavellian principle “The end justifies the means.” Paul does not believe evil can ever be justified, and this remains his point throughout the letter. Paul’s ultimate point is that only Christ can justify.

Since Paul established Christ as the standard, he is also pointing out that he is not judging or condemning. Since Christ is just, He can condemn correctly those who are doing wrong, including those who are misquoting and slandering Paul. This is why Paul can state their condemnation is just in verse 8—not because of his standards, but because of Christ’s.

This brings Paul to address a fourth objection to his overall argument in the book: “What then? Are we better than they?” (v. 9). This objection gets the lengthiest treatment in this chapter. It may be that Paul is trying to keep everybody even. He is trying to make every reader see the need for Christ so one party will not think they are better than another.

Specifically, Paul is asking, “Are the Jews better than the Gentiles?” Since the Jews did have the advantage of having the oracles of God, are they less sinful? Paul’s answer is simply no. Paul states that he previously had condemned both Jews and Gentiles. Winters notes that the Greeks/Gentiles were condemned in chapter 1 of this letter and the Jews in chapter 2 (40). So, while the Jews may have had an advantage through the Word of God to understand better what sin is and therefore be able to avoid it, ultimately they did not, which means they are in just as much need of salvation as the next party or race of people. “Paul has been showing that the Old

Testament privileges, though giving to the Jews a certain superiority to the Gentiles, did not give them any advantages in escaping the divine condemnation” (Vincent 34). All are under sin (v. 9c).

To prove his point, Paul quotes from several Old Testament passages. These quotes prove that Paul believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament. When he references these passages and others, he is attesting to their truth and that God inspired men to write these passages. Yes, it is internal evidence for the inspiration of the Bible, but even for skeptics, it would be expected that a book that is from God and therefore thought to be inspired would have evidence within itself to prove its verity.

The use of these Old Testament passages is called a “florilegium, a fixed body of Old Testament quotes taken from various parts of the Old Testament and woven together without regard for context” (Pollard 110). The practice of making these florilegia may have developed during the intertestamental period, and there are several examples of them in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Paul may be using a well-known florilegium here (110).

Paul is verifying that some in the first century trusted the Word of God as being from God. If Paul is inspired too, this just adds to the case of inspiration. Paul, Christ, and others believed the Old Testament to be from God and verified that by their use of it and quoting from its text.

Paul will actually quote from several passages from the Old Testament, mostly from Psalms. “The object of these citations is to prove the undoubted guilt of the Jews” (Lard 108). He starts with a quote from Psalm 14:3: “There is none righteous, no, not one . . .” (v. 10). This is the same psalm that starts, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (14:1a). The psalm paints practical atheism, or people who live like there is no God. In this quote, it is being emphasized that compared to God, no one can be considered righteous. “[O]f course this has in view responsible people; the thrust of the whole argument is that none could be saved by the law; hence the universal need of the gospel . . .” (Winters 40).

Paul then quotes more from Psalm 14, which is repeated in Psalm 53, but this time backs up a verse. Paul states, “. . . There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God” (v. 11). The psalmist wrote, “The LORD looks down from heaven upon the

children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God” (14:2). While the message is the same, the wording is very different. Paul is quoting the Septuagint’s wording; that is, he is quoting a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, like Jesus and many others did in the first century (Barnes 80). So, the wording will be different from the English versions that have been translated, though again it must be emphasized that the message is the same.

While the psalmist may be speaking in hyperbole, he is pointing out the fragility of man compared to God. Man cannot fully understand God, and all that is understood about God has been revealed (1 Cor. 2:11-12). The next line in verse 11 is more direct about the point being made: “. . . There is none who seeks after God.” Mankind does not understand God because mankind, when it rebels, is obviously not seeking God or His ways. The depravity of man that Paul has already described in chapter 1 leads to the rejection of God. It leads to practical atheism, acting like there is no God. It leads to no one seeking God because there is no influence of God.

Therefore, giving over to sin causes more sin and eventually rejection of God. Paul, continuing his quote from Psalms 14 and 53, says that all have turned aside from God and that they have all become unprofitable. “The Hebrew of the Psalm means *have become corrupt*,” where Paul uses the term *unprofitable* (Vincent 35). The Jews totally rejected God throughout their history by combining idolatry with the true worship of God. They would worship God on one day of the week and Baal on another. This is total rejection! This is why they are all unprofitable.

Therefore, Paul concludes with this quote: “There is none who does good, no, not one” (v. 12c). This line has been used to defend the doctrine of total hereditary depravity, or the *T* in the TULIP of Calvinism.

The doctrine of hereditary total depravity . . . is the concept that all children come into the world with both the *effect* and *guilt* of Adam’s original sin. . . . therefore, they are totally (completely) depraved (evil), i.e., moral corruption extends to every part of their makeup. (Jackson 42).

This doctrine is false; otherwise, why would Jesus hold up children as the example of what adults must become to enter the kingdom of

heaven (Matt. 18:3)? Several other Scriptures teach that sin is not inherited by children from their parents (cf. Gen. 8:21; Matt. 19:14; 1 Cor. 14:20).

Bible interpreters also need to be careful in understanding what type of language they are reading. Paul is quoting poetry. Poetry is well known for using expressive phrases to emphasize a point. Again, these sections of Romans and Psalms are hyperbolic. One must be careful not to make theological conclusions that are contradicted in other Scriptures from poetic imagery.

So, what is Paul using this passage to say? “This does not imply that no one ever did any good whatsoever. Rather it states that none does good unmixed with sin . . . Thus no one, no, not one, is free from sin” (Winters 41). Paul is stating that all creation, all mankind, has been corrupted at one time. It may be he is expressing similar thoughts to the individual who says, “I can do nothing right.” When mired in sin, man gets to a point where nothing is right anymore and no good can be done anymore by the sinful individual.

The context of this passage needs not to be lost. Paul is speaking of the Jews here: “Consequently all are guilty before God. Are the Jews, then, better than the Gentiles? . . . Not at all” (Lard 109). Paul is making sure the reader understands all have sinned, Jew and Gentile alike. All are susceptible to becoming mired down in the muck of corruption and separating themselves from God.

Paul moves on to how these sinful actions manifest themselves. Sin manifests itself in man’s words. Paul quotes three lines in a row from Psalms 5:9, 140:3, and 10:7, in that order, to point out that man sins with his mouth. The line from Psalm 5 states that words bring death like an open tomb when they are full of deceit. In short, lying brings death, maybe death to a relationship, maybe death to trust, maybe physical death, but lying brings death. “An open grave is an unnatural sight. It is expected to be closed. So of the throats alluded to. By long abuse they had become unnatural” (Lard 109).

Next, Paul compares the sinful use of words to poison. “Their words are like poison released through the fangs of a serpent” (Winters 41). False words have poisoned and will continue to poison society. One example is the false words of evolution. Sadly, due to the propagation of evolution, which teaches that humans are just highly evolved animals, life has been devalued. This has led an

alarming number of children to be convinced that the murder of their peers and teachers at school is not something to be avoided. School shootings are not a political problem, nor a gun problem, but a heart problem that stems from false ideas perpetuated by words. Unfortunately, it may be a long time before this problem can be fixed because the false teachings that devalue life are so prevalent. False words poison society.

Lastly, Paul states that the sinful have mouths “full of cursing and bitterness” (v. 14). “Their corrupt and profane speech showed the bitterness in their hearts” (Winters 41). Instead of using their mouths to praise God, they, the Jews, had used their mouths to curse Him and serve others. The Jews were guilty of blaspheming the name of God, which they were specifically told not to do (Exod. 20:7). At times in Old Testament history, the Jews would apply the true name of God to false gods. They truly became full of cursing and bitterness.

The sin of the Jews was not limited to their words. They also put their words into action to sin against God. Paul again uses several quotes to show how they acted sinfully. Paul points out that these evil individuals are swift to murder, especially the innocent. This quote from multiple verses in the Old Testament (Prov. 1:16; Isa. 59:7-8), shows a lack of value for life. Perhaps, this was displayed the most when the Jews murdered Christ, who was an innocent man.

Paul refers again to Isaiah 59:7 when he states, “Destruction and misery are in their ways” (v. 16). “Wherever they go they destroy reputation, or life, or something else held dear, and thus sow misery in their way. But worst of all, they ruin souls” (Lard 110). Paul is describing individuals that have stopped caring whom they affect with their actions. As they go their way, they are spreading destruction, and that destruction brings misery to those with whom they come in contact. However, they may be bringing destruction and misery on themselves. “When a people, any people, lose reverence for human life, there remains nothing for them but destruction and misery. They are treated with the same treatment they give (cf. Matt. 7:1-2). Their path is a path of ruin” (Winters 41). Whether the ruin is brought on themselves or on others, these sinful individuals make life worse by their rebellion against God.

Because of the misery spread by them, the sinner does not know the way of peace. Paul, quoting from Isaiah 59:8, is saying that sin leads to the opposite of peace. God provides peace that passes understanding (Philip. 4:7). Sin separates men from God (Isa. 59:2). Therefore, when living in sin, mankind separates itself from the peace of God. The peace of God is the only lasting peace and the only peace that will matter. People continually war with each other and will war again. Rebellious people war with God and will continue to do so. The only peace that matters stops living in sin and lives with God by doing His will.

The comparison Paul makes in verses 16-17 shows that people are either in a miserable war against God or they are at peace with God. Sin is rebellion and lawlessness (1 John 3:4). When living in sin, one cannot be at peace with God. There is no such thing as a Christian sinner. Every individual is either a Christian at peace with God or a sinner at war with God. Everyone needs to be former sinners who have made peace with God by becoming Christians.

In the last line Paul quotes, he illustrates the total rejection of God (v. 18). The sinner in word and deed has no fear of God. This quote from Psalm 36:1 “is the heart of their problem: they had lost their reverence for God and therefore had no desire to do His will. And when this is the case, there are no restraints to moral corruption” (Winters 41). This can be viewed as a progression: words lead to actions; actions lead to rejection of God; rejection of God leads to rejection by God. The Jews had rejected God continually over their history; this led to God rejecting them, allowing them to be taken by the Assyrians and eventually Babylonians into captivity. Paul’s use of Scripture is a reminder of how far sin will take the sinner, and it should be remembered that the Gentiles and Jews are the same concerning sin. The Jews may have had the advantage, but they, like the Gentiles, sinned and faced the rejection of God.

The advantage the Jew had belonged only to the Jew. Paul states that the law only speaks to those who are under the law. British law applies only to British citizens, and United States law applies only to the citizens of the United States. Even though British law once was the law in the same territory that the United States now occupies, the law no longer applies because of some incidents late

in the eighteenth century. The Law of Moses was once the Law from God to the Jews, but that law never applied to the Gentiles unless they proselytized.

The Law of Moses was fulfilled. Christ came to fulfill it: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18). Christ did fulfill the Law, and therefore, He ended the Law, as Paul later states, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4).

As Paul will explain later, law is the reason that right and wrong are known. Law is the standard that shows the world where it has gone wrong. The law the Jews had taught Paul what sin was (Rom. 7:7). The realization of the presence of sin in a person’s life should cause that person to be struck silent, or, as Paul says, his or her mouth should be “stopped up” (v. 19). The image Paul is using with this phrase literally means “fenced up” and is “the effect of overwhelming evidence upon an accused party in the court” (Vincent 36). “Stopping mouths is difficult business,” but there comes a point when faced with the evidence of sin that an individual can only sit in sad silence (Robertson 346). Therefore the Jew is guilty, not to the exclusion of the Gentiles, but just as guilty as the Gentiles. Paul will soon make the point that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .” (Rom. 3:23).

Before Paul makes that stunning proclamation, he concludes that no one can be justified by the deeds of the Law (v. 20). Law is unmoving. True law does not change. The Law of God is perfect. This means that the Law does not give mercy and grace. Now, even in the Old Testament God gave grace, but that grace was not available through the Law but by the intercession of God. This points to these greater points: man needs grace, and God is the source of grace. To make grace and mercy available, God gave the sacrificial system to the Jews, but He even showed grace beyond those to Adam in the garden, to David after his sins concerning Bathsheba, and to every other individual who was not struck dead after breaking one of the Old Testament law systems. Even Achan



was given the chance to repent before he suffered the consequences of his sin (Josh. 7:19).

So, what is the advantage of the Law then, or why have it? The Law was there to show mankind what is wrong and how to try and do what is right. Again, humanity will fail, but that does not mean it should not try. Life is better when the laws of God are followed. The more that follow the laws of God, the better the world will be. The illustration of the Word of God being the instruction manual to live this life best may come short of everything the Bible is, but it still is the instructions on how to live the best life according to the manufacturer.

So, that is the advantage the Jew has. The Jew knew the Law earlier. The Jews had more access to know how to live a better life. Now all have the New Law, so all have the advantage of knowing how to follow God, but the Jew had it first, which would have prepared them for the New Law to come. No wonder Paul said in Romans 1:16 that He is “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek”!

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Jack Gilchrist is a 2002 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University; he holds a bachelor's degree in history and vocational ministry. He is a 2005 graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching.

Jack preaches for the Pine Grove church of Christ in Scott Depot, West Virginia, teaches Hebrew History I-IV at WVSOP, and co-directs Senior Week of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. In addition to located work in Ohio and Pennsylvania, various speaking appointments, and short-term mission trips in the United States, he has participated in short-term mission work in the Bahamas, Russia, Canada, and Costa Rica.

Jack and his wife, Katie, married in 2002 and have one son, Andrew, who is ten. Katie stays busy as a mom, proofreader, and tutor. Andrew enjoys music and sports.



# ADAM, JESUS, AND THE HUMAN

## PROBLEM

*Romans 5:12-21*

*Charles J. Aebi*

### **Introduction**

Brothers and Sisters, I thank you for coming today to encourage me for my efforts in preparing this message. I appreciate the brethren who have worked and still work to maintain this school of preaching, as well as those students who come to take advantage of our efforts. I thank our Lord for you, and I believe many will be saved by our having established and worked at the West Virginia School of Preaching. I have been assigned to study with you Romans 5:12-21 today. We read this passage from the NKJV:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed where there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the one offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting

in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Let us pray for the Lord's blessings as we try to understand what He inspired Paul to say to us here: Holy Father, guide us to understand what Paul wrote for our learning in this difficult passage. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I read and reread this passage several times, then outlined a path I thought I wanted to follow, and read parts of several commentaries on these verses. Then, I revised my outline and began writing, and after a few more days, I revised my outline again and started over after talking with my best critics, my wife and my daughters, so you get the benefit or lack of benefit of our study of this great passage.

## Structure and Topics

It may be helpful to notice one structural peculiarity of this passage: In verse 12, Paul begins a discussion of Adam's sin bringing sin and death into the world, then for the next five verses leaves that topic, then returns to it in verse 18. Coffman notes this and asks a question on verse 13 that he calls upon Godet to answer:

Verse 13, *For until the law [of Moses] sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*

The subject that Paul introduced in verse 12 is left hanging till verse 18; and the ensuing verses (13-17) are parenthetical. At first glance, this verse appears to be starting a paradox. In the pre-Mosaic period, sin was not imputed; how then can it be said that "sin was in the world"? Godet explained it thus:

Even during the time that elapsed down to the giving of the law sin was in the world (as evidenced by the fact that all died); now sin is undoubtedly not reckoned in the absence of law. Nevertheless, that did not prevent sin

from reigning during the interval between Adam and Moses, which proves certainly that it was imputed in some measure. (189)

### **The Calvinist Interpretation**

Think of our journey today as a journey of different viewpoints, or interpretations, of what is said about God's plan for mankind. Let us look first at what Calvinists think God has in store for us. Their way of thinking will seem to the conservative Christian to be sound on many points, but not all. Calvinists believe that God started with a detailed master plan in which He would predestine all that every human will do and where he or she will end up. God knows the future because He has willed it. Calvinists believe God has predestined *A* to go to heaven and *B* to hell, for example; this plan is to be carried out by Original Sin in this way: Adam's depravity (his fallen nature after he sinned) is inherited by all his descendants. Let the Calvinist commentator Albert Barnes explain it in his comments on verses 18-19:

(1.) Adam was created holy; capable of obeying law; yet free to fall. (2.) A law was given him, adapted to his condition—simple, plain, easy to be obeyed, and fitted to give human nature a trial in circumstances as favourable as possible. (3.) Its violation exposed him to the threatened penalty as he had understood it, and to all the collateral woes which it might carry in its train—involving, as subsequent developments showed, the loss of God's favour; his displeasure evinced in man's toil, and sweat, and sickness, and death; in hereditary depravity, and the curse, and the pains of hell for ever. (4.) Adam was the head of the race; he was the fountain of being; and human nature was so far tried in him, that it may be said he was on trial not for himself alone, but for his posterity, inasmuch as his fall would involve them in ruin. . . . (5.) *His posterity are, in consequence of his sin, subjected to the same train of ills as if they had been personally the transgressors.* . . . (6.) There is *something* antecedent to the moral action of his posterity, and growing out of the relation which they sustain to him, which makes it certain that they will sin as soon as they begin to act as moral agents. . . . This

hereditary tendency to sin has been usually called “original sin;” and this the apostle evidently teaches. (7.) As an infant comes into the world with a certainty that he will sin as soon as he becomes a moral agent here, there is the same certainty that, if he were removed to eternity, he would sin there also, unless he were changed. There is, therefore, need of the blood of the atonement, and of the agency of the Holy Ghost, that an infant may be saved. (136-37)

Perhaps in an effort to excuse our failings, some have invented “original sin,” the theory that when Adam fell, his nature was changed so that his descendants all inherited his fallen nature; this “original sin” prompts them to actual sin, a doctrine that all Catholics and most Protestants have borrowed from Augustine, a bishop of Hippo in North Africa in the third century. Albert Barnes spends several pages of fine print trying to justify the doctrine that when Adam sinned, all men became sinners in that his nature was so changed that the whole human race was born with a depraved nature, giving them a tendency to sin (136-39). Schreiner in the ESV Study Bible has Adam passing on his sinful nature to all his descendants (2166). Hendriksen comments on verse 12:

In what sense is it to be understood that through Adam’s fall sin entered the world? Only in this sense that gradually, over the course of the years and centuries, those who were born inherited their sinful nature from Adam, and therefore committed sins? Without denying that this indeed happened, we must nevertheless affirm that there was a far more direct way in which “through one man sin entered the world.” . . . In Rom. 5:15 he writes, “By reason of the trespass of the one the many died.” He obviously means that *the entire human race was included in Adam*, so that when Adam sinned, all sinned; when the process of death began to ruin him, it immediately affected the entire race. [He then quotes an old children’s catechism that says:] “In Adam’s Fall We Sinned All.” (177-78).

In this way, Hendriksen sets forth his belief in the original sin doctrine of Calvinism even while attempting to tone it down to make it sound more palatable. Barnes goes on to say that the Scriptures set forth plainly the whole system (of Calvinism) as a fact without any

attempt at explaining its hows and whys. What they believe and what Barnes means by “the agency of the Holy Ghost” (137) is that God will send the Holy Spirit to operate directly on the souls of those infants and adults of the elect to cleanse them of original sin and actual transgressions, and this is done so effectually that they can never sin again so as to be lost. Since this goes beyond anything to which reference is made in our Romans 5 passage, we will not discuss it here. Verses 15-21 do refer to the One Man, Christ, whose righteous act provides justification and restores righteousness to those who will accept it, in effect restoring what was lost in Adam’s transgression. Here, the Calvinist balks at grace to all; when he says Adam brought universal sin, he should also allow Christ to bring universal salvation, according to verses 16-19. Calvinists believe that Christ’s atonement saved all who are “the elect,” meaning all who are predestined to heaven (*As*). The *As* do not know they are saved, so God sends the Spirit upon each of them to directly remove all their actual and inherited sin, give them faith, and cause them to repent and know they are among the elect. This “calling” by the Spirit is so effectual that once saved, they are always saved. Calvin called this “final perseverance.” Those who are predestined to be lost (*Bs*) have no choice; they are not of the elect, so are predestined to suffer in hell for eternity. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is not sent to them to get them to believe, repent, confess Christ, and be saved.

### **The Gospel Interpretation of the One Man, Adam**

Let us look at the scenario as seen by taking the New Testament at its word (like Barnes thinks he is doing!) but without injecting predestination and original sin into the picture. God has a plan in which He allows man freedom to choose to obey or to sin, and He knows man will often choose to sin, so God makes provision for the sacrifice of His Son to atone for man’s sin. His plan was made before He created the universe, and after that, God created Adam and Eve and gave them a place to live, the Garden of Eden, and a law to live by—what they will or should do in Eden. Here, Satan enters the picture in the form of a serpent, who tempts them to disobey God. They have work to do tending the garden, and they could eat the fruit of the garden’s trees, except for the tree of knowledge in the midst of the garden. Eve reported that God had said, “You shall not



eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” (Gen. 3:3). But Satan persuades Eve to eat to be wise like God. She eats and persuades Adam to eat. He does, and spiritual death in the form of separation from God happens immediately. They lose their home in Eden and their fellowship with God. Sin was brought into the world by one man—Adam: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . .” (v. 12). Allen includes in his book a clear chart contrasting Adam and Christ (62):

<i>Adam</i>	<i>Christ</i>
(1) Trespass.	(1) Act of righteousness (5:15, 18)
(2) Many died.	(2) Many received grace (5:15)
(3) Judgment.	(3) Free gift (5:16)
(4) Condemnation.	(4) Justification (5:16, 18)
(5) Reign of death.	(5) Reign of life (5:17)
(6) Disobeyed.	(6) Obeyed (5:19)
(7) Many made sinners.	(7) Many made righteous (5:19)

Winters makes a strong argument that the death that came by Adam’s sin was spiritual death:

One thing should be kept in mind: the whole section [vv. 12-21] is a contrast between Adam’s sin and the benefits of Christ’s death. It is therefore imperative that we determine the kind of death (spiritual or physical) Paul had in mind. Although many great, learned, and noble men have concluded that physical death is meant (since all die physically), the context forces me to the conclusion that it is spiritual death (and by spiritual death I mean the penalty of sin or separation from God). Following are some of the internal reasons which have led me to this conclusion: (1) Death is mentioned as the result of each one’s sin (v. 12), but all die physically, whether they sin or not (e.g., infants, mentally retarded, etc.). (2) That which is produced by sin (death) is opposite that which is given through Christ (vv. 15-17). (3) That which was lost by Adam’s sin can be regained in Christ (vv. 15-18). (4) The one is condemnation and the other is justification (vv. 16-18). (5) Death (which

comes by sin) is contrasted with the life given by Christ (v. 17). (6) In the one we are made sinners, but in the other we are made righteous (v. 19). (7) Death is contrasted with eternal life (v. 19). (8) The offense (resulting in death) is contrasted with grace (life or salvation) (v. 20). (9) Sin, which reigned unto death, is contrasted with righteousness, which is to eternal life (v. 21). Thus I am forced to the conclusion that death in this section means spiritual death or separation from God, although this does not exclude the . . . fact that physical death is a consequence of sin. (62-63)

Grubbs insists that physical death to all resulted from Adam's sin (83). Allen presents scenarios for both physical and spiritual death but leaves it up to the reader to choose between them (61). Most agree that both spiritual and physical death were the result of Adam's sin. Sin has always resulted in immediate separation from God (Isa. 59:1-2), and sin always ends up in physical death.

Having stated in Romans 1 his theme that the Gospel, not the Law, is God's power to save, Paul goes on in 2-3 to show the need for salvation demonstrated by the sinfulness of both Gentiles and Jews, who are without excuse for their way of life that ignores God. There is a universal need for righteousness—a need that can be satisfied only by the Gospel, which tells of God bringing righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, His Son, whom He sent to justify and reconcile those who have made themselves enemies of God by their opposition to God's way.

Adam started it, or, to be precise, Adam and Eve did. Paul was not a male chauvinist; he gives Eve a pass here and lays the blame squarely on Adam, where it belongs. After all, Adam was the head of his house, and Eve was his helper, not his boss. Adam could have said, "No," and stopped the whole process, but he did not. He chickened—and ate. Sin is disobedience to God's command, which Adam knew as well as did Eve, whom we understand to be silently included in Paul's indictment of Adam as guilty of bringing sin into the world. But lest we get carried away with blaming just Adam (and Eve), note that our title includes "the Human Problem." Sin did not stop with Adam and Eve; they just brought it into this world, and we today share with the rest of humanity the guilt of keeping on with it. We know that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . ."

(Rom. 3:23). But we know that our job as Christians is to share with the world the cure for this problem—Jesus Christ, who through one act of righteousness made justification possible for all who will receive it.

The passage assigned as our text, Romans 5:12-21, like the rest of Romans, deals with the human problem of sin and what has been done and what must yet be done about it, which will be addressed more by Paul in the Romans chapters that follow. But neither this passage, nor any other, places man in the position the Calvinist sees him in. Adam's nature did not change when he sinned. He fell from grace just as all fall by sin, but his descendants did not inherit original sin, for it does not really exist; it is a figment of the Calvinist imagination. Babies are born holy, pure, and without sin. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3), and in Matthew 19:14, He said that the kingdom of heaven has such persons as little children in it. Hendriksen has been cited as saying that Jesus died to remove sin from little children, but he is mistaken, for children have no sins to be removed. Sin is not something one is born with; it is something that all accountable people do. Sin is universal because all sin and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). What we inherit from Adam is not a depraved nature, but the freedom of choice that allows us to choose not to obey God, as did Adam, or to obey God, as did Noah. There is no such thing as "original sin" and never was.

## **Sin and Death in Romans 5**

*Sin* is defined in Scripture as something you do, not something you are born with or inherit. "Whosoever commiteth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). I prefer the old King James Version here because "transgression of the law" seems clearer than "lawlessness," though they mean the same thing, and the Greek word here is *anomian*, meaning "without law" or "lawlessness." The word *transgression* is used as a synonym for *sin* in verse 14, referring to Adam's sin in eating of the forbidden fruit. *Sin* is also called an "offense" or "offenses" in verses 15, 16, 17, 18, and 20 in the NKJV, where the ASV renders it "trespass." Sin is called "disobedience" in verse 20

in several translations. So, if we allow the Bible itself to define sin, we have transgression of the law, an offense, a trespass, lawlessness, or disobedience—all referring to violations of God’s law.

Which law? The Law of Moses is not specifically named here, though Moses himself is in verse 14, and later in Romans, Paul will refer to it. The Law of Christ is not named here either, though it is in Galatians 6:2. But God has always had a law, though it was often unwritten, as in Eden when God’s law was spoken by God himself. God’s law before Moses is sometimes called God’s Moral Law or Patriarchal Law, which was given by God himself or through His prophets or spokesmen to various people. So, even Adam had a law to obey, as did Eve, Cain, Abel, Abraham, and others. They all also knew that to violate God’s law was sin; long before the Law of Moses was written, Joseph said, “How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9). Adultery was known to be sin long before the Law of Moses said it was wrong.

Angels had sinned before the earth existed (2 Peter 2:4), which means that God had communicated His law to the angels (because sin is a violation of God’s law, though we know nothing of God’s will or law for angels), but Adam was the first man to sin after God created earth and man. What was the nature of Adam’s sin? It led to death, as does all sin eventually—“For the wages of sin is death . . .” (Rom. 6:23). Adam had been told, “[I]n the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17), and he died spiritually (was separated from God) then and started on the road that led eventually to his physical death. But how did Adam’s (and Eve’s) transgression differ from ours? They were tempted by a false promise, which is like some temptations we have. They were offered forbidden fruit; was it an apple that stuck in their throats and has since been called your “Adam’s apple”? [Dr. Kenneth Hunter used to say the problem in Eden was not an apple; it was a green pair!] But whatever the scam may be, whatever tempts us to sin, the process today is very similar to what happened in Eden.

Adam is thus perceived to be a representative of the whole human race, as Christ is in verse 17 for the justification of all. It should be obvious from the nature of sin that Adam is responsible for his own sins, and we for ours. “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt

of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” (Ezek. 18:20). Our sin may differ in degree from Adam’s, but it does not differ in kind; we transgress, as did Adam, and it separates us from God, as it did Adam.

Paul speaks of “those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam” in verse 14. He seems to refer to those who lived from Adam to Moses without specific law. Whiteside says the difference in sin here is that “Adam violated a positive law; these people [those who did not sin like Adam] violated the moral law” (122). Dunkin says:

God talked directly to the patriarchs and gave them instructions, held their respect in some cases and lost the reverence and appreciation in others. Sin was just as wrong then as it is today; but Paul said God had not yet given man a law with His wrath for sin declared, except in specific cases, such as was given to Adam and Eve, and perhaps many others of whom we have no record. (122)

### **The One Man Jesus Solves the Human Problem**

The Human Problem is that all sinned and thus death spread to all men (v. 12). The “all sinned” in verse 12 seems to refer to all men participating in Adam’s sin or in its consequences, Adam being seen here as the representative of the human race. “An example of the working of the solidarity of humanity is seen in Levi’s paying tithes to Melchizedek; through Abraham, his great-grandfather, even though Levi ‘was in the loins of his father’ (Heb. 7:9-10) at the time.” (Bell 45). Sin is transgression of God’s law—whatever law He had in effect at the time of the transgression. Even before the Law of Moses, God’s Moral or Patriarchal Law was being disobeyed, so sin was being committed, separating men from God and exposing them to death. God had known this would happen, so He had planned the free gift of His Son to atone for the sins of all. Why sin is so bad that Christ had to die on the cross to atone for it is a question we do not have time and space to ponder here, but even if we did, we probably would not understand it fully. The degree of evil in a crime is often gauged by the punishment meted out for it; the fine for sin is death and beyond that, hell, which is described as

being in unquenchable fire, outer darkness, torment, and a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth in great pain, a fate worse than death. God specified death as an appropriate punishment for sin, but Christ's atonement went beyond restoring life to sinners.

In addition to the evils resulting from Adam's sin, there are the ruinous effects of our own sins that must be overcome, or else we are hopelessly lost. But Paul assures us that the blessings through Christ abound much more than the curse through the trespass of Adam; they include deliverance from our own sins. (Whiteside 123)

As usual, McGarvey says it best on verses 17-19:

[I]f we had only Adam's sin to answer for, then the teaching of this passage would establish the doctrine of universal salvation, for Christ's act completely counteracted Adam's act. But there are other sins beside that first one committed by Adam, and other punishments beside natural death. It is in its dealings with those that the range of Christ's act exceeds that of Adam, and it is here also that salvation becomes limited. The resurrection (which nullifies the effect of Adam's act), though a form of justification, *precedes* the hour of judgment, and hence can not be final justification, for the latter is the product of the judgment. Moreover, the resurrection which Christ effects, as federal creative head of the race, does not depend on faith; for all, the believing and the unbelieving, the just and the unjust, have part in it. But the justification which comes *after* that resurrection depends upon other relations and provisions. In administering this final justification, Christ stands as the federal *regenerative* head (the headship which peculiarly pertains to the church, and not to the race—Eph. 1:22, 23), and bestows it upon that part of the race which has been regenerated by faith. This headship, therefore, is conditional, and the salvation which depends on it is not universal, but conditioned on faith. To illustrate by a figure, there are *two* doors which we must pass in order to inherit eternal life. The first is natural death. This door was closed for all by Adam, and opened for all by Christ. The second is the judgment. This door was closed for all having capacity to sin by their own individual sins, and

opened by Christ for those who shall be justified through belief in him. Therefore, in teaching that Christ leads all through the first door, Paul has not taught universal salvation, for true, complete salvation lies beyond the second door. Justification from the sin of Adam is one thing, and final justification from our own sins is quite another. . . . (336-37)

Paul says that Christ's gift far outweighed Adam's sin. Bell says: A comparison of Adam, "a figure" of Christ, and of Christ, "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), in their resemblances and disparities, is found in Rom. 5:12-21. Both are representative men whose acts—Adam's disobedience and Christ's "obedience even unto death"—are imputed, respectively, unto those whom they represent. Adam is a fountain of evil; Christ of good. Sin, condemnation, ruin and death follow in Adam's train; justification, righteousness, redemption, and life in Christ's. Respecting disparity, Christ does not merely take Adam's defaulted pace in order to restore the status quo. As a statue always surpasses its model, five times over the chapter [Paul] declares that benefits in Christ "much more" than compensate for losses in Adam. The poison of Adam has a much more potent antidote in Christ; the stream of grace runs stronger and deeper than the stream of sin. (42-43)

Lard, at the end of his great commentary on the Greek text of this section of Romans, makes a comment that this writer amens, along with a recommendation that you read Lard's comments on chapter 5 of Romans:

Thus ends, in the latter part of this chapter, one of the most profound and compactly-thought pieces of composition, it has ever been my fortune to meet with. If, when the reader has studied it as I have, he shall have the satisfaction of feeling that he is master of it, he will be the possessor of a sensation to which I am afraid to lay claim. I devoutly wish him the pleasure. (193)

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## Biographical Sketch

Charles J. Aebi is a native of southwestern Pennsylvania. He was raised with a denominational background, but obeyed the Gospel in 1949 and began preaching in 1952. He has a B.S. degree from Penn State, an M.A. from Abilene Christian, and a Ph.D. from Ohio University. Charles has served as minister for churches in Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Texas and has preached and held workshops and preached Gospel meetings in several states and foreign countries.

He has served as an elder for several years each in three congregations. He currently serves as a minister and an elder for the Barlow-Vincent church of Christ in Vincent, Ohio, which he helped to start in February 2003, and which built a new meetinghouse in 2006 and a new Bible classroom building in 2018 and now has



attendance of about 140. He taught Bible for thirty-four years at Ohio Valley College (now University), serving fifteen years as academic dean and vice-president and six years as chairman of the Bible department. He retired from the college in 1998 and taught at the West Virginia School of Preaching from 1999-2014. He has authored eight books and has written chapters in several others. He writes for the *West Virginia Christian*, the *Gospel Advocate*, and some other brotherhood papers.

Charles and his wife, Imogene, have four children—Ruth, Joy, Mark, and Mary—and twelve grandchildren and five great-grandsons. All of the children, grandchildren, and their spouses are faithful Christians. All of the men in the family preach; all of the men and women teach Bible classes. All of the grandchildren have graduated from Christian colleges, and eight are married.

# THE LAW: HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, AND GOOD

*Romans 7:7–13*

*Aaron N. Burch*

## **Introduction**

Why the Law? What is its value, its purpose? These are the questions Paul seeks to answer in Romans 7:7-13. In the development of his thesis that salvation comes through Jesus alone (cf. 1:16-17; 3:21-26), Paul has just stated in the previous section that Christians “have become dead to the law” (7:4) and “have been delivered from the law” (7:6). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] To illustrate the totality of the Christian’s deliverance from the Law, he compared such to the dissolution of the marriage bond at the death of a spouse (7:2-3). Just as a woman is released from the marriage bond at the death of her spouse, the Christian has been released from the Law through Jesus. The thoughtful first-century Jewish Christian reading Paul’s letter might ask (and so too might we), “Of what value is the Law then? If we have simply been delivered from the Law through Christ and the Law brought only ‘sinful passions’ and ‘death’ (7:5) anyway, why did God give the Law? What is its value, and what is its purpose? Are you saying the Law is evil, Paul?”

With his oft-repeated rhetorical and transitional question, “What shall we say then?” (v. 7, et al.), Paul begins to answer the question of the Law’s value and purpose:

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the

commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. (vv. 7-13)

## **The Text**

### ***A Question: Is the Law Sin? (v. 7a)***

Paul begins his discussion with a question: “Is the law sin?” (v. 7). From a Jewish point of view, such a thought is virtually blasphemous (e.g., Acts 6:11-13; 21:28). The Law could never be sin. The Law is “perfect” and “sure” (Psalm 19:7). It is “right” and “pure” (19:8). It is “true and righteous altogether” (19:9). The Law is more valuable than “gold” and “[s]weeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (19:10; cf. 119:72, 127). The wise man “delight[s]” and “meditates” in God’s Law “day and night” (1:2). Furthermore, for Jews, the Law was the foundation of their relationship with God (Exod. 19:5-6).

Paul agrees. He exclaims, “Certainly not!” (v. 7). This phrase has been variously translated as “God forbid” (KJV, ASV), “Absolutely not!” (NET), “May it never be!” (NASB), and “By no means!” (ESV, RSV, NRSV). The phrase is somewhat colloquial and is perhaps most literally translated simply as “may it not be” (Dunn 132). But that does not do full justice to the force of the verb’s construction. The verb is a negated aorist optative. The optative mood describes a possible (Wallace 480) but perhaps improbable action. By using this construction, Paul denies even the possibility of the Law ever being sin. The construction, in general, according to Burton, “deprecates something suggested by a previous question or assertion” and “expresses the apostle’s abhorrence of an inference which he fears may be (falsely) drawn from his argument” (79). In other words, Paul is saying, in some of the strongest terms conceivable (Dunn 132; Wallace 481), that the Law is not sin.

### ***A Connection: The Law and Sin (vv. 7b-11)***

So, the Law is not sin. That is not why Jesus has delivered us

from the Law. Yet, the question remains, “Why then?” The answer, according to Paul, lies in the relationship between the Law and sin.

Some, like Dunn (381-82), think Paul is alluding to Adam and his sin in this section. While Paul has certainly referred to Adam already in Romans (5:12-21), an allusion to him in this section is not entirely clear. Further, according to Dunn, Adam stands for “everyman” (382). In other words, Paul uses Adam as a representative of all people, including Paul himself. So, whether Paul alludes to Adam or not, the section depicts the same struggle with sin that all men have faced, including Paul. For that reason and because it appears most natural, we will assume in the following comments that Paul is referring to himself.

In verses 7b-11, Paul makes ten assertions that explain the relationship between the Law and sin: 1) “. . . I would not have known sin . . .” (v. 7). The Law made sin known to Paul.

Had God kept silent in regard to sin, and never communicated with man upon it, in the form of law defining what things are sins, the conception of sin would never have been in the human mind. We should have lived and died, with no more knowledge of it, than though there was no such thing. (Lard 229)

Because of the Law, Paul knew exactly what sin was. 2) “I would not have known covetousness . . .” (v. 7). With the second assertion, Paul gives one example of what the Law revealed. When God in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21) said, “You shall not covet . . .,” He revealed sin. “[C]ovetousness” is “a desire for someth[ing] forbidden or simply inordinate” (Bauer et al. 372). Both the Greek words (*epithumia* and *epithumeo*) and the underlying Hebrew term (*chamad*) primarily mean “desire” (371-72; Koehler et al. 325), but the context of the Ten Commandments implies “desire” with a sinful connotation; i.e., wickedly longing for someone else’s “house,” “wife,” servants, livestock, or any other possession (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). 3) “[S]in . . . produced in me all manner of evil desire” (v. 8). Once God revealed sin in the Law, sin caused Paul to have more sinful desire. The difficulty compounded. He was fully entrenched in sin.

With his fourth through eighth assertions, Paul explains what he meant by the third statement. 4) “[S]in was dead” (v. 8). Apart from

the Law, sin's power was diminished. In a sense, it was dead. 5) "I was alive . . ." (v. 9). Paul was also alive apart from the Law. Sin had not yet killed Paul. Of course, Paul is talking spiritually (Eph. 2:1). At one point, prior to the Law, Paul was spiritually alive. Certainly, the Law was given centuries before Paul was born. So, how was Paul "once" alive (v. 9) if he died when the Law came? Paul implies that there was a time in which he was not accountable to the Law. At that time, he was alive. However, when he came to the age where he was accountable to the Law, the Law revealed sin and sin killed him. This further implies that Paul was not spiritually dead when he was born. If Paul was spiritually dead when he was born, he could not have "once" been alive. Thus, prior to his accountability to the Law, sin had no power over him. Sin was dead, and Paul was alive. But 6) "sin revived . . ." (v. 9). Paul's situation changed drastically "when the commandment came." That is, when Paul reached the age of accountability to the Law, when he knew right from wrong, sin came to life. Sin gained power. And 7) ". . . I died" (v. 9). Spiritually, Paul died. Sin overcame Paul and killed him. Without the Law, sin did not have this power. With the Law, it did with terrible consequences. The result was that 8) ". . . I found [the Law] to bring death" (v. 10). The Law promised life (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 6:24; Prov. 6:23; Rom. 10:5), and common Jewish thought was that observing the Law led to life (Dunn 384). But Paul experienced the opposite. The Law brought death. Paul thought the Law would bring life, but 9) "[S]in . . . deceived" him (v. 11) and 10) "killed" him. Sin had used the Law against Paul.

The key to these ten assertions exists in their modifying phrases. "[E]xcept through the law," Paul would not have known sin (v. 7). Because "the law had" condemned covetousness, Paul knew evil desire. "[T]aking opportunity by the commandment," sin produced desire (v. 8). "[A]part from the Law," sin had no power and was thus dead. "[W]ithout the law," Paul was alive (v. 9). After "the commandment came," however, Paul died. "[T]aking occasion by the commandment," sin deceived Paul (v. 11). And, "by it [the Law]," sin killed me.

While the assertions highlight the damning nature of sin—sin produced evil desire (v. 8), sin deceived Paul (v. 11), and sin killed Paul (v. 11)—the modifying phrases emphasize the role of the Law.

The Law itself was not sin. The Law did not encourage sin. The Law revealed sin (Roper 424). The Law condemned certain actions (like covetousness), with the result that Paul knew what sin was, was guilty when he committed it, and then died because of it. Sin thus gained power. In one sense, Paul did indeed die because of the Law—the Law made sin known. Had it not revealed sin, Paul would not have been guilty (Rom. 4:15). Yet, on the other hand, he did not die because the Law was evil, but rather because sin was. The Law itself was not “the problem” (Keener).

The life of Adam is illustrative of what Paul is describing (Lard 231-32; Roper 426, 428-29). When God made Adam, he was sinless. He remained sinless until God commanded him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When the command was given, Adam had the choice to obey or disobey. Without the command, Adam could not have sinned, but with the command, he could. Of course, he did, and then he died. The command did not kill Adam. Sin did. Yet sin used the command. The command itself was good, but at the same time, it revealed sin and in that way empowered sin. Paul’s life and for that matter our lives too illustrate the same.

The question, then, of why the Christian needs to be delivered from the Law still remains. To this point, Paul has demonstrated that the reason is not that the Law is evil. Far from it, the Law reveals sin. Perhaps, though, the answer already lies implicit in the text. The problem was that once the Law revealed sin and sin gained power, causing death, the Law was helpless to deliver Paul from the consequences of his sin. Therein lies the need for Jesus and for deliverance through Him from the Law (Rom 7:24-25).

### ***A Conclusion: The Law vs. Sin (vv. 12-13)***

Verses 12-13 form somewhat of a conclusion to Paul’s thoughts in vv. 7-11. Technically, verse 12 is probably the conclusion and verse 13 is the first verse of the next paragraph or thought (Dunn 376). Paul’s use of a question followed by the exclamation “Certainly not!” points to a further development of his overall argument. He used the same rhetorical device in several other passages in Romans (e.g., 3:4, 6, 31; 6:1-2, 15; 9:14; 11:1, 11). At any rate, whether Paul is beginning to develop his next thought or not, the verses are very closely connected as is evidenced by Paul’s

use of “then” (*oun*) (v. 13), an “inferential” conjunction (Bauer et al. 736).

Paul makes three concluding statements about the Law and sin in verses 12-13: 1) The Law is good (v. 12). 2) The Law is not death (v. 13a). 3) Sin is death (v. 13b).

First, the Law is good. From Paul’s discussion in 7:1-6, one might come to the conclusion that the Law was bad. Such, however, is simply not the case. As Paul labored to demonstrate in vv. 7b-11, the Law merely revealed sin. In fact, according to Paul, the Law or “commandment” (v. 8, et al.), a synonym for the Law, is “holy,” “just,” and “good” (v. 12). That the Law is “holy,” according to Bauer, who suggests that it is “pure, perfect, [and] worthy of God” (Bauer et al. 11). The description is reminiscent of Psalm 19:7-8: “The law of the LORD is perfect . . . The commandment of the LORD is pure. . . .” Further, the Law is “just” (v. 12), meaning it is righteous. And it is “good.” The Law is not evil. It is not unrighteous. Instead, it accords with all that is right and good.

Second, the Law is not “death.” In verse 13, Paul asks the question: “Has then what is good become death to me?” The “good” thing Paul has in mind is the Law. Perhaps, some might follow Paul’s reasoning in verses 7-12 and admit, “Yes, the Law is good, Paul, but because of the Law’s relationship with sin, it, for all intents and purposes, is death.” Paul counters this thought with the same emphatic statement he used in verse 7: “Certainly not!” According to Paul, the idea that the Law is “death” (v. 13) is just as preposterous as the idea that the Law is “sin” (v. 7). The Law could never possibly be death. So, then, what is? The answer, sin!

Sin is death. After his emphatic response, “Certainly not!” (v. 13), Paul begins, “But sin. . . .” The conjunction *but* sets up a strong contrast between the “good” thing, i.e., the Law (v. 12), and “sin” (v. 13). The Law is not death; sin is. A survey of translations reveals a slight but significant difference in this last sentence of verse 13. The NKJV makes the main sentence: “[S]in . . . was producing death,” whereas the ESV, RSV, and NRSV translate it as “It was sin . . .” The difficulty arises from the fact that the Greek text contains no finite verb in this sentence (Dunn 386). The KJV and the ASV follow the Greek text very closely and translate the sentence with no main verb: simply, “But sin. . . .” It appears that

the best understanding is that Paul implies the opposite of the question with which he began the verse. To paraphrase, the thought would be, “The Law is not death, but sin is death.” So, Paul is saying that sin is not just producing death, sin *is* death!

Perhaps more importantly, though, in this final verse Paul reemphasizes that the Law is not the problem. Rather, he concludes, the Law displays the terribleness of sin (v. 13c). Through the Law, sin is revealed as “exceedingly sinful.” The Law manifests how terrible sin really is. Without the Law, man might conclude that certain actions are wrong and others are right (cf. Rom. 2:14-16). But with the revelation of the Law man knew exactly what was right and what was wrong. And worse still, this knowledge increased man’s sin; not that the Law made him sin more, but that it increased his knowledge of how sinful he was and how entrenched in sin he was. And perhaps worst of all, the Law revealed the penalty—death (cf. Rom. 1:18)! The God-given role for the Law was to elucidate sin, to make it known, and to display its utter folly. For the Law to do this was in no way evil. In fact, it was good, holy, and righteous for the Law to reveal sin.

## **The Themes**

In this passage, Paul focuses on two key themes: 1) the nature of the Law and 2) the nature of sin. Essentially, Paul argues that both the nature of the Law and the nature of sin reveal that the Law is not evil, but holy, good, and righteous. Paul has developed them together in order to explain the need for deliverance from the Law. At the same time, he has contrasted the nature of sin and the nature of the Law. Perhaps, viewing these themes individually in summary form may help our understanding of Paul’s point.

Regarding the nature of the Law, Paul has stated or implied six key ideas: 1) The Law is not sin (v. 7a). It is not evil. Instead, 2) the Law makes sin known (v. 7b). It reveals sin. 3) The Law is used by sin (vv. 8-11). Sin has taken advantage of the good Law. 4) The Law is good, righteous, and holy (v. 12). 5) The Law is not death (v. 13a). 6) The Law reveals the extreme sinfulness of sin (v. 13b). In summary, Paul is saying that the nature of the Law is good. We are not delivered from the Law because the Law is evil. The Law is good and does nothing evil.



However, sin has taken advantage of the Law. Regarding the nature of sin, Paul states or implies seven key ideas: 1) Sin uses the Law (v. 8). 2) Sin produces more evil desire (v. 8). 3) Sin lives through the Law (v. 9). 4) Sin deceives (v. 11). 5) Sin kills (v. 11). 6) Sin produces death (v. 13). 7) Sin is revealed as extremely sinful by the Law (v. 13). In contrast to the Law's good nature, the nature of sin is death. It is not the Law that kills, but sin. As such, we need deliverance from sin. But the Law only reveals and condemns sin. It does not and cannot deliver from sin. Thus, we need deliverance not only from sin, but also from the Law. In other words, we need deliverance from the Law not because it is evil, but because sin is and the Law cannot deliver us from it.

### **The Thoughts**

Three key thoughts about the Law pervade Paul's discussion in this section. First, the Law is good. It is holy, righteous, and good. The Law was never, nor is it now, sinful or wicked. Elsewhere, Paul would write: "But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate . . ." (1 Tim. 1:8-9a). Indeed, the Law is perfect, right, and pure (Psalm 19:7-8). The problem never was with the Law. The problem was and is and will be, until the Lord returns, sin! Sin stands between God and us. Sin separates and destroys our relationship with Him.

Second, the Law accomplished God's intended purpose (West 213-14; Lard 229). It accomplished everything God designed it to do. Just as God intended, the Law reveals the terribleness of sin. It reveals, first of all, that we have committed sin, that we have violated God's standard. Consequently, it reveals that we are not righteous, "no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). None of us ever have or ever will keep the Law without error—that is, except Jesus. It thus reveals that we are more sinful than we might believe. Without the Law, we might get the erroneous idea that we are not too bad, perhaps even pretty good. But as we look into the Law and learn its expectations and precepts, we are constantly confronted with how terribly sinful we are and how very far we have transgressed God's will. Additionally, the Law reveals the consequences of sin, including the condemnation of the sinner. It reveals the just punishments for sin.

Then, at the same time, it also reveals our inability to fix the problem. We have violated God’s commands. We deserve punishment. And, from the standpoint of the Law, we have no way out, no solution.

Third, the Law does not save. Paul does not explicitly state in this passage that the Law does not save, but the idea is implicit in the entire discussion, from the very first question to the conclusion. He ended the previous section with the amazing statement that Jesus delivers us from the Law and that we are dead to the Law. But why? Why do we need to be delivered from the Law? It is not that the Law is evil. The Law is good. And it is not that the Law has failed to perform its purpose. It has revealed sin and the utter terribleness of sin. Yet we, the condemned, the sinful, the wicked, are left by the Law in that condition. That is not the fault of the Law. The Law cannot deliver. That was not its design. To the Galatians, Paul wrote, “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law” (3:21b). Instead, as the Law displayed our sin and condemned us, it also pointed to the solution—not itself—Jesus (3:24). The Law does not save—it prepares us for the one who does. Without the Law, we may not appreciate how very much we need Jesus!

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# THE ADOPTED LIFE

*Romans 8:12-17*

*Eddie Cooper*

My appreciation is expressed for the invitation to be a part of this lectureship. The eldership and lectureship committee are to be commended for their work in the selection of these topics.

I had a professor years ago that said, “If you get Romans, it will get you.” It is certainly true that it is a great book for study, and the application of these truths will help us in living the Christian life.

My assigned topic, The Adopted Life, found in Romans 8:12-17, will hopefully be a source of encouragement to all of those who read and study this great passage in the future.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

## **Introduction**

Romans 8 may be one of the most familiar and best-loved chapters in the Bible. The chapter opens with great assurance, “no condemnation” (8:1), then “all things work together for good” (8:28), and finally, “nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God” (8:39).

Our society is having a terrible time with responsibility and the bearing of consequences, but this will occur if we devote ourselves to living according to the flesh (vv. 12-13). Also, take note that an identifying mark of the sons of God is that they are led by the Spirit

(v. 14), thus we can know that we are the sons of God. A grand thought is that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (v. 16). Finally, we learn that God's children are joint heirs with Christ of glory (v. 17).

If you look carefully, you will find that Paul sets forth the high privilege of Christians, for whom holiness has been made possible by two things: 1) the incarnation and saving work of the Son of God and 2) the indwelling of the Spirit of God. By the one, there is justification from past sins. By the other, holy living afterwards is made possible by walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh.

Paul deals with the concept of sonship. Genuine believers are not just children of God as a result of being created by God, but are adopted into God's family with the full rights of inheritance.

### **We Are Debtors (v. 12)**

Having shown that there is no condemnation to they that are in Christ Jesus, Paul now declares that we are debtors. Being debtors, we are under no obligation to the flesh, thus endangering our eternal welfare to satisfy its lusts. Is it possible for children of God to live after the flesh? If not, Paul's warning is unnecessary.

There is an implication that brethren can live after the flesh. As a matter of fact, Paul gives us a list of the works of the flesh. Galatians 5:19-21 reads:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Being a debtor means it is a matter of solemn obligation 1) because the Spirit dwells in us and 2) because we are delivered from sin and it is required that our lives be given in God's service.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states:

[T]he idea of obligation or debt is coupled with that of liberty. Man is thought of as at one time under the authority and power of the flesh (8 5), but when the Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in him, he is no longer a debtor to the flesh

but to the Spirit (8 12.13), and debt or obligation to the Spirit is itself liberty. As in Gal, man thus passes from a state of bondage into a state of sonship which is also a state of liberty . . . (8 14). (Rees 59)

Here is an obligation placed upon every Christian to fulfill the will of God in his or her life. Because we are “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20) and because we are given renewed life through Christ, we have an obligation to God. We owe Him a debt. Therefore, we are obligated to live not after the flesh but after the Spirit. God will not make us obey the words of Christ, but if we love God and Christ, we will be obedient (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-4; 5:3).

### **Putting to Death the Deeds of the Body (v. 13)**

The person whose life is dominated by the flesh will ultimately die. This refers to eternal separation from God. Lenski was impressed with the words *live* and *die*: “Men ever think that they are really living when they give way to the flesh, whereas in reality they are leading straight for eternal death” (517).

We cannot with our own strength mortify, i.e., put an end to, the deeds of the body. We need the aid of the Spirit helping our spirit in the effort.

Someone has said, “If you do not kill sin, it will kill you.”

Even though some may have been baptized into Christ, are members of the church, and are among God’s people, they may still live after the flesh, or, by giving the Spirit control over their lives, they may put to death the deeds of the flesh and live eternally, being led by the Spirit. Ephesians 3:16 reads, “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”

The more one indulges in the appetites and desires of the flesh, the more one loses one’s spiritual life. If, for example, a Christian indulges in anger or malice or any of these passions that the Lord condemns, not only is he violating the word of the Lord, but also he is destroying the spiritual man, weakening it every day, and giving the flesh greater power over the spirit; and so the flesh will dominate and control the whole man while the spiritual man languishes and dies.

Winters has written:

The Spirit puts to death the deeds of the body. The deeds of the body are sinful deeds, and the destruction of those deeds (sin) is by the aid of the Spirit. Does the Spirit do it apart from any effort on the part of the individual? Of course not! Christians, even with the indwelling Spirit, continue to be faced with temptation and they will fall into sin, but their failure is not because the means of escape are not available, even as it is written, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Corinthians 10:13, KJV)

The Spirit has provided, “us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of God” (2 Peter 1:3), which knowledge, found in the New Testament of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is called, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). The Spirit therefore mortifies the deeds of the body in the flesh through means—that is indirectly by the word of the gospel. Sin is put to death in one’s body when he obeys the word of God, when he follows the Spirit’s instructions as given in the truth, which is the living and powerful sword of the Spirit (Hebrews 4:12). (143)

The lessons are clear with regard to the teaching concerning the Spirit and that Christians should yield themselves to this power at work in their midst. Since believers have been joined with Christ, they should try to live accordingly. One needs to cooperate with the redemptive action of God, all the while knowing that God’s redemptive work does not depend on one’s own ability to cooperate.

### **The Sons of God (v. 14)**

This verse introduces a new topic illustrating the benefits of the gospel. The ones mentioned are led by the Spirit, which means they submit to the influence and control of the Spirit. Lipscomb points out:

To whatever extent the Holy Spirit by its indwelling strengthens the human spirit to enable it to control the flesh, to that extent the leading is internal; to whatever extent the

motives of “the law of the Spirit,” when brought to bear on the heart in the New Testament, enlighten and strengthen, and so enable it to keep the body in subjection, to that extent the leading is external. The leading, then, consists of the whole of influences of every kind exercised by the Holy Spirit on the human spirit, enabling it to keep the body under. (149)

The Greek word for *led* also means “controlled” so this is a person controlled and dominated by the Holy Spirit and His desires and interests. And this being led continually by New Testament teachings, and our obedience together with this instruction, proves that we are among the saved, or that we are God’s children.

One evidence is a willingness to yield to that influence and submit to Him. All Christians submit to His influence; all sinners reject and oppose it.

Jackson has written:

Human beings are not free to act merely as they will. They have an intrinsic sense of responsibility. . . .

Through all the centuries of human history, the moral confusion and ethical depravity of the human family have been painfully obvious. . . .

[I]t acknowledges then the need for **instruction** as to how men ought to behave. There is the implication that this instruction will be external to man, i.e., an objective body of truth that lies beyond the mere inclination of his own conscience.

How did this sonship come about? It did not happen naturally. According to our flesh, we were not sons, but slaves. Slaves to sin. Stuck in fear, the fear of death. But something happened to change our status from slaves to sons. We have been brought into the family. We have been adopted as sons.

Lipscomb has well said:

The bondage which throughout the Epistle is contrasted with the liberty of the children of God is the bondage of sin (6:6, 16, 17, 20; 7:25), and of the corruption of death as a consequence of sin (verse 21). They had all been once under this bondage, which tends unto the fear of death. (Heb. 2:14, 15). (149-50)



## The Spirit of Bondage (v. 15)

As sons, we do not have the spirit or disposition of bondage or slaves, leading to cringing fear again, as under paganism and even under the law of Moses, but rather that of adoption—of having been adopted as sons, which means more than simply children who may possibly be unwanted—for if as adopted as sons, it means we are indeed wanted and have a dignified status before God, as well as the intimate relation of wanted children.

According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, cases of adoption are these:

In Greece a man might during his lifetime, or by will, to take effect after his death, adopt any male citizen into the privileges of his son, but with the invariable condition that the adopted son accepted the legal obligations and religious duties of a real son.

In Rome the unique nature of paternal authority (*patria potestas*), by which a son was held in his father's power, almost as a slave was owned by his master, gave a peculiar character to the process of adoption. For the adoption of a person free from paternal authority (*sui juris*), the process and effect were practically the same in Rome as in Greece (*adrogatio*). In a more specific sense, adoption proper (*adoptio*) was the process by which a person was transferred from his natural father's power into that of his adoptive father, and it consisted in a fictitious sale of the son, and his surrender by the natural to the adoptive father. . . .

As a Rom[an] citizen the apostle would naturally know of the Rom[an] custom, but in the cosmopolitan city of Tarsus, and again on his travels, he would become equally familiar with the corresponding customs of other nations. (Rees 58)

As sons, our dignified status before God, as well as the intimate relation of wanted children, causes us to cry (not to weep, but to exclaim, to exult) “Abba,” an Aramaic word used by children that means “Father” in a very endearing sense.

Sanday explained the repetition as

one of endearment and entreaty, taken from the natural impulse of children to repeat a beloved name in

different forms.

Barrett was impressed with the profound implications of this verse, as follows:

That it occurs twice (the expression “Abba, Father”) in Paul’s Greek writings is a striking fact, which may be due to the impression made by Jesus’ direct and unconventional approach to the Father. It corresponds exactly to the opening of the Lord’s Prayer in the Lucan form (Luke 11:2), and Paul’s reference here may be to the use of this prayer in Christian worship. The very fact that you can address God as Abba proves that the Spirit is at work among you, and that you are God’s children. (qtd. in Coffman 281)

### **The Spirit Bears Witness with Our Spirit (v. 16)**

Winters concerns himself with two questions asked here:

First, what kind of character constitutes a child of God?

Second, what kind of character do I have? It is the function of the Holy Spirit to answer the first question and it is the function of the human spirit to answer the second. When the Holy Spirit tells us (through the word of God) the kind of character that constitutes a Christian and our spirit tells us, by its personal knowledge, the kind of character we are, we can then determine whether we are the children of God or not—whether we are the kind of character the Spirit defines as a Christian. When the human spirit can say its own character is like the character revealed by the Spirit as a child of God, then both spirits are bearing witness together. To say the same thing another way, when one’s character corresponds with the kind of character that constitutes a child of God, then that person can know with great confidence that he is a Christian. To summarize the Spirit says, through the word, that in order for one to be a child of God he must be born again (John 3:5), be converted (Acts 3:19), die to the world and to the love of sin (Romans 6:1-4), and become a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). (143)

The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. What does it mean to bear witness with our spirit? Is it some

kind of feeling? Is it a mysterious spiritual sense? Neither of these. This verse is an explanation of the previous verse. Paul is saying, "The evidence that I am a child of God is that I am prompted by the Holy Spirit to call God 'Abba, Father.'" This prompting to relate to God in such intimate terms is the witness of the Holy Spirit that we are children of God. In addition, our spirit (based upon our knowledge of what it takes to be a child of God) similarly bears witness to this fact. There are two dual witnesses to our divine status.

The Spirit gives directions through the Word of Truth how to become children of God. Our spirits bear witness from our hearts we have complied with these conditions, and so they jointly bear testimony that we are children of God.

Lipscomb has well said:

When it is established that we have become God's children, there must be the conjoint testimony of the two witnesses that we continue in the faith. The Holy Spirit gives directions as to the kind of life that we are to live, and our own spirit bears testimony as to whether we conform our life to these instructions. But the Holy Spirit, through this testimony or witness, molds the human spirit into his own likeness, dwells with our spirit, directs our spirit; so that the same spirit that was in Christ Jesus dwells in us. We are led by the Spirit, and through us the Spirit of God acts and works, because our spirit is imbued with the purposes, thoughts, temper, and being of the divine Spirit. So, then, if we faithfully bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), there is a happy and harmonious union of the Spirit with our spirit that brings confidence and assurance to our heart that enables us to cry: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are." (1 John 3:1.). (151)

### **Adopted, We Are Heirs (v. 17)**

One of the means for the greatest inheritance, that of eternal life, is adoption. We should all be grateful that we may qualify for the riches of eternal inheritance by adoption. No one today is a rightful heir to this inheritance, except by adoption. One must become an adopted child of God to inherit eternal life.

According to this text, as adopted children of God, Christians have a legal, spiritual heir relationship with God, the Father; Christ, the Son; and the Holy Spirit. What a wholesome relationship! What a glorious expectation of the future when life on this earth is terminated.

Before reconciliation and adoption, the Gentiles were alienated from God, as Paul declared in Colossians 1:21. But after Christ came and established His Kingdom, His church, and souls were “delivered . . . from the power of darkness and conveyed . . . into the kingdom of the Son of His love,” (1:13), reconciliation, redemption, and forgiveness were obtained and God adopted all as His children in His kingdom (1:18). As adopted children, they became heirs.

Paul declared, “Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:7). And since the “sons of God” (v. 14)—“children of God” (v. 16)—are “joint heirs with Christ” (v. 17)—the Son of God—the children of God may expect God, the Father, and Christ—the Son—to share with them all the riches of the eternal kingdom throughout all eternity.

As a joint heir with Christ, our elder brother, one acquires the rights, privileges, and blessings of the family of God. Being a joint heir with Christ is the highest honor possible in receiving that inheritance.

Have you noticed the provision given in consideration of the Christian’s inheritance?

Coffman states, “Here again the great provisional is hurled into the consideration of the Christian’s inheritance. ‘If’ the child of God is faithful, even to the point of suffering with Christ, then, but not otherwise, shall he truly inherit eternal life” (282).

Brunner says:

We are still only adopted; we have not yet taken over the inheritance. We have been appointed heirs apparent of eternal life and its fulfillment, but we do not yet enjoy it. We have the full assurance of future glory, but we are not yet out of the life where there is suffering and fighting. Indeed, a definite suffering actually belongs to true discipleship.

Whoever does not take up his cross and follow him, cannot

be His disciple (Matt. 16:24f). He who does not want to suffer with Christ cannot share in His glory either. The way of the Christian is not a path on the heights but down below. The way on the heights is in heaven, not on earth. (qtd. in Coffman 282)

## Conclusion

Of all the blessings enjoyed in Christ, none can mean more to us than the fact that there is no condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1). The mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and those who follow the desires of the flesh can have no peace with God. Until their consciences are seared, they are constantly conscious of that lack of peace and calm which should characterize the child of God.

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, whom God gives to all who obey Him (Acts 5:32). He lives in us as heaven's representative to strengthen our spirit and help us to put to death the deeds of the body, sanctifying and purifying us.

Our eternal destiny depends on us. If we are willing to make the effort to put to death the deeds of the body, the Holy Spirit will give us victory and eternal life as the reward; but if we are not willing to make the effort and are satisfied to drift along in the ways of the flesh, we shall die eternally.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Eddie Cooper is the son of the late Denver and Florence Cooper. He is married to the former Barbara Buckley of Parkersburg, West Virginia, and they have two adult sons. Jason is a psychologist and clinical director at AGAPE in Nashville, Tennessee, and adjunct professor at Lipscomb University. He lives in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, with his family. Scott is the manager of Sales and Purchasing at the Rutherford County Tennessee Co-Op. He and his family currently live in Leoma, Tennessee. Eddie and Barbara have four grandchildren.

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# THE PURPOSE OF GOD

*Romans 9:6-18*

*Peter Ray Cole*

Had God given up on the Jews? Had the Word of God failed to capture the world's attention? What about the promise of God to save the righteous through the Seed of Abraham? The Apostle Paul understood the Jewish mind, and he accurately anticipated their thoughts to be "if they were condemned of God, then God had failed in His promise made to them and to Abraham" (Deaver 330).

Many Jews of Paul's day arrogantly held to a tainted view of the Messianic promise made by God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Their explanation of this promise of God had selfishly emphasized the physical aspects of the promise above the spiritual promises for Abraham's descendants. In his commentary on Romans, Deaver states:

In this promise there are three special elements: (1) the land element—God planned to give a certain land to the descendants of Abraham; (2) the national element—God promised, "I will make of thee a great nation"; and (3) the spiritual element—"In thee (and thy seed, Gen. 22:18) shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (337)

God fulfilled these promises made to Abraham and his descendants. The land element was fulfilled when the Israelites took possession of Canaan:

So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass. (Josh. 21:43-45) [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

The national element can be recognized as having been fulfilled by observing the nations around Israel paying tribute and thereby



recognizing them as a legitimate nation. Even the queen of Sheba paid tribute (1 Kings 10:10). In 10:23, it is recorded that King Solomon—and thereby his nation—“surpassed all the kings” of the other nations. The spiritual element was “fulfilled in the Christ—His Gospel, His Church/Kingdom, His Rule” (Deaver 343).

Generations removed from the disciplining conquest into the promised Canaan land and the height of Israel’s national dominance, Abraham’s physical offspring had selfishly twisted the spiritual element into yet another physical blessing. They rejected the Messiah and taught that salvation came through the physical lineage of Abraham. More evidence of their selfishly convenient belief is observed in John 8:33, when the Jews rejected Christ’s demand for obedience to His Word, saying: “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?” They had convinced themselves that their bloodlines made them uncondemnable.

This arrogant attitude also lent itself toward a lack of inclusion with Gentiles who had “put on Christ” through baptism (Gal. 3:27) even though the Old Law had been “nailed . . . to the cross” (Col. 2:14). Many Gentiles began to view the Jews’ rejections of Jesus and His new law as a significant weakness in God’s plan. If the majority of God’s special people had rejected the prophesied Gospel and the remnant who had accepted were not accepting of the Gentiles’ conversion, then what was God’s purpose? Had God’s plan failed? Had God failed? Or had mankind failed in genuine faith and obedience?

### **God’s Sovereign Purpose Has Not Failed (vv. 6-9)**

Paul begins his defense for the purpose of God by stating in verse 6 that “it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.” This is perhaps a clarifying statement following his heartfelt expression of grief for his countrymen and brethren in the previous five verses. Paul is not saying that God’s plan and purpose had failed, but rather that the Israelites had rejected His plan.

In verse 7, the readers’ minds are taken back to the words of Moses in Genesis 21:12, “for in Isaac your seed shall be called.” God had a plan, and not even Abraham’s failure stopped God from fulfilling His promise. Well-intentioned, Abraham and Sarah

attempted to intervene in God's planned process when, at the insistence of his wife, Abraham bore a son by Hagar, the maidservant (16:2-4). Ishmael, while biologically of the seed of Abraham, was not the son of promise and was never intended to be the one to fulfill God's plan that in Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed (22:18). By attempting to circumvent God's stated plan, the birth of an illegitimate son yielded unnecessary heartache to those directly involved as well as the illegitimate nation to come.

The religious leaders of Paul's day had been teaching that the nation of Israel would be saved because they were the direct physical descendants of Abraham. Their doctrinal compromises and hypocrisies led to the attitude that faithfulness to God's Word was no longer a priority. There was even a story, told by the Rabbis, that Abraham sat just outside of the gate of Gehenna "to deliver any Israelite who otherwise might have been consigned to its terrors" (Edersheim 188).

In his commentary on Romans, Coffman speculates that of the 318 male servants born in Abraham's household (Gen. 14:14), "at the very least, all the sons of Keturah and Hagar" would be numbered with these trained servants (318). Yet their physical relationship to Abraham did not make them automatically Paradise-bound. Paul's recall of Old Testament accounts demonstrated to the Jews that this physical ancestry did not automatically connect the sons of Keturah and Hagar, nor anyone else, with the promise of God. The specific plan was for the seed to come through Abraham and Sarah by Isaac. He further illustrated that physical lineage did not guarantee salvation by stating in verses 6-7, "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.'" Paul further explains in verse 8 that "those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God. . . ." Historically, this references the planned lineage through Isaac and also implies the need for faithful acceptance and obedience to God's plan.

In application to today, we might say that "some call themselves Christians but are not living as Christians." Simply calling oneself a Christian does not make one a Christian. Yet so many casually and conveniently make this assertion with no other indication that they

are seeking to follow Christ and His will for their lives. Like the Israelites, they hold tightly to tangible traditions, outward gestures, and physical emblems; however, they have no real spiritual conversion and conviction to Christ (Matt. 15:9).

Neither God's Word nor His promise have failed. God presented Himself in the flesh (John 1:14), walked perfectly (1 Peter 2:22), taught the Truth (John 7:16), willingly died on the cross (John 10:18), was buried in the tomb (Matt. 27:57-61), resurrected His lifeless body (Luke 24:23), and ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:9-12). This was always God's plan. Jesus was not an afterthought; His victory over Satan was prophesied at the initial fall of man (Gen. 3:15). Jesus, as our Savior and the fulfillment of God's promise, was "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

Paul's gentle explanation and exhortation quickly becomes demanding to the reader as he draws a line of demarcation between those who are and who are not the children of God (v. 8). God blessed Ishmael physically (Gen. 17:20), but regarding the Seed of Promise, Ishmael was considered illegitimate. The Seed of Promise was to pass through Isaac (v. 7). Quoting from Genesis 18:10—"according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son"—Paul reminds us in verse 9 that the chosen path of God had been foretold long before.

This also applies to all who live under the New Testament Law: only those who come to God through His Son, the Seed of Promise, may have a legitimate relationship with God. Paul told the Church in Galatia, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (3:27). Being an heir to this promise is not based on the criteria for a physical relationship, as referenced in verses 9-10 (e.g., "Sarah shall have a son" in verse 9); the heirship was based on the criteria set by Christ, as in John 14:6: "No one comes to the Father except through Me." If anyone, regardless of physical characteristics (including race, nationality, ethnicity, etc.), desires to be heirs to the promise, it is by obedience to Jesus Christ. He said we are His if we "do whatever I command you" (John 15:14). Our lineage, our claim to heirship, is through our faithful obedience to the Gospel. Our bloodline is not physical; rather, it is the spiritual contact with the blood of Jesus through baptism (Rom. 6:4; Eph. 1:7).

## **God's Sovereign Purpose Follows His Chosen Path (vv. 10-13)**

In verses 10-13, Paul expands and reinforces his argument by illustrating that not even all of the direct bloodlines of Isaac, the Son of Promise, would be a pathway for the Seed. Both individually and nationally, God confirmed His desire for the Seed to pass through Isaac's younger son, Jacob, instead of the elder son, Esau. Genesis 25:23 states, "[T]he older shall serve the younger." Lipscomb points out that "[t]here is no account of Esau's ever having served Jacob" (172). Paul confirms this thought in verse 11, saying, "[F]or the children not yet being born, nor having done anything good or evil . . . ." By God's selection of Jacob, the Seed would come through the Israelites and not the Edomites. It appears that Paul, quoting from Malachi 1:2-3 in verse 13, is not referencing specifically Rebecca's twin sons, but the nations they represented. Since Malachi stated, ". . . Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated . . ." (1:2-3) some 1,400 years after the twins' birth, the nations are being referred to and not the individuals.

It seems that the Edomites may have been rejected by God ("Esau I have hated"—Mal. 1:3) due to their evil choices regarding their treatment of their cousin nation, the Israelites. The arrogant nation of Edom (Obad. 1:1-14) chose to refuse passage to the Israelites (Num. 20:14-21) while the Israelites travelled from Kadesh to Canaan. This may be an example of sibling animosity (Gen. 27:41) that had been passed down from generation to generation. Distracted by maintaining and fueling this hatred for a cousin nation, the Edomites ignored the fact that long before their respective nations were fully established, Jacob and Esau had restored their relationship and loved one another, even offering generous gifts to one another (33:1-5). God did not limit the Edomites' ability to be obedient to God; they themselves did this in their disobedient choices, thus removing themselves from God's shelter. Although the Israelites were far from being consistently obedient, they did return to God and demonstrate a penitent heart on numerous occasions.

God made a sovereign decision by specifically choosing the path and process through which His Son would enter the world. Reese, in his thick commentary on Romans, suggested that this was more than within God's prerogative, it was absolutely necessary for His

ability to save mankind and God would allow nothing to stand in the way of His promise being fulfilled (438). In using these examples of Isaac and Jacob, the readers of Paul's letter clearly understood God's righteous prerogative and our need for Him to make independent objective sovereign choices for the benefit of mankind. Back in Romans 8:28-30, Paul told the readers that for all things to "work together for good" (8:28), those who have answered His call should recognize salvation was made possible because of these sovereign choices made by God. The chosen path of Christ, the Seed, beginning with Adam and Eve (Luke 3), then culminating with Joseph and Mary (Matt. 1), may not be revealed in every detailed decision made by God to mankind, yet the obedient can recognize His planned path was not unrighteous in purpose or result.

### **God's Sovereign Purpose Does Not Make Him Unrighteous (vv. 14-16)**

Adamantly, Paul states that God's sovereign choices do not make Him unrighteous: "Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!" (v. 14). As quoted from Exodus 33:19 —"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"—in the following verse, God clearly has the right to show mercy and compassion to whomever He desires. A common explanation of mercy is not getting what an individual deserves. The act of generosity is not an obligation of God, but a choice to show compassion upon whomever He desires. God has always been extremely generous and yet has never been unfair to anyone. In addition to this, God also reserves His right to be extra-generous on whomever he desires.

The parable of the day laborers (Matt. 20:1-16) is often used to express this generosity of God. Day laborers were hired by land owners with large tracts of land where grapes were often cultivated. Throughout the day, unemployed individuals would wait near the area where the harvests were sold in hopes that a landowner would hire them for a fair wage. In his commentary on Matthew, Boles suggested that even if laborers were not hired during the first calling, it was possible, and generally expected, that other landowners would return and hire individuals for the last three quarters of the day (399). Matthew 20:6-7 suggests that laborers would even wait until "the

eleventh hour” (20:6) in hopes of being hired even for the last few hours of daylight. Based on the reaction of the laborers hired for a full day, each laborer receiving the same wage regardless of hours worked was not the common practice of the time. Jesus answered their frustrated inquiry by saying, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?” (20:13-14). God has broken no promise, and His purpose is being fulfilled; rather, it is our carnal mindset of being owed more and deserving more from God that makes us doubt Him.

Paul summarizes this argument in verse 16 by stating God’s mercy is not based on “him who wills, nor of him who runs”; in other words, it is not by my thought of what is appropriate, neither is it based on what I have accomplished. Lipscomb, in his commentary on Romans, suggested that Paul may have been referring to Esau from verses 10-13 (174). Isaac wanted Esau to receive the blessing (his will). Esau carried out his father’s desires. Yet this did nothing to influence God in His choice to bless the nation of Israel instead of the nation of Edom.

Because God has been so liberal with His blessings, mankind has struggled with an attitude of expectation and entitlement instead of gratitude. Public prayers of thanksgiving have often recognized that He has showered mankind with innumerable blessings and that many of them have gone unnoticed, attempting to demonstrate an acknowledgement of His generosity. We are all recipients of God’s grace, mercy, and compassion; however, we do not all accept the teachings (Titus 2:11-12). Sadly, it is often those who expect and even demand God’s mercy and generosity that are the most careless with their spiritual lives. When this careless attitude wreaks havoc on their lives, it is generally God they turn to in anger and blame, refusing to take responsibility for their poor decisions.

### **God’s Sovereign Purpose Never Infringes on Freewill (vv. 17-18)**

The sovereign choices of God will never infringe on anyone’s freewill. Conybeare and Howson stated, “Scripture considers men under two points of view; first, as created by God, and secondly, as

free moral agents themselves. These two points of view are, to the intellect of man, irreconcilable; yet both must be true, since the reason convinces us of the one, and the conscience of the other” (521).

The rejection of God’s mercy will always harden the spiritual heart. This is what happened to Pharaoh when God offered him mercy to let His people go without consequence. Pharaoh rejected the evidence that was overwhelmingly demonstrated before him. It appears the more evidence that was shown to him, the harder his heart became. During Exodus chapters 7, 8, and 9, Pharaoh was given opportunities to change his mind and become obedient to God’s command. Pharaoh’s heart hardened more and more each time God provided a “way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13).

The hardened heart of Pharaoh is suggested by Robertson to be rigid, or stiffened, like the hearts of those in Ephesus (Acts 19:9) when Paul preached in the synagogue for three months (383). The more Paul reasoned with and persuaded individuals with the bold presentation of Christ and His baptism, the more many of them hardened their hearts against the purpose of God, which was to save them from their sins by contacting the blood of Jesus Christ in baptism. God never supernaturally impeded Pharaoh from relenting in his refusal to allow the Israelites to go. More accurately, this seems to be a battle of who is more powerful, God or mankind.

The Egyptians and much of the world viewed Pharaoh as the most powerful man in the world. They believed that the pharaohs possessed supernatural powers and mediated between gods and humans, eventually becoming gods themselves upon their deaths (Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica). In verses 17-18, Paul writes: “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” It was God who allowed the pharaohs to come into power (13:1-2). In Exodus 7-9, God’s purpose for this pharaoh was to demonstrate that a hard heart will draw you away from God and lead you to make foolish decisions.

God allows mankind to make these foolish decisions even though His genuine desire is that “all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). When mankind is obedient to God, it becomes evident

that His mercy is increased. This does not mean that good people receive more material blessings from God in contrast to the wicked. Consider Joseph, who conducted himself extremely upright (Gen. 39:6-23), and yet those outside of Christ are able to see only the evil that was done to him. Yet the faithful Christian understands more fully what Joseph proclaimed to his brothers on behalf of God, who had blessed Joseph during those difficult and dark times: “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (50:20).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

God’s sovereign purpose to save mankind has not failed. God accomplished exactly what was intended before the world began. God’s perfect plan for salvation was accomplished by bringing His Son into the world through His chosen path. God’s choice in how He would bring about salvation did not make Him unrighteous. It demonstrated His mercy and compassion. Similarly, God’s plan and purpose have never infringed upon the freewill of mankind.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Peter Ray Cole graduated from the West Virginia School of Preaching in 1998. He continued his education through Southern Christian University, earning a Bachelor of Science in Biblical Studies. In May 2010, he completed his Master of Arts in Professional Counseling through Amridge University. Peter Ray is a licensed professional counselor (LPC).

Upon graduation from WVSOP, Peter Ray worked as the associate minister for the Barrackville church of Christ in Barrackville, West Virginia. He currently serves as the minister for the Washington Street church of Christ in Fairview, West Virginia, where he has been since November 1999. From 2005 to 2014, Peter Ray made annual mission trips to India, where he worked for a month, preaching the Gospel and teaching in preacher training schools. In 2015, he began making annual trips to Kenya, where he teaches in the Kenya School of Preaching under the oversight of Bear Valley Bible Institute—International. He is actively involved with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and currently serves on the board of directors. In 2016, Peter Ray opened his counseling practice, the Family Life Center, LLC, in Fairmont, West Virginia.

Peter Ray has been married to Amantha (Sexton), formerly of Virginia, since 1998. They were blessed with a precious daughter, Kelly Lynn, in December 2015.

# THERE IS A REMNANT

*Romans 11:1-10*

*Justin Odom*

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the elders of the Lord's church at Hillview Terrace for their oversight of this lectureship. I also must express my thankfulness to the lectureship committee for inviting me to speak and be a part of this study on the book of Romans.

Paul declared the dramatic thesis of the book:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (1:16-17) [All Scripture references are from the NJKV unless otherwise noted.]

From that statement, Paul sets forth with unmistakable clearness the relationship that needed to exist between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians in Rome. While we are not lessening the value of the other books of the New Testament, Romans stands out as a true gem of the New Testament. Some state that the book of Romans is the "heartbeat of Christianity." However, why is it considered as such?

Suppose you are a first-century Jewish man living in the city of Rome. You have devoted your entire life to the Law of Moses. You have honored God, kept the Sabbath, and treated others in accordance with the Law. As a faithful Jew, you are required to travel to Jerusalem for the three big feasts, the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Tabernacles. Perhaps, you have traveled the 2,539 miles from your home in Rome to the city of your God, Jerusalem. Since the trip took almost a month, you have made provisions to attend the Passover and the Pentecost; you are a "visitor from Rome" (Acts 2:10). Having celebrated the Passover, you might have witnessed what was done to the "blasphemer," Jesus of Nazareth. You might have thought this man deserved to die, but the news of His resurrection has you questioning who He was. To ease your thoughts, you accept the report that the disciples of Jesus

stole His body from the tomb, and you prepare for the Pentecost feast.

When the Day of Pentecost has fully come, you hear the disciples of Jesus proclaiming the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. They present overwhelming and convincing proof that you can no longer ignore. You hear the solution to the problem of sin: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Wanting to please the God of heaven, you respond to the command and are now a Christian! Now, you are free from the guilt of sin (Rom. 6:17) and the Law of Moses (7:1-6). You return home to Rome full of joy and excitement! However, for the next twenty-five years, very few of your kinsmen, the Jewish nation, have responded to the Gospel as you have. More Gentiles worship with you in Rome than do Jews.

So, there you are, living in the political, social, financial, and pagan hub of the world. You are one of at the very least twenty-eight (not including “households,”—Rom. 16:3-16) Christians in the city filled with upwards of one million people. The questions are racing through your mind. Has God forgotten us? Did the plan of salvation and “the grace of God that brings salvation . . .” (Titus 2:11) nullify the promises God made to Israel? You struggle with the loneliness of your salvation. Does God even care that my family is lost? Has God given up on my friends? Has God given up on me?

This shows us the value of Paul’s letter to the Romans, especially 11:1-10. This passage answers the questions of the Jewish mind in the first verse, “[H]as God cast away His people?” And if not, what did He do with them? The answer to the question is broken down into three sections: 1) The Remnant for God (vv. 1-5), 2) The Grace of God (v. 6), and 3) The Blinded to God (vv. 7-10).

### **The Remnant for God (v. 1-5)**

Paul addressed the subject of justification by faith in Romans 1-5. With the start of chapter 6, there are two questions that Paul preemptively asks and answers regarding that justification by faith. Question 1 is stated in Romans 6:1, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” It might occur to some that since grace over-abounded where sin abounded, that it would be profitable for mankind to sin even more that we may receive more

grace from God. This would come to their debased minds because of the excitement sinning would bring to their lives. The answer is a resounding no! We are dead to sin and can no longer live in sin! Paul expands on this through chapters 6-8.

The second question, “I say then, has God cast away His people?” (v. 1), is prompted from the discussion of chapters 9 and 10 about the rejection of God by Israel and God’s rejection of them. This question implies that justification by faith has annulled all the promises God made to Israel; how could God do that to His chosen nation? From the Jewish mindset, it would be inconceivable that God would cast the nation of Israel away. Their minds would resort back to all the passages about God being with Israel:

- “Now the LORD had said to Abram:  
    ‘Get out of your country,  
    From your family  
    And from your father’s house,  
    To a land that I will show you.  
    I will make you a great nation;  
    I will bless you  
    And make your name great;  
    And you shall be a blessing.  
    I will bless those who bless you,  
    And I will curse him who curses you;  
    And in you all the families of the earth shall be  
    blessed.’” (Gen. 12:1-3)
- “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people.  
    I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves;  
    I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright” (Lev. 26:12-13)
- “But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob,  
    And He who formed you, O Israel:  
    ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
    I have called you by your name;

You are Mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.  
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,  
Nor shall the flame scorch you.  
For I am the LORD your God,  
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I gave Egypt for your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in your place.  
Since you were precious in My sight,  
You have been honored,  
And I have loved you;  
Therefore I will give men for you,  
And people for your life.  
Fear not, for I am with you;  
I will bring your descendants from the east,  
And gather you from the west;  
I will say to the north, "Give them up!"  
And to the south, "Do not keep them back!"  
Bring My sons from afar,  
And My daughters from the ends of the earth—  
Everyone who is called by My name,  
Whom I have created for My glory;  
I have formed him, yes, I have made him." (Isa. 43:1-7)

- "I will lift up my eyes to the hills—  
From whence comes my help?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.

He will not allow your foot to be moved;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.  
Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;  
The LORD is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,

Nor the moon by night.

The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;

He shall preserve your soul.

The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in

From this time forth, and even forevermore.” (Psalm 121)

The question “Has God cast away His people and annulled the promises?” is answered by Paul: “Certainly not!” (v. 1). Roper states, “This teaching can be diagrammed as a small circle within a large circle. God had rejected most of Israel (the large circle), but He had *not* rejected Jews who believed in Jesus (the small circle)” (190).

What proof did Paul have that God has not cast off His people? Paul himself! The concept of individual salvation is found in the fact that he was an Israelite (the purest blood), of the seed of Abraham (the greatest lineage), and of the tribe of Benjamin (the smallest but most loyal tribe). “The apostle mentions this to show that he was a Jew in every respect; that he had a title to all the privileges of a Jew, and must be exposed to all their liabilities and dangers” (Barnes 237). Lipscomb observes, “Had God cast them off because they were Israelites, Paul would not have been His servant” (198).

Paul states in verse 2 that God has not cast away the people that He foreknew. Those that have responded to the Gospel, those that responded to the plan of God for justification and salvation, have not been cast away. Paul has already stated, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (1:16), and, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (5:1). To the church at Thessalonica, Paul wrote, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth . . .” (2 Thess. 2:13).

Paul continues to press the point that God had not cast away His

people but instead chose to save them through Jesus Christ by using the illustration of the Old Testament prophet Elijah in verses 2-4. We are encouraged to remember the great victory God's prophet had on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18:20-40, followed by the self-pity of Elijah in the cave in 1 Kings 19:11-18. After the victory and success, the discouragement and depression set in. As New Testament Christians, we may be able to relate to Elijah more than we know. After times of great spiritual success, we are often faced with loneliness and defeatism, and we begin to wallow in our misery! We must be reminded, as was Elijah, as was the entire Jewish nation, that God has a remnant for Himself. The Hebrew people knew what a remnant was:

- “The remnant that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. And a cubit on one side and a cubit on the other side, of what remains of the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and on that side, to cover it.” (Exod. 26:12-13)
- “When anyone offers a grain offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. He shall bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn it as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD. The rest of the grain offering shall be Aaron's and his sons'. It is most holy of the offerings to the LORD made by fire.” (Lev. 2:1-3)
- “And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. And they said to him, ‘Thus says Hezekiah: “This day is a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but

there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.”” (2 Kings 19:1-4)

- “And it shall come to pass in that day  
That the remnant of Israel,  
And such as have escaped of the house of Jacob,  
Will never again depend on him who defeated them,  
But will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.  
The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob,  
To the Mighty God.  
For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea,  
A remnant of them will return;  
The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.  
For the Lord GOD of hosts  
Will make a determined end  
In the midst of all the land.” (Isa. 10:20-23)

There is still a remnant for God in the Christian age! *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines a remnant as used by Paul in verse 5 as, “a small residue, that which is left, more literally, there has come to be a remnant, a spiritual remnant saved by the gospel in the midst of apostate Israel” (958). The Christian knows that God will always have a small number that will be faithful: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14). “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Thus Paul finds comfort and hope in the fact that God is not compelled to cast off all ‘His people which He foreknew’ [v. 2] in a special way” (Bell 122-23).

While most Jews had rejected God, a significant number had not.



In Acts 2:41, three thousand Jews became Christians on the day of Pentecost. By Acts 4:4, five thousand Jews had become Christians. In Acts 5:14, Jews became Christians in increasing multitudes. In Acts 6:7, Jews became Christians in multiple numbers, including many of the priests. By the time Paul arrives in Jerusalem in Acts 21:20, there are “myriads” of Jews that became Christians and had concerns about Paul’s work among the Gentiles. The remnant for God is a significant number, like the seven thousand in Elijah’s day. However, this remnant was not based on law keeping, but by God’s grace.

### **The Grace of God (v. 6)**

The salvation of mankind is by grace “[f]or the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men . . .” (Titus 2:11). The word *grace*, as found in the Greek language, means “that which bestows delight, favorable regard, and the divine influence on the heart” (Vine et al. 510). Paul would write to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (2:8-9). While this concept is common throughout the New Testament, it was also present in the Old Testament.

In the midst of an evil-hearted world, while God made plans to destroy His creation with a worldwide flood, it was Noah that “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8). God was under no obligation to Noah; He did not owe Noah by giving him the instructions that would spare his life and the lives of those on the ark. The information God gave to Noah was a gift! It is also interesting to note that Paul uses the grace of God in Romans 11:1-10 to illustrate that the remnant for God exists because of grace; the eight souls that were saved on the ark, the remnant of mankind, was also due to God’s grace (1 Peter 3:20).

The sons of Korah wrote about the grace of God in Psalm 84:11: “For the LORD is a sun and a shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” Charles Spurgeon made an interesting observation and comparison to the sun and shield with the grace of God:

As a sun, God shows myself to me; as a shield, God shows me Himself. The sun discloses mine own nothingness; the

shield, divine sufficiency. The one enables me to discern that I deserve nothing but wrath and can earn nothing but shame; the other, that I have a title to immortality and may lay claim to an enduring inheritance in heaven. I learn, in short, from God as “a Sun” that I have “wages,” I must have eternal death; but from God as “a Shield” that if I will receive the “free gift” I may have eternal life. (359)

The glory of the grace of God, as described by Paul in the New Testament, is its distinctiveness. While fleshly Israel observed the letter of the law to be in the covenant relationship with God, the remnant does not remain because of meritorious works.

The great objection to Paul’s preaching the gospel of Christ, on the part of old Israel, had to do with his categorical rejection of all the elaborate ceremonial of Moses’ law, to which fleshly Israel tenaciously clung, not in the sense of keeping it, as did Zacharias and Elizabeth, but in the sense of making it a device of their own glorification; and, upon such basis, they denied that salvation could be extended to the Gentiles. (Coffman 373-74)

To say that God saves us by His *grace* because we have *earned* our salvation by what we have done would be to speak nonsense. One might as well say, “I got clean by getting dirty,” or “The bird soared into the air by staying on the ground.” To say that we are saved by grace on the basis of our works would make the word “grace” lose its meaning. “Grace” would no longer be “grace.” (Roper 193)

The grace of God is the *unmerited* favor of God. The grace of God gives us the capacity to believe, the grace of God reveals to us the things to believe, the grace of God gives us the testimony to produce belief, and the grace of God provides the help we desperately need from God! The inspired writer of the Hebrew letter wrote:

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and

find grace to help in time of need. (4:14-16)

The Gospel is a message of hope because it is a message of grace! God knows and cares about those that are His remnant (Psalm 23). God is the God of our help:

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.  
You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.  
You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.  
For there is not a word on my tongue,  
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.  
You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is high, I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
Even there Your hand shall lead me,  
And Your right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,"  
Even the night shall be light about me;  
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,  
But the night shines as the day;

The darkness and the light are both alike to You. (139:1-12)

But could the Jewish mind in the discussion of verse 6 hold partly to works and partly to grace? Could they, like Peter, when he had the vision of the sheet being let down to the earth with unclean animals for the Jews and was told to kill and eat (Acts 10:9-16), keep the ceremonial parts of the Law and still be saved by God's grace? Barnes comments on Paul's words of verse 6:

And from this it follows that salvation cannot be *partly* by grace and *partly* by works. It is not because men can advance *any* claims to the favor of God; but from his mere unmerited

grace. He that is not willing to obtain eternal salvation in that way, cannot obtain it at all. (241)

It also must be pointed out that salvation is not by grace only. While this may be a popular interpretation of what Paul is discussing in verse 6, it is not the teaching of God on the matter of grace:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

So then, if the remnant Paul speaks of is due to the election of the grace of God, why is there only a small number saved and not a more significant group, especially of the Jewish nation?

### **The Blinded to God (vv. 7-10)**

The cause of blindness was questioned by the disciples of the Lord in John 9:2, in regards to the man that was born blind. Their question “[W]ho sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” was a common misconception to the cause of suffering. Jesus would reply that neither had sinned but “that the works of God should be revealed in him” (9:3). While it may be the case that people are blind for various physical reasons—born blind, macular degeneration, accidents, et al.—it would stand to reason that most people do not choose to be physically blind. Those that would purposely take their eyesight have a psychosis that needs to be dealt with.

However, those that would purposely choose to be *spiritually* blind have a greater problem than those that would choose to be physically blind, one with eternal consequences. Perhaps, instead of asking, “What sin causes a person to be physically blind?” the better question would be “What sin causes a person to be spiritually blind?” Paul states in verse 7 that Israel had not obtained what they were looking for, national salvation. The elect, however, found salvation by the grace of God. He further states that those that have not obtained salvation, fleshly Israel, were blinded to God.

The word *blinded* in this passage carries the idea of hardening, petrification. It is derived from a Greek word meaning “to cover with a callus, dulled spiritual perception” (Vine et al. 136). Another word that could be used is *unimpressible*. Why could the Jews not obtain salvation? They were unimpressed with the works and message of Jesus Christ! John writes in his gospel, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30-31). Consider the seven miracles Jesus did in the Gospel of John: water to wine (chapter 2), healing the nobleman’s son (chapter 4), healing the man at the pool of Bethesda (chapter 5), feeding the five thousand (chapter 6), walking on water (chapter 6), healing of the blind man (chapter 9), and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (chapter 11). These seven miracles show Jesus is the master of quality, distance, time, quantity, nature, misfortune, and death. And still, the Jews were so unimpressed with Him because they purposely blinded themselves to Him spiritually!

To further press the point, Paul uses a mixture of Old Testament passages to describe their condition in verse 8: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day.” The first part of the verse comes from Isaiah 29:10 and the second half from Deuteronomy 29:4. They had a “spirit” (Hebrew *roo-akh*), meaning their life and their mind was in slumber or sleep. The Jews became lethargic in their senses to follow Jesus spiritually. Like the prickling sensation one might receive in the arms and legs of the body when these extremities “fall asleep,” so did the Jewish mind. Newell writes, “The process of that awful thing, spiritual hardening, is thus depicted in Israel as nowhere else, for hearts harden most quickly when men are trusting in their place of special privilege, without fellowship with God who gives it” (413).

Paul also quotes from David in Psalm 69:22-23 to describe the blindness the Jews had to God, “Let their table become a snare before them, And their well-being a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; And make their loins shake continually.” Paul takes these imprecatory (invoking judgment or calamity on one’s enemies) verses to highlight the total and complete desolation

of the house of Israel. This same desolation Jesus declared:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate. . . . (Matt. 23:37-38)

“Eyes which see no spiritual beauty in the Lord Jesus Christ but flash wrath upon Him may well grow yet more dim, till death spiritual leads to death eternal” (Spurgeon 302). Lard wrote:

When Elymas sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, Paul, as a punishment for their sin, smote him with blindness. Thus, as a punishment for their sin, God now deals with the Jews. . . . Eyes he provides for all, but as to the right use of them, they, themselves, must see to that. (351)

Although the Law of Moses was designed to bring the Jews to Christ, when they rejected Jesus and chose the Law, the Law made them stumble and caused them to fall from God. This quote by Paul shows that God never intended for the basis of salvation to come through national Israel, but there was the basis of the covenant God would make with the people through Christ. This is the same condition of those that still reject God today: “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:11-12). God has always rejected those that reject Him.

## **Conclusion**

We may find ourselves in places with people from different backgrounds and walks of life struggling to remain faithful to God. We may ask ourselves, “What’s the point of all this?” or “How can a small band of faithful disciples to the Lord withstand, let alone convert, a surrounding population that hates God, rejects His Son, and closes their eyes and ears to the message of the Gospel?” Only when that faithful group of Christians remembers that God has not forgotten us or lost interest in those that have no interest in Him can we fully appreciate the salvation we have in Christ Jesus. There will always be a remnant for God, by the grace of God, if we refuse to

be blinded to God!

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Justin Odom grew up in Reader, West Virginia, and is married to the former Kristina Deagel of Moundsville, West Virginia. They have three children; Ben (20) and Jenny (19) are both students at Freed-Hardeman University, and Hannah (17) is a senior in high school. Justin is a 1997 graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching and has his master's degree in biblical studies from Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver. After graduation from WVSOP in 1997, Justin preached for the Pennsville church of Christ in Pennsville, Ohio, then with the Rt. 38 church of Christ in Washington Court House, Ohio. He has been working with the church in Fairfield, Illinois, since 2006.

# MORE THAN CONQUERORS

*Romans 8:31-39*

*Steve Higginbotham*

*“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Rom. 8:37) [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]*

These words are among the most encouraging words in the book of Romans. They give us a glimpse into the future, calm our insecurities, and give us hope. It is verses such as these we ought to be memorizing and putting into our hearts. Remember what the psalmist said: “Your word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (119:11). It is not enough to have God’s Word in a scroll, a book, or a smartphone. We need to have His Word in our hearts. But are we memorizing Scripture today like we should, or like we did in years past?

As I travel and preach at various places, I frequently ask the congregation to tell me some of their most comforting Bible verses. The answers I have received have shocked me. I typically received answers like “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25) or “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24) and “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7). Friends, are these really the passages that give us the most comfort? Are these the passages we turn to when we are discouraged or brokenhearted? Are these the passages that reassure us when our faith wavers? Or are they the only passages we have taken the time to memorize?

Do not misunderstand me. I am a believer in memorization. Furthermore, I am a strong believer in memorizing verses that uphold contested Bible doctrines and that answer denominational errors, but I am also convinced we need balance. In addition to



memorizing verses that expose denominational doctrine or affirm truth on challenged doctrines, we need also to commit to memory those verses that sustain us, comfort us, and give us hope when life's circumstances become difficult to bear. The section of Scripture we will be discussing does just that. Read the following passage and soak up the assurance and hope it provides:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;

We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (vv. 31-39)

While these words are powerful and help to sustain our faith, they are sometimes misunderstood, and some implications contained therein are overlooked. It is the purpose of this study to examine a few lessons from this section of Scripture and provide reasons for the assurance of our victory.

## **Clarification of the Text**

### ***Being a Conqueror Implies a Conflict***

Many fail to consider this implication. They get so caught up in the conqueror part that they fail to consider that this word implies a conflict, an opposition, and an opponent.

As the Apostle Paul begins this section, he asks the rhetorical question, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31). The answer is an obvious “No one.” However, that is not to be

understood as though we have no opponents at all; but rather, we have no opponents who can prevail against us. When Paul wrote this, he certainly had his share of opponents: the Judaizing teachers, Roman authorities, and even jealous brethren. Likewise, Christians living today have opponents with whom we must do battle: secularists, radical feminists, denominationalists, atheists, and even some of our own brethren.

While we may be conquerors, it does not mean our life will not be plagued by conflict. In fact, that is exactly what it does mean. We will experience conflict for we have an enemy with whom we are engaged in a life-or-death battle. Peter warns us about this opponent by saying, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Christianity is not an easy life. It is a life in which we must put on spiritual armor (Eph. 6:10-18) and fight until the day we die. Being a conqueror is not merely a title conferred upon us; rather, it is a description of our victory over our enemy.

On numerous occasions, I have had people visit me in my office and tell me they wanted to become Christians. While I was happy for their expressed desire, I was very concerned regarding the motive of their desire for they would say something like this: “I need to get baptized because my life is a wreck. I lost my job, my wife has left me and taken the children with her, my car won’t run, and I’m behind two months on my house payment.”

Whatever gave us the idea that becoming a Christian will remove such circumstances from us? Do we really think that if a man obeys the Gospel, he will get a job, his wife will come back home with the children, his car will suddenly begin to run, and his delinquent bills will vanish? God never promised such! This is a false “health and wealth gospel.” Where did Jesus ever teach anything other than Christianity being a daily life of self-denial that involves bearing a cross (Matt. 16:24)?

It is because of this misconception that people get disillusioned with God because He does not keep a promise He never made in the first place!

Being more than a conqueror (v. 37) does not mean life will get easy; in fact, it may mean it gets much more difficult. It may mean

“a pit” is in your future, like it was in Joseph’s (Gen. 37:24). It may mean a “fiery furnace” is in your future like it was in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s (Dan. 3:21). It may mean a “lion’s den” is in your future like it was for Daniel (6:10-24). And it may mean a “whip” or “prison” is in your future like it was for Paul (Acts 16:16-24).

Have we treated this passage in Romans like we have treated Hebrews 11? We have dubbed that chapter the Hall of Fame of Faith, and rightly so. Therein is contained a victory after victory, but do not stop reading:

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. (11:35-38)

As you read this great passage, keep in mind that though we are conquerors, we do not receive our “crown” without a “cross;” our “victory” without a “war;” and our “triumph” without a “struggle.”

### ***Maintain God’s Point of View***

I know what words like *conquer*, *victory*, and *triumph* look like to humans, but if we are to understand this passage, we need to make sure we understand what these words look like to God.

Consider God’s faithful king Josiah. He came to the throne at the age of eight (2 Chron. 34:1). By the age of twenty, he had torn down all the altars and high places for pagan worship and restored true worship. Because of his faithfulness and tender, humble heart, God promised Josiah a gift. Wow! Can you imagine the God of this universe telling you He has a gift that He has arranged just for you because of your faithfulness? What could it be? The text gives us the answer. God promised him that he would go to his “grave in peace; and . . . not see all the calamity” that God would bring upon the nation (2 Chron. 34:28). Of course, God keeps His word, and after reigning thirty-one years, and at the young age of thirty-nine,

Josiah was mortally wounded in battle by an archer's arrow. A violent death at a young age is a gift from God? It is from God's point of view.

Or consider those saints in the book of Revelation who had been murdered by the Roman Empire because of their unwavering faith in Jesus. In chapter 6, their souls are crying out for vengeance, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (6:10). From mankind's point of view, they looked defeated. They had been killed, their bodies buried, and were no longer a nuisance to Rome. Yet from God's perspective, they were alive and well, reigning with Jesus (20:4).

My point is, God is not nearly as concerned with the longevity of our physical existence as He is with our eternal existence. No one is getting out of this life without dying (apart from those who are alive at the time of Jesus' return). So, being a conqueror has nothing to do with health and longevity of life.

### ***Do Not Miss the Implicit Humility We Must Possess***

With most conquerors, there is a tendency toward pride. However, those who conquer through Christ have no right to pride, and God made sure we understood that.

During the time of the judges, God raised up Gideon and his army to deliver his people from oppression inflicted upon them by the Midianites. However, God wanted to make sure that everyone knew that it was He who delivered them and that it was not by the people's might, lest they boast. Eventually God culled down the number of men to just three hundred. These three hundred men went out to battle against an army that was described as "numerous as locusts" (Judg. 7:12). Surely, no one among Israel could have claimed glory in the victory. God saw to it that while His people would be victorious, the glory would belong to Him.

The same is true with our victory over sin today. There is no room for glory, other than in God, and here is how He assured it. Have you ever noticed the imagery Paul employed in this passage in which he calls us conquerors? Paul said, "We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter . . ." (v. 36). Paul describes himself and others as "sheep." But whoever heard of "conquering sheep"? Sheep do not

conquer. But we, as sheep, have conquered—but we cannot boast in this victory. The credit goes to Christ!

I am reminded of the flea who was sitting on the trunk of an elephant as they crossed a bridge. With each step the elephant took, the bridge would creak and shake under the great strain. Upon exiting the far side of the bridge, the flea said to the elephant, “We sure did shake that bridge, didn’t we?” If we can understand this illustration, we can see the folly of trying to take credit for being a conqueror. Our victory is secured not because of our own might, but because of our relationship with Jesus, the Christ.

### **The Basis for Our Victory**

The text that has been assigned, Romans 8:31-39, outlines for us five reasons why the child of God will be victorious and a conqueror.

#### ***God Is for Us***

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31)*

The answer to this question Paul raises is obvious. Who can stand in opposition to the God of this universe? Consider His wisdom and power. The future of those who partner themselves with God is secure!

I have a friend who has been told by his doctors that he does not need to get stressed, due to his heart condition. This friend, however, loves Kentucky basketball. But as good as Kentucky is at playing basketball, the outcome of many of their games is uncertain. That uncertainty causes his blood pressure to rise so he devised a plan. During game time, he records the game and busies himself with other matters. When it is time for the game to have finished, he checks the final score. Then, knowing the outcome of the game, he can watch some of the most nerve-racking games without stressing a bit. The reason is, of course, he already knows the outcome. It does not matter if Kentucky is down by twenty points because he knows they will come back.

Switching from basketball to football, can you imagine if you were invited to dress out and be a Pittsburgh Steeler for a day? Suppose you and your fellow Steelers teammates had a game scheduled against the best middle school football team in the

country. Would you have any worries about the outcome of that game? Of course not. You would know the end from the beginning. It does not matter how good that middle school team may be, they are not going to be able to compete against the Steelers.

Likewise, the conflict between God and the forces of evil has already been decided. The outcome is certain. God wins, and those who partner with him will win too. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31).

### ***Jesus Died for Us***

*“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (v. 32)*

If God loves us enough that He would deliver up His own Son to die on the cross on our behalf, do you think He would abandon us in the conflict? God has demonstrated just how much He loves us by giving us His best—His Son! If He is willing to give His best for us, then what would He not do to secure our salvation and our victory over sin?

It was not as though God had no choice in the matter. Jesus was not taken, He was delivered up. But who delivered Him up? It was not Judas, for money. It was not Pilate, for fear of the people. It was not the Scribes and Pharisees, for envy. It was the Father, for love’s sake! Consider the weight of these words: God “did not spare His own Son . . .” (v. 32).

There may be many uncertainties in life, but one of them should never be, “Does God really care about me?”

### ***God Justifies Us***

*“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.” (v. 33)*

I am not sure I fully understand why it required the death of Jesus to atone for our sins, but I am fully convinced it did. God is a just God (Isa. 61:8), but how can a just God allow unjust people to dwell with Him and fellowship with Him throughout eternity? The answer is the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, God can remain “just” and also become the “justifier” of men (Rom. 3:26).

After making the unimaginable decision to allow His Son to die for mankind, who can bring a successful charge against God's elect? Would not God step in and say, "Wait a minute! That charge won't stick. This one has been justified. I've paid for him!" God would not pay so much, only to allow another to claim us.

### ***Jesus Intercedes for Us***

*"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."* (v. 34)

Assurance after assurance is set forth in this section of Scripture. Not only did Jesus die for us, but also He rose, and as a risen Savior, He makes intercession on our behalf. Not only is a just God going to defend you because you have been justified, but also, as if that were not enough, Jesus is by the side of God, making intercession for us, pleading our case before God. What assurance!

### ***Jesus Loves Us***

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (v. 35)

Jesus is fully invested in us. He left the riches and glory of heaven to come to earth for the purpose of dying for us. He was not obligated to do this, but He was compelled by love. Does anyone think that such love can be "turned off"? Will our actions, even selfish, sinful actions cause Jesus to stop loving us? Of course not. We were selfish and sinful when He died for us in the first place (Rom. 5:8).

As I survey this section of Scripture, I am given strength, hope, and assurance. My salvation is secure in Christ. No one or nothing can cause God to stop loving me. So, the decision is mine. If I want to be a conqueror, I will be. Nothing can stop me. If I choose to partner with Jesus, the battle is already won and the victory already secured. May God open our eyes to this reality so that we can live in assurance of eternal victory!

### **Biographical Sketch**

Steve Higginbotham is a native of Chester, West Virginia. He and his wife, Kim, have four children. He has been preaching the Gospel since 1984. The last eight years, he has been the preaching

minister for the Karns church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee, and he serves as an adjunct instructor at the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies.





# GOD: JUST AND JUSTIFIER

*Romans 3:21-31*

*Steven Haguewood*

Juxtaposition is a state of being in which two things side by side seem to contrast with one another (*Webster's Desk Dictionary* 497). Juxtaposition seems to be the state in which Paul places God in the text of Romans 3:21-31. He is in one end just, one who expects punishment for every sin. He is, on the other hand, the justifier, the one who makes just those who are of themselves unjust. God is both: He is just, and He is the justifier.

## **Just**

God is just. The term *just* means strict adherence to what is fair and honest (*Webster's Desk Dictionary* 796). God has a real demand for justice. Fairness means sin must be punished. In the Garden of Eden, sin became a problem for mankind.

Genesis 3 records the opening of man's eyes to the reality and punishment of sin. God said that eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil would be punished by death in Genesis 3:3. Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden tree and, because of their sin, they were punished with pain in childbirth, hard labor to eat, and exile from the Garden, which contained the tree of life (Gen. 3:14-24). Paul describes the situation from the Garden this way: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . ." (Rom. 5:12). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

Sin touches the life of every human. "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . ." (v. 23). In fact, John says that if any man denies sin in his life, that he is a liar and is calling God a liar (1 John 1:8-10).

God is perfect. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone" (James 1:13). He cannot even be tempted by evil, much less sin. According to 1:17, there is no darkness in Him,

not even a shadow. God is the image of righteousness, purity, and perfection. He cannot be touched by sin.

That is the major problem for people. Humans are sinful and, as soon as God's law is violated the first time, tainted forever. Consider this fact on closer investigation of verse 23: "[A]ll have sinned . . ." *Sinned* in the Greek is *hērmarton*, an aorist verb (*Analytical Greek Lexicon* 187). An aorist is a punctiliar snap-shot of one moment in time or event (Mounce 194-201). The indication here is that one sin is enough to make one unjust. *Fall short, husterountai*, on the other hand, is a present indicative, a current state and ongoing condition (Mounce 130). Because of any sin that any human commits, that human enters into the ongoing state of falling short of God's glory. It takes only one sin, and all humans are guilty of at least one sin.

### ***God's Distinct Role***

God has a distinct and strong sense of justice. Sin must be punished, no exceptions. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). No one will miss God's judgment. Sins will be answered, and "[i]f we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27). Sin's result is a "FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES" (10:27, NASB). The answer for sin is punishment in the fires of hell, which will forever consume the dead sinner. Sin must be answered because God is just.

Sin makes you God's adversary and leaves you subject to His fury-driven fire. God's justice demands a punishment for sin. That is one end of God's juxtaposition.

### **Justifier**

Batey, in The Living Word Commentary series' *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, rightly points out, "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, man's proper relation with God must come from beyond himself" (51). Humans need help since their creation was not for destruction, but for salvation. This help must be

capable of making right a sinful man and of paying for the punishment of sin that he is due. Man's destruction is not what God desires. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Knowing of man's coming depravity, He set up beforehand the propitiation for sins. A propitiation is something used to gain favor of an offended God (*Webster's Desk Dictionary* 726). In Koine Greek, the term for *propitiation* means the manner or means of removing impediments to a relationship with God (Bauer et al. 474). God's sense of justice must be assuaged so He sent down the propitiatory sacrifice. "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). Sin is the impediment to a relationship with God. One sin is enough to impede the right relationship, and all humans have sinned and fall short of His glory (v. 23). The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was incapable of removing the impediment, according to Hebrews 10:4: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." So, the sacrifice of Jesus, God in perfect human form, was necessary for man's salvation.

### ***Justification***

Justification is made available to man by God's unbelievable grace. Sin is an insult to God. God gives man the gift of justification anyway. Coffman gives attention to the concept of justification being given "freely" (112), in keeping with the KJV and NKJV. The term in question in this discussion is *dōrean*, which does indicate an undeserved nature for the recipient but focuses more on the content of the gift (Bauer et al. 266). The gift freely given is offered by His grace. Grace, in the five-case system, is in the dative of instrumentality case. Roberston prefers the seven-case system and assigns grace, *chariti*, to the instrumental case (*Word Pictures* 347). In his grammar, he outlines the instrumental and its subsequent blending with the dative (525-26). The instrumental dative, as it is known now, indicates a causal or point of origin for an action or item. Thus his gift, *tēi autou chariti*, would be translated "by His grace." God's grace is the origin of the gift, or propitiatory sacrifice, that justifies man.

## **Grace**

*Grace* in the Greek, according to BDAG, means a “beneficent disposition” (1079). Grace is good will toward someone else.

Because of His good will toward us, God justified us through redemption in Jesus Christ. Redemption is the idea of being released from a ransom (Robertson, *Word Pictures* 347). Its meaning is similar to the meaning of the term *redeem* today, to buy back or obtain the release of someone or something by payment (*Webster’s Desk Dictionary* 759). People enslave themselves to sin with a single transgression of God’s law. God does not want sin to be mankind’s end, but it must. Luther connected the words of the poet Horace, who said in reference to writing a play, “Do not bring a god on the stage unless the problem is so grand it takes a god to solve it ‘*nodus deo uindice nodus inciderit*’” (qtd. in Bruce 101). Luther’s idea shared by Bruce is that sin has become a problem so grand that it takes God to solve it. Justification given by God’s grace is offered without distinction; both Jew and Greek are found in need of the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This justification is offered to those who are “in Christ” (v. 24). *In Christ* or some derivative (*in Him, in whom, in Jesus*) is found 169 times in Paul’s writings (Coffman 112). This is the same place that the righteousness of God is found among men (vv. 21-22).

## **Summation of the Juxtaposition**

DeWelt sums up the idea of sin, justice, and justification like this: Justification “is obtainable to all who believe, and needed by all for all have sinned . . . Is made possible by the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ . . . In the sacrifice we can see the basis for both justice and forgiveness” (59).

Mankind has a propensity for trouble. Job said, “Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble” (14:1). The trouble in which one finds oneself with God is of one’s own making. God does not tempt people with sin and does not desire sin in the world. Unfortunately, Satan has learned just how to get to each person with temptation. Every human being other than Jesus has committed sin, and just one of those sins is capable of bringing about a person’s fall.

Since all have sinned and fall short, every human being other than Jesus requires a means of propitiation. God is just and demands a full remittance for the debt of sin in the life of each person. If such remittance is not received, then the one not covered is punished with the furious fire of hell for eternity. That was never God's intention so He prepared the propitiatory sacrifice for us in His son Jesus. Through that sacrifice, man has the ability to have God's wrath answered. That is the definition of grace, when someone does something for someone else intended to benefit the recipient of that gift. Through the sacrifice of His son, He offers pardon to sinful men by His grace.

### **Justifying Law**

Romans 3:21-31 is intended to deal with the contrasting of laws that one may use for salvation. The treatment of the problem begins with Paul's handling of the Old Testament, in light of salvation, and its shortcomings. He deals with God's answer to the failings of the Old Law and then introduces its replacement in the Law of Faith. Paul, in this short passage, summarizes the whole of the Scheme of Redemption that God has for mankind.

Sin has been part of human history since nearly the beginning of history. Adam and Eve started something that no person could finish. Adam, the one man through whom sin entered the world, pronounced a death sentence on all people; since then, all people have been subject to sin, as Paul alludes to in Romans 3:23. The Bible makes it quite clear that the Old Testament could not accomplish the removal of the guilt of sin. Hebrews 10:4 says that it is impossible for the "blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." According to the sacrificial system God put in place, people were to sacrifice a bull or a ram (in rare cases, turtledoves or pigeons) as an atonement for sins and guilt (Lev. 1-6). Worshipers were to lay their hands on the sacrifices, signifying that the animals were taking their places in death (DeHoff 248). As has already been noted, the Old Testament system did not take sins away so the Father sent the Son to make that sacrifice. John the Immerser noted this in John 1:29: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

## ***Which Law?***

Lard is convinced that no law whatsoever is involved with the justification of man. He says “if it is to be attained, it must be without law” and that “[t]his salvation, which, at bottom, is justification, is without law” (114). He further goes on to say:

It was over this passage that Luther made his famous translation, “we are justified by faith *only*,” which daring act gave rise to that doctrine. But Luther’s act was prompted solely by his aversion to the Papal tenet of justification by works. It is without defence either from scripture or philology. . . . It is only when belief is affirmed to be the sole condition of justification that I put in my demurrer. . . . A man can not be justified, and his sins remain unforgiven; nor be forgiven, and remain unjustified. Now it is held by all who have a proper regard for the Bible, that no one can be forgiven without repentance. Farther: it is conceded by all, that repentance is one act of obedience to Christ’s authority, and belief a different act. These two acts can never be confounded; nor has the one any power either to usurp the place of the other, or supplant it. (123-24)

Be certain what is happening here. Paul is contrasting the Law and Prophets with the Law of Faith. It is not the absence of any law that Paul has in mind, but the Law of Faith that supplants the Law and Prophets.

The “Law and the Prophets” (v. 21) is a reference to the Old Testament. Jesus spoke of the Law and Prophets in the Sermon on the Mount as that which would not pass away until all therein has been accomplished (Matt. 5:17-19). Not to get too far afield, it must be noted that all of these things were accomplished in the person of Jesus, the propitiatory sacrifice offered by God. He said as He was dying on the cross to complete that sacrificial act on the cross in John 19:30, “It is finished!” The phrase *It is finished!* is the Greek *tetelestai*, a third-person perfect passive indicative that could be translated, “It has all been accomplished” (*Analytical Greek Lexicon* 402). Works in accordance with the Old Testament are no longer acceptable in regards to one’s salvation since the sacrifice of the Savior on the cross.

Another law has taken the place of the law of works. The new

law is a law of faith. To be certain, faith was necessary during the Old Testament and prior to that, during Abraham's time, as he demonstrated his faith by leaving his home and by offering Isaac as a sacrifice. The New Law now is in contrast to the Old Law. It is, however, just as much law. The difference is that now it accomplishes what man needs through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Clearly, there is a law under which the Christian must operate. James calls it "the perfect law of liberty" (1:25). Paul tells the Galatians that we should "fulfill the law of Christ" (6:2). M'Caig quotes Austin defining the term *law* as follows:

"A law, in the most general and comprehensive acceptation in which the term, in its literal meaning, is employed, may be said to be *a rule laid down for the guidance of an intelligent being, by an intelligent being having power over him.*" Under this comprehensive statement, he classifies "laws set by God to His human creatures, and laws set by men to men." After analyzing the three ideas, *command* as the expression of a particular desire; *duty* or *obligation*, signifying that one is bound or obliged by the command to pursue a certain course of conduct, and *sanction*, indicating the evil likely to be incurred by disobedience, he thus summarizes: "The ideas or notions comprehended by the term *command* are the following: (1) a *wish* or desire conceived by a rational being that another rational being shall do or forbear; (2) an *evil* to proceed from the former and to be incurred by the latter in case the *latter* comply not with the wish; (3) An expression or intimation of the wish by words or other signs." (1844)

One can easily see that the concept of law, as defined by Austin, will fit into the purpose of the Gospel as expressed by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. His desire by His grace is to perfect His people. He has told man exactly how to become perfected. In the end, failure to follow His instructions are punished (2 Cor. 5:10).

The law that justifies now is the one that took the place of the one that was passing away in the first century (Heb. 8:13). Under this second covenant of which the Hebrew writer speaks, the Lord will "be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins . . . remember no more" (8:12). Justification comes by the second

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covenant, the New Testament, which takes the place of the inferior one that was completed, passed away, and disappeared.

*“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.”* (v. 31)

### **Who Can Be Justified?**

Consider a few verses from the text (emphases added):

- Verse 22: “[E]ven the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to *all* and on *all who believe*. For there is no difference. . . .”
- Verse 23: “[F]or *all have sinned and fall short* of the glory of God. . . .”
- Verse 26: “[T]hat He might be just and the *justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*.”
- Verse 28: “Therefore we conclude that *a man is justified by faith* apart from the deeds of the law.”
- Verse 29: “Or is He the *God of the Jews* only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? *Yes, of the Gentiles also*. . . .”
- Verse 30: “[S]ince there is one God who will *justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith*.”

*All* is the word that keeps appearing throughout this passage of scripture. *All* includes everyone and excludes no one. It is the same in John 3:16 in that God’s desire is for everyone, “whoever,” to have eternal life. Since all have sinned and the gift by God’s grace is the propitiatory sacrifice for everyone who sinned, the entire world is opened up to the possible justification offered by the sacrifice of our Lord. Everyone who has become unjust through sin can become justified in Christ Jesus.

### ***What Is Required for Justification?***

The righteousness of God is appointed to all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, for all those who believe (Rom. 3:22). This is

all in reference to the “Law of Faith.” *Believe* and *faith* are both derived from the same root in the Greek, *pistis*, and are practically interchangeable (Bauer et al. 817-21). The circumcised and uncircumcised are both justified by faith, the same faith in Jesus Christ that affords one the righteousness of God. In fact, as Batey points out, Paul is here stressing the equality in the Law of Faith of Jew and Gentile (54).

The only requirement listed in this text is faith in Jesus Christ. As has already been noted above, this is not a faith-only stance taken by Paul, as claimed by Martin Luther. This is an establishment of the command to adhere to the “law of faith” (v. 27), which one finds in the pages of the New Testament, like in James 2:18: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works,” and later in 2:26: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” The works one does could never justify any human. On their own, people are desperate and lost individuals. Each person alive needs the gift given by God’s grace of the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ for justification. Faith, though, demands faithful actions taken on behalf of the Lord. When giving the image of the judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus lists the loving actions taken on behalf of the Lord to benefit the lives of fellow human beings as criteria considered pursuant to one’s salvation. As this writer has often stated, “You cannot work your way into heaven, but you can *not* work your way out of it.”

Required for your justification is faith in Jesus Christ and in God the heavenly Father. It further requires faith in the Word of God imparted to mankind, a faith that moves one to action based on love for God and for fellow man. Such obedient, faithful action can never justify anyone—only Jesus can do that. His justification is offered only to those who believe, and belief, faith, is more than just agreeing with a proposition. Faith includes enough trust in someone to fulfill his or her promises even if those promises have conditions.

## **Conclusion**

People become sinners on their own. Adam was the first, but all humans make the wrong spiritual decision at some point in time. This decision leaves us short of God’s glory and is always

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punishable by death because God is just and justice demands an answer for sin. Sin is a terminal illness from which all men suffer. God knew mankind's plight and intervened on its behalf. He did so by sending Jesus as the propitiation, the one who would find favor with God, whom mankind offended with sin. So, the just God who Himself demands a punishment for all who sin offered the payment for sins that He demanded, and that payment was the life of His fellow creator and Son, Jesus the Christ. The just God became the justifier of mankind. Not all people would be justified in their actions, though. Some would not because they would refuse to believe. Belief necessarily involves obeying the Law of Faith, which dictates the steps in the lives of the sinful people who wish justification. If they are unwilling to abide by the Law of Faith, then they cannot expect justification because the Justifier has the right to tell the unjust how to come to justification, and He executed that prerogative flawlessly in the New Testament.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Steven Haguewood was born in 1971 in Anderson, South Carolina. He graduated high school in 1990 and went to Freed-Hardeman University and studied psychology. He met Jennie Bang there, and they eventually married in 1993. They had four children: Christopher, Brandon, Rebeca, and Bethany. After spending several years doing commercial construction work, he went back to Freed-Hardeman and finished his B.S. in Bible and M.A. in New Testament.

He has preached in local works in Theo, Mississippi, and at the North End congregation in Parkersburg, West Virginia, where he is currently located. Steven has preached meetings in Mississippi, West Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, and South Carolina.



# NEWNESS OF LIFE

*Romans 6:1-14*

*Jason E. Ridgeway*

## **Introduction**

Before I get into my written lesson, I would like to thank the elders of this congregation for their continued guidance and leadership over the West Virginia School of Preaching and this lectureship. I would also like to thank Andy Robison and the lectureship committee for asking me to present. I am truly honored and grateful for everything you do. To the instructors, thank you for your time, sacrifice, and love for the school. And finally, to the students, I write keep on keeping on with the truth of the Gospel. Remember, the world will try to get to you. The world will try to discourage you. But with the peace that God provides, you will overcome the world. Therefore, “Preach the word!” (2 Tim. 4:2). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

We live in a time of continued influence from an evil and debased society. With sin all around us and inviting us to its fun and games, it becomes a real struggle to remain faithful. But we are Christians. We are living in the “newness of life” (v. 4). And oh, what a life it is!

The following verses give us a picture of our birth into this new life. Paul encourages the Roman Christians not to drift backward into the slavery in which they once lived. He will push them to go beyond the world and live a life that has its focus on God. Paul would encourage the church at Philippi the same way: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:13-14).

How can anyone press toward the goal when he or she continues in sin? And that is where we begin. . . .

*“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may*

*abound?” (v. 1)*

We must remember that Paul is addressing newer Christians who are having a lot of difficulty with paganism and/or Judaism. Their main struggle at this point is understanding how grace and sin work. As Paul enters this section (chapter 6), he poses two questions. These questions are to direct his readers to a potentially perceived misunderstanding that they will have of 5:20, “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. *But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more . . .*” (emphasis mine).

To accomplish an explanation of his message of grace, Paul asks them three essential questions. The first one, “What shall we say then?” (v. 1a), shows no hesitation on Paul’s part. He is asking them, “What is the next step in this discussion?” He is not going to go any further in his teaching until he clears up “More sinning equals more grace given.” Barnes writes, “This is a mode of presenting an objection. The objection refers to what the apostle had said in chap. v. 20” (140).

The next question is, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (v. 1b). This would be the question that Paul will spend most of chapter 6 answering and helping the Roman Christians find clarity.

*“Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”*  
(v. 2)

Paul answers his first two questions with an unequivocal and absolute, “Certainly not!” (v. 2). Winters explains this as, “A strong emphatic negative reply” (67). Winters continues by writing, “There is absolutely no way by which God would encourage sin by blessing the committing of it” (67). The force of this statement should bring about a clear perception of grace.

But Paul will continue to make sure that these Christians are aware that they must not continue in the past life they once lived. They have entered a new life. For Paul to ask this third question in chapter 6 shows just how concerned he is for the Romans to understand. But what is death? Death is a separation. When we die physically, we will be separated from our bodies. How can anyone who has died to anything, in this case the world, have the ability or desire to live again in that situation? Therefore, more grace can

never come from something in which we have died.

*“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* (vv. 3-6)

Now reminding the Roman Christians and us, Paul will set forth the message of and obedience to the Gospel. Along with verse 2, Paul outlines the obedience to the Gospel. Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Vine writes that the Gospel “denotes the good tidings of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith, on the basis of His expiatory death, His burial, resurrection . . .” (Vine et al. 167). In this explanatory description of the Gospel, the key is what the Gospel is rather than what the word simply means. But does the Bible give us this understanding of the Gospel? We need to go to other writings of Paul to see the entire picture, which will ultimately lead us back to verses 2-4.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul works through proving the resurrected body of Christ. But Paul begins the chapter by defining the Gospel. He writes:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (15:1-4)

Paul writes, “the gospel which I preached to you” (15:1), and then tells us what the Gospel is. It is the death, burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And then with a powerful and authoritative conclusion Paul writes, “according to the Scriptures” (15:4). What then are we to do with this information?

In 2 Thessalonians 1:8, we read, “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” But that raises a very



important question. How can we obey a historical event? Must I go and die on a cross, be buried in a tomb, and then on the third day be raised? Of course not.

This is where the Bible student comes back to verses 2-4. What Paul does then is to remind his readers about their obedience to the Gospel. He asks them, “Remember when you died to the world?” James describes death as a separation: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (2:26). Separation from the world is the first step taken in obedience to the Gospel. Christ died on the cross; we must die or be separated from the world.

Next, Paul used their baptism as the obedience to the burial of Christ. Christians were reminded that they too were buried. They were buried into the death of Christ through baptism. This burial is in water, not the Holy Spirit. The greatest example of baptism being in water is that of the Ethiopian eunuch: “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’” (Acts 8:36). Jackson comments on this passage, “Both Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12 make it clear that the baptism of these passages involves both an **immersion in something**, and a **being raised** from the same substance. This makes perfectly good sense if water baptism is in view” (2).

Therefore, Paul has carried them back to their time of conversion, telling them that having obeyed the Gospel, they have died from the life once lived, been buried, and are now raised to walk in newness of life. They are to not go back to the dead and buried old life but live in the grace of Christ.

*“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” (vv. 5-6)*

If Christians are now in a “newness of life” (v. 4), how can we ever revert to a life of sin and slavery? Being crucified with Christ signifies, as Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and

gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Sin is the old way of living and is not compatible with the “newness of life” we now enjoy (v. 4). Every time we sinned outside of Christ, one more link on the chain was added. There was no freedom in that type of lifestyle. Despair and heartache were the only results of being a slave of sin. We are now no longer slaves of sin but have become freed from sin.

*“For he who has died has been freed from sin.” (v. 7)*

The freedom in the spiritual life comes not from going backward and obeying sin, but living in the newness of life without sin. Why would anyone who has been freed from such a place of despair want to return to it? We have been freed from the penalty, or released from the bondage of sin (Winters 70).

*“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.” (vv. 8-9)*

The use of the word *if* in this passage stresses “the conditional nature of human redemption” (Coffman 217). We must make the decision to obey the Gospel. The decision to make is if we will die to the old self, be buried into Christ’s death through baptism, and be raised to the newness of life. Salvation will not be thrust upon me without my accepting it, something being taught within Calvinist theology.

Paul is not saying that we will never sin, but that we now have a dominating force over sin, namely Jesus Christ. We must continually live with Christ and in this dominion; therefore, death has no power. We can resist satan. [I refuse to use a capital letter for this name. Even in face of being grammatically incorrect.] “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

*“For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.” (v. 10)*

Christ’s death on the cross was so final, so complete, that He never would need to die again. The Hebrew author writes of Christ, “who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices,  
*Jason E. Ridgeway*

first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (7:27). And again, in Hebrews, "He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (9:26). The life that Christ now lives is that which is looking toward God.

*"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (v. 11)*

We also must now live our lives as having died and been raised to a new life given and dedicated to the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ (Boyd 89). This life is not without sin, but is that which is focused on the spiritual and not on the carnal. What an amazing phrase, "alive to God in Jesus our Lord" (v. 11)! The word *alive* comes from a Greek word meaning "to preserve alive, to come to be, become, be made" (Vine et al. 349). We therefore "become" something that we were not before. We were slaves to sin and dead in our sins. We lived a life that could not serve God in that condition. Now, as Christians, being raised with Christ, we can now serve Him.

*"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." (v. 12)*

To allow sin to "reign" is to let sin take control of ourselves. How do we "let sin reign" (v. 12)? This is done by our obedience to sin's lust. Deaver writes, "The picture in the original word is that of a monarch ruling upon his throne. When sin controls the body, sin has been enthroned as the ruling monarch" (200). Do not let sin be enthroned to rule your body.

Something very important to note here is this: temptation is not sin. We are all tempted. Christ was tempted by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11. The Hebrew writer records, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (4:15). It is sin at that time when we are drawn away by our desires and obey the lusts of it. James writes, "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (1:15). If we can stop at the temptation point, then we succeed. And God has promised us a way out of temptation to sin. Paul writes, "No

temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

*“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” (v. 13)*

As Paul continues his description of overcoming sin, he tells the Christians to “not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin” (v. 13). Verse 13 is a contrast statement, asking, “To whom and how do we present ourselves?” What does it mean to “present”? The original Greek meaning of the word *present* denotes, “to place beside” (Vine et al. 207). The first *present* has me to “yield” (207) myself to sin. The second *present* in the verse signifies that I am to take myself and place myself next to God. What am I going to do? I cannot accomplish both. Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). Deaver writes, “Our bodies, therefore, must be given to God. The divine injunction of Romans 12:1 is: ‘. . . present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God . . .’” (203). The visual picture that we see is as if we are picking our bodies up and presenting them to God. We are then never to own our bodies again. We “were bought at a price . . .” (1 Cor. 6:20). This is the death that He died once for all and the life that I must live with my body because I am not my own. The “newness of life” (v. 4) is the result of presenting myself to God.

*“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (v. 14)*

The victory is ours; we won the race. Why would anyone want to jeopardize the spiritual future he/she has? This new life is one of freedom from sin. To have “dominion” (v. 14) means, “to be lord over, rule over” (Vine et al. 333). Unless we prevent it, we can have total freedom from that which, in the past, did ensnare us. Now, as Christians, we reside under grace and not under the Old Law. That

is the “law” that is mentioned in verse 14. We are under the Law of Christ, “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Gal. 2:16). Under the law of grace, we find forgiveness and freedom from sins. This is the “newness of life” (v. 4).

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Jason E. Ridgeway was born in Roanoke, Virginia. He and his family moved around the country, first due to his father being in the United States Navy and then when his father began to preach. Jason is married to Cindy (Oiler). They have two children. Their son, Hayden, is a student at Shawnee State University, and their daughter is a senior in high school. Both of their children have been homeschooled.

Jason has preached now for twenty-seven years. He has served as associate, youth, campus, and/or pulpit minister for congregations in Tennessee, West Virginia, and Ohio. He has spoken on

lectureships in Ohio, West Virginia, and Tennessee. He loves speaking to youth and college groups and has done so in Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Florida.

Jason graduated from the West Virginia School of Preaching in 1996 (the first graduating class). He then went on to receive his bachelor of arts in economics from the University of Rio Grande, Ohio (2006). He presently is studying for a master of arts in Christian ministry at Amridge University. In his free time, he enjoys reading and family vacations. He also has a great passion for the mission trips he takes each year to Costa Rica, preaching the Gospel.



# THE PERPETUAL CIVIL WAR. FLESH VS. SPIRIT

*Romans 7:14-25*

*Glenn E. Hawkins*

I want to express my appreciation to the elders of this congregation and to the lectureship committee of the school for the invitation to speak on this lectureship. The book of Romans has long been a favorite of mine. I was first introduced to a deeper study of this book as a student at Ohio Valley College when Tom Gummer taught the class. Someone, and I am not sure who, was certainly right when saying, “When you get Romans, God will get you.”

For the topic The Perpetual War: Flesh versus Spirit, I am assigned Romans 7:14-25, which reads as follows:

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the saw of sin. [All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.]

As I have read, reread, pondered, and studied this passage, the



words of the Apostle Peter came to mind when he said of the epistles of Paul in 2 Peter 3:16, “As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” Truly, there are some things Paul wrote that are more difficult to understand, and this passage may well be one of them.

I have in my library some fifteen to twenty commentaries on the book of Romans, written by men both in our brotherhood and in the denominational world. I have found that there is no consensus as to whom exactly Paul is talking about in this passage. But when all is said and done, two views seem to be the most prevalent. One view is that Paul is speaking of himself and representing all Christians who still struggle with the problem of sin and the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. Lard and McGarvey, in our fellowship, as well as others outside our fellowship, hold this view. On the other hand, there is the view that Paul was talking about himself as a Jew and as a representative of all Jews who were seeking to be justified or to be made righteous by the Law of Moses. In our fellowship, this is view held by Allen, Coffman, Whiteside, Roy Deaver, and Roper in their commentaries on Romans.

Trying to choose which of these two is the most reasonable view reminds me of the story of the young man during the Civil War here in America who could not decide which side to support and join, the North or the South. So, he decided to wear a blue jacket of the North and gray pants of the South. The only trouble was he was shot at by both sides.

Well, to keep from being “shot at by both sides” in this discussion, I have decided that Paul was speaking of himself and of any Jew who was seeking to be justified by the Law in the struggle against sin and flesh. Let me say, however, that this in no way mitigates the fact that even though Christians are under grace, we still struggle with sin from time to time. Certainly, no Christian would ever deny that.

When considering any text of Scripture as to meaning, it is imperative to look not only at the text itself, but also at the immediate context, the remote context, and even the book in which it is found. The basic theme of the book of Romans is found in

Romans 1:16-17, where Paul said:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it written, “The just shall live by faith.”

A further statement along these lines is found in Romans 3:28, where Paul says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Judaizing teachers had been teaching that for one to be justified, one had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. Paul dealt with this in Galatians 5:4, where he wrote, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

Paul would remind the Roman Christians about what happened when they were baptized into Jesus Christ in Romans 6:1-14. Verse 12 of that chapter states, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” When Christ reigns in our hearts and lives and when the Holy Spirit dwells within us, sin is like an intruder or thief in our lives as Christians. Sin does not take up residence within us. After verses 14-25, Paul concludes in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Furthermore, the word *law* occurs twenty-two times in the seventh chapter of Romans. Of these twenty-two times, the article *the* appears with the word *law* fifteen times, which I take to be a reference to the Law of Moses. For the above-mentioned reasons, I conclude that Paul was talking about himself or any Jew who is seeking to deal with the problem of sin by the Law of Moses.

Let us now look at this section of Scripture verse by verse. In verse 14, Paul says, “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” As Coffman points out, “[d]uring the first three centuries of the Christian era, the ‘Christian expression’ interpretation of Paul’s words in this place was practically unknown” (247). Beginning with Augustine and continuing down to the time of the reformers and later on into the past two centuries, the view that Paul was referring to himself as a Christian became popular.

Paul does affirm that the Law is spiritual; that is, it appeals to the inner man. But Paul states that “. . . I am carnal, sold under sin” (v. 14). When was Paul carnal, sold (enslaved) under sin? Are we as Christians sold under sin? Whiteside says, “In verse 9 he spoke of the time when sin entered his life and he died. He then explains that sin, not the law, caused this spiritual death. Sin here is personified and Paul represents himself as having been sold to sin as a slave” (155). MacKnight says here:

Because the apostle in this passage uses the first person, ‘I am sold,’ &c. Augustine in the latter part of his life, and most of the commentators after his time, with many of the moderns, especially the Calvinists, contend, that in this, and in what follows, to the end of the chapter, the apostle described his own state at the time he wrote this epistle, consequently the state of every regenerated person. But most of the ancient Greek commentators, all the Arminians, and some Calvinists, hold, that though the apostle speaks in the first person, he by no means describes his own state, but the state of an unregenerated sinner awakened, by the operation of law, to a sense of his sin and misery. And this opinion they supposed by observing, that in his writings the apostle often personates others. See Rom. xii.11-13. Wherefore, to determine the question, the reader must consider to which of the two characters the things written in this chapter best agree; and in particular, whether the apostle would say of himself, or of other regenerated persons, that ‘they are carnal, and sold under sin.’ (322)

Paul continues to describe the dilemma he faces in verse 15: “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” Paul is not saying that he did not know what he was doing. The word *know* here means to grasp the consequences of what one is doing. That can be said of every sinner. The RSV translates this, “I do not understand my own actions.” Whiteside translates this verse as follows: “For that which I accomplish I know not: for not what I would, that do I practice; and what I hate, that I produce” (157). Whiteside went on to say:

The sinner does not know what he accomplishes by a life of sin. He cannot so much as know how far reaching is the

influence of his life of sin. In his thoughtful moments he desires a different life from the things he practices, but without Christ, sin has him under its dominion. (157-58)

Paul writes in verse 16, "If then I do that which I would not, I consent to the law that it is good." Roper says of this verse, "The law tells me I should not do a certain thing. I do not want to disobey the law, but I find myself doing the very thing I do not want to do. When I do, I feel guilty. The fact that I feel guilty is proof that I agree with the law in saying that the action is wrong" (436). Paul's conscience was at work here.

In verse 17, Paul writes, "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Does sin really dwell in the Christian? Paul in 6:12 says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye shall obey it in the lusts thereof." A Christian may commit an act of sin when caught off guard or by being overtaken in fault, but that is not the same thing as sin dwelling or reigning in the body. Sin may enter into a Christian life a thief entering your house, but that does not mean that the thief dwells, or lives, in your house. This of course does not mean that the Christian, when he or she sins, is not responsible for it. As Deaver says, "It simply shows that sin was more powerful over him than his mind, but he was responsible for this condition" (240).

Verse 18 is an explanation or conclusion from verse 17. It reads, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not." While under the law, Paul had the willingness to do good but not the ability to be free from sin and hence was still a slave of sin. Now notice the word *for* in verse 19: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." This is practically a repetition of verse 15. This could not refer, in my mind, to a Christian. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:10, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe. . . ."

Verse 20 reads as follows: "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." This verse is almost identical to verse 17. Deaver comments, "This simply means. If I, because of the power and control of sin in my life, do that which I will (desire) not to do, thus it is clear that it is sin which has control

of my body, and that it is not my will that has control. This proves that I am a slave of sin” (241). Again, this means that humans are responsible for allowing sin to control their lives. Here, we see the helplessness of mankind without Christ.

Verses 22-23 further explain verse 21: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” The Jews delighted in the law of God so far as it concerned the inward man—that is the mind, the will, and spirit—even though they did not always keep it. The problem was the law of sin, which ruled the body like a tyrant. Sin is in control, as verse 14 says, and the body is sold under sin. In my mind, this cannot be said of a Christian.

Next, we come to a verse that can portray the cry of every person, Jew or Gentile alike, who is trying to deal with the problem of sin by keeping the Law of Moses or simply by trying to do enough good to earn salvation. Verse 24 reads: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” The term *wretched* is from a word that means miserable, wretched, distressed. It carries the idea of being exhausted from “toils and troubles” (Thayer 613-14). The phrase “the body of this death” (v. 24) is an interesting one. Bruce recalls the ancient story of the king who tormented his captives by tying decomposing corpses to their bodies (147). What a disgusting picture this is! This is the cry of every unsaved person under the Law of Moses then and without the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice the question is who, not what.

Paul gives the answer to his question in verse 25, the last verse in our text: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” Coffman wrote, “[A]nd this outburst of praise, somewhat like a stroke of lightning, illuminates the darkness of this terrible chapter, and permits a fleeting glance at all that Paul was about to say in the eighth” (259). Romans 8:1 thus says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

While some may be surprised at the ending of verse 25, where Paul says, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but

with the flesh the law of sin,” Paul simply makes a final statement of what the futility of his spiritual condition is without Christ. Thank God, we too say, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

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## Biographical Sketch

Glenn Hawkins was born Oct. 16, 1943, to the late Jack and Frona Hawkins. His father was a Gospel preacher for almost sixty years.

After graduating from Newark High School in Newark, Ohio, Glenn graduated from Ohio Valley College in 1963 with an A.A. in Bible. In 1965, he graduated from Harding College with a B.A. in Bible; then in 1975, he graduated from Harding Graduate School of Religion with an M.A. in Philosophy of Religion.

Glenn has preached full-time in Missouri, Tennessee, and, for

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On June 27, 1965, Glenn married the former Hope Shutts of Parkersburg, West Virginia. The couple has two sons: Kenneth, who with his wife, Susan, has one daughter, Addison; and Adam.

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# THE ANCHORED LIFE

*Romans 8:18-25*

*Jason Hoeflich*

## **Overview of the Text**

The eighth chapter of Paul's epistle to the church in Rome can be summed up in the word *hope*. In Romans 8:18-25, Paul uses the word no less than five times. He also reinforces his theme of hope throughout the text with supplemental words like *eagerness*, *deliverance*, *liberty*, *adoption*, and *redemption*. Hope is therefore the umbrella under which all things pertaining to the salvation of those Christians living in Rome existed. It would be within this hope that the church, along with the Paul, would await their eternal glory. "The theme of glory marks the boundaries of this subsection that sets out the major implications of being 'in Christ' . . . Although glory is only mentioned three times in vv. 18-30, it is the overarching theme of the passage" (Moo 508).

The church in Rome during Nero's reign knew persecution well, and they lived their lives following Jesus Christ at great personal risk. Paul encouraged these Christians to look beyond their current difficulties to their future glory in heaven. For those Christians living in Rome, their faith would be anchored in this hope. What we find in the eighth chapter of Paul's epistle to the church in Rome are Christians who are longing for heaven, and the reason their hope was anchored in this was Christ, in whom there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). The chapter builds upon this theme from Romans 8:1 and culminates with the anticipation of ultimate deliverance that transcends circumstances of persecution and bodily harm in verses 18-25. This narrative of hope can therefore be divided into three sections: Delivered from Suffering, Delivered from Consequence, and Delivered Forever.

## **Delivered from Suffering (v. 18)**

In order to grasp fully the context of verse 18, the previous two verses must also be considered. Paul describes the church in Rome as being heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. This implies that



Christians will share in His glory, resurrection, and blessings. However, it also means for the Christian that during his or her time here on earth, they will not be free from normal, everyday suffering, which can befall any human being. The suffering that Paul is specifically referring to in verse 18 is what should be expected exclusively from those who are Christ's disciples; being in Christ will bring about an element of hardship in the form of persecution (James 1:2-4). So prevalent is the theme of suffering and persecution in his epistle to the church in Rome that Paul makes mention of it on at least three occasions (5:3; 8:18; 12:12), possibly four if Romans 16:20 is a reference to suffering. The fear is that this type of suffering would tempt those who are in Christ to give up or go back into the world to relieve the persecution and tribulation (Heb. 10:26-31). Therefore, the question that many Christians often ask themselves is, "Is it really worth it? Is the inheritance that Christians have been given worth all the hardship and heartache of living as a child of God?" (Keller 35). This is the context under which verse 18 is penned. Paul is clearly aware that these Christians would be pondering such a question, especially those Christians living in Rome under the intensity of Nero's persecution. Paul's statement is designed to encourage, but it cannot be ignored that he is highlighting the reality that there will be suffering and heartache in this life, especially for Christians. Paul wants the church in Rome to see the contrast to suffering in which the reward for enduring will fully eclipse the pain and misery of years on earth. "Paul is saying; If you knew where you were heading in the future you would not even entertain the idea that your current problems and pain aren't worth it" (Keller 35). Therefore, as Christians share in persecution and suffering on account of their faith in Jesus, they will likewise share in His glory and reward. The context would also imply the willing "participation in Christ's sufferings" (Matera 199). The suffering to which Paul refers comes from the Greek word *pathema*, and while the word can mean physical pain and suffering, it also carries with it the idea of suffering on a psychological level of "emotion and affection" (Strong 672). Suffering, in this light, becomes a multi-tiered affliction since it arouses the physical fears of being tortured or harmed as well as emotional suffering and mental anguish, likened to Jesus' experiences first at Gethsemane

and then ultimately at Calvary.

This suffering is contrasted to the glory that all Christians will receive at some point in the future. The glory that “shall be revealed” (v. 18) is from the Greek word *apocalupto*—from which our English word *apocalypse* is derived. [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Being in the aorist tense, this verb represents a specific incident taking place at a specific point in time (Acts 1:7). The incident is eschatological in nature, pointing to a time when those Christians in Rome along with Paul, who places himself on the same plane with his brethren as both being saved from sin and suffering for the Savior, will be glorified. As Matera notes, the context of Romans 8:11 dictates that this future date can be no other time or event than the resurrection (199). This is the basis of hope for all Christians. No matter how bad life gets, no matter how downtrodden one may become, it pales in comparison to the reward awaiting those in Christ. If Jesus suffered terribly and yet was glorified, then no matter what any Christians face, they too will partake of the same power, glory, and inheritance that brought Jesus out of the grave and placed Him at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1).

### **Delivered from Consequence (vv. 19-22)**

Paul emphasizes the unparalleled event of final deliverance by employing the use of “poetic imagery and apocalyptic language.” Furthermore, “the sufferings and glory of the believers in Jesus in 8:18 and the frustration and freedom of the creation in 8:19 are set out in parallel fashion” (Longenecker 719). This is an important point to establish. Paul is in effect using poetic and apocalyptic language to emphasize what he has just said in verse 18. Contextually speaking, if he is speaking about the deliverance of mankind from sin and misery here on earth in light of eternal deliverance, then his emphasis, regardless of what form of literature he employs, must be teaching the same thing. Therefore, verses 19-22 are paralleled with verse 18, which reinforces the entire context upon which Paul wrote about the future deliverance of the saints in Rome. The Apostle Paul appears to be using a unique type of parallelism referred to as climactic parallelism, in which several units of Scripture build a particular thought to a climax (Osborne

228). Paul's premise is laid out for his readers in verse 18: "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Verses 19-22 expound upon that premise; thus, Paul is telling his readers why they should endure and what their reward will look like. Paul's exhortation finally culminates in verse 25, when he reminds his readers that with their hope in Christ, they will find their strength to persevere over their present sufferings. That all will be redeemed and made as it was intended is a picture of the glory with which Paul is trying to encourage his brethren. It is a deliverance that is to be full, complete, and powerful, restoring those who are in Christ to the redeemed state for which mankind was originally designed before sin separated us from God and changed everything. "[T]he glory to be revealed (verse 18) is so marvelous that the (whole) creation is eagerly looking forward to it (verses 19-22), we ourselves are ardently awaiting it (verses 23-25) . . . All three groan . . . as in childbirth . . ." (Hendriksen 266). This is where these verses over the years have caused a great deal of contention as to Paul's exact meaning. What is the "creation" in verses 19-22, and is it something different from those Christians Paul is writing about in verses 18 and 23-25? Several theories exist that seek to answer this question: *creation* refers to everything God has created, including angels; *creation* refers only to nonrational nature, i.e., plants and animals; *creation* is only those Christians who are awaiting glory; *creation* is the human body itself, thus, "creature," not "creation," is the intended meaning; *creation* is speaking only of nonbelievers; *creation* is only nonrational nature and nonbelievers; *creation* refers only to angels (Longenecker 719-20). From among the list of theories, the two most prominent and defended theories are: the creation is in fact nature and would include the earth, plants, and animals; and the creation can only mean Christians. Whether or not Paul is writing about the *creation* or the *creature* may greatly influence how one interprets verses 19-22.

### ***Literal Creation Redeemed?***

We will first explore the theory that the creation of verses 19-22 means the physical earth and nature. Is it possible that the Apostle Paul, when he writes, "For the earnest expectation of the *creation*

eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (v. 19, emphasis added), means the earth, which would include nature, plants, and animals? That the “creation,” being nature, will share in the deliverance of those who are to be redeemed in Jesus Christ? Many would argue that this is exactly what verses 19-22 teach: that when mankind is redeemed at the final judgment, the physical world will also be delivered from its bondage under sin. Those who support this view would point out that the earth, or ground, was cursed in the Garden of Eden after Adam’s sin (Gen. 3:17), and therefore, the world was subjected to sin and bondage alongside of Adam but the earth ultimately with man will be delivered and glorified at the Day of Judgment. It is argued that the proof for this assertion lies in the text. Creation was subjected to futility (v. 19), although it was unwilling to undergo the futility of the curse (v. 20), but God subjected the creation after Adam sinned, and so when He redeems His people, He will restore the creation along with the mankind for whom it was made (v. 21). There is no doubt that there is truth to the premise of creation’s futility, but does the premise support the conclusion to the end of its total redemption? Does the deliverance of creation demand the conclusion of its equal deliverance with Christians? If the earth was subjected to futility because of Adam’s sin, does that mean that it will be redeemed and restored at the final judgment?

It can certainly be said that the earth was subjected to futility since it does not support humanity as God originally designed. The conclusion of those who contend that the earth will be redeemed alongside of Christians cite the fact that the earth and everything in it was made for humanity (Gen. 1:26). Thus, if Christians are to be fully redeemed, then the dwelling place that was made for them must also be redeemed, lest they be found lacking. However, it must be noted that even after the fall, the creation never became *insufficient* as to its purpose in supporting life and supplying the needs of people. The fall of creation was a consequence of sin, not a lost state. The ground being cursed is a use of what God made good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) to further His will. However, many theologians from these verses have formulated the doctrine of a Renovated Earth. It is claimed that verses 19-22 is one of many proof texts that God will not destroy the earth at the end of time, as suggested by 2

Peter 3:10-13. Instead, it will be renovated, renewed, and redeemed to support Christians for all eternity (Alcorn 152). But what about heaven? How does the earth being redeemed fit into the scope of the eternal abode for those who are Christ's? According to those who support the Restored Earth Theory, the world itself will be heaven, or at least it will be the dwelling place of heaven. According to the theory, heaven as it exists now is not the final or eternal heaven, but it will eventually be after the earth is redeemed and heaven is brought down and placed upon it as the New Jerusalem. Alcorn's explanation is as follows:

[W]e should see earth as a derivative realm and Heaven as the source of that realm. If we do, we will abandon the assumption that something existing in one realm cannot exist in the other. In fact, we will consider it likely that what exists in one realm exists in at least some form in the other. We should stop thinking of Heaven and Earth as opposites and instead view them as overlapping circles that share certain commonalities.

. . . [T]he New Jerusalem that will be brought down to the New Earth is currently in the intermediate or present Heaven (Hebrews 12:22). If we know that the New Jerusalem will be physically on the New Earth, and we also know that it is in the Present Heaven, *does that not suggest that the New Jerusalem is presently physical?* (54)

The issue with such a proposition is that it presents a major contradiction both logically and biblically. From a logical standpoint, it violates the law of non-contradiction, otherwise known as the law of contradiction. The law, as defined by Warren, states, "Nothing can both have and not have a given characteristic (or property) in precisely the same respect. . . . For example, nothing can be *black* all over and *not-black* all over at the same time" (23). Now consider the proposition that heaven is in its intermediate form. This supposes that the creation will be restored after the events of 2 Peter 3:10-13 and that heaven will be brought down and placed on the earth. It further surmises that the New Jerusalem exists in the intermediate heaven right now as a literal, physical habitation within a greater spiritual habitation. If this is true, then heaven is itself a contradiction. According to the law of non-contradiction, heaven is

either a spiritual place or it is not a spiritual place. It cannot possess both characteristics. Furthermore, heaven existing on earth is in the same sense a violation of the law of non-contradiction for the exact same reason: either the earth is physical, or it is not physical. The Bible clearly teaches that heaven is a spiritual dwelling, since God is Himself a Spirit (John 4:24). The Bible also teaches that when an individual dies, the spirit that is within that person returns to God (Eccles. 12:7).

According to Scripture, the human spirit can exist on earth only as long as the body is present. When the body can no longer support physical life, the spirit departs. Jesus Christ Himself had to put on flesh and blood to live among people (John 1:14). When He died, He left His body, which was buried, and when He rose from the grave, He returned to His body. He ascended into heaven in Acts 1:7, but Scripture teaches that He did not keep His physical body since Paul states that our earthly bodies will be transformed into heavenly bodies (Philip. 3:20-21). John tells us that what those heavenly bodies look like is unknown but we will be like Christ (1 John 3:2). If Scripture teaches that the resurrected body will not be physical in nature, then how can it be concluded that the dwelling place for the new body is physical? The glimpse of eternity that the Bible gives is not heaven being brought down to earth, but Christians ascending to Jesus in the clouds of heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18). If this is the case, then it cannot be true that the physical creation is redeemed in the same sense that the Sons of God will be redeemed. This is what Paul is telling the church in Rome to long for, a glorified state in which the sufferings of the physical body are no longer an issue because we have put off corruption and put on incorruption (1 Cor. 15:53). Simply stated, Scripture does not support the conclusion that the creation in verses 19-22 is in fact subhuman in nature and that it will be redeemed equally alongside of man.

### ***How Does One Arrive at Such a Conclusion?***

On the surface, the Restored Earth theory appears to be nothing more than a glorified variation of premillennialism. Premillennialism “is a system which basically says that Christ will come to earth and reign a thousand years before the end of all things”

(Moffitt 303). Even Alcorn recognizes that there are similarities between the Restored Earth Theory and premillennialism (144-45). However, Alcorn is critical of premillennialism not because it teaches a false doctrine, but because the supposed thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ *is not long enough* and it fails “to understand the Biblical promise of an eternal reign on the New Earth” (144). So, how does one individual read verses 19-22 and conclude that the earth will be restored at the final judgment along with the children of God while another person reads the same Scripture and concludes something entirely different? Fee and Stewart describe the problem as follows:

Our hermeneutical differences here are several, but they are all related to one thing—our lack of consistency. This is the great flaw in our common hermeneutics. Without necessarily intending to, we bring our theological heritage, our church traditions, our cultural norms, and our existential concerns to the epistles as we read them. And this results in all kinds of selectivity or “getting around” certain texts. (72)

As stated, the background of an individual, including heritage and church traditions, may be major factors in determining how a person may interpret Scripture. Yet one criteria that is not often explored is one’s existential concerns. What if heaven is boring? What if I do not like my new body? What if I spent my whole life serving God and living for Jesus, but heaven is not all that it is cracked up to be? Perhaps, since some people are comfortable with the physical world, it is familiar to them, so their interpretation of passages like verses 19-22 reasons toward God restoring the earth along with Christians because the notion of the unknown makes those people uncomfortable. It is even possible that our current culture and its materialistic tendencies add to existential concerns. Paul, while not explicitly telling us what heaven or our new bodies will be like, does provide a piece of evidence that should be encouraging and assist in achieving a biblically balanced interpretation of verses 18-22. In 1 Corinthians 15:37, Paul says that the physical body people possess here on earth is to be thought of as a seed. As good as it is now, it is not even close to what it will eventually become in the future. This means that although it cannot be said what the new body will be, what can be concluded is that it is far better than what we have now

and that we should want *that* body. The creation being redeemed along with man is not the only conclusion that can be made that provides comfort. The glory, deliverance, liberty, and redemption into something far greater than a physical world and a physical body is what Paul believed was enough to provide comfort.

### *A Contextual Analysis*

It can be concluded that Scripture does not support the assertion made of verses 19-22 that the deliverance of creation will be a renewal and not destruction. However, what about the Scriptures that supposedly support this view? In particular consideration should be the argument that 2 Peter 3:10-13 does not mean “destroy” but “restore.” For a proposition such as the deliverance and restoration of the earth to be true, it must be either be directly stated that such is the case in Scripture or at least be implied in another Scripture. It is certain that nowhere in Scripture is it specifically stated that the earth will first be burned up, then renovated and restored. So, if not directly stated, then is it implied? Does 2 Peter 3:10-13 support the argument made of verses 19-22 that the earth will be restored, and that creation will be delivered as a physical realm? It is important to briefly consider this since it is the same event Paul is writing about in verses 19-22. If one examines 2 Peter 3:10-13 as a supporting text for the Restored Earth Theory, it will be observed that the language used by Peter is that of complete destruction. In 3:10-12, Peter says that the elements will melt—*luo*, which means to “loosen, break up, dissolve, or destroy” with fervent heat (Strong 654). The source of the earth’s destruction, *luo*, will be melted—*teko*, “liquified” (712). This *teko* will be the result of fervent or extreme heat—*kausoo*, which is defined as “set on fire” or “fervent heat” (644). This definition is reinforced by Mounce, who writes that the word carries with it only the meaning of “being on fire, burning intensely (1187). In no instance do any of the definitions of these Greek words directly mean “fire and restoration.” Nor do these words imply or even illustrate as Peter uses them a restoration of what is burned up. Furthermore, we have an example in Scripture of Peter using fire—*pur*—in a manner where he does state that it will purify a Christian’s faith, not destroy (1 Peter 1:7). If Peter can clearly indicate this illustrative meaning



of fire in his first epistle, then why would he not do the same of the earth and creation in the second epistle if we are to understand the earth as not being totally destroyed?

The conclusion is not justified by the evidence. The deliverance of creation will not be a full restoration alongside of man. This theory fails logically, grammatically, contextually, and scripturally. Therefore, the deliverance of creation from verses 19-22 cannot mean that the earth will be cleansed and then restored as mankind's eternal dwelling place. Furthermore, this theory makes the cross and the blood of Jesus Christ less about redeeming mankind from sin and more about restoring the earth. Finally, if heaven is to be physical and on earth, then what will hell be like? Will it be physical, and if so, where will it be located? At the present, there seems to be no answer to this question. The conclusion is, therefore, not justified by the evidence. Therefore, this theory must be rejected.

### ***Creation or Creature?***

If it can be concluded that the deliverance of the earth including subhuman nature is not what Paul is writing about, then that must mean that Paul has in mind the creature, not the creation. To determine if this is true, the Greek word that Paul uses must be examined. Whether *creature* or *creation*, the Greek noun *ktisis* is often used. According to Strong, this word can be defined as "formation, building, creation, or creature" (650). The word *ktisis* as used in Scripture is used to describe both the creation (Rom. 1:20) and the creature (Mark 16:15). The only way to determine whether the author is referring to creation or creature is with context. Clearly, the Gospel cannot be preached to trees and rocks, so Mark 16:15 can only mean "creature," as in people. The *ktisis* of the world in Romans 1:20 can include people, but the context seems to suggest the creation of earth, implying that His attributes are observable as far back as Genesis 1. Context is the only way to determine which definition of *ktisis* Paul is intending.

To determine this, the entirety of verses 18-25 must be considered. In verse 18, we find the culmination of the first seventeen verses of the chapter, where the subject is people. Thus, it is people who are delivered from sin, people who are no longer in the flesh but the spirit, people who are given adoption through the

spirit, and thus people who look forward to the “glory revealed in us” (v. 18). Verses 19-22 speak of the futility of creation, which was not of its own choice, but also of its future deliverance. Verses 23-25 speak of we who “groan within ourselves” (v. 23) and eagerly await our deliverance “with perseverance” (v. 25). On both sides of verses 19-22 is language communicating the fall, redemption, and eager deliverance of mankind. Context would suggest that this is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he penned these verses. Bruce speculates that *ktisis* is not necessarily *creation*, but *creature*, carrying different meanings: “false gods; Jewish birth pangs of the coming Messiah—the time of distress which would usher in the Messianic age. If so, Paul regards all of mankind, and indeed creation as a whole” (173). Wacaster also notes that verses 19-22 are

written in close connection with verse 18, which speaks of the glory that we shall all enjoy . . . Whatever the “creation” is, it has the capability of longing for and enjoying that glory . . . The creation under consideration in verse 19 is the church, i.e. the children of God. (364)

If Paul is intending for *ktisis* to be understood as *creature*, then this would build a harmonizing bridge between verse 18 and verses 23-25, removing a tremendous amount of difficulty in understanding the passage. Even Longenecker, who defends *ktisis* as being subhuman nature, recognizes that “interpreters of 8:19-22 need to take seriously into account the *probability* that Paul had principally people, that is God’s ‘created humanity,’ in mind when speaking of ‘the creation’ in 8:19-22” (721). It is also worth noting that most versions of the King James Bible have *creature* as the translation of *ktisis*. Yet, while this may look to be a conclusive argument from context, Scripture, and history, problems with this theory exist as well. The biggest problem with the argument that Paul can only mean mankind or Christians is that a clear distinction exists between the *ktisis* of verses 19-22 and those who are Christians in verses 23-25. The *ktisis* that awaits the revealing of the sons of God cannot therefore be the sons of God (v. 19). Furthermore, the creation is liberated into the Sons of God (v. 21). Therefore, one cannot, without particular difficulty, state that the *ktisis* of verses 19-22 means only mankind or Christians.

## *Is There an Answer?*

Does a sufficient explanation of verses 19-22 exist? The answer is of course yes! Both those individuals contending that *ktisis* is subhuman nature and those who argue that it can only mean Christians are right in *some* respects. Those who defend the *ktisis* as being subhuman nature may in fact be correct but take their conclusion too far so as to include nature being redeemed with mankind, as if Christ had uttered Matthew 26:26-28 with it in mind. Those who argue that the *ktisis* can contextually mean only Christians may be right; however, by eliminating any possibility that Paul could be talking about subhuman nature, they remove an emphatic implication of redemption. To better understand Paul's meaning behind *ktisis*, one must understand personification. Personification is the assigning of human qualities and attributes to things that do not possess those qualities. Several scholars recognize this as a vital part of understanding Paul's meaning of creation, and more than a few examples of this can be found in Scripture.

If, according to Scripture, trees can rejoice (Ps. 96:12), floods can clap their hands (Ps. 98:8), the wilderness can be glad (Isa. 35:1), and mountains and hills can burst into song (Isa. 55:12), why should not birds and plants be able to look forward with longing? As is clearly evident, we are dealing here with *personification*. (Hendriksen 267)

Matera also notes that Romans 8 is not the first chapter of the epistle in which Paul uses personification. Paul "personified sin and death in chapters 5-7. In this passage, then, creation refers to the inanimate and animate world apart from humankind" (199-200). Thus, through personification, the creation can eagerly wait and groan, but its liberation does not demand that it means literally delivered. Furthermore, Christians are clearly the contextual subjects of the entire eighth chapter, yet subhuman nature can be included if personification is understood. This is part of the poetic essence of verses 18-25, and it demonstrates something powerful and profound. The deliverance and glory of God's children on the Day of Judgment will be so momentous, so incomparable to any other event this side of the cross, that all of creation rejoices. Creation was subjected to futility as a consequence of mankind's sin, yet when Christians are redeemed and glorified, the earth will

be liberated too, not in being restored but by having finished its intended purpose and passing away. Therefore, the environment in which man will dwell for eternity will be spiritual in nature and, as is such with the new body, is not subject to decay or futility. We will be free from sin and from its earthly consequences in all capacities.

### **Delivered Forever (vv. 23-25)**

It is for this reason that Christians also groan, anchored in the hope and expectation of deliverance. It is a grand contrast: the creation symbolically groans for its deliverance while the pinnacle of misery exists in humanity who, through sin, was the cause of the separation from God. “Let it be recalled that the principal thought of this whole paragraph is not the deliverance of creation, but the future glory of the children of God” (Reese 363). The evidence Paul gives for this deliverance is the firstfruits of the Spirit—that is, the risen Christ—which points back to verse 16. The same Spirit through which the Word was written, by which Christians are guided in Christ, and through which they find adoption, testifies the promise of a harvest.

The idea is Hebrew in nature, but the significance was clear even to the church in Rome. Christians possess the firstfruits of the Spirit. The death, burial, and resurrection are the fulfillment of God’s faithfulness to His Son and subsequently to all Christians. The firstfruits of a harvest were often symbolic of a promise to deliver the rest of the harvest in the same manner. Since Jesus Christ is the firstfruits of the Spirit and Christians possess the firstfruits, then they also will, in the same manner as Jesus Christ, be raised from the dead and delivered to the Father. Paul uses an incredibly powerful metaphor to reinforce that if Jesus was raised from the dead and is glorified, you will do the same! However, as Dunn suggests, the metaphor is demonstrating that the whole will accompany the piece: as Jesus worked, so will Christians; as Jesus died, so will Christians; as Jesus was raised, so will Christians be raised (473). Therefore, Paul instructs the church in Rome to wait for “it” (v. 25). The “it” of which Paul speaks is that day when the church is called home, given their reward, and forever delivered into eternity with the Father. It is this reality that the hope of salvation is anchored upon. It is this hope that all Christians eagerly await and

patiently endure through trials, heartache, tribulation, and suffering. It is faith that keeps this hope alive. The Hebrew writer states that faith is a combination of what one hopes for, in this case heaven, and the evidence that God gives them to solidify to their hope, for “faith is the substance of things *hoped* for, the *evidence* of things not seen” (11:1, emphasis added). Hope is what drives an individual to push forward; it is what enables a person to overcome spiritual mountains; it is what anchors a Christian in God to do all things (Phillip. 4:13) and ultimately to persevere. Sometimes, Christians want more, if only to see a glimpse, if only to have a taste. Paul is telling the church in Rome that they have already had their taste through the cross and empty tomb. Paul is essentially saying, “Hold on and bear your cross for Him, and one day He will empty your tomb and take you home.” Hope loses all of its potency upon sight, and Paul realizes this, and he wants the church in Rome to realize it as well. He states that a Christian can preserve only through hope in Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Romans 8:18-25 at its core is a message of love, sacrifice, resolve, hope, and perseverance. It is a message that embraces the sobering reality that life is difficult, especially at times for those who are in Christ. However, Paul’s message not only reinforces the previous verses of the chapter, but also reaches its summit with a message that no matter how bad things get, no matter how dark and lonely suffering may become, we will be delivered from that suffering in all regards. We will be delivered from the consequences of sin, even the sin that has affected the world we inhabit but not the world to come. Christians will be delivered forever if they just hold on. The greatest motivation for this is of course the cross and Jesus Christ, who committed no sin but died for the sins of all people. Nobody was more righteous, more holy, more perfect than Him, and nobody deserved the cross less. He had every right to give up and quit, but He never did. He persevered through it all in the hope of saving you. Even at the cross, He never let you go; He was anchored in you, so that you may likewise live a life anchored in Him.

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## Biographical Sketch

Jason Hoeflich is a 2008 graduate of the West Virginia School of Preaching. After leaving preaching school, he attended Freed-Hardeman University, where he earned a B.S. in Bible and an M.A. in the New Testament. He has been married to Stajah Lee Hoeflich for fifteen years and has two children, Fiona, age five, and Rowan, age four. Jason is the pulpit minister at the South Logan church of Christ in Logan, Ohio.



# THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

*Romans 9:19-29*

*Van Sprague*

Our text is viewed by some as a fertile field for reaping the teachings of unconditional election. The gleanings have been used in attempts to prove a hyper-sovereignty of God that places the freedom of choice outside of mankind's ability and ambition. Such teaching tends to initiate a reaction that seeks to show this section of Romans does not teach such. If we come to these verses asking, "How does this prove God's irrevocable election?" or "How does this prove we have the ability and right to choose?" we will fail to understand what is being said because we are asking the wrong questions.

To avoid such error, we make it our goal to examine this assignment as it is qualified by its broader biblical context. Doing this will find harmony for the difficult teachings of this text in plainer Scripture. As such, this exposition will be concerned with neither disproving Calvinism, nor proving individual free will, but with expressing that which is communicated by the text. This is essential since approaching it with any other agenda will miss that Paul's purpose was not to elaborate on God's predestination of man or on our ability to choose, but on God's righteousness and control in executing the awe-inspiring plan elaborated upon in these chapters.

In the previous chapter,

[t]he apostle has just been magnifying the grace enjoyed by the church; but Israel, the chosen people, remains without, and shares in none of these high privileges. Is this possible? is it just? [sic] What end can be answered by it? If the salvation proclaimed by the Gospel is of God, ought it not be, first of all, the portion of the chosen people? The Gospel which sets this great problem, must surely, if true, furnish its solution. This solution the Apostle gives us in these chapters (ix.-xi.). (Godet, *Studies* 146)

God spread His Gospel at such a time and way that there would



be Jews who would reject it, resulting in more Gentiles obeying. However, according to His plan, the jealousy of the Jews did not hinder, but helped lead to more descendants of Abraham seeking and following Christ (Rom. 11:7-21; 11:30-12:2). Our Lord was right, and this had long been part of His plan, as is communicated in our passage, Romans 9:19-29.

In verse 19, a querist is addressed: “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’” [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] This question was a response to the answer to the previous question, “Is there unrighteousness with God?” (9:14), to which Paul concluded, “[H]e has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (9:18). Learning the meaning of the question and the disposition of the one pictured asking it will help us understand Paul’s answer.

“Why does He still find fault?” (v. 19). Why does God still find fault with whom? The examples of Pharaoh (9:17) and Esau (9:13) stand closest to this question, but they are not the primary focus of the chapter. They are illustrations referring to Paul’s “countrymen according to the flesh”—unbelieving Jews (9:3). Did this represent an honest question from a humble heart or a charge being made by dissenters? The verse contains hints regarding the asker and his tone.

*You* is singular and corresponds with *Oh man* in verse 20. Considering this compound argument has, at its core, God’s acceptance of the Gentiles as children of promise (9:8), it is fitting that *O man* should be understood as it is in Romans 2:1 and 2:3. *O man* is a moniker for the body of Jews who were struggling with the Gentiles’ place in the church and generally leaning toward the apostasy of trying to be justified by the Old Law.

In Micah 6:7, the LORD’s people were pictured as asking, “Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” Certainly, this was a ridiculous question, showing that the people challenged the righteousness of God. Is it not interesting that Micah retorted, “He has shown you, O man,” in 6:8? This is the same word, in the same case, in the Septuagint as the word for *man* in verse 20. Could it be that addressing the challenger this way was meant to credit him with the

same presumptuousness as the erring people represented in a book with which he would have been familiar?

There are distinctions between the questions in verses 14 and 19 that further imply a harsher tone in the latter question. Verse 14 is asked with the negative particle *mē*, which, when used with the indicative mood, implies a negative answer. So, it was like Paul wrote, “What shall we say then? There is not unrighteousness with God, is there?” Verse 19, on the other hand, is not phrased that way and is not presented as coming from an editorial *we*, but it is pictured as coming from an individual, distinct from the questions that had previously been fielded (3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14). “You will say to me then” (v. 19) is a phrase used only one other time in the book of Romans, but regarding a hypothetical position of a Gentile who might arrogantly say, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in” (11:19). Verse 14’s question seems to be that of a searcher, while verse 19’s is that of a skeptic. Paul proceeded to answer in kind.

The answer the question seems to imply is, “If God is righteous, then He should find fault with ‘Nobody; for in hardening myself I have done nothing but obey Him’ (Godet, *Commentary* 162).” This either goes on to deny God’s righteousness since He does find fault or affirm that God finds fault in no one. To say otherwise, the challenge implies, would be unjust and irrational.

If there is any doubt about how the question was understood, in verse 20 Paul began, “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?” *But indeed* is a compound of three words, becoming “a strong corrective. Paul will indicate that the attitude of heart that prompts such a question that would find fault with what God wills is wrong!” (Reese 448). A way we might understand it is as if, having been affronted by someone, we exclaim, “right! really!” (West 295). *Reply against* shows that the attitude reflected by the question posed is meant to be one that stands in contradiction to the answers Paul has given so far. “God, indeed, had already answered once in the previous sayings. This word implies the *spirit* of contention” (Godet, *Commentary* 163). This is important to understanding the way Paul responded as we read on.

The reply that Paul gave in the rest of verse 20 “is not an answer to the questions, but rather a rebuke to those who raise such

questions” (Whiteside 205). He confronted an attitude that would present what is really a challenge in an interrogative form. The apostle used an illustration, loosely taken from Isaiah 29:16, that would be familiar to those who might hold a similar position to the one to which Paul was responding: “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (v. 20). The verse in Isaiah ends, “He has no understanding.” If it is absurd to think that a lump of clay would have the ability, let alone the right, to contend with its maker about why it is the way it is, Paul made it clear that the heart of the challenge was also not right-minded. Such an attitude cannot be equated with the mindset we should have. One should not “think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

Job repented of his arrogance in questioning God after he was answered by Him, saying, “. . . I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (42:3). The passion in verses 22-24, followed by the thoroughly established proofs in verses 25-29, are built in such a way that any who had an objection like that expressed in verse 19 should also be moved to “repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). “[I]n vv. 19 and 20 Paul pleads solely man’s incompetency to discuss the dealings of God. But we shall see that he does not stop there, and that he enters more profoundly into the marrow of the question . . .” (Godet, *Commentary* 162).

Most translations do not represent the particle *e* in verse 21. If we translate it “or,” Paul forces the hypothetical challenger into a disjunction that demonstrates further the fallacies of his opposition. Paul basically gave him two choices: “Can a potter not do what he wishes, or does he not have power over the clay?” To affirm the first was to concede the point of the text. To affirm the second was absurd.

The illustration of God molding us to do His will has been abused to mean more than Paul intended. Namely, the doctrine of Calvinism holds that some are “by the decree of God, antecedently predestined to that corruption . . .” (Calvin 133).

[O]ne principal reason why so much difficulty has been felt

here, has been an unwillingness to stop where the apostle does. Men have desired to advance farther, and penetrate the mysteries which the Spirit of inspiration has not disclosed. Where Paul states a simple *fact*, people often advance a *theory*. (Barnes xii)

The figure of the potter and the clay was instituted to illustrate the arrogance and flaws of the contention. As with all figures, it should not be stretched beyond its meaning. Paul, in moving on to answer the question, is not going to concede the point that God forces anyone to do anything, nor is he going to attempt to deny it. He is going to elaborate upon a plan that exhibits a design beyond human wisdom. It should elicit the response “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

Further, when we seek to understand this illustration through the eyes of a Jew of the first century, we are called back to Jeremiah 18. The full text, which is the backdrop of Paul’s point, is condemning to the doctrine of unconditional election:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.” Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?” says the LORD. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

“Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”’” (18:1-11)

Jeremiah’s illustration is also one from the lesser to the greater. If a potter could choose what to do with the marred clay in his hand, how much more could the Lord choose with us? God would also be right in choosing whether a container would be used for a task that would seem undesirable or for a job that was more favorable. Even in a great house, both kinds of vessels, of necessity, were present (2 Tim. 2:20). However, far from implying we have no control, God used Jeremiah’s message to call His people to repentance, that He might choose to form them differently. First Thessalonians 4:4 teaches each “should know how to possess his own vessel . . .” Second Timothy 2:21 indicates anyone can make the change from a dishonorable vessel to an honorable one: “if anyone cleanses himself from . . . [being a vessel of dishonor], he will be a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master. . . .” Each of these finds people culpable for the uses to which they put themselves. This apparent conflict with what Paul wrote in Romans 9 further establishes that he was not addressing mankind’s abilities to choose, but God’s right in His planning. Perhaps, the Holy Spirit did not compel Paul to carefully avoid seeming like he was absolving mankind of any choices because the average Jew’s understanding of such an illustration would preclude such errant thoughts.

Having moved from chastisement (v. 20) and an illustration of the faulty argumentation of the questioner (v. 21), Paul wrote a passionate reply. The curt response was designed to show both the complexity of God’s plan—such that it eluded one asking the question—and sting the questioner with a conclusion that would become so obvious it would not need to be stated.

Verse 22 begins like a conditional statement where we would expect to find the typical formula of *if . . . then*. However, there does not seem to be a consequent *then* to conclude the clause. Verses 22-24 are complex and then feel as though they end before the thought is complete. It seems that there is “a part of the sentence being suppressed due to emotion or for effect” (Lenski 622). A simpler

form of this usage is in Luke 13:9 in the parable of the fig tree. The keeper of the vineyard urged the owner to give an unproductive plant another year, then said, “If it bears fruit.” Most translations provide some word to complete the thought. We understand the keeper’s meaning is, “If it bears fruit, then we will keep it.” Though more complex, we may summarize verses 22-24 by saying, “If God wanted to do something, . . .” and adding the implied conclusion “. . . then He would be right to do it.” As such, this literary tool—called an *aposiopesis* (Robertson)—was employed to highlight that any challenger is utterly outclassed by God’s intricate planning. The content of the antecedent (*if* clause) is so compelling that there is no need to finish the thought. The doubter should understand and be impressed and ashamed.

*Wanting* is a present participle. The verb to which it corresponds is *endured*, in the aorist tense. The picture given is that during a period of time while God was enduring, He was wanting. It was also during this period of enduring that the “vessels of wrath” are spoken of as “prepared for destruction” (v. 22). *Prepared* is a perfect participle. In this instance, the word is adjectival and indicates that vessels, during the time of God’s patient endurance, had been prepared, and stood prepared, for destruction. It is illogical to contend that “prepared for destruction” means that our Sovereign forced them to be that way.

Certainly it could not be said that he endured with much longsuffering people or things that were exactly as he wanted them to be. Hence, God did not make these characters fit for destruction; they made themselves so, and God had endured them with much longsuffering. (Whiteside 208)

What then is communicated by this phrase? Though God could have destroyed these vessels immediately after having cause, He bore His righteous wrath. He would have no condemnation or destruction to withhold from any who had no reason to be judged, and those who had reason to be condemned and become objects of wrath had been and were continuing to be. The passive or middle voice of the participle *prepared* does not necessitate that the Father made them that way, but they had allowed themselves, or made themselves, containers worthy of being inflicted by and showing God’s wrath.

Taking verse 23 into account, we find it helpful to interpret the first participle of verse 22, *wanting* as a concessive use (Robertson). Paul was not saying, “Because God was wanting to show His wrath,” He did this or that. It presents the idea that *even though* He was wanting to show His wrath concerning the vessels of wrath, He endured with the purpose of showing the riches of His glory. Truly, “[t]he Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

“[E]ven us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles” (v. 24) shows who should accurately be considered as “the vessels of mercy” in verse 23. Phrases including *Jews* and *Gentiles*, or *Greeks*, appear throughout the book, and they communicate equal treatment by God regardless of former religion, nationality, or background. The Gospel is God’s power to salvation (1:16), all are under sin (3:9), He is God (3:29), and He has called Jews and Gentiles. Becoming a vessel of mercy is not about someone’s birth “[f]or they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham . . .” (9:6-7). Those “prepared beforehand” (v. 23) are said to be called by Him.

Paul wrote the Thessalonians, reminding them of how he encouraged them “to walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). He further taught them to practice self-control “[f]or God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (4:7). Combined with Ephesians 4:1, we see there are two primary parts to this calling. God offers. Man accepts. The second letter to the Thessalonians specifies how one is chosen by God and called:

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2:13-14)

The Gospel was and is the way we are called out to live as the sanctified vessels of God. It was our Lord’s plan before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-20) to send His Son to die for our sins, be buried, and rise again the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-4),

establishing the church, His called out (Matt. 16:16-18). It is in this sense that it can be said some are chosen or “prepared beforehand for glory” (v. 23). “He chooses but He chooses through and by His plan, the gospel. He chooses to save those who obey, and He chooses to reject those who do not obey” (Winters 111).

Finally, Paul interjected three portions of the Old Testament as evidence that what he was expressing as God’s plan had been clearly established. If this were not an argument compiled by the Holy Spirit, we might think Paul’s last statement was incomplete, that he was distracted by this new course of reasoning. On the contrary, this should be read as an intentional layering of information with the purpose of overwhelming the quibbler to concede Paul’s point.

It can be viewed this way: Verse 20 implies that the spirit of the one asking the question is arrogant. Twenty-one goes on to show the absurdity of the premise that one could find fault with God for doing as He would will for His creation. Having forced the questioner to acknowledge that point, verses 22-23 begin the thought again, with detail, that God had a plan, leaving it to the reader to conclude that it must be right, and before finishing the thought, as if to overwhelm the anticipated troubler, he mounds evidence from the Old Testament in verses 25-29.

The first quote is from Hosea, a prophet to Israel, who warned of their impending destruction because of their sins. After his wife, Gomer, “weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then God said: ‘Call his name Lo-Ammi, For you are not My people, And I will not be your God’” (1:8-9). In 721 BC, the ten northern tribes were taken into captivity by Assyria. This was the fulfillment of the prophetic name given to Gomer’s son. Hosea went on to write, however, what Paul went on to quote in Romans 9:

“I will call them My people, who were not My people,  
And her beloved, who was not beloved.”

“And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,

‘You are not My people,’

There they shall be called sons of the living God.” (vv. 25-26; cf. Hosea 1:10; 2:23)

Israel never came back to inhabit their land as a nation. The New Testament’s application of Hosea’s prophecy indicates that the



return was actually a spiritual one. Peter, who wrote to “the pilgrims of the Dispersion” (1 Peter 1:1), alluded to these verses. The context drew a contrast between those who had come to Christ as the living stone and those who had rejected Him. The way Peter applies these verses acts as a good interpretation for Paul’s citation. The vessels of wrath, then, are those Jews who stumbled, “being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed (1 Peter 2:8). Paul made the application direct when, after mentioning God calling Jews and Gentiles, he said, “As He says also in Hosea . . .” (v. 25).

Verses 27-28 turn the focus to the Jews. About to refer to Isaiah 10:20-23, he began, “Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel . . .” (v. 27).

Paul characterizes Isaiah, not as just speaking, but “crying” this message. While the word “cry” often is used to designate the message as a prophetic utterance, such an impassioned utterance was intended to arouse greater attention, lest the message be missed. (Reese 457-58).

The plain message from this reference is that it should not have escaped the attention of the Jewish reader that God was clear only a remnant of His promised nation would remain. The mercy and grace exhibited in such preservation is asserted in the phrase “. . . He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness . . .” (v. 28) and explained in his next allusion to Isaiah: “And as Isaiah said before: ‘Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah’” (v. 29). What one may try to decry as unfair, that God would save Gentiles while there were Jews who were lost, Paul is making clear is mercy. If the Lord had not been patient with His people, they would have stood as an example of eternal destruction, like Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 1:7).

Man departing from God’s will was going to happen (Rom. 3:23; Luke 17:1). The Father used that evil to bring forth good. The history of the early church is filled with examples of evil people and events that seemed less than ideal resulting in God’s glory. When the church was persecuted, they spread and preached the Gospel (Acts 8:4). When Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement, one group of missionaries became two (Acts 15:39-40). Evil men preached to cause Paul greater pain, but Christ was still preached

(Philip. 1:15-18). Paul used the example of Pharaoh's hardheartedness benefiting God's cause. He quoted the prophets who spoke of the majority of Israel being unfaithful but taught there would be a remnant. In fact, the unfaithful would be part of what brought about the success of the remnant. The ten tribes of the North were scattered throughout the world, never to return as they had been. When the Messiah came, this provided pockets of monotheists throughout most lands, Samaritans who were looking for the Christ (John 4:25-30), and Gentiles who were not strangers to the Messianic hope (Matt. 2:1-4). A pagan, Alexander the Great, had united the world under one language, Greek. All of this—and more—though resulting from disobedience to God, made the dawn of the first century “the fullness of the time” (Gal. 4:4; cf. Rom. 5:6)—just the right time for God to accomplish the key to the plan of redemption. All this was according to how our Master Potter crafted it.

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## Biographical Sketch

Van Sprague began preaching as an assistant at the church of

Christ in New Lexington, Ohio, in the summer of 2004. It was that summer he began his studies at the West Virginia School of Preaching, where he graduated in 2006. Having served as a preacher in Rio Grande, Ohio, from 2006 to 2010, and Lubeck, West Virginia, from 2010 to 2015, he currently evangelizes with the congregation at Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, where he began in the summer of 2015.

Whether away or at home, he considers it the best work to be able to teach the Gospel. He has been blessed to have engaged in mission works in Guyana, South America, and he stays busy with individual Bible studies in Berkeley Springs. He feels it is a privilege to serve as an instructor of personal evangelism and prayer at WVSOP.

The greatest earthly supporters of his work are his family. His wife, Jennifer, and three children, Victoria (11), Isabella (8), and Christopher (3), are a constant support and motivation.

# THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

*Romans 11:11-24*

*Ron Thomas*

## **Introduction**

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the West Virginia School of Preaching lectureship this year. Having moved from Illinois to Ohio in 2016, I had my first opportunity to attend the lectures the same fall, then again in 2017. I look forward to supporting the school and lectureship for years to come.

My study on Romans 11:11-24 is in the broader context of chapters 9-11, chapters dealing with hard passages and difficult of understanding. There may be difficulty, but it is possible (and necessary) for one to understand accurately. Some significant doctrines learned from the three chapters are in relation to such questions like the following: Will the *nation* of Israel all be saved? Is Paul speaking of election of individuals for eternal salvation? Is it only confession of faith in Christ that is required for salvation? Did God harden hearts in such a way those who desire to be saved cannot? I am sure these questions are addressed already by the contributors to this lectureship. As I type this, there is no hard question that comes to mind that has not been given attention by me within the assigned text. If there is (in your mind) and I failed to adequately address it, I ask that you forgive me for that failure.

It is my intent to give reasonable and thorough attention to the text of Romans 11:11-24, but without being bogged down with unnecessary issues. I also intend to give a summary address of the first eight chapters in brief, but deal a little more in summary brief with chapters 9-11, so we can transition well into the assigned task. To begin, I start with a word study, how the word *grace* is used by Paul in this epistle.

## **Word Study on *Grace***

The word *grace* (Greek: *charis*) is used in Romans twenty-four times. Vine said the word has various uses, context depending (Vine et al. 277). Mounce defines it as “grace” or “favor” and applies it as God’s goodness toward those who cannot earn or do not deserve such gain (as God’s favor) (303-04). It is my contention that God’s *grace* cannot be separated from God’s *teaching*. To read of God’s *grace* is to read of God’s unmerited favor as revealed in God’s teaching; one cannot know a single thing about God’s *grace* apart from that which He teaches. In my estimation, many use the word *grace* without really knowing of that which they speak. There are many who speak of God’s *grace* and use the word to convey the *elimination* of works, including God’s commands to be obeyed for salvation. However, “the *grace* of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age . . .” (Titus 2:11-12). [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

### ***Romans 1:5, 7***

Paul received *grace* and apostleship from God; that which he received from the Lord was turned into a teaching assignment (apostleship, cf. Acts 9:15). Paul was given a commission to preach/teach the saving message of God to those in Rome (cf. Titus 2:11-12).

### ***Romans 3:24***

Justified freely (in the margin, “without any cost”) by *grace*; God’s favor is seen in Jesus, and since Paul is contrasting Jesus to the Law of Moses in the context, to be justified freely by His *grace* means to be justified freely by His New Covenant Law, something Paul precisely identifies in 8:2 (“the law of the spirit of life in Christ”) and 8:7 (“the law of God”). It was because of God that He sent His Son into the world to pay the cost that sin requires, death (6:23).

### ***Romans 4:4, 16***

*Grace* (NKJV) is *gift* in the NIV, and the NIV certainly is correct

in this rendering (the English words *grace* and *gift* are different, though related in application). Paul's word *wages* (NKJV, NIV) is used to contrast *grace*. God's gift (grace) is His favor, unmerited favor extended to the whole of humanity (John 3:16); *wages* is used in relation to work, something earned and owed because of the work done (Rom. 4:4). God's promise (salvation) is to those who receive it by faith (4:16), and this is according to grace, God's unmerited favor that *teaches* us to deny ungodliness (Titus 2:12). In the context of Abraham, continuing with the contrast of the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, Paul's point in mentioning Abraham's faith was his acceptance by God long before the works (deeds) of the Law of Moses were even in existence. Consequently, salvation was not and could not be based on anything God owed to one who obeyed the Law of Moses, as if it were a wage.

### ***Romans 5:15, 17, 20, 21***

God's free gift (His Son, salvation) to all is unlike Adam's punishment to all; as in Adam all die (punishment), in Christ all live (God's gift of salvation). Those who choose to live their lives as they desire (desired), die spiritually because of the choice to disobey God; those who choose to live in accordance with the Spirit's will (obey God) have life, eternal life. God's gift (grace) in Romans 5:15 is Jesus; God's gift is free—no man had to do a thing to warrant this gift that God initiated on His own long before the created world was brought into existence (Eph. 3:11); it came freely from God. God's free gift brought justification, and those who receive God's gift (grace), which is Jesus, will be *taught* by Jesus (Luke 6:46), obeying the law of Christ (Rom. 8:2), the law of liberty (James 1:25). No matter the strength and power of the Law (Law of Moses), God's grace abounds to such a degree it can overcome the worst, tallest, biggest, and deepest of sin's influence, and grace (God's favor) will reign in righteousness (Rom. 5:20-21). How can grace reign through righteousness? “[S]o His favor too might reign in right standing with God which issues in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21, Williams New Testament).

### ***Romans 6:1, 14, 15, 17***

God's favor is so abundant that no matter the seriousness of sin, there is enough of God's favor (grace) to overcome. That does not mean, however, to show the magnitude of God's grace overcoming one needs to continue in sin. God's favor will not continue to abound when one lives a sinful life (Rom. 6:1). In 6:14-15, Paul speaks of and contrasts two systems by which one chooses to live. There is the system of law and the system of grace (Titus 2:11-12). To be under the system of grace, one lives a life of obedience, which leads to righteousness (Rom. 6:16). Learning from the doctrine (teaching, system) of grace, we are delivered from sin (cf. 7:25).

### ***Romans 11:5-6***

It is because of these two verses, in my view, the word study on *grace* is needed. Some will take these two verses, tie them in with Romans 9:14-18, and abuse the application! To begin, the word in these two verses means the same as in the other location in the epistle; that is, it means God's unmerited favor or gift, as learned from the New Covenant. Paul's point is to contrast man's effort with God's freely given gift. Thus, the remnant Paul speaks of pertains to God's gift of salvation to all those He foreknew (11:2), who would lovingly respond to His gift; because it is freely given, it cannot be based on works, that is, based on the Law of Moses (cf. 4:14-16).

### ***Romans 12:3, 6***

The word *grace* is understood to be God's unmerited favor given to Paul, God's gift of responsibility that Paul willingly took on himself to obey (Acts 26:19). God's grace, then, is His gift in Romans 12:3 (cf. 1 Cor. 9:16-17). Through the favor/gift of God given to Paul, Paul exhorts the saints not to think on themselves more highly than they ought to. Of course, 12:2 makes clear the saints in Rome must be able to prove the will of God, that is, know it and put it to application. Paul, as a teacher and apostle, received from God His grace, favor, or gift to teach. In 12:6, the English word *gift* (*charisma*) is understood to be a spiritual gift corresponding to what Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 12, a gift used to benefit the body of Christ. Thus, the spiritual gifts given by God to saints are according to His grace, His unmerited favor wherein teaching is to

result in benefitting the whole of the body (cf. Eph. 4:11-16).

In Romans 15:15, the word *grace* in “the grace that was given to me of God” (ASV) would and could mean “gift” or “favor” in relation to *teaching*. “The first clause in the next verse shows that Paul uses ‘grace’ here with his reference to his apostolic commission” (Reese 701).

In Romans 16:20, Paul gives a closing salutation to the saints in Rome, asking the Lord’s favor to those who love and are faithful to His divine will.

The word *grace* in Romans is to be understood to mean God’s favor, unmerited favor; that *favor* that God showers upon those He loves is in relation to God’s teaching on salvation and man’s embracing of it. On Pentecost, God’s grace taught the people the message of the Lord (via Peter), and the people had enough understanding within them to ask the question “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), wherein Peter replied they were to repent and be baptized. There is nothing in Romans to contradict this understanding. Man’s desire to enjoy God’s grace is in relation to his responsibility to hear and heed the Lord’s Word, His message of righteousness. When Paul said he received God’s grace and apostleship, it was to teach others the saving message of Christ (cf. Acts 9:5-6; 26:19). Thus, one is saved by grace because one’s justification is in Christ (Rom. 5:1).

## **Romans 1-8**

All who suppressed God’s way of righteousness are guilty before God; the Jews (the nation of Israel) were guilty before God because of hypocrisy, and their hypocrisy was directly related to their failure to be circumcised in heart (Rom. 2:28-29). The hypocritical disposition contributed to their failure to understand God’s purpose in giving the Law of Moses [the word *Law* is spelled in uppercase when referring to the Law of Moses]. That purpose was to show sin exceedingly sinful, to condemn the one who transgressed its commands (3:20). In this condemnation, the Law registered against the transgressor the verdict of guilty (3:23), but at the same time, it was not within the Law’s capability to save the one



who transgressed it, for the Law was not designed by God to save a single person (3:20; 4:15). Instead, it was through the Law that God's knowledge and plan was revealed, wherein righteousness would be (can be) attained, thus making the Law of Moses temporary (3:21).

When Paul introduced Abraham into the discussion, it was to show that righteousness was (is) attained apart from the Law. Righteousness apart from the Law was not readily accepted by the rabbis. Consider some of what they believe: The Torah was given to Moses and its content is eternal (Chumash xix), and the Torah preceded the created world (xxi). One reads "the unanimously held view that every letter and word of the torah [sic] was given to Moses by God; that it has not been and cannot be changed; and that nothing was or can ever be added to it" (xix). In fact, before the time of Abraham, it was God's design the Torah be given to all mankind, but Abraham earned the right to be the initial of God's chosen people (54). "It is axiomatic that God treats a person according to what his *deeds* have *earned* him, and that his *store of merit* becomes depleted if God changes the course of nature for his benefit" (66, emphasis added). This is their view (currently) of matters related to the Torah, that is, the Law of Moses.

Presumably, this was the battle, the mindest Paul addressed when he lived as a faithful Jew and when he battled the Jewish way of thinking after his conversion. Paul took the historical and chronological facts of the case to make his point that justification was through faith, and especially faith in Jesus, not obedience to the Law of Moses (Rom. 4:16). He did this by showing 1) the Law declares all are under sin (3:9-18) and that it was not designed by God to attribute righteousness to a single soul (3:20), 2) the Law of Moses taught God's righteousness is revealed apart from that given to Moses in its codified form (3:21); it is known as the "law of faith" (3:27), and 3) Abraham was declared righteous by God because he believed Him, that is, trusted Him, in accordance with the "law of faith" before the Law was given to Moses (establishing point 2).

Having access to God's favor by the "law of faith" (Rom. 3:27), one has peace with God (5:1), that is, sins are forgiven. Sin predates anything related to the Law of Moses; it went as far back as the time in the Garden when the first couple introduced sin into the world

through their actions (5:12); the consequence of this action was death, and each generation from the time of the Garden to when Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome, all have suffered the same consequence (cf. 2 Tim. 1:10). Jesus, however, overcame death (Rom. 5:18-19) and can overcome any sin in the life of those who love God. Why then would any saint desire to be in bondage to sin all over again (6:16-18)? The struggle one experiences between a desire to do what is right, meeting the Law's exact teaching not to covet (for example), but failing to meet that teaching, brings one to the point of despair when considering one's standing before God (7:24). The answer is that only in Christ can one overcome the power of sin (8:1); this is on an individual basis, a response of one's heart (remember Abraham).

In all of this, Paul taught that God's *righteousness* is not and was not exclusively to the *Jewish* nation. God's righteousness was (is) also to those who are of another nation (Gentiles), to all those who believe (or call on) God for salvation (cf. Acts 2:21). Additionally, it was the Jewish *nation* who failed to understand this message, then killed the very one who came to deliver this salvation (2:36). Thus, as Paul wrote, it was through the Jewish (Israelite) nation that God brought His salvation to all people. In the next three chapters, he develops this and also shows that all Israel will be saved, but it is not the Israel they think. Paul takes this thought of an individual's response and gives more attention to the role of the physical nation of Israel.

## **Romans 9-11**

The nation of Israel played a significant role in God's plan to redeem man (Rom. 9:1-5). God made the nation of Israel His own via adoption, and it was through fleshly descent that God brought His promised Son (9:5; cf. Gal. 4:4-5) into the world (This is important: Romans 9:5 gives clear indication concerning what Paul is going to say, that is, his reference to individuals representing nations). Though it was via the nation of Israel God brought His Son into the world, it was the Holy Spirit who made a distinction between those of the physical nation and those belonging to Him (cf.

2 Tim. 2:19), otherwise identified as spiritual Israel (9:6-13). There is a difference between being a child of Abraham via normal/natural descent and being a child of Abraham by God's choice, God's promise.

The important point Paul wants his readers to understand pertains to God's choice through whom He would bring His promise into the world. It was God's choice of Isaac, not Ishmael; God's choice of Jacob (Israel), not Esau; and, though not stated in the text of Romans 9, it was God's choice of Judah (then David), not the other eleven sons of Jacob (Israel), as Scripture indicates in the following passages: Acts 7:8, 17, and 37 and Genesis 49:10 and 13:22-23. Paul's point of physical descent is secondary to his point of *promised* descent in identifying who the true Israel is.

Earlier in this epistle, Paul considered an objection he assumed would be (or by experience was) offered to him. What advantage then was there to being a Jew (3:1)? Paul wrote that one advantage given to the Jewish nation was the privilege and responsibility of having God's Word (3:2) but then drives home the point (3:3-20), as Johnny Polk said, they did not obey that Word. He resumes the point he left off in chapter 3 here. Not only did God give the nation His sacred Word, but also it was through the nation that God chose to bring His promise to all (9:14-18); it was God's *sovereign* right to do this! As through Isaac and not Ishmael, as through Jacob (Israel), not Esau, so it was through Israel (Jacob), not Egypt (Pharaoh), that God's promise to bless all nations came (cf. Exod. 19:4-6).

Paul now considers objections that would be (have been) offered (Rom. 9:19-24). Who is the "O man" and "me" of 9:20? As Isaiah used similar words to refer to the nation (29:16), Paul used these words to refer to the same nation of Israel, personified in a person taking up Israel's defense. How can God fault those He hardened? If God hardened Israel, as He hardened Pharaoh, then neither Pharaoh nor Israel can possibly be at fault for not believing, the objection goes. This is rejected based on the following: 1) God has sovereign right to use nations as He chooses, 2) "known individuals are mentioned to make a chain of history" (Polk), and 3) God is not sovereignly arbitrary in making decisions to harden for it was Israel's choice to reject God's message (cf. Acts 13:46), and in this

rejection, as with Pharaoh, a hardening took place; they “dug in their heels” (one might say) in rejecting God’s salvation.

Thus, mere physical descent through Abraham was not what made one a child of God for only a remnant of the “seed of Abraham” (Rom. 9:7; cf. 4:16) will be saved. Scripture attests to this very point (9:25-29). In all this, Paul is not speaking of personal salvation; nothing in the text/context remotely speaks to this. As Leon Morris said, it is election to *privilege*, not eternal salvation that Paul has in mind (356). If this is the case, then why did Israel not attain a righteous standing with God because of the privilege of having the oracles of God? Because the nation of Israel sought to attain righteousness by their own way of thinking (Rom. 9:33–10:3), and Jeremiah already indicated this was not possible when he said, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (10:23, KJV). Still, Israel tried!

God’s righteousness is through Christ, not the Law of Moses (Rom. 10:4-10). Since Jesus is the end of the Law (Matt. 5:17-20; Gal. 3:24-27), Paul’s message of righteousness was through the one Israel considered a stumbling block (Rom. 9:33; cf. 11:9-10). At one time, those under the authority of the Law of Moses could be righteous (10:5), but only in relation to a circumcised heart (cf. 2:6-7, 10, 28-29). Now, since the Law is no longer authoritative, under the authority of the Law of Christ (8:2, 7; James 1:25), God’s righteousness is to both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 10:11-13), not exclusively to Israel through the Law of Moses.

God’s righteousness was proclaimed via preaching (Rom. 10:14-21), and this message of God’s intention to offer salvation to Gentiles was clearly stated through various prophets (10:16-21). Moreover, God’s righteousness was proclaimed (made available) to Israel long before its proclamation to non-Israelites (cf. Deut. 10:12-13; Micah 6:8, et al.). Those who accepted this preaching with humble hearts were justified before God by faith, an obedient faith (Rom. 2:7, 10, 13). Not every one of those to whom the words were preached accepted them; neither in the days of Isaiah, nor during the days of any of the prophets who followed Isaiah, down to the time of Jesus and Paul. Thus, as this message goes to the Gentiles, the

same message was rejected by national Israel.

God, however, did not reject those He foreknew (Rom. 11:2; cf. 8:28-30); that is, God did not reject those He knew beforehand would respond in faith to the message Paul preached. The message Paul preached was the Lord's call for all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and those who chose to be saved, these are the ones who are children of promise, spiritual Israel, the remnant (Rom. 9:27; 11:5). Of course, as physical Israel illustrates, not all chose (or choose) to be saved. On the other hand, all who call on the Lord will be saved. One cannot call on the Lord without knowledge, or hearing the message proclaimed. The message went forth everywhere (10:14-18). As Israel rejected God's message, "Israelites who rejected the Gospel hardened themselves against any who would receive it!" (Polk).

With these points established, it can be said that God did not reject His people for not all Israel is Israel (Rom. 9:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:9)! So, according to "the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5; consider the word study above) those of the remnant are Israel, the spiritual seed of Abraham and, thusly, all Israel will be saved. God rejected the nation Israel, but among the physical nation, a remnant exists; this is spiritual Israel (11:4-6). God hardened Israel because of their rejection to His way of righteousness (11:7-10).

### **Commentary on Romans 11:11-24**

*"I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles."* (v. 11)

The words *they* (twice), *their*, and *them* refer to national (physical) Israel. Because of their rejection of the Gospel of Jesus, Paul turned his message's focus to the Gentiles. "Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:46). This is the clear teaching of the verse. However, as it reads in English, there appears a problem. Israel stumbled, but they did not fall; but in the next breath (so to speak), Paul affirmed they did fall. Did the nation Israel fall, or did they not fall? "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly

not! But by their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy” (v. 11, English Majority Text). “Now I ask, have they stumbled to their ruin? Never! The truth is, that by their lapse salvation has passed to the Gentiles, so as to make them jealous” (Moffatt). “I ask then, they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they? Absolutely not! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous” (v. 11, NET). Paul distinguished between stumbling and sinning on one side and falling on the other hand. With the stumbling and sinning, there is a cure, but not with falling (Origen, qtd. in Bray 280). The NKJV makes this plain, like the other versions, via the context; it is clear that Paul does not speak of the nation Israel as a lost cause. They made their choice (as a nation), and God made His choice as sovereign. Nevertheless, God’s will is not for them to be lost, but that they might come to repentance and be saved (2 Peter 3:9).

*“Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” (v. 12)*

The Israelite nation fell, or stumbled, but their stumble brought riches to others, in this case, non-Israelites. The word *fullness* (*plērōma*) is used seventeen times in the Greek New Testament, including three other times in Romans (11:25; 13:10; 15:29). In 11:25, the word can be understood to refer to a numerical quantity that is saved; in 13:10, there is no numerical quality associated with the word, and the same is true in 15:29. In the other locations wherein Paul used the word (1 Cor. 10:26; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10, 23; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 1:19; 2:9), there is no numerical quality in view. Thus, in this verse, unless there is something in the context to demand quantity, it is best to understand it in contrast to that which is lost or empty. In other words, if those lost come back, what is lacking, empty, or lost is now filled up and overflowing without regard to some particular number, contrary to what Kruse thinks when he says, “[W]e are justified in concluding that Israel’s ‘full inclusion’ means the full *number* of believing Jews . . .” (429, emphasis added). Lard is certainly correct when he says fullness is exactly equivalent to conversion: “If the fall and loss of the Jews are

a benefit to the world, how much more will their conversion be” (357).

“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry. . . .” (v. 13)

Shifting his focus from the role of the nation of Israel in relation to salvation, Paul gives attention to those of the Gentiles who might think of themselves as blessed more than the Jews because the nation of Israel was cast out while they were included. Paul is very pleased to be God’s messenger to the Gentiles. “As Paul also was *appointed* to preach to them, he had a right to speak to them with authority” (Barnes 246).

“[I]f by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.” (v. 14)

An idea of provoking to *jealousy* seems peculiar. While jealousy can be understood as a positive characteristic (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2), it is not generally thought of that way. What does Paul mean? Paul used the word *parazēloō* (*jealousy*) four times (Rom. 10:19; 11:11, 14; 1 Cor. 10:22), and three times he used it in relation to a divine response to Israel toward a positive end; in other words, God used other people (nations) to get the Israelites to respond positively to God’s warning and appeal to return to Him (10:19). Paul used the word here (and in verse 11) to get the Israelite nation to understand that with their rejection, the Lord turned to the Gentiles. Although reference to Acts 13:46 was already made, it is worth bringing attention to it again: “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, *we turn to the Gentiles*’” (emphasis added). In Romans 10:19, Paul referenced the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21, a direct reference to the Lord’s attitude toward Israel because they responded to Him in disobedience: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (KJV). In 1 Cor. 10:22, Paul used the word *jealousy* as a warning against the Christians because there was confusion and compromise with a competing ideology: “You cannot drink the cup

of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" (10:21-22). The English word *jealous* (*zēlos*) is used more often, sixteen times in the New Testament, twice in Romans (10:2; 13:3). The range-meaning of the word in the NIV is "zeal, zealous, jealousy, concern, enthusiasm, envy, raging" (cf. Kohlenberger et al. 336), indicative of how the word can be used in varied contexts. Since Paul carried the message of God with him wherever he went, he used this message to provoke a response, that "I may provoke to jealousy" (v. 14). What was his intent in doing this? It was to provoke a response, to get "those who are my flesh and save some of them," obviously implying they are lost. Of course, the power of conversion was not in Paul, but in the message of God, "the power of God to salvation" (1:16). Paul is assertive, aggressive, in initiating the conversion process with his preaching and teaching, but it is not in Paul the man, but in Paul's message from God as preached (cf. 10:14-15).

*"For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (v. 15)*

Lard's comment on this verse deserves repeating: "[T]he future reception of the Jews will not consist in restoring them, as Jews, to their former national prosperity, but in receiving them into the divine favor in virtue of their obedience to Christ" (359). Harrison and Hagner comment that Israel in a mysterious way fulfills her role as a servant to the nation (173), but I am not seeing it as a mystery because Paul makes clear what has happened. Because Israel rejected the Lord (cf. Matt. 27:5), Paul turned to those of non-Jewish persuasion, thus preaching the Gospel to the ethnic peoples of the world. "[T]heir being cast away" (v. 15) reflects Israel's rejection of the Gospel message of the Lord Jesus. As for "the reconciling of the world," it was to Moses the Lord spoke (who spoke to the Israelite nation):

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be



to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. (Exod. 19:5-6)

Israel, as a nation, failed in the challenge and exhortation, so it was Paul who recited the words of the nation’s prophet Isaiah, “But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people’” (Rom. 10:21, cf. Isa. 65:2). Since the nation was disobedient to God, they were cast off, thus dead. If they return to the Lord, then they will have “life from the dead” (v. 15). Paul speaks of the nation’s role, but regarding salvation, it is an individual’s choice to be saved (Acts 2:21). Israel, however, as a nation is made up of many individuals, and those individuals collectively were carriers of God’s message to those in the world; but with their rejection of His message for their individual lives, God chose to use them no longer; thus they were cast off.

*“For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” (v. 16)*

There are varied interpretations of this verse in how to apply the terms. In verses 11-15, Paul wrote about the nation of Israel’s stumble/fall (v. 11), the richness of the Gospel message to the Gentiles (v. 12), Paul’s desire to provoke his national brethren to jealousy (vv. 13-14), and, if successful, how their acceptance (repentance) would be life from the dead (v. 15). This verse and the next are illustrations to make his point clear. Some ancient commentators interpreted the “root” (v. 16) to refer to Abraham, patriarchs, and ancestors while “firstfruit” refers to Christ. Martin Luther understood the word *firstfruit* to be the apostles (Krey and Krey 102). In order to get clarity, consider two translations: 1) “If the first handful of dough is consecrated, so is the whole mass; if the tree’s root is consecrated, so are the branches” (Williams), and 2) “If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches” (ESV). These two translations do not seem to differentiate between *dough/branches* or *whole mass (lump)/root*. I like the way Williams reads; what is holy (the root) makes everything that springs from it holy. In this illustration, to what does Paul refer with these terms? Roper thinks the “firstfruit” would be the patriarchs, and this goes well with the

context of Paul's words, going back to chapter 9 (202); Lard, on the other hand, thinks the *firstfruit* refers to the Jewish Christians (also Harrison and Hagner) and the "mass" (dough) refers to the nation of Israel (360). It seems to me, there is a significant problem with this: if the nation (the lump/Israel) is holy in its current standing, then how can the holy be rejected? Lard answers this by saying the word *holy* does not mean "pure or sinless," but "acceptable." "The Jews are *capable* of being accepted, and will be, when they obey Christ" (emphasis added). Harrison and Hagner, however, interpret *holy* in its normal sense, "separated, consecrated to God" (173). Lard, I think, says more than can be sustained, and Harrison and Hagner are correct to understand the word with its normal meaning.

*"And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree. . . ." (v. 17)*

In verses 17-18, Paul warns Gentiles against adopting an arrogant attitude toward those branches that have broken off (Kruse 434). There is difficulty in properly assigning meanings to the figurative terms in the previous verse, but the difficulty becomes less so in this verse. The "branches" that were broken off refers to national Israel, specifically, those of the physical nation who refused to believe the Gospel message of Paul. The "wild olive tree," understood as a branch, refers to the non-Jews, or Gentile believers. The branches were broken off the good (cultivated) olive tree (v. 24), and a wild olive tree branch (believing Gentile) was grafted in its place, that is, in their stead, or as the RSV renders it, "in their place" (v. 17). Lard disputes this is the idea because the Greek is incapable of this rendering and the Gentiles were not grafted in anybody's stead (362)! He argues this way because some have subscribed to a false interpretation that Paul has in view "the old Jewish church" (361). Gentiles "came into the church just as did the Jews, and not into a place made vacant by the rejection of others" (362). Vincent thinks similarly: "Some render *in their place*, instead of *among them*; but the latter agrees better with *partakeest*. Hence the reference is not to *some* of the broken-off branches in whose place

the Gentiles were grafted, but to the branches in general” (127). Together, the wild and cultivated olive branch is made holy because of the root; that is, as Roper and Morris have said, into the patriarch Abraham, the father of the faithful (cf. 4:16; 9:7).

*“[D]o not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.” (v. 18)*

The idea of boasting seems contrary to the Christian spirit of life in Christ. Jerome, commenting on this verse, said every time he passed a synagogue, these words would come to mind, a reminder of how fortunate Gentiles are who have been grafted into the Olive Tree (Bray 283-84). The word for *boasting* is *katakauchaomai* (Kohlenberger et al. 416), used four times in the Greek New Testament (twice in 11:18 and one each in James 2:13 and 3:14); in each context wherein it is used, it conveys a competitiveness; thus, Paul speaks of “boast[ing] against” (v. 18) although in James 2:13 the competitiveness is of mercy “triumph[ing]” (NIV) or boasting over judgment. In any event, the idea Paul wants understood is there is no room for boasting against another when it is God who does the supporting (v. 18). Thus, as it is contrary to the spiritual nature and will of God for any Jew to think in such a way as to be boastful, thinking of themselves as better than the Gentiles, it is equally wrong for the Gentiles to think of themselves as being God’s better *replacement* for the Jews (Jewish nation) because the Jews are the ones cast off. The emphasis is God/Christ, the one who did the grafting, not the one who was grafted in.

If you make the church the bride, Christ is the groom. If you make the church the body, Christ is the head. If you make the church a temple or a city, Christ is the cornerstone, the mountain, the foundation. If you make the church an olive tree, Christ is the trunk that carries it in himself, makes it fertile and waters it. (Etaples 103)

*“You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.” (vv. 19-*

21)

This is not hard to understand. In general, many (most) of the Jews thought of themselves in a special way because they were entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2), but in their way of thinking, they established their own way of righteousness (9:33-10:3), which was not in accordance with God's way of righteousness; something had to give. That which gave way was Israel because God was not pleased with their response to Him and His message (cf. Acts 13:46). Consequently, the Lord's response was to prune them away from the olive tree, casting them into the fire (cf. Matt. 3:12). Why were they cast away? Because of unbelief. It was unbelief that generated a forty-year wandering in the wilderness for the nation (Num. 14:33), it was unbelief that caused many within that nation not to be allowed to enter the Promised Land (Heb. 3:7-11), and it was unbelief that cut away the nation from the olive tree. Those grafted in, Paul warned, must not think of boasting against those pruned or broken off. This would be foolish because the source of grafting is God, and into that which they were grafted was the seed of Abraham (Murray 86). The partisan separation between the Jew and non-Jew was palatable (one might say). In Ephesians 2, the same apostle wrote of the middle wall of separation being brought down (2:14), like the walls of Jericho being brought down by the Lord fifteen hundred years earlier (cf. Joshua 6), only in that case it was to destroy a sinful people while in Ephesians it is to accept a willing people.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and

foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (2:14-22)

*“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.”* (vv. 22-23)

The word *goodness* is “kindness” in the NIV, ESV, and NET. God’s mercy, His kindness, is something to behold. Earlier, Paul wrote, “Do you think so little of the riches of God’s kindness, forbearance, and patience, not conscious that His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4, Williams). Kruse reminds us of Paul’s point when he said Paul always spoke of God’s kindness as leading people toward his salvation, giving salvation from sin to those who trust in His Word (436). The word *severity* (*apotomia*) is used only twice in the New Testament, both times in this verse (Kohlenberger et al. 83). The NIV renders the word “sternness”; the CEV reads “how hard”; the Good News Bible, “how severe”; and the NET, “harshness.” Robertson said the word is from *apotemnō*, which means “to cut off, abrupt.” Notice the *cutting off* was not an action taken by God on a whimsical basis, “but to the nature of the human response” (Harrison and Hagner 174); this cutting off occurred because those who responded decided to depart. I have already have made a few references to Acts 13:46, and it deserves mention again: “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (KJV). I want to connect this thought with the words of Peter, when he said of those who rejected Christ that they have become, “‘A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.’ They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do” (1 Peter 2:8, ESV). Though the firmness

of the Lord is in place with His sternness, so also is the hope God gives to people if they return to Him from whom they walked away. As the Lord easily cut one off, if one chooses to come back to the Lord, He is also easily capable of grafting one back in. “God will never work any special miracle on the Jews to induce them to believe; nor will he ever increase the power of the gospel for their sake” (Lard 366); if they come back to the Lord, it will be the result of an individual decision made.

*“For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?” (v. 24)*

The *you* refers to Gentiles who believed and obeyed the Lord Jesus (v. 24). The “olive tree which is wild by nature” is that world from which the Gentiles came. Paul wrote:

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:9-10)

It is “an apt metaphor of the Gentiles who had continued for uncounted generations in pagan debauchery, without the knowledge of God in any degree comparable to that of the Jew” (Coffman 393). From this wild olive tree, the Gentiles, because of their obedience to the Lord, were cut off from the old way of thinking and living and grafted in to a new way of thinking and living (to them) into the cultivated olive tree. The Jews who were cut away or broken off from the cultivated olive tree, because of their disobedience to the Lord, died (fell, stumbled) spiritually after having been cut off; their source of life in the cultivated olive tree is now no longer their source of life. If the Jews do not continue in unbelief (v. 23), God is able and willing to graft them back into the cultivated olive tree, which is “contrary to nature” (v. 24). It is contrary to nature because the cut-off branch withered and died and no longer has any life to contribute to the cultivated olive tree and is so far gone (if you will),

it can receive no life from the cultivated olive tree! But with a penitent heart (2:4; cf. Luke 13:3, 5), “God is not bound by the limits of what people see as natural” (Morris 417). In the illustration the Lord gave to Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones, any limitations in the natural realm is quickly suppressed by God (36:1-14), for the Lord can do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think . . .” (Eph. 3:20).

### **Application**

The application of this study is in three areas: 1) some concluding remarks from the study, 2) some applications we can make to living a faithful Christian life, and 3) an outline from which to preach.

First, some concluding remarks from the study: It is very important that one have a clear sense of what Paul is addressing. He is not speaking of election to personal salvation, as many in the Protestant religious world teach (such as Calvinistic thinkers like R. C. Sproul). Paul’s focus was (is) on the role the nation of Israel played in God’s *Scheme of Redemption*, a very important role. Israel was led by people who lost sight of the Lord’s way and made their own way as desired (cf. Prov. 14:12); couple this with religious leaders, and the way of man became the religious/righteous way that was, in fact, not the Lord’s way of righteousness at all! On the other hand, the Lord never lost sight of His of those who truly loved Him and chose to obey Him. These are the true Israel of God.

Second, what are some applications we can make to help us be better Christians? To begin, as Paul warned some about thinking much of themselves, let us be warned that we are not to fall into the same trap. For some, I suppose, it may be an easy thing to think of oneself in such a way that others who do not think like them are considered inferior or religiously uninformed. I cannot imagine this way of thinking! But on the other hand, I think I can. In the days of Paul, as in our own day, there were partisans who lost sight of the Lord’s way and accentuated their own way. In our day, race relations, political affiliations, and even religious loyalties among brethren have generated situations in which some regard their ways of thinking to be better than others’ and thus regard themselves to be of a higher spiritual plane. Whatever divide might exist and

whatever cultural gap is present—the only thing to bring us together, to bridge the gap, is the Lord Jesus.

Third, an outline from which to teach: A very important aspect of teaching is considering the nature and love of God. Is God all love—so that He will condemn no one but the most egregious sinners? Some so think. Is God so severe in His looking at man there is *nothing* one can do to be pleasing to Him? A third view in need of correction is that God is partial in salvation. In other words, God chose to save some, but in His not choosing others to be saved, they are condemned, and nothing can they do to change that status. This evil view of God contradicts the plain teaching that God is partial to no one; it also contradicts the very nature of God’s love and justice. (Wythe)

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Ron Thomas is the preacher at the Sunrush church of Christ in Chillicothe, Ohio; he also serves as one of the elders. Ron has served as a preacher in Idaho (Mountain Home, Jerome), Illinois (Sullivan), and Ohio. He has been preaching since 1989; he is a graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching (1995). He is married to the former Anne Lyon of Van Wert, Ohio, and they have two daughters, Jenni (Daniel) Falkenheim of Columbus and Nikki Thomas of Columbus, and three grandchildren, Landon Thomas and Jensen and Eden Falkenheim.

# OH, THE DEPTHS OF THE RICHES OF GOD!

*Romans 11:25-36*

*Steve Higginbotham*

*“Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become his counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him And it should be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” (vv. 33-36) [All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]*

In my judgment, one of the most neglected and consequently needed Bible doctrines is the doctrine of God. The reason is that we frequently treat God as a presupposition and get on to more relevant matters, such as “What does God want me to do?” and “How does God want me to live?” While those topics are good, they have no compulsion when removed from the personage of God.

I once heard someone say, “Rules without relationship result in rebellion.” I find this statement not only true, but insightful. If a man does not “know” God, why would he deny himself to please Him? Why would he choose the difficult path rather than the easy path? If we do not come to know the one who gave the rules, we will break the rules when it becomes convenient. God calls us to do some difficult things. Jesus said that if we are to be His disciples, we must deny ourselves, take up a cross, and follow Him (Matt. 16:24). Before I do all that for someone, I am first going to have to get to know him or her. Are there not things that you would readily decline if a stranger asked you to do it for him or her, but if it was someone you loved, you would not hesitate in doing it?

Overlooking God and treating Him as a presupposition will catch up to us eventually. We need to spend time learning about Him: His nature, character, and desires.

I have observed that we “miss” God even in passages that

explicitly speak of Him. For example, how many times have we used John 14:6 to teach that the only way to heaven is through Jesus Christ? But that is not what the passage says. The passage says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the *Father* except through Me” (emphasis added). This passage does not even mention heaven! But someone might say, “No, but that is where the Father is, right? So, it is just semantics.”

But I beg to differ. It is more than semantics. It is the difference between a place and a person. Suppose a child returns home for a visit after being away for many months. Do you think it would matter to the parents of this child if his reason for their child wanting to come home was to sleep in his old bed or visit with them? Surely the place should not be more important than the parents. Likewise, we should not become disciples of Jesus because He can take us to a “place” (heaven), but because He can take us to a “person” (our Heavenly Father).

At some point, we must stop bypassing God and develop a relationship with Him and not just what He tells us to do or what He has to offer us.

So, let us consider a few points concerning the depths of the riches of God.

### **God Is Worthy to Be Praised!**

While I do not want to wander far from the context of the passage that has been assigned, I do want to consider several passages that testify to the greatness of God, our Father. I can almost see the wonderment and awe on the faces of these men who recorded these words for us. As we begin this lesson, I want to establish that it was not just the Apostle Paul who stood in awe of God, and I want us to take a moment and soak in this reverence and awe.

Consider the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:17-21). Have you ever tried to picture the scene? On this occasion, there were five thousand men present, not even counting the women and children. This could have potentially been a crowd double or triple the size of five thousand. And all these people were told to sit down and Jesus was going to feed them all with five loaves and two fish. This would be impossible for anyone except God, but nothing is too big for God. I have often wondered how the fish and bread were

replenished in the disciples' bags as they served this multitude. Did they get down to one final piece of food, then suddenly, their bag got heavy again, causing them to look in and see that it had been refilled? Or was it the case that every time they handed out a piece of bread or fish, the bag was instantly filled again? I do not know the answer to that, but I do know that if I were present that day, I would have been impressed with the strength and power of God through this miraculous display.

Imagine being present at the raising of Lazarus (John 11). Imagine the tension, anticipation, and excitement that must have existed when Jesus said, "Take away the stone" (11:39). As they must have eagerly peered into the darkness of that tomb, they must have wiped and widened their eyes as they saw the first glimpse of movement in the darkness of the shadows. Then, before their very eyes, He appears in full view, alive! Who but God can do such works?

Consider Moses as he had just been called by God out of a burning bush (Exod. 3:3-10). Can you imagine how Moses must have marveled in reverent fear as he watched the ten plagues befall Egypt (7-12)? Then, imagine how Moses must have felt when being pursued by the Egyptian army, only to be delivered through the midst of the Red Sea and to watch as the waters collapsed on the Egyptians. Would you not join him as he stood on the other side of the Red Sea and sang:

Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?  
Who is like You, glorious in holiness,  
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?  
You stretched out Your right hand;  
The earth swallowed them.  
You in your mercy have led forth  
The people whom You have redeemed;  
You have guided them in Your strength  
To Your holy habitation. (15:11-13)

Or, consider the prophet Micah as he expresses bewilderment at the redemptive work of God. Consider his words:

Who is a God like You,

Pardoning iniquity

And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?

He does not retain His anger forever,

Because He delights in mercy.

He will again have compassion on us,

And will subdue our iniquities.

You will cast all our sins

Into the depths of the sea. (7:18-19)

While Moses was amazed by God's power, Micah expressed amazement at God's redemption. Who is a God who would love such a weak and sinful people? Let that soak in.

Like the prophet Micah, Paul in Romans 11 is marveling at God's greatness in redemption. In light of these truths, can we sing the words to this song without feeling them?

You are beautiful beyond description,

Too marvelous for words,

Too wonderful for comprehension,

Like nothing ever seen or heard.

Who can grasp Your infinite wisdom,

Who can fathom the depth of your love?

You are beautiful beyond description,

Majesty enthroned above.

And I stand, I stand in awe of You,

I stand, I stand in awe of You;

Holy God, to whom all praise is due,

I stand in awe of You. (Altrogge, no. 937)

Let us now turn our attention to the immediate context of Romans 11 and examine why God is worthy to be praised.

## **Why God Is Worthy to Be Praised**

### ***Because He Has a Plan for Saving Both Jews and Gentiles***

I never cease to be amazed at how frequently I discover Christians who think that God was concerned about only Old Testament Israel, and furthermore, not concerned if you were the unfortunate soul who was born to Gentile parents. Such a view, on

the very surface, appears to be unjust. How could one be condemned based on something over which one had no control?

Gentiles have always been loved by God, and it has always been God's desire to save them. If God had no plan for the Gentiles, then how could God command the following: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him all you peoples!" (Psalm 117:1). How could Gentiles fulfill this command if God would not save them? Can you imagine God saying, "I will not save you, but I want you to worship and praise Me?"

Further proof that God loved the Gentile nations is seen in the prophecy of Caiaphas (John 11:51-52). Caiaphas, the high priest, prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation (Jews)—and not for that nation only, but would gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Notice, He was not going to gather them into one and make them children of God; rather, He was going to gather the children of God from all nations and make them one with the Jews. This was a part of God's plan.

From before the foundation of the world, God had a plan to save all men (Rev. 13:8). This plan began to be revealed in Genesis 3:15, when God promised that the seed of woman would bruise the head of the serpent. This promise is clarified even more when God calls Abraham (Gen. 12) and promises that through his "seed," all nations of the earth would be blessed. As history was awaiting the coming of this Savior, God made a special covenant with the Jews. This covenant did not imply that God no longer cared for the Gentiles. It did not imply that God was not going to save the Gentiles. No, God still loved and desired the salvation of the Gentiles as He did the Jews.

God's plan was to reconcile both the Jews and the Gentiles to each other and to God in the church (Eph. 2:16). While the Gospel was initially given to the Jews, it was later given to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). Today, whether Jew or Gentile, salvation belongs to those who reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:16).

### ***Because He Loves All Men***

It is incomprehensible to me how a holy God could love such wretched people. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). Not a one of us is righteous (3:9-10). And it is not like we made a handful of mistakes. We have countless sins to our charge. These sins amount to an affront against God. Through these sins, we have declared our independence from God, and yet, He loves us anyway. Who is a God like this? Who has such patience? Who can be sinned against time and time again, and remain willing to take us back if we humble ourselves?

When one reads the descriptions of the Gentiles in Romans 1 and the Jews in Romans 2, how is it that God still offers us the gift of salvation to all men in Romans 3:23? The apostle Paul tells us that his life is a "case study" in the depth and riches of God's love. He said:

[A]lthough I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Tim. 1:13-16)

After telling us how deeply mired in sin he once was, Paul gave credit to God for His "exceedingly abundant" grace (1 Tim. 1:14). The grace contained within the Gospel is not barely able to save us, but it "abounded much more" than our sins (Rom 5:20). It can grant us an *abundant* entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God (2 Pet. 1:11). And it is measured out to us in fullness, grace upon grace, i.e., accumulated grace (John 1:16).

### ***Because God Desires to Be Merciful***

You learn much about a person's character by identifying the things in which they take delight. Paul states in this chapter that God desired to show mercy to the Jews and the Gentiles (vv. 31-32).

This mercy was not shown out of obligation. Neither was it

granted grudgingly. Instead, God's word tells us that God "delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18). Is that not great to know? Does that not speak volumes about the character and nature of the God we serve? Mercy is not something He "has" to extend; it is something He takes delight in extending! Maybe if we understood how God delights in showing mercy, we would not fret and worry so much about whether we are really forgiven or not.

### ***Because His Wisdom Surpasses the Wisdom of the World***

No one is equipped to be God's counselor (v. 34). His ways and judgments are past finding out on our own (v. 33). His wisdom is not "conventional." His Scheme of Redemption would never have been figured out by mortal man, but only through revelation. This way, there is no room for boasting. Rather, all must humble themselves and admit that their salvation was a gift revealed, not a prize that was earned.

Paul said it this way:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor. 1:26-29)

Who by man's wisdom would have ever thought that God's Son would leave heaven and take on flesh and live among us? That He would then be hated and murdered? But through the shedding of His blood on the cross, all those who are spiritually washed in that blood through reenacting His death, burial, and resurrection in baptism would be forgiven and justified in God's eyes?

To the Jews, it was a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles it was foolishness, but to those who trust God, it is the power and wisdom of God and our salvation (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

Brethren, let us stop treating God as a presupposition that we do



not need to discuss. Rather, let us teach and preach more about the character and nature of God. In doing so, we will find ourselves enthralled by His wisdom and grace.

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