

Commentary
on the book of
ROMANS

by
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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 1



APOSTOLIC GREETING

1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, ²(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) ³Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; ⁴And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: ⁵By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: ⁶Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: ⁷To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

The book of Romans is to inspired literature what a unique and exquisite painting is to finer art. It is set within the framework of “*eternal purpose*,” and highlights the means through which we are brought into fruitful affiliation with the Living God. The rich colors of grace and Divine love are accented throughout the book, showing salvation to be the focus of Divine intention.

While “*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable*,” there are Divinely inspired words that are addressed more specifically to faith. These are foundational words, upon which the faith, hope, and love of the saints of God rest. All books of Scripture contain, and revolve around, these utterances. There is correction in God’s word, but that is not

the heart of it. There is also instruction in righteousness—words that speak directly to living godly in this world. Neither are these words the center of Scripture. This situation does not take from their essentiality and seriousness. It is, in my understanding, a cardinal principle of Scripture, that all rebuke, correction, and instruction are designed to bring the believer back to the foundations, where real progress in the faith can be made. For this reason, it is written, “*If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” (Psa 11:3).

A SUMMATION OF THE BOOK

A number of subjects will be addressed in this Epistle, but the Spirit will always bring us back to these foundational considerations.

- † The indispensability of men possessing righteousness.
- † The absolute failure of men to be righteous in their own strength.
- † The provision of righteousness announced in the Gospel.
- † Justification, or the realization of righteousness, comes by faith.
- † A very real union with Jesus Christ is realized in our justification.
- † The “*flesh*,” or what we are by nature, is totally unacceptable, and invariably leads to death, or separation from God.
- † Justification causes the future to become more relevant than the present, thus compelling us to live, and be saved, by hope.
- † The entirety of salvation, from beginning to end, is of the Lord, and is

according to a predetermined purpose.

- † Faith, above all things, is effective before God.
- † The foundational role of Israel in the formation and growth of the church.

All other subjects addressed in Romans are but branches sprouting from the trunk of Divine purpose. **The larger branches always have to do with how God has and is implementing this purpose through Christ Jesus the Lord.** The fulfillment of that purpose depends solely upon the Son of God. Our participation in that glorious purpose depends upon our faith, which alone can take hold of the wondrous message of the Gospel of Christ.

INNER WARFARE

The most extensive teaching concerning the inner warfare experienced by the believer is found in this book (Chapter 7). This wonderful exposition of spiritual life sheds great and indispensable light on the life of faith. You will find it to be a key to spiritual understanding. The Spirit will set the stage for understanding this warfare in the preceding chapters with unusually strong affirmations.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

This book was written while Paul was still a free man (as compared with the prison Epistles). It is generally understood to have been written from Corinth around 58 A.D. By his own admission, Paul had not yet been to Rome when he wrote this foundational Epistle. Yet, he longed to come there to impart *“some spiritual gift”* to them (1:12), be comforted by their mutual faith (1:13), and preach the Gospel to them (1:15). He also declares that he had frequently *“purposed to come”* to them in order that he might have fruit among them (1:12).

His arrival in Rome (Acts 28:16) came approximately three years after this Epistle was written (A.D. 61).

THE ORIGIN OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

We are not provided any record of the origin of this body of believers. There is no evidence that it was founded by an Apostle, which is itself an arresting

consideration. Roman Catholic tradition affirms it was founded by Peter, but there is no evidence of this. Further, Paul would doubtless have mentioned Peter in the Epistle if this were the case.

Yet, this church had become renown throughout the world: *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the*

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whole world” (1:8). Paul refers to several in Rome with words of unusual commendation. *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ . . . my well beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ . . . Mary, who bestowed much labor on us . . . Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me . . . Amplias my beloved in the Lord . . . Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved . . . Apelles approved in Christ . . . them which are of Aristobulus’ household . . . Herodion my kinsman . . . them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord . . . Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labored much in the Lord . . . Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine . . . Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them . . . Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them”* (16:3-15).

An impressive list, indeed! Notice their only real distinction is found in their association with Christ Jesus. That is the thing that made them unique. How wonderful it would be to see an impressive list like that concerning the churches of

our day.

Here was a body of believers, in the midst of a despotic political empire that had no former association with the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, or the Apostles. All of this WITHOUT the apparent presence, at that time, of an Apostle! There were *“strangers of Rome”* present at the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). We know from Acts 18:2, that Aquila and Priscilla had been *e x p e l l e d* from Rome with other Jews. How sparse our knowledge of this body of believers.

A Great Testimonial

The *“beloved of God”* in Rome, *“called to be saints,”* stand as a testimony to what the Lord can do. There was no Apostolic effort to found the church. The congregation in Jerusalem did not plan a strategy to establish a church in this citadel of paganism—around 1,200 miles away. Yet this church was raised up—and a significant one at that!

The worth of a church is not determined by its founder, but by its faith. Those who are sectarian in spirit could not have received the church at Rome, because it was not founded by the Apostles. But Paul, who had the Spirit of Christ, received them as brethren, acknowledging the unusual number and quality of believers among them.

PURPOSE FOR WRITING

The objectives realized by this marvelous Epistle are, in my perception, several. I will only mention them here, developing them further as we proceed with an exposition of the book. Each of these matters is carefully expounded in the power of the Holy Spirit, and are central in Apostolic doctrine. It is difficult to conceive of a more weighty presentation of the Good News.

- † The **meaning** of the Gospel of Christ.
- † The relationship of the Gospel to **the Law**.
- † The relationship of the Gospel to **the Prophets**.
- † The relationship of the Gospel to **the universal need of humanity**.

THE MAN GOD USES

Rom 1:1 **Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.**

While this appears to be a somewhat standard introduction, there are precious jewels of truth to be found in it. **Any word of Scripture must be addressed as a profitable word from God.**

PAUL

Throughout Divine history, there have been men who have so distinguished themselves in their service to God, that their names have been sanctified. It is, after all, the person who makes the name, and not the name who makes the person.

Think of the renowned names of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Job, Joseph, David, Peter, John, and others. Who can forget such names as Sarah, Miriam, Rahab, Deborah, Mary, and Elizabeth. Their faith and manner of life made those names significant to the entire world. Others have brought reproach upon names through their unbelief and sin—people like Cain, Nimrod, Achan, Korah, Herod, and Judas. The power of character can thus be seen—power to cause honor or reproach to be brought upon a name.

The name “Paul” has been recognized by saints and sinners alike from the beginning of his life in Christ Jesus. The distinction given to that name is owing to his faith, and the aggressive manner in which he served the Lord Jesus Christ. This name is mentioned no less than 156 times in Scripture, and every single time it refers to the same individual.

Formerly, Paul was known as “Saul, of Tarsus” (Acts 9:11). The name “Saul” means “Desired,”^{Strong’s} certainly befitting of one so eagerly sought by the Lord Jesus Himself. Precisely when he began to be known exclusively as Paul is not clear. The first reference to the Apostle of the Gentiles as “Paul” is found in Acts 13:9, around A.D. 46, or nine years after his conversion. “Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,)” From that point on, he is referred to as “Paul.” The only reference

to “Saul” after that is when Paul recounts the appearance of Jesus to him in his call to the apostleship (Acts 22:7,13,14).

The name “Paul” means “Small,” or “Little.”^{Strong’s} By way of comparison, when Samuel upbraided king Saul for his flagrant disobedience, he referred to the time when he was in God’s favor. “When thou wast LITTLE in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?” (1 Sam 15:17). In the case of Paul, his commendable smallness was the latter part of his life, as compared with king Saul, whose latter life was his worst time. Paul’s smallness consisted of his renunciation of everything that was gain to him. He did this in order to “win Christ” and be “found in Him not having a righteousness” of his own (Phil 3:7-14). Everywhere his name is mentioned, his

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zeal for the Lord is what comes to mind.

A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

The distinguishing trait he first mentions is that of being Christ’s “servant.” The meaning of this word has been dulled in our time by thoughtless use. The word “slave” is more appropriate, carrying the real meaning of the word to our generation. It describes a person whose sole existence is wrapped up in carrying out the will of someone else. Unquestioning obedience identifies the slave, and so it was with the Apostle Paul. He knew nothing of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” When it came to life in this world, he chose death to life,

servitude to liberty, and the pursuit of God’s will to a quest for happiness.

CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE

In the Kingdom of God, key positions are assigned. This is evident throughout Scripture, and is quite different from an institutional approach to serving the Lord. Think of the people God chose, and whose role in history was assigned. Noah (Gen 6:8), Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Joseph (Psa 105:17-21), Moses (Ex 3:4-10), Aaron (Heb 5:4), David (), the Prophets (Amos 2:11), John the Baptist (John 1:6), and the Apostles (John 15:16). None of them volunteered for their office, or gained it by pursuing a “career path.” The supreme example, as always, is that of our Lord Himself. It is said of Him, “And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to day have I begotten thee. As He saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb 5:4-6). Precisely the same procedure was involved in Paul becoming an “Apostle.” He was CALLED to be one.

It is no different to this very day. We are told preachers cannot preach “except they be sent” (Rom 10:15). Elders are made overseers by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28).

Evangelists, pastors and teachers are gifts from Christ, not careers (Eph 4:11). Every member is strategically placed in Christ’s body. As it is written, “But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired”^{NASB} (1 Cor 12:18,28). Spiritual gifts are distributed according to God’s will (1 Cor 12:11). The Word of God knows nothing of highly polished professional ministers, carrying about with them the credentials of this world. In the Kingdom of our God and His Christ, the placement of God is the individual’s credential, or authorization.

This is precisely why Paul says “CALLED to be an Apostle.” He does not

appeal to self-developed expertise, professional training, or any natural gifts and abilities. He makes no appeal to his instruction by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He is writing to them in an appointed role, and that is sufficient reason to receive what he declares. The validation of his ministry will be confirmed in the message he delivers, and its power upon those receiving it..

SEPARATED UNTO THE GOSPEL

God-given gifts and abilities are to be employed in His work, and His alone. An Apostle was not called to be a politician, business man, or academic scholar. Paul was “*set apart for the gospel of God.*”^{NASB} By this, he means he was detached from the world in order to declare and expound

the “*Gospel of God.*”

And why is the Gospel here called “*the Gospel of God?*” Is this not a strange sound in our day? Of course, this is not the only place such an expression is used. At least seven times the Spirit refers to “*the Gospel of God*” (Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet 4:17)^{KJV}. Here is a term rarely heard in our day.

The Gospel is the proclamation of what God the Father has accomplished through Jesus Christ His “*only begotten Son.*” Jesus did the Father’s will (John 5:30), reconciling the world unto Him (Rom 5:10). The Gospel if most properly called, “*The Gospel of God.*” It is the good news of His satisfaction, and is therefore

called “*the glorious gospel of the blessed God*” (1 Tim 1:11).

Being “*separated to the Gospel of God,*” that is where Paul’s expertise was found—and how clearly that is seen in his writings. Although he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, Paul makes not a solitary reference to anything that notable Jewish teacher communicated. He was separated unto the “*Gospel of God.*” Although himself a Roman citizen, and able to appeal to judicial protocol (Acts 22:25-29; 25:11), he provides not a single syllable about governmental issues, trends, or advances. He was “*separated unto the Gospel of God.*” His ministry was in strict comportment with his calling. In keeping with what is required of stewards, he was “*faithful*” (1 Cor 4:2).

A GOSPEL THAT WAS PROMISED

“*(Which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,)*” The Apostle is most careful to distinguish what he proclaims from all other gospels; i.e., “*another gospel*” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). Right here we soar high above contemporary religion. Rarely, if ever, will one hear a correlation made between the Gospel of God, or the Gospel of Christ, and the holy Prophets. But this a repeated association made by the Holy Spirit.

HE PROMISED by HIS PROPHETS

From one perspective, the whole matter of salvation in Christ Jesus is referred to as “*the promise.*” This is particularly true when it is considered from the vantage of the New Covenant, which is the pledge, or basis, of our salvation.

ABRAHAM

Three times in the fourth chapter of Romans, what is experienced in Christ Jesus is called “*the promise*” (Rom 4:13,14,16). The focus of that passage is the blessing of **righteousness by faith**, as revealed in Abraham, “*who is the father of us all.*” In him we find the example of having faith, and the response of God to that faith.

The third chapter of Galatians also

refers to the Abrahamic promise, equating it with the New Covenant. Five times in that chapter, the Spirit refers to “*the promise*” (Gal 3:14,17,19,22,29). In that passage, “*the promise*” is the announcement that God would bless the world through the Seed of Abraham. In relation to our text, this was “*the Gospel of God which He had promised before by His prophets.*” Abraham, by Divine definition, was “*a prophet.*” In fact, the word “*prophet*” is first applied to Abraham (Gen 20:7), which is a most arresting consideration.

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THE PROPHETS

From the very beginning, the Gospel was identified with the message of the

prophets. When Jesus first began to preach, announcing His mission, He said He was doing what Isaiah the Prophet had foretold (Luke 4:18-19). On the day of Pentecost, Peter distinguished both the happenings of the day and his unique message with the prophets (Acts 2:16,30). Throughout the book of Acts, the Gospel was consistently said to be according to the words of the holy Prophets. “*All the Prophets . . . have likewise foretold of these days*” (Acts 3:24). “*To Him give all the Prophets witness*” (Acts 10:43). “*And to this agree the words of the Prophets*” (Acts 15:15). Paul confessed, “*I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come*” (Acts 26:22). From morning until evening he “*expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the Prophets*” (Acts 28:23). Peter affirmed the salvation declared in the Gospel had been announced beforehand by **the Prophets** (1 Pet 1:10). There is no question about this.

The Lord Jesus Himself

As the “*Author of eternal salvation*” (Heb 5:9), the Lord Jesus Himself was the

theme of the Prophets. His birth (Matt 2:6; Mic 5:2), life (Lk 2:40; Isa 53:2), ministry (Lk 4:18-19; Isa 62:1-3), death (1 Pet 2:24; Isa 53:4-6), resurrection (Acts 2:27; Psa 49:15), ascension (Eph 4:8; Psa 68:18), and high priestly ministry (Heb 5:6; Psa 110:4), were foretold by the Prophets. Thus the heart of the Gospel, the Son of God, was declared by the Prophets.

The Nature of Salvation

The nature of salvation was also prophesied by **the Prophets**. A genuine change would be wrought in man. A new character would be given that would compel the individual to obey God by preference. A sampling of these wonderful promises will suffice to confirm this point.

- † Men would receive understanding—the *“eyes of the blind will be opened.”*
- † The ability to discern the voice and direction of the Lord—*“the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.”*
- † The debilitating effects of sin would be overcome—*“the lame man leap as an hart.”*
- † Acceptable praise would be offered by the people—*“the tongue of the dumb will sing.”*
- † Where no awareness of God was found, an abundance of revelation and refreshment would break forth—*“for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”*
- † The refreshment would be consistent, and not sporadic—*“And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.”*
- † A way of access to God would be made for those rescued from the world—*“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness.”*
- † Good tidings would be proclaimed to the meek.
- † The brokenhearted would be healed.
- † Liberty would be announced to the captives.
- † The prison in which bound prisoners were confined would be opened.
- † A time of Divine acceptance would be announced.
- † A Divine exchange program would be inaugurated: beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.
- † The waste places of life would be

rebuilt.

- † A new kind of covenant would be made in which God’s laws would be put into men’s inward parts and written on their minds, they would all know the Lord, and iniquity would be remembered no more.
- † Thorough cleansing and sanctification would be realized.
- † A new heart and a new spirit would be given to those blessed by God.
- † The stony and rebellious heart would be removed.
- † God’s Spirit would be put within men, causing them to walk in His statutes, keep His judgments, and do them. (Isa 35:4-9; 61:1-4; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:25-27).

A LITTLE KNOWN APPROACH

Today, this approach to Jesus has been placed to the side in preference of answering people’s perceived needs. Little is known of Jesus Christ and His great salvation because of a fundamental ignorance of prophets. Even though the church is *“built upon the foundation of Apostles and Prophets,”* the professed church has grossly neglected those prophets. This neglect has contributed to the extensive spiritual ignorance that prevails among professed Christians. The result has been the development of *“another Jesus”* bearing little resemblance to the One foretold by the Prophets. The *“other Jesus”* is not only proclaimed by perceived cults, but in many churches that are considered to be fundamental, orthodox, and conservative.

A thorough knowledge of the Prophets is certainly not essential to receiving Christ and obeying the Gospel, and we should not present this subject as though it were. But there is more to the life of faith than a beginning. If believers intend to successfully navigate through the wilderness of this life, the Messiah foretold by the Prophets must not be strange to them. Gentile churches were reminded of the words of the Prophets (Rom 3:21; 16:26; Eph 2:20; 3:5), and so must the churches of our time.

The message of the Prophets serves as the great confirming evidence of valid spiritual experience. Their prophecies are a sort of spiritual encyclopedia, defining what happens when a person is *“born again.”* Both the nature of the New Covenant and those within it are described in most remarkable detail. Any view of life in Christ that does not stand the test of the Prophets is not true, and is therefore not on the proper foundation.

The Apostles opened up what the Prophets foretold. By Divine determination, their doctrine lays down a foundation for our faith. The proper interpretation of experience will come through an understanding of the Prophets. When what they affirmed would happen, occurs in you—and you know it—confidence will erupt like a spring of everlasting life in your heart.

HOLY SCRIPTURES

With great deliberation, the Holy Spirit moves us away from human philosophy and opinion. There was a time in history when the truth of God was passed along among men by word of

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mouth. There are at least two things that can be said of those times. First, the scope of revealed truth was very narrow. Second, it was known among relatively few people. Even the record of great revelations and prophecies came long after their origination.

So far as Scripture is concerned, Moses is declared as the first writer (Lk 16:29; 24:27,44; John 1:45; 5:46-47). The whole of Scripture prior to Jesus is referred to as *“Moses and the Prophets”* (Acts 26:22; 28:23). Again, Jesus referred to the whole of pre-Apostolic Scripture as *“in the law of Moses, and in the*

prophets, and in the psalms” (Lk 24:44).

THE FIRST PROPHECY

The first prophecy of Scriptural record is that of Enoch, “*the seventh from Adam*” (Jude 14). It is generally understood that his prophesy was handed down by word of mouth rather than by writing—a most remarkable thing of itself. There is a view of the Jude text that states it was taken from the Apocryphal “Book of Enoch.” There is, however, no satisfactory support for this view.

However a person chooses to consider this quotation from Enoch, its inclusion in Scripture is a rich commentary on how God keeps His word in tact and pure. Here is the most ancient prophecy spoken by a man. It was uttered over 2,900 years before Jesus was born.

If God kept the word of Enoch intact without it being written, how much more will He maintain the integrity of Scripture—written truth inspired by Him. While Enoch undoubtedly prophesied of the coming of the flood, Jude applies his word to the second coming of the Lord. “*Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him*” (Jude 14-15). Therein is again confirmed that Jesus is the locus of all Scripture.

INTEGRITY OF SCRIPTURE ASSUMED

Thus, in saying the Gospel of God was according to the Holy Scriptures, the Spirit has established their absolute integrity. If there was any doubt whatsoever about the truth of Scripture, our faith could not be founded upon what if written therein. The higher critics, therefore, who have caused men to question the accuracy of Scripture have attacked our faith. They are not qualified to be the critic of Scripture. However, Scripture shall be their critic in the day of judgment. As Jesus said, “*the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48).

It is no wonder that Paul said of the “*holy Scriptures,*” “*which are able to*

make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Contained within the framework of Scripture—particularly the writings of the holy prophets, are promises of a proclamation that would be good news—“*glad tidings of good things*” (Rom 10:15).

THE CENTRALITY OF SCRIPTURE

In this day of distorted theological emphasis, the centrality of Scripture must again be affirmed. These days more attention is being paid to HOW it is said rather WHAT is said. Human programs have supplanted Divine promises, and “*science falsely so called*” has upstaged holy Scripture, given by inspiration of God. Even among professing preachers, there is an unhesitating acknowledgment of a lack of acquaintance with Scripture. The condition tragic beyond description, yielding insipid and powerless followers.

The “Gospel of God”—the good news of the “*wonderful works of God*” (Acts 1:11)—is not according to human logic. Nor, indeed, is it according to self-perceived, or institutionally dictated, human needs or desires. It is according to what God “*promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.*”

The righteousness of God, now given to men upon the basis of their faith, was “*witnessed by the law and the prophets*” (Rom 3:21). The revelation of the Gospel mystery “*now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets*” (Rom 16:26). Jesus died and was raised the third day “*according to the Scripture*” (1 Cor 15:3-4).

In a classic demonstration of the truth of Scripture, and because it is living, the Spirit assigns personality to it. “*The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you”*” (Gal 3:8). And again,

“*the Scripture hath concluded all under sin*” (Gal 3:22). And again, “*Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded*” (1 Pet 2:6).

What will be declared in the book of Romans is in strict accord with the word of the Prophets in the Scriptures. Do not look for new and novel teachings, like those confused Athenians (Acts 17:21). Rather, there will be a powerful

In this day of distorted theological emphasis, the centrality of Scripture must again be affirmed. These days more attention is being paid to HOW it is said rather WHAT is said. Human programs have supplanted Divine promises, and “science falsely so called” has upstaged holy Scripture, given by inspiration of God.

proclamation of the message for which the Prophets prepared us. If the holy Prophets did not foretell the gospel that is being preached, it may be discarded as spurious and powerless.

Every true proclaimer of the Gospel can say with Paul, “*Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come . . .*” (Acts 26:22). By so doing, men can be encouraged to “*search the Scriptures*” to confirm whether the Gospel being heard is really true (Acts 17:11).

If it were required of every professed preacher to declare what the prophets declared was coming, their ranks would quickly be thinned out. However, this is what God requires, and He will hold every preacher accountable for properly presenting Christ Jesus and salvation.

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.” The identity of the Gospel is not taken for granted. The Holy Spirit makes the proper Gospel associations to those who have already heard, believed, and obeyed it. The criticality of the Gospel to the walk of faith necessitates these continual associations. Already the Spirit has reminded us the true Gospel is the one promised by the Prophets. If there is no correlation between the gospel embraced and the one promised by the Prophets, *“another Gospel”* has been espoused. Now the text goes to the very heart of the Gospel—the spirit of the message. Just as surely as a person has a heart, or central part, so does the Gospel have a pivotal point.

CONCERNING HIS SON

The Gospel is fundamentally about the Son of God—it is the Gospel *“concerning His Son.”* Everything about the Gospel hinges upon the Lord Jesus Christ. When it reveals the righteousness of God (Rom 1:17), it does so through the proclamation of the Son. If the wrath of God is made known in the Gospel (Rom 1:18), it is by beholding the cursing of the Son for the sake of fallen man (Gal 3:13). The Gospel is about the Son of God, sent to be the Savior of the world.

The basic view of the Savior is that He is *“the Son of God”*—the *“only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). As a believer, you are **A** son of God (Rom 8:14,19; Phil 2:15; 1 John 3:1-2). Jesus Christ is **“THE** Son of God” (Matt 14:33; Lk 1:35; John 1:34). In his gospel, Mark made this clear: *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, THE Son of God”* (Mk 1:1).

In this identity—*“His Son”*—the Spirit is affirming that Jesus came into the world to perform *“the will of the Father”* (John 5:30). He was begotten by the Spirit of God to fulfill the will of God. He came into the world to save the world because that was the purpose of the Father. At the very heart of the Gospel, therefore, is the

proclamation of the Son of God who came to accomplish the will of God in our behalf.

JESUS CHRIST

The expression *“Jesus Christ”* refers to the Son’s ministry as a Man.

JESUS

“Jesus” is His human name, and emphasizes what He came to do. When the Savior was born, the angel of the Lord told both Mary and Joseph His name was to be called Jesus. *“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name JESUS . . . Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins”* (Lk 1:31; Matt 1:10-21). In obedience to this word, it is said of Joseph,

The Gospel concerns Christ’s humanity as it relates to our salvation. It spends no time whatsoever addressing novel matters about His life that have no immediate relevance to our salvation.

“and he called His name JESUS” (Mt 1:25).

The name *“Jesus”* is the Greek equivalent of Joshua, who is referenced in Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8. The name *“Jesus”* appropriately means *“the Lord saves.”* This name was not unique to Jesus, but was common among the Jews. Thus we read of *“Jesus, which is called Justus”* (Col 4:11). It is also the Greek equivalent of Joshua (Heb 4:8). However, our Lord has ascribed such greatness to the name, that throughout the world, wherever it is heard, HE is remembered.

Among men, Jesus has no peers. He is

“THE Man” (1 Tim 2:5), *“the SECOND Man”* (1 Cor 15:47), and the *“LAST Adam”* (1 Cor 15:45). The Gospel concerns Christ’s humanity as it relates to our salvation. It spends no time whatsoever addressing novel matters about His life that have no immediate relevance to our salvation. No wonder it is written, *“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”* (Rev 19:10).

CHRIST

“Christ” means *“anointed one”*—in this case, THE anointed one. Others have been anointed: i.e. Aaron (Ex 29:7), Saul (1 Sam 9:16), David (1 Sam 16:12), and Solomon (1 Kgs 1:34)—but none of them were *“THE Christ.”* That honor belongs to the Lord Jesus alone. While men anointed the ones mentioned before, God the Father anointed Jesus. As it is written, *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power”* ^{NKJV} (Acts 10:38). Again, it is said of Him, *“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows”* (Heb 1:9).

As *“the Lord’s Christ”* (Lk 2:26), Jesus was appointed to by Himself resolve the dilemma of sin. Upon the basis of His vicarious, or substitutionary, death those who believe on Him would be released from both the guilt and power of sin. Thus, when Jesus began His ministry, He declared this word was fulfilled in Him: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord”* (Lk 4:18-19).

The Gospel particularly opens up that marvelous announcement. It declares we are living in a time when God will accept men, absolving them of guilt, purifying their hearts, and making them *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). All of this is upon the firm foundation of the

work of *“THE CHRIST, the Son of the living God”* (Matt 16:16-18).

As *“the Christ,”* Jesus is the only Man truly and fully recognized by God. Upon Him, and Him alone, hangs the destiny of all men. That is the precise teaching of Romans 5:15-21.

OUR LORD

To remove any question concerning the relevancy of the Person of the Gospel, the Spirit adds He is *“OUR Lord.”* Right here, it is important to deal with a bit of theological haberdashery that has become fashionable. You have no doubt heard people say men should “make Jesus their Lord.” Others have said, “You have made Him your Savior, now make Him your Lord.”

No such language or concept can be found in the Word of God. Let it be clear that it is not possible for Jesus to be Savior and not Lord—in ANY sense. You have no role whatsoever in making Jesus Lord. The Spirit has spoken expressly on this matter. *“God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36). Further, *“He is Lord of all”* (Acts 10:36), whether men choose to accept Him in that capacity or not.

Secondly, everywhere the terms *“Lord”* and *“Savior”* are ascribed to Jesus, “Lord” is either used first, or clarifies Who the Savior is. Concerning the latter, when Jesus was born, the shepherds were told, *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which IS Christ the Lord”* (Lk 2:11). And again, *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, THE Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil 3:20). And again, *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope”* (1 Tim 1:1). In all other instances, *“Lord”* is always before *“Savior”* (Tit 1:4; 2 Pet 1:11; 2:20; 3:2,18).

The point is that Christ Jesus cannot be compartmentalized. He cannot be received partially, or only in one of His capacities. It is not possible to experience Him as Savior, but not as Lord. The very notion is an absurdity. Men must flee from such approaches to the Savior, for

they dull the conscience and cause spiritual sleep to descend upon the soul.

SEED OF DAVID

Jesus is *“the Seed”* of the *“woman”* (Gen 3:15), the *“Seed”* of *“Abraham”* (Gal 3:16), and *“the Seed of David”* (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8). Each of them emphasize an aspect of His humanity.

† Because deliverance from sin must be accomplished by someone partaking of the human nature, Jesus is called the

The Lord Jesus Christ cannot be received partially, or only in one of His capacities. It is not possible to experience Him as Savior, but not as Lord. The very notion is an absurdity.

Seed of the woman—one *“made of a woman, made under the law”* (Gal 4:4).

† Because He is the solitary One through whom the world would be blessed, He is called Abraham’s Seed, to whom the promises were made (Gal 3:16; Heb 2:16).

† Because He would accomplish salvation through a righteous rule, or reign, He is called *“the Seed of David.”* In this case, the Lord became the Savior, and the Savior was exalted to be the Lord (Acts 2:36; Phil 2:9-10).

Here is a wonderful aspect of redemptive truth that appears to be scarcely known. Our salvation is being brought to its completion by a reigning King. He is presently ruling *“in the midst of His enemies”* (Psa 110:2), bringing *“many sons to glory”* right through the enemy’s territory (Heb 2:10).

All of this is the fulfillment of God’s ancient promise to David, the man after His own heart. *“I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever”* (2 Sam 7:12-13). **The Psalms** also confirm this promise: *“The LORD*

hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne” (Psa 132:11).

Isaiah also declared it: *“And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness”* (Isa 16:5).

Jeremiah proclaimed this truth: *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper; and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”* (Jer 23:5-6).

Ezekiel announced it: *“And I will set up one shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My Servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and My Servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it”* (Ezek 34:23-24).

Jesus is pointedly declared to be *“the Son of David”* (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 15:22). He is the promised *“Seed,”* or Offspring, that would reign forever. Peter declared the fulfillment of this promise on the day of Pentecost: *“Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption”* (Acts 2:30-31). Death was the vassal of Jesus, serving His purpose. When His death had met the Divine requirement, Jesus struck it down to the ground in an act of triumph.

Thus the promise of an everlasting kingdom, administered in righteousness by the Offspring of David, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The nature of salvation demands such a King. The challenges of this great salvation are of such magnitude men cannot manage them. As an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, Paul was appointed to declare and expound this truth. He will this it with power in this very Epistle, blessing our hearts, strengthening our faith, and anchoring our hope.

THE GREAT CONFIRMING WORK

“And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Again, the focus is still on *“the Gospel of God,”* to which Paul was separated. That Gospel was foretold by the prophets. It concerns the Son of God, who is the Man Jesus, who is God’s anointed One, and our Lord. He is also the fulfillment of God’s promise to David, that He would raise up someone to seat on his throne forever. I cannot proceed further without noting that none of these things are given preeminence in the institutional church. All of them are areas of theological weakness in the average congregation. This situation, however, can be resolved by returning to Christ-centered preaching and teaching.

The obscurity of the Son of God in much preaching is staggering to consider. It is, in my judgment the reason for such a high level of spiritual sterility within the professed church.

DECLARED TO BE

In salvation, **declaration** takes the precedence over explanation. The power of God is channeled through the **proclamation** of the Gospel, which is itself *“the power of God unto salvation”* (Rom 1:16).

The Gospel of God is an **affirmation** of Divine accomplishments. It announces amnesty, proclaims propitiation, and reports reconciliation. All of this centers in God’s appointed **Servant**, the Lord Jesus Christ (Isa 42:1; 49:9; 52:13; Zech 3:8; Matt 12:18).

WITH POWER

In order for this salvation to be fully accomplished, not only was a basis required, but a powerful reigning King also. Upon the ground of the accomplished reconciliation and satisfaction of God, Jesus was granted *“all power in heaven and earth”* to bring the sons home to glory. That is what is required to convey us safely through the morass of sin and this *“present evil world.”*

Now, through the Gospel, Jesus Christ is proclaimed to be the Son of God **“WITH**

POWER”—all power in heaven and earth. While Divine power will be the means through which His enemies become His *“footstool”* (Matt 22:44; Acts 2:35; Heb 1:13; 10:13), that is not the focus of this text. The *“power”* given to Him is in order to the justification, sanctification, and glorification of those believing in Him. Justification refers to the Divine work whereby sinners are acquitted of their sin, cleansed of its guilt and power, and given the very righteousness of God. Sanctification is the process whereby believers are separated from the power of sin, and brought into conformity to the image of Christ Jesus. Glorification is the grand culmination of salvation in which perfect spotlessness and blamelessness are achieved, and every vestige of sin and the sinful nature removed from us—when we will *“be like Him.”*

The obscurity of the Son of God in much preaching is staggering to consider. It is, in my judgment the reason for such a high level of spiritual sterility within the professed church.

Now it takes power, Divine power, to accomplish such a large work! The *“Gospel of God”* announces that Jesus Christ has been given that power. He has been given to the church in this marvelous capacity: *“far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything FOR the church”*^{NIV} (Eph 1:21-22). The extent of His dominion exceeds our abilities of comprehension. Elsewhere the Spirit says of His exaltation, *“Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him”* (1 Pet 3:22). There is no power, or authority, that is not subject to Him—whether it is for us or against us.

Both our enemies and the multitudes of holy angels that are appointed to minister to us, bow to Him.

In a remarkable declaration of the extent of Christ’s authority, it is affirmed that there is a single personality that is NOT subject to Him. It is the Father Himself, Who has subjected all things to the Son. *“Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under Him, it is clear that THIS DOES NOT INCLUDE GOD, who put everything under Christ”*^{NIV} (1 Cor 15:27).

It is no wonder, therefore, that such wonderful promises are given to those who believe on Jesus—or trust wholly in Him. *“Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life . . . He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life . . . he that believeth on me shall never thirst . . . he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live . . . whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness . . . whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins . . . whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed . . . he that believeth on him shall not be confounded . . . Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”* (John 3:15,16; 3:36; 11:25; 12:46; Acts 10:43; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6; 1 John 5:5).

While such texts clearly imply the necessity of believing, that is not their focus. The concentration of such passages is the RESULT of believing—the outcome of unreservedly replying on the Son of God. The reason for the strength of these promises is the power of the Savior. Because He is the *“Son of God WITH POWER,”* we may trust implicitly in these Divine commitments. How blessed, indeed, is the person who trusts in Christ!

SPIRIT OF HOLINESS

The declaration that Jesus is the Son of God with power is *“according to the Spirit of holiness.”* This is a unique phrase, and conducive to much exploration. Most versions read the same

way (NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB). The NIV reads, *“Who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God.”*

“The Spirit of holiness” refers to Christ’s fundamental nature. Although the Holy Spirit played a prominent role in the resurrection of Christ, it is Christ’s own Spirit that is the focus of this verse. Peter preached this truth with great power on the day of Pentecost, opening it to our understanding. He confirmed that Christ could not be retained by the grave—it was simply not possible. This is owing to the superiority of holiness. Thus Peter proclaimed, *“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE THAT HE SHOULD BE HOLDEN OF IT. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (hades, or abode for the spirit), neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption (the body, in the grave)”* (Acts 2:24-27).

Thus, though Christ *“was crucified through weakness, yet He liveth by the power of God”* (2 Cor 13:4). Because He was absolutely holy and sinless, death could hold neither His Spirit nor His body. Thus, we have a Savior who is both all-powerful and all-holy!

THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Christ confirmed the Father’s acceptance of His death for the transgressors. The resurrection of Jesus was the MEANS by which He was declared to be the *“Son of God with power.”*

Salvation hinged upon three great accomplishments of Christ: His death, resurrection, and intercession. The Spirit reasons with us in this manner. *“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea RATHER, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us”* (Rom 8:34).

The same truth is powerfully affirmed in the ninth chapter of Hebrews. *“For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us (intercession) . . . but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (death) . . . so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him (resurrected Christ returning for us)”* (9:24,26,28).

The centrality of Christ’s resurrection

Because He was absolutely holy and sinless, death could hold neither His Spirit nor His body. Thus, we have a Savior who is both all-powerful and all-holy!

is declared in a number of ways.

- † Through it Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom 1:4).
- † We have been born again to a living hope through Christ’s resurrection (1 Pet 1:3).
- † Our baptism obtained its effectiveness through Christ’s resurrection (1 Pet 3:21).
- † The imputation of righteousness upon the basis of our faith is owing to our Lord’s resurrection (Rom 4:24).
- † Christ’s resurrection is the Divine pledge that we also will be raised from the dead (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14).
- † In Christ’s resurrection, we have also been raised up to sit with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:5-6).
- † Christ’s resurrection confirms those trusting in Him have been delivered

from the wrath that is coming (1 Thess 1:10).

- † Jesus was raised in order that we might be justified (Rom 4:25).
- † The power devoted to those in Christ Jesus is the very power that raised Him from the dead (Eph 1:19-20).

It is no wonder, therefore, that such a great emphasis is placed on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Gospel emphasis—the heart and core of *“the Gospel of God.”* Seeing this, the Apostle abandoned all competing pursuits that he might know Christ *“and the power of His resurrection”* (Phil 3:10).

In the resurrected Christ we not only find Divine confirmation that he is the Son of God, we also find power for living. It is a power that cannot be grasped without the eyes of our understanding being opened by God—but God is willing to do open the eyes of our understanding that we may see *“the exceeding greatness of the power that is toward us who believe”* (Eph 1:15-19). God is *“able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us”* (Eph 3:20).

One further thing should be noted on the matter of Christ’s resurrection. **The ONLY proof we have of it is the testimony of the Gospel.** The evidence of it has been withdrawn from the arena of flesh and blood. Those who say they demand tangible evidence before they will believe are in great error. You may recall that Thomas made this foolish assertion: *“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). Confronted with the living Christ, he quickly recanted on this demand, saying, *“My Lord and my God.”* Jesus gave a telling reply to the confession of Thomas—one to which we all do well to take heed. *“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed”* (John 20:28-29). Notice, Jesus conferred a blessing on those who *“have not seen, and yet have believed.”* He did NOT, however, confer a blessing upon Thomas who only believed after he had

seen! Taken seriously, this account is conducive to great sobriety. As well, it is devastating to many attempts to prove the authenticity of Scripture by physical evidence.

Thus the Spirit anchors our faith to a risen, yet unseen, Christ. He points us to the “*Gospel of God*” for proof of the matter—a testimony impregnated with Divine power! He tells us God Himself has

declared Jesus Christ is His Son “*with power.*” The ONLY proof of that indispensable reality is the word of the Lord. But, as all real believers know, that is really all the proof we require!

WHAT AND WHY

“By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name.” The Spirit never leaves us in the hands of human reasoning. The truth of God is consistently declared in such a manner as to encourage faith and trust in God. Although Paul has already affirmed his Apostleship, and the focus of it, he now elaborates on it. In doing this, he is, through the Spirit, drawing attention to the purpose of His Apostleship, rather than to the Apostleship itself.

This, of course, is not characteristic of the wisdom of this world. Among men, office is more frequently exalted above function, bringing glory to men. But in God’s Kingdom, function is exalted above office, so that the office is nothing unless the function is carried out. Were this single verity to be seen within the professed church, it would radically alter its view of preachers, elders, evangelists, deacons, etc. Paul had been called to DO something, not merely to fill a formal office. In this very Epistle, we will find him effectively doing what he was called to do.

GRACE AND APOSTLESHIP

First Paul has summarized the Gospel for us, showing it to have originated with God, and proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he will authenticate his role in the Kingdom by showing its relationship to that Gospel. If what we do does not directly interface with “*the Gospel of God,*” it has no relevance in the Kingdom of God.

The order of the gifts received is important. First grace, then Apostleship. First Divine favor, then ministry. Grace is given to us to fulfill our ministry, not as a reward for performing it. In this, we are

to understand that being called to the Apostleship was owing to the grace of God. By grace, Paul was an Apostle. That, of course, is how anyone comes to be a laborer together with God. The understanding of this contributes significantly to a faithful and fruitful ministry. A failure to perceive it causes one to trust in human wisdom and rely

In the final analysis, grace is a stewardship, given to men in order that they might work together with God. Everyone in the body of Christ receives grace—grace to do something. They are responsible for fulfilling their role to the glory of God.

upon the flesh.

When “*received,*” grace is always productive. It is never an end of itself, but the Divinely appointed means to an ordained end. It is the means through which we are saved by faith (Eph 2:5-8). “*Everlasting consolation and good hope*” also come “*through grace*” (2 Thess 2:16).

As Paul indicates in this passage, he was given grace to do something. Elsewhere he states the grace of God made him a skillful master-builder, who could lay a good foundation (1 Cor 3:10). Because of grace, he “*labored more abundantly*” than the other apostles (1 Cor 15:10). His impeccably holy life was also owing to the grace of God (2 Cor 1:12). Grace made the Apostle what he was, and he knew it. That is a blessing.

In the final analysis, grace is a stewardship, given to men in order that they might work together with God. Everyone in the body of Christ receives grace—grace to do something. They are responsible for fulfilling their role to the glory of God. Peter states it this way. “*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*” (1 Pet 4:10).

The grace of God is “*manifold,*” or multifarious and diversified, because that is the nature of God’s work. While there are common graces found among God’s people—traits that are to be found in us all—there are also unique ministries. Paul will now elaborate upon his own ministry—the “*Apostleship.*” It was a ministry given to him by the grace of God, and was given in strict accord with the Divine agenda. **The grace of God will not undergird a humanly conceived agenda.**

Neither will the Lord assign a ministry without providing grace to fulfill it. It is a blessed condition when these two matters are perceived with some degree of clarity.

FOR OBEDIENCE

The stated objective of the Paul’s “*Apostleship*” was “*for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name.*” This is an intriguing phrase, and conducive to much meditation. Other versions read, “*to bring about the obedience of faith*” (NASB). “*To the obedience that comes from faith*” (NIV). Both the etymological structure and the doctrine of this verse confirm it means “*the obedience that springs from faith*”^{Robertson}. **Faith is the living spring from which all valid response to God issues.** It is the sanctifying factor in all Kingdom labor. “*Without faith, it is impossible to please*” God (Heb 11:6).

That is a Scriptural axiom that must never be allowed to dim in our understanding.

Later in this Epistle, the Spirit will refer to this same truth. He will state that God's eternal purpose *"was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH"* (Rom 16:26). In the Greek text, the wording is precisely the same, with not a single variation: εἰς ὑπακοήν πίστεως. The meaning here is that **Paul's Apostleship was to this intent, or for this objective: that men might render obedience to God because they believed the Gospel.** Someone has well said of faith, "Faith is a commanding principle exacting obedience to itself." ^{J. Barmy}

UNLIKE OBEDIENCE UNDER THE LAW

This is totally unlike the obedience that was common under the Law. That was an obedience of mere routine. The reason for this circumstance was owing to at least two things.

First, the people did not have a heart for obedience. At the foot of Sinai, when they declared in fear they would do all God had commanded, the Lord gave His response to Moses—and it is a telling one. *"I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"* (Deut 5:28-29). Their hearts were unrenewed, and therefore their obedience was flawed to the core. Law, spoken from heaven, could not effect a change in the heart of the people. Therefore, the Lord declares their intentions were good, but they did not have the capacity to fully do what God required of them.

Second, the Law was not an economy of faith. It did not require faith, and was not established on faith. This is not a matter of conjecture, but of express

revelation. *"The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, The man who does these things will live by them"* (Gal 3:12). The Law, or First Covenant, depended wholly upon doing. Life was promised to the one who thoroughly kept the Law, without a single deviation—and ONLY to such.

Holy people had always obeyed out of faith, which is a higher principle than Law. Thus the Scriptures speak of "the law of faith" (Rom 3:27). This is a "law" that produces the results required by God.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF OBEDIENCE

Now, in Christ Jesus, comes a different kind of obedience that was commanded under the law— **obedience that springs from faith.** It is not that such obedience was totally strange. Holy people had always obeyed out of faith, which is a higher principle than Law. Thus the Scriptures speak of *"the law of faith"* (Rom 3:27). This is a *"law"* that produces the results required by God.

One of the classic passages of Scripture on this matter is the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. That text is devoted to affirming the effectiveness of faith, and why it is not possible to please God without it. The passage is filled with examples of extraordinary human responses to God—and **all of them proceeded from faith.** A brief review of them will serve to confirm the truth of our text.

- † By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice.
- † By faith Noah, being warned of God, built an ark to the saving of his house.
- † By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to leave his country and kindred.
- † By faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country.
- † By faith Abraham offered up Isaac,

accounting God was able to raise from the dead.

- † By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Eau concerning things to come.
- † By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, while worshipping.
- † By faith, Joseph commanded that his bones be carried out of Egypt when Israel was delivered according to God's promise.
- † By faith Moses' parents hid him, not fearing the edict of the king.
- † By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.
- † By faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.
- † By faith Moses kept the Passover.
- † By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea.
- † By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.
- † By faith Rahab received Israel's spies in peace, and did not perish with those who believed not.

None of these exceptional responses could have been elicited by Law. They all came from faith, the most powerful incentive among men. It is greater than a trembling mountain and earth-shattering noise. Faith, because it is in the heart, provokes obedience *"from the heart"* (Rom 6:17), which is an absolute requisite with God.

Settle it in your mind, where there is no obedience, there is no faith. As James would say it, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"* (James 2:26). Just as a body without a spirit is not a person, so faith without works is not faith. It is only a pretension.

The obedience that comes from faith is *"obedience unto righteousness"* (Rom 6:16), or an obedience that results in righteousness^{NASB}. It is the obedience that also proceeds from the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. As it is written, *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet 1:2). Just as surely as faith made sick people whole through the word of Jesus (Matt

9:22; Mk 10:52), so faith produces obedience in those who believe the Gospel.

A BRIEF SUMMATION

Thus Paul’s Apostleship was an assignment from God, by grace, to declare “*preach the Gospel*”—but not merely to voice it. Through his preaching he was to elicit a response from men—the “*obedience that comes from faith*.” He was not merely fulfilling an obligation, but working together with God in the grand enterprise of salvation.

This is a facet of preaching the Gospel that sorely needs to be restored. Too much preaching puts no pressure upon the hearers. It is too novel, too intellectual, too entertaining—too academic. It neither brings faith nor provokes obedience. Such preaching is more related to the novelties of the “*Epicurean and Stoic philosophers*” of Athens than the preaching ordained by God (Acts 17:18-21; 1 Cor 1:21). When hearing about the lifeless philosophers of Corinth, who were influencing the church, Paul wrote the following. “*But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power*”^{NASB} (1 Cor 4:19-20).

The Gospel itself is a compelling message. It cannot be heard with indifference. It is God’s “*power unto salvation*” (Rom 1:16). The failure to obey it will also result in sure condemnation (2 Thess 1:8). Oh, that God would raise up great preachers of the Gospel. Powerful proclaimers that would bring such pressure to bear upon the hearts of men that they would cry out, “*What shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 16:30), thereby rendering an obedience that is honoring of the Lord Jesus. It is time to declare war on lifeless lectures and entertaining speeches in the churches!

AMONG ALL NATIONS

The Gospel is not a provincial or parochial message. It is the message through which the promise to Abraham is being fulfilled: “*all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?*” (Gen 18:18; 22:18). When Israel disobeyed God,

they were judged by being dispersed, or driven, into “*all nations*” (Deut 28:37; 30:1). But now, Jesus having “*put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Heb 9:26), the nations are targeted for a blessing through the message of the Gospel. Sin had extended to every nation, and thus the Gospel will be brought to every nation—even to “*every creature*” (Mk 16:15).

Some men have a burden for a particular people, or a specific country or nation. This is a noble thing. But ponder

relatively crude circumstances.

And look how effective his ministry has been! From every nation men and women have yielded the obedience of faith because of the Gospel he faithfully preached. In the last day, when the final harvest is gathered, the fruit of this single man will be a sight to behold! Paul himself was an example of the type of obedience faith produces. The secret to his prolific ministry was his faith!

FOR HIS NAME

The Spirit adds these significant words: “*for His name,*” or “*for the sake of His name*”^{RSV}. The New Jerusalem Bible reads, “*for the honor of His name,*” while the New Living Translation reads, “*bringing glory to His name.*” Here is a wonderful aspect of the preaching of the Gospel and the obedience that comes from faith. The meaning of the words is that Paul sought to bring honor and glory to Christ through his Apostleship. He did not seek his own glory, having discarded as “*dung*” those things that were “*gain*” to him (Phil 3:8).

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a ministry to “*ALL nations!*” Some few men have so regarded their ministry. The great preacher John Wesley is reported to have said, “The world is my parish.”

If you imagine that you have a lot of responsibilities, consider the extent of Paul’s call and ministry. He was “*THE Apostle of the Gentiles*” (Rom 11:13). His ONLY qualification for this extensive ministry was the “*grace and Apostleship*” he had received! He thought in terms of “*Rome,*” “*Spain,*” “*Macedonia,*” and “*Syria*” (Rom 1:15; 15:24; Acts 16:10; 15:41). He ministered in synagogues (Acts 18:4), market places (Acts 17:17), and places where philosophers gathered (Acts 17:19). He preached by rivers (Acts 16:13), in prisons (Acts 16:30-32), and before kings and judges (Acts 23:24; 26:2). His words were heard in the palaces of Rome (Phil 1:13; 4:22) and an upper chamber in Troaz (Acts 20:8-11). His ministry was experienced in the barbarous island of Malta (Acts 28:4). The extent of his ministry would be impressive and unparalleled in this day of jet planes, television, and internet communications. Yet it was all accomplished under

Whatever reproach has been brought upon the name of our blessed Lord, it never came from the Apostle Paul! Throughout history, men, causes, and institutions have arisen that have heaped glory and honor unto themselves. Men have become so vain as to “*call their lands after their own names*” (Psa 49:10). But it was not so with Paul, nor will it be the case with any person of faith.

God Himself honored, or glorified, the Son! Jesus once said, “*If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing: it is My Father that honors me*” (John 8:54). In one of the great prophecies of the extent of Christ’s salvation, the Father said, “*It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a Light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth*”^{NASB} (Isa 49:6). This truth had been written upon the heart and mind of Paul. He was in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He therefore sought to bring glory to His Lord in “*all nations.*”

Those who limit their spiritual focus to a specific society, limit the glory due to Christ. Their interests should extend as far as their God-given abilities allow. The honor of Jesus is at stake!

Every time someone believes and obeys the Gospel, honor is brought to the Lord Jesus. It justifies His death, proving it to be efficacious. It glorifies His resurrection, confirming its power can raise men from death in trespasses and sins. It demonstrates the power of His intercession, which supports all believers in their ministries as well as their circumstances.

Lest we become proud in our approach to Kingdom work, God works among men for the sake of His beloved Son. While God surely loved the world, He loves the Son more! Jesus is His *“well beloved Son”*

(Matt 3:17; 17:5; Col 1:13). When the Father forgives us, it is *“for Christ’s sake”* (Eph 4:32). When it comes to our faith, and the fellowship of suffering that prepares us to reign with Christ, it is written, *“For unto you it is given **IN THE BEHALF OF CHRIST**, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake”* (Phil 1:29).

Thus, in his ministry, Paul joined with the Father in bringing honor and glory to the Son. After all, *“It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us”* (Rom 8:34). What is more fitting than to minister *“for His name.”* What greater honor can be afforded a mortal than to say, He expended himself for the honor of Jesus’ name! Think more of Jesus, and of the glory that is due His holy name. It is godly

to think in such a manner, and ungodly not to do so.

If you have been associated with organized religion for any length of time, you know this is an exceedingly rare perspective. That very circumstance confirms the aloofness from God, rank unbelief, and lifeless routine that is being promoted.

Wherever an acute awareness of God is not being produced, or honor is not being brought to Jesus, or hearty obedience is not being rendered to God, only two possibilities exist. Either the Gospel is not being preached, or it is not being believed. Unless that situation is remedied, there is no hope of being saved. I realize these words may appear strong, but the Word of God leaves us with no alternatives.

THE HEAVENLY CALL

“Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ.” The manner of this text is a heavenly manner—it is the way God speaks of our salvation. Where such language is strange, the people do not know *“the manner of the kingdom”* (1 Sam 10:25). We live in a day when speech has become loose, casual, and empty. It is not capable of carrying great thought. Men have even sought to reduce the Word of God itself to the language of the street, which is not capable of conveying Divine thought in a powerful manner. Much of the Scripture involves the development of a special nomenclature through which God can effectively communicate with His offspring. This is one of the great ministries of the Old Covenant, with the tabernacle service. Time will not allow me to develop this thought to any significant extent here. It is enough to observe that the pivotal points of the Gospel are all expressed in terms that were developed in God’s covenantal relation with Israel. Some examples include lamb, altar, sacrifice, blood, washing, holiest place, holy place, priest, high priest, intercession, pleasing fragrance, atonement, sanctify, redeem,

reconcile, anointed, and others. The promises of a coming Savior were all expressed by holy Prophets, and in specially revealed terms. Their words were the appointed containers of Divine

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AMONG WHOM

This verse is an excellent confirmation of this truth. A view of God’s people is stated that is most edifying. It serves to clarify our understanding of salvation. First, the Spirit includes the Roman believers as suitable recipients of the Gospel. They were *“among”* the *“all nations”* to whom the Gospel was sent, and for whom it was tailored. This view at once devastates any notion of fleshly distinctions. Even though citizenry in Rome was counted as something superior, yet from heaven’s viewpoint, they were *“among the nations”*—one portion of a needy populace.

The Spirit provides another view of human commonality to the Ephesians. *“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the*

lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:1-3). Although men are prone to "measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves" (2 Cor 10:12), the Gospel approaches them as having a common need. That is why a devastating blow is dealt to sectarianism and human pride wherever the Gospel is believed.

The truth of the matter is that "in Adam all die" (1 Cor 15:22). Sin has leveled the human race, so that the barbarians of Malta need the Gospel, and the salvation it announces, as much as the lords of Caesar's household. Men may boast of superior civilizations and greater attainments, but it is all in vain. That view is too low for the people of God. While there is a very small element of truth to it, it is unworthy of embrace, for it contributes to pride, and moves people to consider the Gospel as less needful than it really is. It is a fleshly view, which is prohibited in the Kingdom of God.

WE WERE CALLED

At the point we were subjected to the Gospel, a distinction began to develop. Through the "glad tidings of good things" (Rom 10:15) we were "called" by God to God. As it is written, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:14). For some, this is too difficult to believe. To them, it is like as theological brier or thorn that cannot be handled. But this is not an appropriate response to the truth. It is honoring to God to believe His Word, and confess that it is the truth. After all, God will be "justified" in all of His "sayings" (of which this is one), and will "overcome," or prevail, when there is a conflict between His words and man's perception of them (Rom 3:4).

The people of God are frequently referred to as "called." One of the more familiar texts is Romans 8:28. "And we know that all things work together for

good to those who love God, to those who are **the called** according to His purpose." (NKJV) The Spirit further affirms, "Moreover whom He predestined, these **He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified**" (Rom 8:30).

The "calling" of reference, therefore, is central in our salvation. It is not tangential, or something of novel interest on the side. The importance of the concept of calling can be seen in the following affirmations of Scripture.

- † **Called** into the fellowship of God's dear Son (1 Cor 1:9).
- † **Called** to peace (1 Cor 7:15).
- † **Called** into the grace of Christ (Gal 1:6).
- † **Called** into liberty (Gal 5:13).
- † **Called** in one hope of our calling (Eph 4:4).
- † **Called** to obtain glory (2 Thess 2:14).
- † **Called** out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).
- † **Called** to inherit a blessing (1 Pet 3:9).
- † **Called** to His eternal glory (1 Pet

a lofty one, not to be viewed through the template of man's theology. Fleshly thinking must not touch this Gospel!

DIVINE INITIATIVE

The very idea of a "call" emphasizes an initiative. In this case, a Divine initiative. A call is not in answer to a request, but is an invitation offered by an interested party who has an concern in the one being called.

The saints of God are exhorted to remember their calling—when it first registered upon their conscience that there was room for them at the Master's table. That call came by means of the Gospel, yet it was intensely personal. It was a call that transcended earthly distinctions. "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor 1:26). There was a single objective in the calling: "**ONE hope of your calling**" (Eph 4:4). It was a "high calling," or an "upward call" (Phil 3:14).

The calling was "holy," and not prompted by our works or accomplishments. It was wholly at the discretion of a wise and loving God. As it is written, "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" (2 Tim 1:9). Because the call came from heaven, it is appropriately called a "heavenly calling," of which we are "partakers" (Heb 3:1).

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5:10). Paul has already said he was "called to be an Apostle." Now he tells the Roman brethren they are also "the called of Jesus Christ." Other translations highlight the uniqueness of this expression: "among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (NIV, RSV, NRSV), "and by His call you belong to Jesus Christ" (NJB), "marked out to be disciples of Christ" (BBE). Literally, the phrase may be translated "called to be Jesus Christ's" (Robertson). Although of themselves these translations do not establish the truth of the text, they do confirm that it is

Referring to his own Apostleship, Paul confesses that even though he was appointed to be an Apostle, yet He was called by God's grace. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus" (Gal 1:15-17). It is important to avoid a view of our calling that does not allow the unreserved acceptance of statements like this. He is a

wise man that is willing to accept the testimony of holy Scripture without doubting.

A “call” assumes some recognition of the invitation on the part of the one being called. Men have longed debated this subject. Some affirm no response is possible unless there is a quickening from God, while others affirm the ability to respond is inherent in the human nature. I am not sure, however, that the Word approaches the subject in such a simplistic manner.

Something must be said about the **necessity** of a call in the first place—and no one responds who is not first called. The very fact that the God of heaven sends out an invitation to humanity indicates how far sin had taken us from Him. The indictment of heaven against the human race is, “*there is none that seeketh after God*” (Rom 3:11). Some might object that there are SOME who do seek after God—but the Spirit says there are “*none.*” The meaning is that no one *by nature* persistently seeks after God—in spite of the fact that philosophers have said that they do. There is a vast difference between making false gods, and earnestly seeking after the true God.

God has appointed that men seek Him, making every effort to find Him. As it is written, “*From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*”^{NIV} (Acts 17:26-27). Yet, because of sin, any seeking that men do on their own misses the mark, bringing them to the wrong conclusion.

Amidst this hopeless condition, the calling of God surfaces—a Divine summons that is effectual. Just as surely as God called out for Adam (Gen 3:9), through the Gospel a call goes out from heaven. We must learn to count on this call attending the preaching of the Gospel.

Divine Drawing

The call of God is the manner in which He draws, or allures, us to Himself. Jesus

declared the indispensability of this drawing. “*No man CAN come to me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him*” (John 6:44). Later, in the same discourse, this same truth is stated in another way. “*Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father*” (John 6:65). This is the Divine manner of the heavenly Kingdom.

The awakening of the soul is not to be taken lightly, as though it were the mere product of human initiative. If men are sensitive of God, have an ear to hear, or eyes to see, they are obligated to confess the origin of them both.

This is not strange language. The Lord has consistently presented Himself as engaged in drawing people. “*The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you*” (Jer 31:3). “*I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love*” (Hosea 11:4). “*Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her*” (Hosea 2:14). Let us have done with any view of salvation that makes no allowance for the drawing power of God.

The awakening of the soul is not to be taken lightly, as though it were the mere product of human initiative. If men are sensitive of God, have an ear to hear, or eyes to see, they are obligated to confess the origin of them both. “*The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them*” (Prov 20:12). Everyone does not possess a hearing ear—or an ear capable of detecting the voice of the Lord. That is precisely why Jesus said, “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*” (Matt 11:15; 13:9,43). It is why the Spirit repeated said to the churches, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9).

Moses told Israel, “*Yet the LORD hath NOT given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day*” (Deut 29:4). This was not an arbitrary decision—as though Israel wanted ears to hear, but God refused to grant them. Their obstinate hearts withheld these things from them (Ezek 12:2). See how different it is with those in Christ Jesus? They have been given ears to hear, and have thus been effectively drawn, or called by God Himself, to Jesus. They have a preference for the Lord, and a longing to hear from Him.

If one chooses to believe men have an innate ability to hear, or be sensitive of, the Living God, very well. That is very much a part of the Divine likeness that we bear—even by nature. However, that ability cannot be aroused without Divine influence. Thus it is written, “*He awakens my ear to hear as the learned*”^{NKJV} (Isa 50:4).

This in no way negates the universality of the offer of salvation. It excludes no one who is seeking, or desires to come to the Lord. It is not a fatalistic view. Rather, this is the Divine explanation of your salvation. It is one that brings all glory to God, and it is the truth.

CALLED TO CHRIST

Our text says we are “*the called of Christ*”—or the called ones belonging to Christ. This expression parallels that of First Corinthians 1:9: “*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*”^{NKJV} The nature of our salvation is expounded in this statement. In order for us to be saved, we have to be brought under the care and direction of the Son of God. God gave us to Jesus in order that He might “*bring us to God*” (1 Pet 3:18).

This aspect of salvation is so particular that Jesus took special note of it when He was preparing to die for our sins. “*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You . . . I do not pray that*

You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:12-15).

If any believers imagine they are capable of being kept through their own efforts alone, let them bend low, still their souls, and hear the prayer of Jesus! The Lord Jesus would not leave His disciples unprotected for three days and three nights! In that appointed interim, the powers of darkness were being loosed. The Son, mindful of the gravity of the situation, turned them over to the care of the Father while He laid down His life and took it up again! What a rich commentary on the weakness of man and the love of God and Christ!

Now, Jesus is the Captain of our

salvation, leading us to the "better country" and the "city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God" (Heb 11:10,16). He is the Shepherd who leads and feeds us, and the Minister of the heavenly sanctuary from Whom our supplies are being received (Heb 8:1-2). There is nothing we need that He does not give, or WANT to give. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant.

And how is it that God brings us under the care of this "great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13:20)? We are "CALLED" to Him! There is an appeal that requires sensitivity of heart and soul. If you have any doubts about the sincerity and effectiveness of this call, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" ^{NKJV} (Rom 11:29). It is a "high calling"

(Phil 3:14), a "heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1), and a "holy calling" (2 Tim 1:9). The ONLY ones who do not profit from this calling are those who "refuse" it (Heb 12:25). But those giving heed to it, will be given by God to Jesus Christ for safe keeping and direction. It will be a most satisfying and joyful condition, yielding the full assurance of faith! In the lively awareness of this truth, you will be able to live triumphantly. You can trust in that!

Does this not open the marvelous treasure of First Corinthians 1:30? "It is because of Him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." How gracious of our God to be so precise on the matter of our salvation!

AN APPROPRIATE DESCRIPTION AND BLESSING

"To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." The priorities of the Apostle are certainly revealed in this introduction. We have no idea of the recipients of this marvelous Epistle until this verse. The man of God first tells us his heavenly assignment and role in the salvation of God. He then affirms he is declaring what the holy prophets of God said was coming. He identifies the true Christ, relating Him to the eternal King that would come from David. He affirms this is the One--the ONLY One--that has been declared to be the Son of God with power through "the resurrection from the dead." He is the One that has commissioned and enabled Paul. His purpose is bring about the obedience that results from faith. He then declares we have been called to be given to the Lord Jesus.

What a marvelous context in which to address believers. In his opening words, he has stripped away all flesh, and shown the world to be worthless. He has not given a syllable of worth to anything proceeding from the flesh, firmly fixed our attention on God, Christ, the Gospel, and

the real reason for preaching. Suffice it to say, there are countless believers that are regularly submitted to preaching and teaching that rarely, if ever, make such holy associations.

We also learn from this that it is out of

We also learn from this that it is out of order to attempt to serve men until we have first honored God through Christ, and in the Gospel. Too, if our intentions are not to promote the obedience that comes from faith, we are not really serving the Lord.

order to attempt to serve men until we have first honored God through Christ, and in the Gospel. Too, if our intentions are not to promote the obedience that comes from faith, we are not really serving the Lord. All vain activities are to be forthrightly abandoned in favor of joining with the Lord in His revealed purpose--working with Him (1 Cor 3:9). No other work is acceptable.

ALL THAT BE IN ROME

Because Paul has the spirit of Christ, he is not a sectarian. He writes to "ALL" the believers in Rome. He is not writing to the magistrates, the university teachers, or the merchants of Rome--at least not in those temporal capacities. He will clearly identify that his words are addressed to those who are in Christ Jesus.

We know from the close of this Epistle that "all that be in Rome" included a wide range of believers. There was an assembly meeting in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (16:3-5), people in prison (16:7), households (16:10-11), and all the saints with "Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas" (16:15). There were married and single, men and woman, relatives, and those "of note among the Apostles" (16:3-7). All of them were included! Wherever a person aligned with Jesus could be found in Rome--this was for them.

A Gospel that cannot be preached to everyone should not be preached to anyone! Whether he was writing to his relatives, prisoners, spiritual leaders, or a married believers, the message was

the same—“*all that be in Rome.*” Such a condition is possible because there are no fleshly distinctions in Christ Jesus. As it is written, “*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal 3:26-28).

A soon as we begin to minister the truth of God with fleshly distinctions in mind, the Gospel necessarily loses its prominence in the minds of both the speaker and the hearers. This is because “*the Gospel of God*” (to which Paul was separated) recognizes no such distinctions. While the Scriptures do contain words addressed to special people (husbands, wives, children, servants, masters, married, single, etc.), they are never at the heart of the Gospel. They are always secondary, and designed to bring the people into the center of the Gospel, where common affiliation and true spiritual benefit are experienced. One of the telling signs of a powerless church is the penchant to present the Gospel as though there were fleshly distinctions in Christ Jesus.

BELOVED OF GOD

Through the Holy Spirit, and under the administration of the Lord Jesus, Paul will now speak to the people of God. He will address them from the highest view, thereby appealing to their new natures. It is the Apostolic manner to begin Epistles in this manner—recognizing the status of the people of God in Christ Jesus.

What a gracious word: “*beloved of God!*” Other versions read, “*To all in Rome who are loved by God*”^{NIV}, “*To all God’s beloved in Rome*”^{NRSV}. The NIV is very weak in this regard, for the word used here is not “*loved,*” but “*dearly loved,*” as I will establish. It speaks of a special relationship, not an ordinary one.

Notice, he does not address those who love God (although they surely did), but those GOD LOVES! Through these words, the Spirit is teaching us where to begin with our spiritual reasoning. It is ever true, “*We love him, because He first loved*

us” (1 John 4:19). The river of love belongs to Him. Our love is but a small tributary when compared with overflowing His. As it is written, “*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*”^{NKJV} (1 John 4:10).

Too, let none imagine that this salutation was for every citizen of Rome. While, in a general sense, “*God so loved the world,*” that is not the love of which Paul writes. Nor, indeed, does the Spirit know anything about God loving every person alike, be he Paul the Apostle or

anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:21,23). This is the love of which our text speaks, and it is a wonderful love indeed!

The word “*beloved*” is a special word in Scripture. It is derived from the Greek word ἀγαπητός, which means *beloved dear, very much loved, one not only greatly loved, but in a unique way.*^{Robertson} No person separated from Jesus is ever so described! This word is used over sixty times in the New Testament Scriptures, and is never applied to someone outside of Jesus Christ.

A soon as we begin to minister the truth of God with fleshly distinctions in mind, the Gospel necessarily loses its prominence in the minds of both the speaker and the hearers. This is because “the Gospel of God” (to which Paul was separated) recognizes no such distinctions.

“*Beloved of God*” means especially endeared to Him because of their association with His well beloved Son. To be loved by God is to be advantaged by Him. It is to experience Him being “*for us,*” so that none can effectively be “*against us*” (Rom 8:31). To be “*beloved of God*” is the opposite of provoking God, as did the Israelites of old (Deut 32:16; 1 Kgs 14:22; Psa 78:58; 106:29). God finds great delight in those who are “*beloved*” by Him. He delights to walk with them as He did with Enoch and Noah (Gen 5:22; 6:9).

Such are people “*after His own heart,*” as David (Acts 13:22), and are His friends like Abraham (James 2:23).

SPECIAL TO GOD

To be “*beloved of God*” involves being special to Him. As it is written, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, HIS OWN SPECIAL PEOPLE*”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 2:9). In another place it is stated that Jesus “*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*”^{NKJV} (Tit 2:14). We do well to NOT be among those thinking these words to be strange.

This should not be a strange idea to us. God said this to Israel, “*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation*” (Ex 19:5-6). When He delivered

Judas the betrayer. Although such heresy is often spouted from the mouths of the unlearned, it is totally false, and a gross misrepresentation of the Living God.

If this word—“*beloved of God*”—was suitable for saints and sinners alike, it would derive no special comfort for the saints. If the grace of God, which brought salvation (Tit 2:11) makes no distinction in those receiving it, of what value is it? If God loves us no more when we are in Jesus than when we were bond-slaves to sin, what benefit is there to being in Christ Jesus?

Jesus has already declared the Father’s love is not lavished upon just anyone. He provided a Savior in His love, but He will not heap His love upon a single rebellious soul. Thus Jesus affirmed, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him . . . If*

them from Egypt, it was *“to be unto Him a people of inheritance”* (Deut 4:20). Again, it is said of them, *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth”* (Deut 7:6), and again, *“Thou shalt be blessed above all people”* (Deut 7:14).

The concept of being special to God, therefore, is not an unusual one, but has been articulated many times. However, when it comes to those who are in Christ Jesus, this endearment is brought to a new level. The church is so special, it is the chosen *“bride”* of Christ (John 3:29; Rev 21:2,9,17). Think of the magnitude of this statement: *“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God”* (Rom 7:4). If Abraham was particular about obtaining a bride for Isaac (Gen 24:7-9), how much more is God discriminating concerning the bride of His Son? You may rest assured, no one will be married to Christ who is not precious and beloved of God! Conversely, no one who loved by Him will be excluded from the Bride.

This specialness can be experienced at the personal level, as confirmed in the Apostle John— *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* (John 19:26; 21:20).

Only to the degree that we can see we are *“beloved of God”* will the accolades of this world come to mean nothing to us.

One further word on this. The status of *“beloved of God”* is not one TO BE attained by the saints. It is a condition that is unquestionably enjoyed in Christ Jesus. Paul’s salutation is simply a recognition of the status of those who have been *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17).

CALLED TO BE SAINTS

While it is totally unreasonable to do so, Satan tempts men to believe they can be unholy and still retain the status of *“beloved of God.”* All manner of teaching has been propagated to encourage this

type of thinking. The Spirit, however, will not give men the luxury of thinking in such a spiritually slipshod manner. If we had to be delivered from the guilt and power of sin to be made acceptable to God, it is inconceivable that we could revert to sin again, and remain accepted by God. Such a thought reflects a level of spiritual stupidity that is completely unacceptable.

The call of God is in order that we might be *“saints.”* The same phrase—*“called to be saints”*—is found in First Corinthians 1:2. Coming from the word *ἁγίοις*, *“saints”* means *pure, blameless, consecrated, holy.*^{Strong’s} This

While it is totally unreasonable to do so, Satan tempts men to believe they can be unholy and still retain the status of “beloved of God.” All manner of teaching has been propagated to encourage this type of thinking.

word—*“saints”*—is like a two-sided coin. One side is HOLY—pure, and free from sin; blameless, and without spot. The other side is CONSECRATED—dedicated to the Lord, and able to come into His presence without being consumed. Both of these are inherent in the word *“saints.”*

Here, then, is the reason why God called us: **to be holy, and to be consecrated, or devoted, to Him.** Any approach to religion, or *Christianity*, that is not based upon these objectives is not of God. It is a delusion that has been perpetrated by the devil. An unholy church is a reproach to Jesus and a desecration of the name of God.

The truth affirmed in these words—*“called to be saints”*—is repeatedly proclaimed in Scripture. In a marvelous association with Divine choice, the Spirit declares, *“He (God) hath chosen us in Him (Jesus) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love”* (Eph 1:4). The ultimate objective of our

salvation is said to be *“That He might present it (the church) to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:27; Col 1:22).

Those who allow for identity with God while maintaining a preference for sin are deceived. We have been called *“with a holy calling”* (2 Tim 1:9), and holiness is imperative. The Spirit leaves no question on this matter. *“But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’”* (1 Pet 1:15-16). And again, *“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14).

The phrase *“called to be saints”* does not suggest believers are not saints NOW. It is an affirmation that this is what God intended by summoning us to Himself. We experience the firstfruits of being saints now, and are so recognized. No less than forty-seven times, the Epistles refer to the people of God as *“the saints”*—the holy ones! The status will be fully realized when we see the Lord as He is, and are thereby conformed fully to His image (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:1-2).

GRACE AND PEACE

The nature of life in Christ can be seen by the blessings conferred upon believers. Here two indispensable things are mentioned: *“grace and peace.”* How often these are joined together in Scripture (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 John 1:3 . . . etc., etc.). These are Kingdom necessities, like bread and water are to the flesh.

GRACE

“Grace” is Divine favor, wherein a preference for the individual is found with God. It is the cause of our salvation, and the means through which it is maintained (Eph 2:5-8). No man can enter into the Kingdom of God without grace, and no one can advance in Christ without it. There are no Divine requirements that can be fulfilled without it, and no ministries that can be accomplished apart from it. The grace of God pervades every aspect of the Kingdom of God.

God's grace is the spiritual environment in which we "stand," or are stabilized. As it is written, "we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Rom 5:2). And again, "this is the true grace of God in which you stand" (1 Pet 5:12). By this, the Scripture means we can only survive in this world by remaining in God's favor. Should we choose to "provoke the Lord to jealousy," we will not be able to stand. We are not "stronger than He" (1 Cor 10:22).

Lest any despair, thinking that remaining in God's favor is wholly dependent upon our accomplishments, the Spirit makes clear that grace is accessed by faith. Salvation in its entirety, from beginning to end, is "by grace" and "through faith" (Eph 2:8). It is our acceptance of, and adherence to, the Son of God that endears us to Him.

Thus our text awakens the soul concerning the grace of God. Not only are we to know of its necessity, we are to expect more of it to be given to us. As it is written, "He gives more grace" (James 4:6). When we are pleasing to the Lord, He will lavish His love upon us. That is why it is written, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col 1:10). The effect of pleasing God is set forth in the person of Enoch. He is one of two men in the history of humanity, that did not experience death. There are two things we know about Enoch. (1) He "walked with God" (Gen 5:22,24), and "he pleased God" (Heb 11:5). The Spirit makes clear that FAITH was the prominent trait in Enoch. That is why he "pleased God"—he believed and trusted Him, convinced that God "IS, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6). And what was the result of this pleasing? He "was translated that he should not see death."

Those who imagine they have no need of grace are walking in darkness. What is more, they are a source of displeasure to God. It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul expresses the desire for the people of God to experience "grace." in increasing measures.

I have deep regrets that I have long

been identified with a movement that rarely speaks of the grace of God. I know all too well of the futility of life without this wonderful grace. I must confess that whatever I have learned of the grace of God has come independently of that movement. Much of my own understanding has been appropriated in the crucible of conflict with the Bible in my hand. Further, I have found my experience is not at all uncommon. I am quick to say there are many others within the group of reference that have also discovered the grace of God, and been richly satisfied with it. For this, I praise God. I also must acknowledge they have discovered the glory of God's grace outside of the theological boundaries of an

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institution.

PEACE

"Peace" involves quietness of soul—a condition where agitation does not dominate the inner man. Here is a possession that is given to men, not achieved by them. Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Our text confirms this was not an experience unique to the Apostles.

Just as surely as we cannot stand without the grace of God, **neither can we remain firm while in a state of agitation and inner turmoil.** Your own experience in Christ will confirm this to be the case. As soon as we become agitated and distraught, we begin to waver, thinking and acting foolishly. We

need the stabilizing influence of His peace. Elihu spoke correctly when he said, "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Job 34:29). That is precisely why Jesus followed His promise of peace with the words, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27b).

This is a peace that "surpasses ALL understanding" (Phil 4:7a). It cannot be comprehended by the sociologist, nor explained by the psychiatrist. It is a gift from God, transcendent to anything of the natural order. As such, it is able to "guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"^{NKJV} (Phil 4:7b). Like a powerful and alert sentinel "peace" keeps our hearts from being distracted by temptation and moved away from the grace of God.

In Christ, we have been called to possess this peace. What is more, this peace is dominating, or ruling, in nature. It is capable of controlling our hearts, ruling them with tenderness and eternal profit. Thus it is written, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace"^{NIV} (Col 3:15).

The peace of God will enable the saints to spend the night with lions (Dan 6:22), and walk about in a furnace of fire (Dan 3:25). It will enable Peter to sleep in prison, expecting death in the morning (Acts 12:6), and Paul to shake off a venous snake that had fastened to his hand (Acts 28:3-5). The peace of God will enable you to walk confidently in the very midst of trouble.

However, peace is more than quietness in the time of trouble. It is also confidence in the presence of the Lord, trouble or not. It empowers the believer to remain close to the Lord in feast or famine, flood or drought.

FROM GOD AND JESUS

With great care the Spirit anchors our faith in God. The grace and peace we require are available in abundant supply. They will come to us "from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." This blessing is repeatedly written to believers: i.e., "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord

Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Philemon 3; 2 John 1:3). This, then, is a general blessing conferred on all saints everywhere. It is our business to ponder and receive it.

The Father and the Son are active in our salvation. They work together in bringing us to glory. Jesus alluded to this when He said, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him"*^{NKJV} (John 14:23). They are not inactive Residents. Let it be clear that grace and peace are ministered from **within** the believer—out of the experience of Divine fellowship. We

cannot receive blessing from the Father and the Son while in an alienated state. If we are aloof from God, we are also aloof from grace and peace.

There is a great need for believers to be **convinced** of the presence and blessing of both the Father and the Son. The fall of humanity was so extensive that it requires the involvement of the entire Godhead to accomplish its retrieval. The holy angels are included as well (Heb 1:13-14). A special realm—"heavenly places"—must be occupied (Eph 1:3; 2:6), and a glorified King must be our Leader! Who is the soul who will take such a great salvation casually, as though it required no effort from us? To "neglect" it is disastrous (Heb 2:3).

An approach to God that hinges upon Law knows nothing of this, choosing to focus on the works of men rather than the *"wonderful works of God."* It gives too much credit to fallen man. Let us rejoice and be glad in our involvement with the Father and the Son. As it is written, *"He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 9). Abiding *"in the doctrine of Christ"* is remaining in a state where we are motivated by, and earnestly cling to, what God has declared concerning Christ. It is maintaining a joyful grasp of the record God gave of His Son, and experiencing the *"power of God unto salvation"* that is experienced through it. The Spirit does not speak in vain when He ascribes the very power of God to the Gospel of Christ!

CONCLUSION

Thus we have been introduced to this marvelous Epistle. Our hearts have been pointed upward, and our minds focused upon God and Christ. The worth of the Apostle Paul has been traced to him being Christ's servant. This was not an honor he took upon himself, but he was *"called"* to this privileged role. Whatever other involvements may have been available to Paul, God *"separated"* him from them all. His major activity was declaring *"the Gospel of God"*—the good news concerning *"how great things the Lord hath done."*

Our thoughts concerning the Gospel have been associated with the promises declared through the Prophets, who spoke *"concerning His Son Christ our Lord."* No other message is honored by God. No other message possesses Divine power. If an understanding of our salvation is to be gained, it will come through a Gospel that declares what the holy Prophets said was coming. A Gospel based upon a human assessment of human need has no place in the church.

The Divine validation of Christ's Sonship took place at His resurrection. By that resurrection God Himself confirmed

and declared that all power belongs to Christ—power to seek and save us, bringing us to glory. The ultimate confirmation is not what you experience, but what Jesus experienced by the power of God. That confirmation is contained in a testimony that is designed for faith. All who do, in fact, take hold of that Gospel

Fifteen hundred years of moral administration under the Law confirmed that valid obedience cannot be induced by a demand—not even a Divine demand. This is not owing to any weakness or deficiency on God's part. The failure of the Law to evoke acceptable obedience among men was due to the weakness of the flesh.

testimony by faith, will experience the blessing of God. God will not ignore the one who believes the record He has given of His Son!

The purpose of true ministry is declared to be inducing obedience that comes from faith. That is a common objective to be realized among *"all nations."* Fifteen hundred years of moral administration under the Law confirmed that valid obedience cannot be induced by a demand—not even a Divine demand. This is not owing to any weakness or deficiency on God's part. God forbid that such a vain imagination should find our place in our thinking. The failure of the Law to evoke acceptable obedience among men was due to the weakness of the flesh (Rom 8:3). The highest work of the Law was found in the ministry of the High Priest. But with the advent of Jesus Christ, even that ministry was abolished. The Spirit states it this way, *"For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect"*^{NKJV} (Heb 7:18-19).

The people of God have been identified as those who have been called **by God** to Jesus Christ. The objective of the call was to bring them to, and under the beneficent reign of, the Savior. Our immediate identity with Christ by faith is the appointed means

through which we will be brought to glory. A blessed arrangement, indeed!

Believers are also dearly loved by God—special to Him, and the objects of His affection. They are thus suitable recipients of grace and peace, which come from both the Father and the Son. Through Christ, a way has been made for us to remain in Divine favor, or to “abide” in His “love” (John 15:10). It is the unique prerogative of faith to enable us to “keep ourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21). That is the all-pervading objective for believers: to remain in love and favor of God.

The remainder of this Epistle will keep these pivotal realities in focus.

Nothing will be declared that ignores them, or places them into the background. Frequently, and in different ways, the Spirit will point to the truth declared in these opening verses. He will make no provision for flesh to be prominent or Christ to lack prominence.

The absolute criticality of identity with the Father and the Son will be constantly affirmed. Not a single word will be said about affiliation with a religious institution created by men. No value will be placed on mere human assessment. When salvation is addressed, it will always center in the Lord Jesus Christ. Further, He will consistently be seen as God’s appointed Minister. The centrality of Divine favor in the whole of

our salvation will also be accented. **Anything displeasing to God jeopardizes salvation.** Faith will be held forth as our preeminent response, always effective, and always honored by God.

The Spirit will lead us into a manner of thinking that finds the eyes of our heart focused on Jesus as the exclusive Means of salvation—in all of its aspects. Everything depends upon Him! What we are by nature will be declared to be unacceptable to God, and utterly powerless and ineffective. We must live in the power of what God has given us in, and because of, His Son. The Spirit does not speak in vain when He ascribes the very power of God to the Gospel of Christ.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 2



APOSTOLIC GREETING

^{1:8}First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹For 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; ¹⁰Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; ¹²That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. ¹³Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. (Romans 1:8-15, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. FIRST THINGS FIRST (1:8)
- II. DIVINE WITNESS AND SERVICE (1:9)
- III. THE REQUEST (1:10)
- IV. A NOBLE OBJECTIVE (1:11)
- V. THE POWER OF MUTUAL FAITH (1:12)
- VI. UNFULFILLED PURPOSE (1:13)
- VII. THE GOSPEL DEBT (1:14)
- VIII. DETERMINED TO PREACH (1:15)

Having heard of the saints of Rome, the Apostle writes to them. He does so as an Apostle, fulfilling His Apostolic office. While Paul traveled the world preaching to both Jews and Gentiles, he only wrote to the people of God—those who were in Christ Jesus. This is the society most endeared to the Lord. As it is written, “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”^{NKJV} (Tit 2:14). And again, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 2:9). These are the people upon whom God’s attention is placed. They are the ones who are fed and led by the Lord Jesus Christ, and for whom He faithfully intercedes. They, and they alone, have been given God’s Holy Spirit, and are properly called “the sons of God” (Gal 4:6;

1 John 3:1-2). Paul had the Divine perspective of the saints, and was therefore aggressive to bring spiritual advantage to them. After all, that is why the Apostolic gift was given: *“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . . ”* (Eph 4:11-16).

All of this may appear quite obvious, requiring no affirmation. However, this is not at all a common perception in our time. The burden of religious emphasis is being placed on recruitment, with all manner of fanciful explanations for it. But this was not the Apostolic emphasis. The Apostles declared the Gospel with great power to rulers and common people, in market places and synagogues, among barbarians and the cultured. But the thrust of their ministry was toward the saints, who faithfully continued in their *“doctrine”* (Acts 2:42).

We must not take this indispensable ministry for granted. The unacceptable level Scriptural knowledge in the average church is the direct result of its emphasis. Much of the preaching and teaching that is heard does not leave one with the dominating persuasion that we *“live by every Word of God”* (Lk 4:4). But when you read the doctrine of the Apostles, that comes across with great power.

Throughout this book there will be a strong appeal to the Scriptures. Affirmations will be buttressed with the Word of God, and we will be told the Scriptures were written for our learning, that we might experience endurance and encouragement through them (15:4). We will be fed with the Word of God.

THE CONTEXT ESTABLISHED

With spiritual expertise, Paul has established the true context of this book.

In his introduction (vs 1-7), he makes no reference to the social or political climate of either Rome or Corinth, from which he wrote. He has elevated their thinking above *“this present evil world,”* and assisted them into the heavenly realms. He has set the tone for the Epistle, thus opening the door for the Lord to work among the people. Do you remember his

Eighteen contextual statements that have nothing whatsoever to do with geography, social issues, political boundaries, or congregational difficulties. All of these are common to all saints of all ages. All of them center in God, Christ Jesus, and the purpose of God.

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opening references?

- S A servant of Jesus Christ (1:1a).
- S The call to Apostleship (1:1b).
- S His separation to the Gospel of God (1:1c).
- S The promise of God (1:2a).
- S The prophets of God (1:2b).
- S The Holy Scriptures (1:2c).
- S His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1:3a).
- S The Seed of David (1:3b).
- S The declaration of the Son of God (1:4a)
- S The Son God with power (1:4b).
- S The resurrection of Christ from the dead (1:4c).
- S Paul’s reception of grace and apostleship (1:5a).
- S Obedience that comes from faith (1:5b).
- S For the sake of Christ’s name (1:5c).
- S Those who are called to Christ (1:6).
- S Those beloved of God (1:7a).
- S Called to be saints (1:7b).
- S Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7c).

Thus our minds have been directed into green pastures, and beside still waters. We have been brought up higher. We see Paul in his heavenly assignment. We see the Gospel in its association with God. We see the Prophets, and the Scriptures as the appointed container of truth. Jesus is declared in relation to God, His promise to David, and the focus of the Prophets. The purpose of Paul’s ministry is affirmed to be the obedience that comes from faith. The people of God are told who they are, and why they have been called. What a marvelous perspective.

We need not look for the context of this book! It has been declared for us. What is written is given to us with God, Christ, the Gospel, and our call to Jesus in mind. Those verities will stabilize everything affirmed in this Epistle to our hearts. In their light, it will all have spiritual power, make sense to us, and nourish our hearts. I do not cease to marvel at the consistent manner in which Scripture was written.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

“1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” The one in fellowship with Jesus is sensitive of, and thankful for, the working of the Lord. In a grand confession of this truth, Isaiah wrote, *“all*

that we have accomplished you have done for us”^{NIV} (Isa 26:12). Apostolic doctrine confirms this with great effectiveness. *“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose”^{NIV}* (Phil 2:13). Thus holy men prayed for Divine working to take place

believers—for the Lord to work in them what was pleasing in His sight. *“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and*

may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever"^{NIV} (Heb 13:20-21). God is honored by a due recognition of His own work. Thus the Apostle begins with a thank offering for the accomplishments in the brethren in Rome.

Like all who are in Christ Jesus, the brethren in Rome were the "workmanship" of God Himself, "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:10). They were His own creation in the Son.

I THANK MY GOD

Thanksgiving ranks high in the Kingdom of God. It is directly related with being in the body of Christ. "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col 3:15). Our prayers and supplications are to be attended "with thanksgiving" (Phil 4:6). The Spirit speaks of overflowing with thanksgiving (Col 2:7). Words of thanksgiving are pointedly compared with speaking that is not acceptable. "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, **but rather giving of thanks**"^{NKJV} (Eph 5:3-4). There is no question, therefore, about the role of thanksgiving in the life of the believer.

The extent of our thanks can be seen in the passage before us. Believers might be tempted to limit thanksgiving to benefits they have personally received. And, indeed, such benefits must be acknowledged in grateful thankfulness to God. But what about thanking God for brethren you have not seen, or for a body of believers you have never visited? What about giving thanks for a group that has never supported your ministry, or sent you a letter, or been devoted to your work? Now there is real sensitivity to God, and evidence of a selfless spirit as well.

And why is Paul so quick to give thanks to God? It is because he is sensitive to the working of the Lord. He knows the origin of faith, and the Cause behind conversion.

FOR YOU ALL

The Apostle does not give thanks for the leaders, or for the more gifted, but for them "all." They are "all" the "workmanship" of God. They have all believed, and had been placed in the body where God was pleased to place them.

Paul said much the same thing to the Thessalonians. "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting"^{NKJV} (2 Thess 1:3). To the Ephesians he wrote, "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you" (Eph 1:16). The Colossians were told, "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord

Like all who are in Christ Jesus, the brethren in Rome were the "workmanship" of God Himself, "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:10). They were His own creation in the Son.

Jesus Christ" (Col 1:3).

Faith enables the soul to recognize the work of God, and therefore give thanks for it. It is important to note that God is not thanked for something He did not do. Believers are the result of Divine working, and it is comely to give thanks to God for them.

Later he will say to the Roman brethren, "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"^{NKJV} (Rom 6:17).

Here is an aspect of spiritual life that could be afforded greater prominence among the people of God.

FAITH THAT IS SPOKEN OF

What is the thing that provokes such thanksgiving to God? It is not the administrative genius of the brethren in Rome. Nor, indeed, is it any form of institutional achievement or appearance. Rather, it is the report of their FAITH,

which was "spoken of throughout the world."

It was the consistent manner of the Apostle to give thanks for the FAITH of God's people—something rarely heard among professing believers. Thanks was given for the Thessalonians because their faith was growing "exceedingly" (2 Thess 1:3). When Paul heard of the "faith" of the Ephesians, he ceased not to give thanks for them (Eph 1:15). The same was said of the Colossians (Col 1:4).

The Thessalonians also had a faith that was spoken of throughout the world. "Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything" (1 Thess 1:8). Timothy brought "good tidings" of the "faith" of the Thessalonians to Paul, thereby provoking thanksgiving through him (1 Thess 3:6-9).

Giving thanks for believing brethren is an expression of spiritual insight, for faith does come from God. It is "given" unto men to believe (Phil 1:29), and faith is "obtained" through the righteousness of God (2 Pet 1:1). It is truly "by grace" that we have believed (Acts 18:27). The Spirit affirms of the Lord Jesus that it is "Through Him you believe in God" (1 Pet 1:21). This is why those with spiritual understanding give thanks to God wherever faith is perceived.

One might well ask the question, "What are churches noted for today?" It is our prayer that it will be their faith. I have been in many an assembly where unbelief was more evident than faith. However, we are part of a Covenant that makes no allowance for unbelief.

I gather the faith of these good brethren was of note among the people of God, for they alone would recognize it as faith. **Only those who treasure faith speak favorably of its presence in others.**

The world is not able to receive those who are not its own. As the Lord said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you"

(John 15:19). If any servant of God seeks to please men, he abruptly ceases to serve God at precisely the point he seeks to please men. As it is written, "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10).

DIVINE WITNESS AND SERVICE

"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." Being "joined" to the Lord and in fellowship with His Son (1 Cor 1:9), Paul speaks of God with a refreshing familiarity. Rather than shrinking back from the living God with a smitten conscience, he calls the Lord to be his witness—to attest that what he is saying is precisely the truth.

GOD IS MY WITNESS

A similar expression, and even stronger, is found in Second Corinthians 1:23. *"Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand."*^{NKJV} I give this text because of its contrast with the one in Romans. Because of the sorrow brought to the Apostle by the conditions at Corinth, he "came no more to Corinth." He calls God to witness "against" his soul is this is not the truth. In the case of the Romans, he desires to come to them because of the report of their faith, and calls God to attest that this is the truth.

This is a form of oath, frequently used in Scripture. In his indictment of Israel, Moses called heaven and earth to witness against them (Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28). Other prophets used a similar oath (Mic 1:2; 2 Chron 18:13).

In so speaking, God Himself is summoned to attest to the truth of what is being said. It is not that such a summons causes God to hear what is affirmed. All things are "naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13), whether we acquiesce to it or not. This expression joyfully submits to Divine appraisal, knowing it will confirm the truth of what is being said. Only one with faith can speak in such a manner.

In a practical way, this manner of speaking confirms the deep interest of the Apostle in the believers in Rome. He was not writing out of a mere sense of obligation, or in the role of a Kingdom official, as it were. In becoming a laborer together with God (1 Cor 3:9), the heart of Paul was knit to his work.

SERVING WITH MY SPIRIT

Paul now draws attention to what he is doing. He is not communicating as a mere friend, or as a member of the same religious institution. Nor, indeed, is he writing as an authority who has "dominion" over their faith (2 Cor 1:14). He is writing as a servant of the Lord—a representative of the Lord of glory.

Paul speaks of God with a refreshing familiarity. Rather than shrinking back from the living God with a smitten conscience, he calls the Lord to be his witness—to attest that what he is saying is precisely the truth.

Serving

The word "serve" is an elevated word, and refers to the kind of service introduced under the law—the **ministry of the priests** in the Tabernacle service. This particular word is used twenty-two times in the New Covenant Scriptures, and is **always associated with worship** (Matt 4:10; Lk 1:74; 2:37; 4:8; Acts 7:7,42; 24:14; 26:7; 27:23; Rom 1:9,25; Phil 3:3; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 8:5; 9:9, 14; 10:2; 12:28; 13:10; Rev 7:15; 22:3). The only reference to idolatrous worship is found in Romans 1:25: *"who worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator."*

The point to be seen is that "serve"

does not refer to unwilling or forced servitude. It is not the mere carrying out of an obligation. This is the New Covenant manner of "worship" – serving the Lord. It is putting His interests above our own because of our acceptance by Him. Such service parallels that of the priests of old, who moved about in the holy place *accomplishing the service of God*" (Heb 9:6 ").

With my spirit

Paul's service is not by rote, or lifeless routine—something altogether too common in the average church. The "spirit" in a person is their essential part. Just as the body is the most outward part of our being, so the "spirit" is the most inner part of us. The verse could also read "with my whole heart," as it does in the NIV, or "with everything that I am in Christ Jesus. "

Here is the part that is instructed by God. As it is written, *"there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding"* (Job 32:8). Pharaoh recognized this type of knowledge in Joseph. He said of him, *"Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art"* (Gen 41:39). This was also said of the four young men who were taken in the Babylonian captivity (Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah): *"God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"* (Dan 1:17).

This type of tutelage and understanding cannot come through mere mental disciplines or erudition. Just as the Spirit "bears witness with our spirit," confirming we are the children of God (Rom 8:16), so God teaches our spirits the realities of the Kingdom of God. When that essential part of our persons drives our service to God, we are serving him with our spirit.

This is a higher form of service. It involves faith, confidence, and persuasion. The love of Christ compels such service, and the threat of rejection or militant opposition cannot quench it. Not only is it higher, it is the only acceptable service.

There is no pretension in the person serving God with their spirit. This is not professional duty, but service from the heart. Tragically, there is such a thing as a religious mask—a form of pretension that finds one speaking for God, yet not possessing a compelling love for Him. In Christ, such ostentatiousness is altogether out of order and unacceptable. In a world of professionalized clergy and institutionalized religion, this is difficult for some to receive. Nevertheless, it is the truth. God will accept no service that is not *“with”* our *“spirit.”*

The service of reference is mentioned in the third chapter of Philippians—one of the hallmark descriptions of the saints of God. *“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3). Why is the Holy Spirit mentioned in Philippians, and Paul’s spirit in Romans? It is because the Holy Spirit is the Divine Animator, as it were, of the human spirit. He is the One who imparts the life and the understanding. Because it flows out of the human spirit, our service is also said to be *“with my spirit.”* This is a glorious confirmation of the reality of our reconciliation to God.

SERVING IN THE GOSPEL

See with what spiritual precision the Apostle speaks. His service is not in the *“church,”* but *“in the Gospel.”* This expression means he served God by preaching, or declaring the Gospel. Some versions accent this perspective. *“I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son.”*^{NIV} *“Whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son.”*^{NRSV} *“Whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son.”*^{NASB}

The Gospel has no power for the individual until it is preached, or declared. But when it is declared, or

articulated, it is attended by Divine power to such an extent that the Gospel itself becomes *“the power of God UNTO salvation”* (Rom 1:16). It is not the power of God to effect political change, marital stability, or economic soundness. Rather, it is the means by which men are extricated from sin, become righteous before God, and have their names written in heaven. That is what *“salvation”* is all

Tragically, there is such a thing as a religious mask—a form of pretension that finds one speaking for God, yet not possessing a compelling love for Him. In Christ, such ostentatiousness is altogether out of order and unacceptable.

about, and Paul was serving that interest.

By serving *“in the Gospel,”* Paul’s ministry contributed to the salvation of men—not only initially, but in bringing them to perfection. The ministry of *“the Apostle of the Gentiles”* has absolutely no relevance in a business environment, a military strategy, or a political agenda. All of those are centered in this world. The Gospel comes from another realm, and prepares men for *“the world to come.”* O, that God would raise up a mighty army of Gospel proclaimers in our generation!

Paul had not only believed and embraced the Gospel, he was a participant in it. Having died and been buried with Jesus, He was now living with Him. For him, the *“newness of life”* had carried him into a labor that focused on the Gospel, and compelled him to speak and write it.

THE GOSPEL OF HIS SON

Behold with what care the Spirit speaks! There is such a thing as *“another gospel: which is not another”* (Gal 1:6-7). Some declare a gospel of *“health and wealth.”* Others announce a prosperity gospel, while some speak of the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. There are even some who

entertain a gospel of the Sabbath day. Even further down the ladder of spiritual delusion, there are benighted souls who deliver a gospel announcing God is pledged to solve all of our problems.

The Record

However, the real Gospel concerns the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord: *“the Gospel of His Son.”* This is nothing less than the salient and good news of the accomplishments and current ministry of Jesus in the behalf of men. John called it *“the record that God gave of his Son,”* identifying it even further: *“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son”* (1 John 5:10-11).

The word *“record,”* as used in First John, is a powerful one. Other versions use the word *“witness”* NKJV, NASB or *“testimony.”* NIV, NRSV

Interestingly, the literal meaning of the word used here (*marturian*) is *“evidence given,”*^{Strong’s} or *“objective information given in proof of something.”* Herein is a marvelous truth. The powerful evidence of the Person, accomplishments, and ministry of Jesus is not to be found in a vision. It is not hidden in the archaeological evidences uncovered by men. Here is evidence, or proof, of a higher order.

The corroborating evidence of God Himself, concerning His Son, is a **message!** It is the Gospel, or good news, of His Son. As simplistic as that may sound, it is far from artificial or on the surface of thought. Here is God’s proof of His Son—a **proclamation!**

The centrality of the Gospel of God’s Son makes provision for the entrance of faith. It is the message through which faith is brought to us. As it is written, *“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, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing*

by the word of God" (Rom 10:14-17).

PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING

"God is my witness . . . that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." I vividly recall when it first registered upon my spirit that this passage did not fit well into my theology. I had accepted the view that the primary interest of God was the lost, and that the loftiest concern of the servant of God was those outside of Christ. It all sounded innocent enough, and, given a twist or two, some Scriptures seemed to support the view. Our Father certainly did "so love the world," providing for its salvation (John 3:16). Jesus did come "to seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10), and admonished His disciples to pray "the Lord of the harvest," that He would "send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matt 9:38). These are precious affirmations.

The ministry of Jesus and Apostolic doctrine confirm the concentration of Divine power and interest is devoted to the church—the body of Christ! The most insightful teaching of Jesus was directed to His disciples. His most sensitive disclosures of the truth were to them. The Holy Spirit is given to the people of God, and He bears witness with their spirit, and intercedes for them (Rom 8:16,26). The Lord Jesus "ever lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). Every spiritual gift is given for the edifying of the body (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Cor 12:7). The body of Christ is appropriately described as "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23). It is the repository for everything Jesus has to give.

This is not unrelated to our subject. Paul calls God to witness that he "always" makes mention of the brethren in Rome in his prayers. It is as though he said that mentioning the believers in Rome was appropriate in all of his prayers. Among other things, that reveals the churches were a prevailing concern for the Apostle. He was the "Apostle to the Gentiles," and took that to include edifying believers among all nations.

We will find in this Epistle that as soon as Paul heard of the faith of a body of

people, he was compelled to edify them, building them up in the most holy faith. He brought them into his prayers, and into his purpose and calling as well.

How Paul Prayed

We are not left to conjecture concerning the content of Paul's prayers for believers. They follow the same pattern of our Lord's final intercessory prayer upon earth: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given

recorded in the third chapter of that book. "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (3:16-19).

The ministry of Jesus and Apostolic doctrine confirm the concentration of Divine power and interest is devoted to the church—the body of Christ! The most insightful teaching of Jesus was directed to His disciples. His most sensitive disclosures of the truth were to them.

The Colossians

Upon hearing of the faith and love among the Colossian brethren, Paul set himself to pray for them. He shares with us the focus and substance of those prayers. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col 1:9-11).

The Thessalonians

An Apostolic prayer for the Thessalonians is also recorded for our edification. "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 1:11-12).

Hebrew Believers

Another poignant prayer is recorded in the book of Hebrews. It is beautiful in both expression and content, revealing the Kingdom manner. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21).

me; for they are thine" (John 17:9). These are a "special people" to God, and there to the Apostle as well. Any lack of regard for believers reveals a lack of regard for God.

The Ephesians

The letter to the Ephesians contains words almost identical to those of our text: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph 1:15-16). And how did he pray for those brethren? "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph 1:17-19).

Another prayer for the Ephesians is

Summation

The manner of Paul's prayers for the people of God are evident, bringing great solace to the hungry heart. They reveal the will of God for His people, and the type of prayers that are in order for all saints everywhere in our time. A brief summation of those prayers will serve to prepare us for the remainder of this book.

- S That God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Himself.
- S That God would open the eyes of their understanding, or heart.
- S That they would know the hope to which God has called them.
- S That they would see the rich glory of God's inheritance in the saints.
- S That believers would comprehend the greatness of the power that is devoted to them.
- S That they would be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man.
- S That Christ would dwell in their hearts

- by faith.
- S That they would be rooted and grounded in love.
- S That they would comprehend the marvelous extent of their salvation.
- S That they would know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.
- S That they would be filled with all the fulness of God.
- S That they would be filled with the knowledge of His will.
- S That they would walk worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all things.
- S That they would be fruitful in every good work.
- S That they would increase in the knowledge of God.
- S That they would be strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.
- S That they would possess all patience, or endurance, and longsuffering WITH joyfulness.
- S That God would count them worthy of calling.

- S That God would fulfill all of the good pleasure of His goodness in them.
- S That God would fulfill the work of faith with power in them.
- S That the name of Christ would be glorified in them.
- S That God would make them perfect in every good work, to do His will.
- S That God would work in them what is pleasing in His sight.

Although by no means an exhaustive list, there are twenty-three things prayed for the church—the body of Christ. They are all pointing in the same direction: perfection in Christ Jesus. Stated another way, being prepared for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7).

Throughout this book, its doctrinal tone will confirm the Apostolic agenda is to make the saints of God strong in the faith. This circumstance should encourage us to also seek the spiritual welfare of the those who are in Christ Jesus.

THE REQUEST

"¹⁰Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you." Not only does Paul confirm he prays for the people of God, he will also make known the nature of some of his prayers for himself. In both views—prayers for the saints and prayers for himself—we will see the centrality of the Kingdom of God in his thinking. Other than things directly related to his Apostleship, we know very little about the personal circumstances of Paul. Because his life was not wrapped up in himself, but in the Lord, he spoke and wrote little of himself. Yet, from time to time, and as it related to his Apostolic office, he would share some of his personal requests to God. They were all made within the context of salvation, and Paul's role in the eternal purpose of God.

MAKING REQUEST

Humility is seen in this statement: a "request" was made. While I do not desire to linger on this point, a request is "made" when it is thoughtfully presented to the Lord. Job spoke of ordering his "cause" before the Lord, presenting his

case as a spiritual lawyer (Job 23:4). The mind is engaged in such a request, and desires are matched, or laid alongside, the "good and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2). It is never acceptable to pray independently of the will of God, or purely out of selfish interests. "Making" a request involves an acute awareness of

Notice the manner in which the Lord urges us to pray. It confirms that our requests are presented with the salvation of God in mind. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all

There is a spirit of self-interest that has risen to dominate the average church. Like a defiling deluge, it has washed God-consciousness from the people. The church is now being inundated with preaching that is filled with psychological jargon and worldly perspectives. Prayers for the church rarely rise above the level of mere earthly circumstance. It is a tragic situation, and has not occurred suddenly.

this when coming before the Lord of glory.

God has invited His people to make requests of Him. Even though God knows the hearts of men, having intimate knowledge of all of their thoughts (Matt 12:25; Heb 4:13), He still urges us to make our requests "known" to Him—articulating them in His presence.

understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6-7). Our prayers are to be bundled with thanksgiving, thus emphasizing that we pray as recipients of the good things of God. The conferment of the "peace of God" upon us, and the maintenance of good hearts and minds "through Jesus Christ" corroborate that God works all

things with a mind to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus *"with eternal glory."*

I have taken the time to briefly state these things because of the times in which we live—or the generation we have been given to *"serve"* (Acts 13:36). There is a spirit of self-interest that has risen to dominate the average church. Like a defiling deluge, it has washed God-consciousness from the people. The church is now being inundated with preaching that is filled with psychological jargon and worldly perspectives. Prayers for the church rarely rise above the level of mere earthly circumstance. It is a tragic situation, and has not occurred suddenly.

The relevance of this condition should be very apparent to us. **God simply will not work for the advantage of those who are basically unaware of Him.** For that reason, doubt and unbelief disqualify prayer. That is why requests are to be made *"with thanksgiving"*—with an acute sensitivity to His working and blessing.

We will find that the request Paul makes has absolutely no relevance outside of the purpose of God. It is made within the context of God's purpose and will, and with the spiritual advantage of the saints in mind. Not only had Paul, like all believers, been raised to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), he conducted his life from that vantage point.

BY ANY MEANS

The phrase *"by any means"* is frequently found in Scripture (1 Kgs 20:39; Psa 49:7; Lk 10:19; Acts 27:12; Rom 1:10; 11:14; 1 Cor 8:9; 9:27; 2 Cor 11:3; Gal 2:2; Phil 3:11; 1 Thess 2:3). Other versions read, *"by some means"*^{NKJV}, *"at last . . . the way may be opened"*^{NIV}, *"somehow by God's will"*^{RSV}, *"if in any way"*^{Darbys}.

The expression emphasizes the uncertainty of life—from our point of view. God does not lay life's plans before us, detailing every aspect of them—not even for an *"the Apostle to the Gentiles."*

Solomon wrote, *"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day*

may bring forth" (Prov 27:1). Speaking through James, the Spirit reminds us to conduct our lives with this in mind. *"Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that"* (James 1:14-15). The Lord Jesus confirmed that this condition should not occasion feelings of futility or remorse. While we neither know nor control tomorrow, it is all in the hands of the Lord of glory. *"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"* (Matt 6:34).

We will find that the request Paul makes has absolutely no relevance outside of the purpose of God. It is made within the context of God's purpose and will, and with the spiritual advantage of the saints in mind.

The phrase *"by any means"* reveals the joyful optimism of faith. Paul had made his request known unto God. He knew all to well that the details of his future had not been revealed to him. His heart had also taken hold of the fact that *"with God all things are possible"* (Matt 19:26), and that every available means are under His control. He saw no need to speculate about HOW his request could, or would be, processed by God. Rather, he left the matter with the Lord, willing to accept *"ANY means"* in the fulfillment of his request. I do not question that he remained alert in his spirit for the fulfillment of his request, not expecting it to happen independently of his perception.

While doctrinally a small matter, this phrase—*"if by any means now at last"*^{NKJV}—reveals the joyful anticipation of faith, and the settled determination to leave matters in the hands of the Lord. Faith does affect the entire person.

A PROSPEROUS JOURNEY

Precisely what is *"a prosperous journey?"* It is not a journey attended by prosperity, as ordinarily conceived. Rather, it is a journey that is culminated—one in which Paul finally reaches Rome. Other versions highlight this perspective. *" . . . now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."*^{NKJV} *" . . . I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you."*^{NRSV}

There is thus a two-fold sense in which the journey would be *"prosperous."* First, that it would be one meeting with the approval and blessing of God (*"by the will of God"*). Secondly, that his desire to see the brethren at Rome would at last be granted. The beloved Apostle thought in terms of his Apostleship: faithfulness to the One who called him, and benefit to the people of God.

BY THE WILL OF GOD

Here is an expression that is not common in our day. We live in the midst of a society that has been cultured to think primarily of itself. Self interests are commonly sought above the will of God. There is even a strain of theology that teaches men it is a sign of unbelief to submit our desires to the will of God. Those embracing this nonsense imagine that demanding from God is an indication of strong faith, and that submitting to His will is a sign of unbelief. The supposition is too foolish to recognize or embrace.

The Apostle does not hesitate to submit his request to God's will. He allows for the possibility that there is a higher agenda than his own, and that God's will supercedes his own. The Kingdom of God does not resolve around the desires of men—even holy men. We must make it our business not to lose sight of this.

God's will is the highest expression of will and purpose. No person is ever at a disadvantage to prefer and submit to God's will. David, for example, *"served his own generation by the will of God"* (Acts 13:36). Paul himself was *"called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God"* (1 Cor 1:1). The Lord Jesus *"gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world,*

according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal 1:4). If the will of God was sufficient to effect our salvation, we may rely implicitly upon it in the details of life, and in our desires as well.

The will of God is the environment in

which we can stand "perfect and complete" (Col 4:12). The whole of life in Christ is lived "to the will of God" (1 Pet 4:2). His will is what we seek to "do" (Eph 6:6; Heb 10:36). Faith causes His will to become our will. It knows the will of God is "good, and acceptable, and perfect"

(Rom 12:2). Submitting to God's will is always right, never placing the believer in a spiritual disadvantage. That truth penetrates every level of life—even down to desiring to go to a specific city and be with a particular people, as revealed in this very text.

A NOBLE OBJECTIVE

"For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established."

Much of the religion of our day is marked by carnal casualness. It is not centered in the good work of the Lord, and has little to do with edification or bringing spiritual advantage to the people of God. This way of thinking is not the manner of the Kingdom, and should not be dignified as though it was.

In his desire to come to Rome, Paul is not thinking of mere camaraderie, or the promotion of some personal agenda. His reasoning is within the perimeter of the Gospel and His call to declare it to the nations.

A LONGING

A "longing" is a strong compulsion. Just as the flesh has powerful lusts, the renewed heart has strong longings or desires. For whatever it is worth, the word "long" comes from **epipoqw**, which means "Have a great affection, yearn for someone, zealously yearn over." Barclay-Newman Paul expressed a similar yearning to the Philippians: "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:8). This, then, is a compelling desire that produced determinations and strong prayers to God within the Apostle. This is not the expression of a sense of mere duty, or the urge to fulfill an official capacity. This is the very heart of Paul.

The Apostle did not express this desire to everyone. In fact, it is only expressed to the churches in Rome and Philippi. He also spoke to Timothy after this manner: "Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy" (2 Tim 1:4). The recollection of

some churches caused grief and deep concern in the heart of Paul. "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain" (Gal 4:11). "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it" (1 Cor 11:18). But there were some who had endeared themselves to Paul by their faith toward God and love to all saints.

In this case, the imparting of a spiritual gift does not refer to transferring a spiritual aptitude to someone else: i.e., enabling some of the brethren in Rome to prophesy, work miracles, etc. Rather, it speaks of sharing with the brethren the things he had received from God. The word "impart" does mean to "give over or share," Barclay-Newman and is so translated by the NRSV and NIV. Paul desired to share with them what he had received.

It is the prerogative of God's people to be a blessing to all who hear of them. There are some believers who, when they are remembered, cause great longings to rise in their brethren. They are a source of encouragement and consolation to those who live by faith.

Paul desired to minister to the saints what God had ministered unto him. This, of course, is the purpose for spiritual gifts—to profit the people of God through them. As it is written, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" NKJV (1 Cor 12:7). It is, as stated in another place, "that the church may receive edification" NKJV (1 Cor 14:5).

In stating his desire, Paul confirmed his delight in determining to "excel to the edifying of the church" (1 Cor 14:12). The one imparting spiritual benefit to the people of God through the exercise of the gift given to him, is a good steward of God's grace. As it is written, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 4:10-11).

In my lifetime I have confronted relatively few people who have a driving compulsion to share what they have

It is the prerogative of God's people to be a blessing to all who hear of them. There are some believers who, when they are remembered, cause great longings to rise in their brethren. They are a source of encouragement and consolation to those who live by faith.

IMPARTING SOMETHING SPIRITUAL

Paul's longing was not driven by a desire for mere friendship in the flesh. He was seeking the spiritual advantage of the people of God—bringing them to maturity in Christ. He was also endeavoring to fulfill His appointed ministry.

received from God with His people. This is always an evidence of a lack of faith in God and love for His people. The same Spirit who imparts spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4-9) will, if not quenched, lead the individual to the proper use of them.

It is always appropriate to minister to the earthly needs of God's people, doing good to them (Gal 6:10). It is even better to minister to their spiritual needs, thus preparing them to live triumphantly in this world, and gain the world to come.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE IMPARTATION

And what was the objective sought by the Apostle sharing with them what he had received? It was not simply the fulfilling of an obligation. By the grace of God, Paul had become a participant in the very work of God. His objectives, therefore, aligned with those of God Himself. His ministry to them was "to the end ye may be established."

The word "established" is a key word representing a fundamental aspect of life in Christ Jesus. The word means to set something up so it remains immovable. It is the word used to describe Christ's determination to lay down His life a ransom for many. "And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51). His determination was so evident the Samaritans did not receive Him "because His face was as though he would go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:53). His mind was made up, and He could not be moved from His intention.

Establishment – A Necessity

The establishment of the people of God is like that. It means their minds are firmly fixed on the goal, and they cannot be moved from it. They will stand the tests of flood and desert, of drought and fire. Those who are established do not vacillate. They do not waver, and are not double minded. They are reliable, consistent, and faithful under all circumstances.

If you have been in Christ for any length of time, you know how exceedingly

rare such individuals are—spiritually established individuals. The early churches, for example, were "established in the faith" by the ministry of Paul and those with him (Acts 16:5). Timothy was sent to the Thessalonians "to establish" them so they would not be "moved" by the "afflictions" they were enduring (1 Thess 3:2).

When Jesus told Peter Satan had desired to sift him, and that He was praying his faith would not fail, He said, "and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk 22:32). This ("strengthen") is the same word, and precisely the same concept. Strengthening the brethren is establishing them in the faith, making them solid and immovable in Jesus. It involves feeding the sheep.

It is always appropriate to minister to the earthly needs of God's people, doing good to them (Gal 6:10). It is even better to minister to their spiritual needs, thus preparing them to live triumphantly in this world, and gain the world to come.

God Himself is devoted to this work. As it is written, "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil" (2 Thess 3:3). And again, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet 5:10). And again, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thess 3:13). And again, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope

through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work" (2 Thess 2:17).

The Lord has made abundant provision for the stability of His people. He has provided gifts to perfect, or mature them through edification. The determined outcome is that they "be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph 4:11-15).

No Provision for Juvenility

There is no provision in Christ for remaining in a state of spiritual juvenility.

I am painfully aware that the contemporary church receives stagnant disciples without the slightest twinge of conscience—but God does not. God is not glorified by unstable and ungrounded believers. The Lord Jesus is not honored by followers who are unable to stand, lacking firmness of conviction and the full assurance of faith. These conditions are a reproach to God, and negate any profession of faith. If God has determined we "be no more children," and has made abundant provision that we no longer remain in that state, who is the person who can justify remaining there?

In nature, an eventual lack of maturity is an abnormality, and is so recognized. But in the realm of the Spirit, it is more than an abnormality. In nature, it is possible to be born with deficiencies that make maturity impossible. However, this is not the case in the Spirit. In Christ we become a "new creation," and there are no flaws in that new creation. It progresses from "glory to glory," being changed into the image of Christ by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18). Those who do not eventually mature in Christ are a living contradiction of the very nature of spiritual life. Their status is totally unacceptable.

Thus, through the Spirit, Paul has set the tone for this Epistle. It will contribute to the stability of the brethren. A message will be presented that will ground them in the faith, and enable them to stand

against the wiles of the devil. His aim is to make the saints better, their faith stronger, and their hope clearer.

I cannot leave this section without emphasizing that every ability the Lord

places in the body is designed to contribute to the stability of His people. If what a person is doing in the name of the Lord brings no stabilizing influence to the saints, it has not come from God. It does not deserve to be associated with Jesus. At

the best, it is a fabrication of men, and at the worst a delusion of the devil. Both, of course, are totally unacceptable. It is no wonder that the Apostle extended himself to establish the saints of God. He knew the manner of the Kingdom.

THE POWER OF MUTUAL FAITH

"¹²That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." While the Apostles were placed "*first*" in the church (1 Cor 12:28), they are not above the church. They are a part of it, and thus were advantaged by those to whom they ministered. In great tenderness, Paul confesses to this marvelous arrangement. Not only was he desirous to deliver to them what he had received, he was intent upon receiving benefits from them.

It is the nature of faith to bring glory to God and advantage to His people. Just as surely as faith honors God and Christ, bringing great delight to them, it also builds up the saints, bringing edification to them. There is a consistency in this Divine arrangement that never fails. The only way to displease God is to cease to live by faith. Likewise, the only way to fail to bring spiritual benefit to the brethren is to cease walking by faith.

COMFORT

"*Comfort*" is one of the premier ministries of the Kingdom of God. The word "*comfort*" is a large one meaning to encourage, help, console, cheer up, and relieve from sorrow. It presumes warfare, opposition, and fleshly frailty. Interestingly, the word "*Comforter*" is applied to the Holy Spirit Himself (**paraklhton**—John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). It is said of the early church, they "*were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit were multiplied*" (Acts 9:31). In John 14:16, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "*another Comforter,*" indicating that Jesus Himself was also a "*Comforter.*" In fact, He is called "*the Consolation (paraklhtsin--Comforter) of Israel*" (Lk 2:25). In addition, God Himself is

declared as He "*Who comforteth us in all our tribulation*" (2 Cor 1:4). Thus, the entire Godhead is involved in our comfort, encouragement, help, and consolation. Also, the Scriptures are affirmed to have been written that we "*that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*" (Rom 15:4). Additionally the person who prophesies "*speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to*

It is no wonder, therefore, that this is such a significant ministry in the body of Christ. Those who have no interest in ministering comfort and encouragement to the people of God have no reason to expect Divine support in their labors.

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It is no wonder, therefore, that this is such a significant ministry in the body of Christ. Those who have no interest in ministering comfort and encouragement to the people of God have no reason to expect Divine support in their labors.

The Need for Comfort

Rather than being a spiritual luxury, comfort is a necessity. Our status as strangers in this world (1 Pet 2:11), together with the opposition of Satanic hosts (Eph 6:12), and a contrary law within our members (Rom 7:23), require the refurbishment of our energies.

Faith is in sharp conflict with the

entire world order. As a result it tends to wane without refreshment. The most holy of men have been brought to a status where they "*were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that*" they even "*despaired even of life*" (2 Cor 1:8). When one "*fights the good fight of faith,*" there is constant need for building up, encouragement, and comfort. This is one of the many reasons contention among the people of God is so wrong. It tends to tear down rather than build up.

A Different Word

The word used here is different—a sort of compound word. The KJV translates it "*comforted together*" (**sumparaklhtai**). Other versions read, "encouraged together"^{NKJV, NASB} and "mutually encouraged."^{NIV, NRSV} The idea is that of reciprocation—each helping the other.

This is a form of spiritual synergy. Synergy is combined action where one part helps the other part to work better. Our fleshly bodies are an example of this type of Divine design. Thus an Apostle helps the church at Philippi to fulfill their ministry, while a representative from that church helped the Apostle to fulfill his ministry (Phil 2:25-28; 4:18-19).

In this way, the body of Christ is "*tempered together*" (1 Cor 12:24). The members are, by Divine determination, dependent upon one another. No one of them or group of them possesses all of the things available to them in Christ Jesus.

There are some things that must be "*ministered*" through those in fellowship with the Head, Jesus Christ. As it is written, "*the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having*

nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col 2:19).

When Paul says "comforted together," he is speaking of nourishment being ministered and knitting together resulting.

MUTUAL FAITH

The means through which "comforting together" is accomplished is "mutual faith." Thus, the faith of one saint builds up and encourages the faith of another saint. The faith of an Apostle not only

beyond the point where advantage can be realized from other members of Christ's body. It is important to observe we are not dealing with religious novelties here. Mutual edification is not denominational camaraderie or sectarian fraternity. The edification and strengthening of God's people cannot be achieved by fleshly means. It can only come through faith, which is our sole means of accessing "spiritual blessings in heavenly places."

A valid congregation of believers is engaged in mutual spiritual improvement. A more firm grip upon eternal verity is

submitted to its expressions. Who is able to discern the harm brought upon believers by expressions of unbelief! How many times I have heard such words

Jonathan, on the other hand, went to David in the woods "and strengthened his hand in God" (1 Sam 23:16). Upon beginning his leadership in Israel, David did the same with his soldiers. "And now may the LORD show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing. Now therefore, let your hands be strengthened, and be valiant" ^{NKJV} (2 Sam 2:6-7). In the early church, Judas and Silas, "themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words" ^{NKJV} Acts 15:32). When Paul and company visited the churches, they "were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5). This is the manner of the Kingdom.

In my judgment, there is altogether too much activity in the churches that does not leave believers strengthened, edified, or comforted. Much of the dialog I hear these days is nothing more than academic prattle, or crudely stated opinions. It does not produce spiritual tenacity in the people of God, or lift them up above smoke of the battle field. It is too close to the earth and too far from heaven. It relies upon men, and not upon God.

God has spoken too frequently and with too much clarity for their to be any ignorance on this subject. Edification is a fundamental activity among the faithful, and is not to take second place to other interests. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom 14:19). "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification" (Rom 15:2). "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thess 5:11). This is the type of activity Paul longed for.

A valid congregation of believers is engaged in mutual spiritual improvement. A more firm grip upon eternal verity is promoted. Hearts are encouraged to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life. Heaven is made more clear, and earth is pushed into the background.

strengthens the faith of a Roman believer, the faith of the Roman believer fortifies the faith of an Apostle. What a marvelous arrangement, and it is available to all!

While measures of faith differ (Rom 12:3), the nature of faith remains the same. There is at least a twofold ministry of faith. First, it appropriates the grace of God, bringing us into God's favor enabling us to appropriate righteousness (Eph 2:8; Rom 3:22,25; 4:5). Second, it equips the child of God to function within the body of Christ to the benefit of all. This particular verse refers to the latter ministry of faith. Paul will open this truth more extensively in the twelfth chapter. The bulk of my comments will be reserved for that section.

No ministry, however lofty, puts one

promoted. Hearts are encouraged to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life. Heaven is made more clear, and earth is pushed into the background. Where these things are not, to some degree, taking place, the gathering is actually pointless.

There are no activities in the Kingdom that are unrelated to readying people to stand before God and receive an eternal inheritance.

There is a word declared in Joshua 14:8 that is appropriate here. Joshua compares the effect of the unbelieving spies on the people of Israel. "Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God." ^{NKJV} This is what unbelief does—it weakens those

UNFULFILLED PURPOSE

¹³Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but

was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles." Grace had so

enveloped the heart of the apostle that he rarely thought of anything but fulfilling his ministry—at least that is what comes

across in Scripture. In a day of divided interests and lukewarmness this is a strange occurrence. Actually, it was not all that common in the first century. But zeal is still the standard for the people of God because that was the manner of the Savior. Isaiah prophesied of the Lord Jesus, that He *"was clad with zeal as a cloak"* (Isa 59:17). When Jesus *"dwelt among us,"* upon beholding His manner, *"His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up"* (John 2:17; Psa 69:9; 119:139). Now the Apostle declares how he has partaken of that Divine nature. Just as Jesus approached his ministry with zeal, so Paul entered into his ministry with zeal.

IGNORANCE UNWANTED

There are aspects to life in the Spirit that are public, and are not to be hidden. This contradicts the course of nature, which tends to make people more private in the intentions of their heart. Already Paul has stated his fervent desire to come to the brethren at Rome (1:10-11). But he does not want them to suppose this was but a casual intention, easily forgotten, or placed into the background of thought when the door was not immediately opened. Many an unstable soul has had noble desires, only to abandon them because they could not be fulfilled when they desired. I have often pondered what marvelous opportunities have been passed by only because individuals have not been willing to *"wait upon the Lord,"* thereby renewing their strength (Isa 40:31).

PURPOSING

Those who imagine that prayers are only to be offered once, or that intentions must not be valid if they cannot be fulfilled quickly, are simply wrong. Paul states he had *"planned many times to come"* to the brethren in Rome.^{NIV} He did not conclude that a failure to fulfill those plans indicated they were out of order.

I ought to point out, however, that Paul was sensitive enough to the Lord to recognize when his intentions were not in synch with the Divine agenda. Once, when they *"tried to go into Bithynia"* the Holy Spirit *"did not permit them"* (Acts 16:7). We are not told precisely how the Spirit

forbade them, but it is evident they were able to recognize His direction. But such was not the case with his intentions to go to Rome. That was a consistent desire of the apostle, and was neither rebuked nor forbidden by the Lord. I can only conclude, therefore, that Paul was in fellowship with the Savior in this desire.

Several years before Paul actually came to Rome, he expressed his deep desire to do so. After remaining in Asia for two full years, *"Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome"* (Acts 19:21). Around four years later, on a boat destined to be dashed to pieces in a storm, Jesus had appeared to Paul saying, *"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome"* (Acts 23:11). It

There are aspects to life in the Spirit that are public, and are not to be hidden. This contradicts the course of nature, which tends to make people more private in the intentions of their heart.

was not until over two years later that Paul finally arrived in Rome (Acts 28:16), a little over two years after he wrote this Epistle.

It seems to me that *"purposing"* is a vital part of our labors in the Lord. After all, our salvation is associated with Divine *"purpose"* (Eph 1:9,11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 John 3:9). It is certainly in order to set our minds and hearts on some honorable Kingdom work, and to be intent about it. In fact, there is a rich fellowship to be had with our Lord in determining to fulfill our ministry in the body of Christ.

Do you have something you have *"purposed"* to do for the Lord? Is there some honorable work you have longed to do, that will bring glory to the Lord and a sense of fulfillment in your ministry? Do not abandon that purpose easily. Learn from our text to keep godly intentions,

expressing them often in your prayers.

HINDRANCE

The most noble of intentions can meet with obstacles. Circumstance can raise, what seems to be, impenetrable walls between you and your desire. The phrase *"let hitherto"* means *"hindered until now."*^{NKJV} Later, Paul will say he had *"been much hindered from coming to"* the Romans (Rom 15:22). He does not say it was not yet time to come, but that he was hindered from coming. He does not say the Lord had told him not to come, but that he was hindered from coming.

The word *"hindered"* means prevented, forbidden, or withstood. Those who imagine their faith will invariably break down barriers instantly, need to examine this text carefully. We live in a spiritual environment where our intentions can be delayed, and even thwarted altogether. This is partially involved in *"troubled on every side," "perplexed," "persecuted,"* and *"cast down"* (2 Cor 4:7-9). While faith ultimately triumphs over these things, we are not to imagine they will not occur.

Once Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, *"Therefore we wanted to come to you; even I, Paul, time and again; but Satan hindered us"* (1 Thess 2:18). However, even though *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick,"* yet when at last *"the desire comes, it is a tree of life"* (Prov 13:12).

Satan hinders in a number of ways. He has an allotted degree of power in nature. The fact that Paul was *"shipwrecked"* three times, and that a deadly serpent burst out of a bundle of sticks, fastening itself on Paul's hand, were not mere happenstance (2 Cor 11:25; Acts 28:3). You may remember Satan's assault against Job. It involved robbery, fire from heaven, a great wind from the wilderness, and sore boils from the sole of Job's foot to the crown of his head (Job 1:15,16,17,19; 2:6-7). When the devil sifted Peter, he employed the questioning of some women (Matt 26:69-73).

There is a wide arsenal of weaponry that our adversary employs against us. He certainly cannot operate independently of

God, to Whom he is responsible. However, from time to time, he is granted leave to put us to the test, and he does so aggressively. From a higher vantage point, this is the proving our faith. In such tests the extent of our trust is revealed, and the firmness of our resolution proved.

So it was with the Apostle. Time and again he sought to go to Rome. His commission as an Apostle compelled him to do so. The nature of the Gospel urged him to remain firm in his resolve. And the good word about the faith of the brethren in Rome also encouraged him to maintain his cause. Satan was neither strong enough or wise enough to stifle that desire. Faith gained the victory for Paul. It will do the same for you!

Another Type of Delay

But there is one other aspect to Paul being hindered that should be considered. Some delay was the result of preaching in other areas. *"The Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia"* also needed to be tutored in the manner of the Kingdom, and thus Paul was sent there with Barnabas (Acts 15:22).

The Apostle zealously entered into his labors, all the while keeping his desire to go to Rome. He was willing to submit his will to the King, and wait for Jesus to use the key of David to open the appropriate door. He is a notable example for us all!

FRUIT

The longing of the Apostle was related to His Apostleship. He was not seeking mere friendship in the flesh. How poignantly he states the matter: *"that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles."* There

was more to Paul's calling than preaching—although that was at its heart. Results were also involved. I have often heard people say "we are not held responsible for results." There certainly is an element of truth in that saying, but it

The Lord Jesus declared that His Father would remove, or take away, "every branch" in Him that "beareth not fruit" (John 15:2). He further asserted that the glory of God and our status as disciples hinged upon fruitbearing.

Fruitfulness is not an option— something that may or may not be possessed. Unfruitfulness, Jesus declared, is the result of the word of God being "choked," or suffocated by the cares of this world

is too small to contain the whole of the matter. God has an intense interest in fruit, being glorified by it.

Fruitfulness Is Not an Option

Fruitfulness is not an option— something that may or may not be possessed. It is something provided for by Jesus, and earnestly sought by God. He is glorified by fruitfulness, and dishonored by a lack of it. Unfruitfulness, Jesus declared, is the result of the word of God being "choked," or suffocated by the cares of this world (Matt 13:22). It is a trait ascribed to *"the works of darkness,"* and with which we are to have *"no fellowship"* (Eph 5:11). The people of God are to be reminded to maintain good works *"that they be not unfruitful"* (Tit 3:14). In His mercy, God has provided resources so that we will *"neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet 1:8). However, NO provision has been made for NOT being fruitful! It appears to me that this is almost unknown among many who profess the name of Christ. Fruitlessness is altogether too common in the churches.

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). We are not, therefore, considering something that is inconsequential.

Fruit Among the Gentiles

While Paul's ministry was not limited to the Gentiles, they were the primary target of his labors. Now, he desired to *"reap some harvest among"*^{NRSV} the Romans, as well as other Gentiles. The zeal with which he labored in the Lord's harvest is a singular phenomenon in Scripture. By his own confession, and in tribute to God's grace, he *"labored more abundantly than they all"* (1 Cor 15:10).

Even though the fruit was gathered for the Lord, yet Paul calls it his own. I assume this is because he really recognized no other work as worthy of his commitment than that to which the Lord had called him. He was a *"laborer together with God"* (1 Cor 3:9), and did his reaping in the name of the Lord. Too, as a good steward, he was garnering sheaves to give back to the Lord.

THE GOSPEL DEBT

"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." The power and effectiveness of faith can be seen in the perspectives and resolves it produces. Its superiority over a system of Law is thus seen. *"The Law,"* the Spirit affirms, *"is not of faith"* (Gal 3:12). Consequently, it did not produce the kind of resoluteness

revealed in our text. People *"under the Law"* were thus described by God: *"Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men"* (Isa 29:13). They remained aloof from God, even though He had spoken to them, directed

them, and *"hewed them by the Prophets"* (Hos 6:5). But this is not the case with those brought into a covenantal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This verse (14) particularly confirms this to be true.

INDEBTEDNESS

To be a "debtor" is to be under

obligation. Further, the obligation is correct, offering no alternative but submission. The idea presented is that of one who has received something of great magnitude, and consequently is indebted.

It requires only a modicum of thought to see viewing oneself as a "debtor" is not a response of the flesh. Flesh perceives no indebtedness to God, and therefore neither honors nor serves Him. Further, its servitude to sin is not perceived as slavery, but as a willing and right preference.

The indebtedness of which the Apostle speaks is an explanation of his desire to have "fruit" among the believers in Rome (verse 13). That desire was not driven by a fleshly view of them, or mere professional interest. There were higher motives.

The Nature of the Gospel Message

The nature of the Gospel itself produces indebtedness among those receiving it. It is a proclamation for "every creature" (Mk 16:15). It offers a Divine resolution to a universal dilemma. The forgiveness (Eph 1:7), peace (Rom 5:1; 10:15), reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20), and justification (Acts 13:39) it announces are for "all men" (Rom 5:18). It announces a Savior that is for "all men" (1 Tim 4:10). That circumstance made Paul "a debtor."

The Nature of the Apostolic Office

The Apostolic office, by its very nature, involves serving the interests of another. The word "Apostle" means, *an ambassador of the Gospel, one commissioned by Christ, a messenger that is sent.*^{Strong's} Such were sent by Jesus to preach and to bear fruit. As our Lord said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). That commission made Paul "a debtor."

The Condition and Nature of Man

The condition of man, created by the entrance of sin and death, requires the hearing of the Gospel. "All have sinned" (Rom 3:23; 5:12), and therefore require the Good News of salvation for sinners. It makes little difference whether sinners are refined or crude, cultured or barbaric, they are all in a condemned state. That

detail made Paul "a debtor," and he gladly accepted that status.

GREEKS AND BARBARIANS

The words "Greeks and barbarians" does not refer to where people lived, but to the language they spoke. "Greeks" were not people living in Greece, but people speaking the Greek language, which was

they were candidates for the Gospel.

Paul, seeing the true nature of the Gospel, and possessing the knowledge of God, preached the Gospel to those noted for thought, and to those not distinguished by their thinking. He knew the Gospel announced Divine provision for the learned and the unlearned.

Those who are most cultured and refined need the Gospel, as well as those who are more savage and barbaric. Sophistication and crudeness are only veneers, or surface distinctions.

A REMARKABLE GOSPEL

I have long marveled at the greatness of the Gospel of Christ. Over the years I have witnessed its transforming power in those who have believed it, embracing the Christ it proclaims. With joy I have witnessed people lacking formal training and disciplined thought become remarkably clear thinkers and articulate speakers. Without being soiled by the philosophies of men, I have seen them learn to read, speak, and reason upon the things of God. Their transformation was so thorough and effective, that those unacquainted with their past could not believe they were once "unlearned and ignorant."

I have also witnessed the most cultured and disciplined minds humbled by their acceptance of the Gospel. I have seen the learned become as fools, willing to abandon worldly wisdom in favor of the wisdom of God. Under the powerful influence of the Gospel, they came to depend upon God without any reliance whatsoever upon their natural abilities and powers. Their transformation was equally impressive, so that people no longer thought of them in regard to their fleshly attainments.

Scriptural Examples

We have examples in Scripture of men of disciplined thought being joined to those considered to be "unlearned and ignorant." Moses, for example, "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Amos was "a gatherer of sycamore fruit" (Amos 7:14).

Daniel, in the king's court, was one in whom was found "an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas"^{NKJV} (Dan 5:12). John the Baptist came from the wilderness,

then the universal language. Under the reign of Alexander the Great, commencing in 336 B.C., Greek was promoted as the universal language. It was associated with culture and refinement.

When, therefore, Paul says he was debtor to the "Greeks and to the Barbarians," he means to the cultured and refined, as well as uncouth and uncivilized. Those who are most cultured and refined need the Gospel, as well as those who are more savage and barbaric. Sophistication and crudeness are only veneers, or surface distinctions. Beneath those distracting appearances, "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Therefore, whether on the barbaric island of Melita (Acts 28:1-2), or in the Areopagus, "in the midst of Mars Hill," surrounded by the most astute thinkers of the world (Acts 17:22, Paul was indebted to preach the Gospel.

WISE AND UNWISE

This is another way of looking at "Greeks and Barbarians." The first view is of their culture, or appearance. The second is of their attainment. The Greeks were noted for their worldly wisdom. They had a precise language, books, libraries, and a host of philosophers as well. The Barbarians did not have these things. Philosophers and writings did not come from their ranks. Yet, with the "wise,"

"clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6).

Paul was a Pharisee, "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3; 23:6). Peter and John

from the writings and words of these men? Has there ever been a person who read the Gospel of John, First Second and Third John, and First and Second Peter, who concluded from those writings they were former fisherman? From the writings of Moses, would anyone conclude he had been raised in the house of

effectiveness of their ministry, was not owing to their natural abilities or former culture. The powerful influence of the Gospel and their affiliation with the Living God made them what they were! That is the nature of the Gospel. It elevates the lowly, and humbles the proud. It brings bread and water to all who thirst, regardless of their earthly pedigree. This single fact has had a profound impact upon my own spirit.

The greatness of these men, and the effectiveness of their ministry, was not owing to their natural abilities or former culture. The powerful influence of the Gospel and their affiliation with the Living God made them what they were!

The Scripture establishes that outside of Christ, here are no real distinctions before God: "there is no difference." Also, fleshly distinctions are not recognized in Christ Jesus, who is the heart of the Gospel. In Him "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Gal 3:28).

were fisherman, noted among the religiously elite for being "unlearned and ignorant" (Matt 4:18-23; Acts 4:13).

Who is the person who, after being acquainted with the words of Moses, Amos, John the Baptist, Paul, Peter, and John, will dare to decide from their words who was learned and who was unlearned? Which individual will venture to say who was educated and who was not, judging

Pharaoh, subjected to all of the wisdom of Egypt? Or, that Amos was a farmer, or John the Baptist someone living in the wilderness? Had we not been told Luke was a physician, would anyone have concluded that to be the case from the books of Acts and Luke, which he wrote? To ask these questions makes their answer very apparent.

The greatness of these men, and the

The awareness of these circumstances, among other things, made Paul a "debtor" to everyone. Each of us have good reason to thank the Lord this is true. Only grace makes real distinctions among men—and those relate exclusively to our ministries within the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28-29), and personal fellowship with Christ Jesus.

DETERMINED TO PREACH

"¹⁵So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." There is a remarkable amount of religious folklore that has been associated with preaching the Gospel. Some examples are, "No one should hear the Gospel twice until everyone has heard it once." "The Gospel is only preached to sinners, believers are taught." "You never preach to believers, only to unbelievers." All of these, and more, have been driven by an institutional agenda, and have not one syllable of support from the Word of God. This verse will confirm this to be the case, and that, as we may expect, with great power.

AS MUCH AS IS IN ME IS

This is an extension of the thought expressed in the previous verse—that he is a debtor to all men. The word "So" is explanatory, as though he said, "That is why." Others versions read, "hence"^{NRSV}, "That is why"^{NIV}, "Thus"^{NASB}. Because,

therefore, he is a "debtor," Paul now speaks of his determination.

While it may appear cumbersome, the expression "as much as in me is" has great meaning. Again, different translations unveil something of this meaning. "Hence, my eagerness"^{NRSV}. "That is why I am so eager"^{NIV}. "Thus, for my part, I am eager"^{NASB}. "As far as it depends upon me"^{Darby}.

In this expression we behold the yielded heart of the Apostle. No part of his real person stood against this resolve: "as much as in me is." He was not struggling with whether the resolve was right or not: "as much as in me is." Just as surely as he loved the Lord with all of his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, so he was fully devoted to the execution of God's will: "as much as in me is." He had been transformed by the renewing of his mind (Rom 12:2), and thus was eager to fulfill

his ministry: "as much as in me is."

This sort of resolution brings great glory to God. When the heart is settled and solid about doing the will of God, the Lord Jesus is honored. May there be more of this type of attitude among those who are serving the Lord.

READINESS

The cry of faith is "I am ready!" Every place faith dominates, readiness is made known. Readiness means *forward in spirit, predisposed, and willing*.^{Strong's} It includes the idea of willingness and eagerness—chomping at the bit, so to speak. It is more than simply being prepared, like a speaker being ready to make a speech. Readiness means the matter is dominating the mind and pulling at the heart. It involves thinking about the matter, and looking intently for the opening of the door of opportunity by the Lord of hosts. Distracting issues have

been settled, and any doubts resolved.

On one occasion, Paul expressed his preparation for both living and dying in these words, *"I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 21:13). Another example of Paul's readiness was expressed in relation to his imminent death. *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Tim 4:6). That is an excellent epitaph for every believer to seek.

Faith prepares us for the work of the Lord. It also produces the strong confidence required to enter into it with zeal. It was reliance upon the Lord that contributed mostly to Paul's readiness, not mere academic preparation.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO BELIEVERS

And what is it that Paul was eager, willing, and prepared to do? It was *"to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."* Mind you, they were already *"beloved of God"* and *"called to be saints"* (v 7). Their faith had been reported *"throughout the whole world,"* being held in high regard (v 8). Paul even looked forward to being encouraged by their faith

(v 12). There were a host of notable spiritual leaders among them (chapter 16). Yet, Paul is eager to come and *"preach the Gospel"* to them!

Let us forever put to rest any notion

of relevance to those who have believed and obeyed it. They have only been introduced to the Gospel. The best of us have but entered the vestibule of the *"glorious Gospel of the blessed God"* (1 Tim 1:11). The Good News of Jesus is an exceeding

Let us forever put to rest any notion that a single member of the body of Christ has passed beyond the necessity of hearing the Gospel. The pit from which such a notion has been lifted was created by a restricted and lifeless view of the Gospel of Christ.

that a single member of the body of Christ has passed beyond the necessity of hearing the Gospel. The pit from which such a notion has been lifted was created by a restricted and lifeless view of the Gospel of Christ. No less than sixty-five times, churches and believers are told of the Gospel (Rom 1:1,9,15,15; 10:15,16; 11:28; 15:16,19,20,29; 1 Cor 1:17; 4:15; 9:12,14,16,18; 15:1; 2 Cor 4:4; 8:18; 9:13; 10:14,16; 11:7; Gal 1:7,11; 2:5,7,14; 3:8; 4:13; Eph 1:13; 3:6; 6:15,19; Phil 1:5,7,12,17,27; 2:22; 4:3,15; Col 1:5,23; 1 Thess 2:2,4,8,9; 3:2; 2 Thess 1:8; 2 Tim 1:8,10; Phile 13; Heb 4:2). The centrality of these references are evident.

Do not imagine the Gospel has no more

large room, worthy of extensive and prolonged inquiry..

If there is one prevailing deficiency that exists in the modern church, it is its woeful ignorance of the Gospel. That unfamiliarity is the fountain from which unbelief, contention, and wayward conduct have come. Wherever the knowledge of the Gospel is lacking, so are all other matters relating to life and godliness. There is a great need in our time for powerful preachers of the Gospel—for men with insight and inner compulsion to open to the church what God has accomplished for them in Jesus. Refreshment and stability for the saints will result.

CONCLUSION

A BRIEF SUMMATION

The powerful interrelationships of Scriptural truth are evident in this passage. With an expertise that can only come from the Spirit of God, the Apostle has woven a beautiful tapestry. He has included God, Christ, and the Spirit. The Scripture, the Prophets, and the Gospel have been mentioned. Christ Jesus has been seen as the Master sending His servant, the Son of God, and the Seed of David. He is affirmed to have been declared to be the Son of God with power through His resurrection from the dead. Paul has presented himself as called by God, designated as an Apostle, and separated to declare the Gospel. He affirms he received grace and Apostleship for the purpose of producing among all nations obedience that comes from faith.

The brethren in Rome have been identified as the beloved of God and called to be saints. Grace and peace have been conferred upon them from both the Father and the Son. Thankfulness to God is expressed for the faith of the brethren in Rome, and that it is spoken of throughout the world. God is called to witness that Paul is serving the Lord with his spirit, and in the Gospel of His Son. Prayer to God is mentioned as the means used to obtain a prosperous journey to the brethren at Rome. The Apostle expresses a profound desire to bring some advantage to the saints in Rome, and to be encouraged by their faith. Because of his indebtedness to all men, Paul desires to have some fruit among those in Rome, greatly desiring to come and preach the Gospel to them. And that is just his

introduction!

ONLY IN THE LORD

Where can such remarkable versatility be found except in the Lord Jesus Christ? Where is it possible to develop such dexterity of thought, save in the power of the Holy Spirit? We have been wafted into higher realms, and prepared for heavenly tutelage. Great things will be brought to us in this most holy environment.

FLESH EXCLUDED

The total absence of any fleshly values should be apparent to every one. Absolutely no significance is placed upon mere human accomplishments or natural abilities. Rather, the Apostle is moved to bring us into the place where God is *"all in all"* (1 Cor 12:6; 15:28; Eph 1:23).

MANNER AND CONTENT

It is true that God is *"is above all, and through all, and in you all"* (Eph 4:6). It is also true that *"all things are of God"* (2 Cor 5:18), and Jesus Christ is *"Lord of all"* (Acts 10:36). Both the manner and content of the Apostolic writings reflect these things with remarkable consistency. They never gave undue glory to man, or suggested there was such a thing as too much glory for God.

I realize these things are most evident to us when, in our hearts and minds, we are in the heavenly places. But these things are not apparent to every one wearing the name of Jesus. There is a remarkable amount of *Christianity* all around us that reasons after the manner of men, and ascribes glory to the flesh. It is enough to say that such things ought not to be.

REAL PROFITABILITY

Real spiritual profitability is experienced by faith and in heavenly places. It is always true, *"the flesh profiteth nothing"* (John 6:63). This is *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"* (Rom 8:7). However men may choose to refine their natural abilities, it is still true, *"the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor 2:14).

These realities are why the Scriptures speak as they do. It is why they appear meaningless and unprofitable to those who are in the flesh. It is also why holy men of God never accommodated themselves to the flesh. Those spoke and

wrote with an acuteness awareness of the God to whom they were accountable, and the Gospel that had been entrusted into their care.

The book of Romans is a rich resource of spiritual insight. But we must be *"in the Spirit"* to receive it. The subjects addressed in it will be delivered from a lofty perspective. The faith of the Roman brethren demanded that this be the case—and ours does as well. If we will come to the truth in recognition of the poverty of nature and the power of the Spirit, we will soon be receiving the understanding and perspectives required to fight the good fight of faith. God is greatly to be praised for having supplied such an abundance of truth! He is, after all, a God that is *"abundant in goodness and in truth"* (Ex 34:6). Truly, there is, as the song says, *"manna all around."*



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 3



THE GOSPEL AND LIVING BY FAITH

1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:16-17, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

In Christ, there are central matters that are to dominate our hearts and minds. **Secondary things must never be approached or handled as though they were primary, and primary things are not to be addressed as though they were secondary.** As simplistic as that may appear, it is staggering how much *contemporary Christianity* majors on minors, and

minors on majors. This is never insignificant, and always yields disastrous results. Those who choose to relegate Divinely emphasized things to the background of their thinking will not escape the judgment of God. God will be “justified” in all of His “sayings” (Rom 3:4). Those “sayings” are characterized by an emphatic tone—an undeniable accent.

institutional emphasis that made little of the Gospel, the righteousness of God, and believing. The Gospel was acknowledged to be the power of God, yet was rarely preached. The righteousness of God was hardly mentioned at all, and believing was viewed more as a commandment than the appointed means of remaining alive before God. I entertain these memories with great sorrow and shame, thankful that grace has retrieved me from their delusive power.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. I AM NOT ASHAMED (1:16A)
- II. THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST (1:16B)
- III. THE POWER OF GOD (1:16C)
- IV. IN ORDER TO SALVATION (1:16D)
- V. TO ALL WHO BELIEVE (1:16E)
- VI. THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO THE GREEK (1:16F)
- VII. THE REVELATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (1:17A)
- VIII. FROM FAITH TO FAITH (1:17B)
- IX. THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH (1:17C)

The passage before us focuses on three fundamental Kingdom realities. One is objective, and the others are subjective, dealing with our experience. The first is “*the Gospel of Christ*,” which is a Divine source. The second and third are “*the righteousness of God*” and “*faith*,” or believing, experienced by the child of God. Throughout the Scriptures these are always primary. They are never treated as though they were inconsequential, and are never represented as “not as important” as other things. This has not always been as apparent to me as it is now. I was an inadvertent victim of an

The person enamored of a religious institution does not view the Gospel as an ongoing necessity. It can easily be forgotten, or upstaged by church, theological, social, or economic issues. Very rarely is the Gospel of Christ a subject of exposition in an institution-centered setting.

The institutional mind-set also sees righteousness, if ever considered, as a goal more than a possession. Believing is considered noble, but is largely taken for granted, with a greater stress being placed on obedience, or strict adherence to a

moral code. This is largely done from Mount Sinai, with little regard to the grace of God.

I do not mean to be overly critical on these matters, but feel it is imperative to briefly address them. I have personally experienced the impact of such an approach, and can testify to the difficulties that attend recovery from its

debilitating affects. In this lesson, I will endeavor to capture the revealed view of the Gospel of Christ, without any regard whatsoever of its impact upon historical or contemporary religious thinking. I make no apology for this approach. In fact, I am compelled to labor with everything that is within me to see the Gospel from heaven's point of view. I see no other view as desirable or profitable.

We will find the Gospel has a direct relationship to the conferment of God's righteousness upon men, and men having faith in God. Where the Gospel of Christ is not preached or known, faith will, at the very best, be weak. Further, there will be no lively awareness of acceptance with God, or the experience of His righteousness. These things, and more, make the passage before us a critical one.

I AM NOT ASHAMED

^{1:16a} ***For I am not ashamed . . .***”

This is a most wonderful expression of confidence: *“I am not ashamed.”* Further, to declare it without hesitancy is evidence of a faith that has apprehended the truth. Shame, in this case, does not mean remorse, or a sense of guilt, as Adam and Eve felt after their transgression (Gen 2:25). Here it means a fear of embarrassment, or expecting to be proved false. This type of shame produces a reluctance to speak, through fear of being humiliated.

I should suppose that nearly every believer has, at some time, wrestled with this kind of shame. It is what constrains a person to keep silence around those who are intimidating—like the armies of Israel before Goliath. Such shame comes from a lack of *“the full assurance of faith”* (Heb 10:22). While such shame is not of itself sinful, unless it is addressed and overcome, it will have eternal consequences. Thus our Lord said, *“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels”* (Mark 8:38).

CONFLICT WITH THE WORLD

In saying He is *“not ashamed”* of the Gospel of Christ, the Apostle is acknowledging that it is in sharp conflict with the wisdom of this world. Elsewhere, the Spirit affirms this is, indeed, the situation. *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”* (1 Cor 1:18). The prophets foretold

that God would decimate the wisdom of this world, showing it to be poverty-stricken and impotent. *“For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent”* (1 Cor 1:19; Isa 29:14; Jer 8:9). The NIV reads, *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”*

I should suppose that nearly every believer has, at some time, wrestled with this kind of shame. It is what constrains a person to keep silence around those who are intimidating—like the armies of Israel before Goliath.

If God has *“destroyed the wisdom of the wise,”* who is the person who will attempt to resurrect it? Where is the individual who will imagine he can buttress the Gospel of Christ with one toothpick of worldly wisdom? It cannot be done, and where it seems to have been done, men have only been deceived.

When God says He has *“brought to nothing the understanding of the prudent,”* He means there is no capacity there to take hold of the things of God. It can neither discover nor support what is revealed in the Gospel of Christ.

The Supreme Display

The height of folly found in the world's wisdom relates directly with the Gospel of Christ. In sending His Son into the world—*God manifest in the flesh*—God brought down the seeming bastion of worldly wisdom. The Spirit puts it this way. *“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”* (1 Cor 2:6-8).

By saying *“the princes of the world,”* the Spirit is viewing the world's wisdom in its most refined and developed state. He is not speaking of governmental princes, but of those expert in the thought patterns of this world. They came from the philosophical, political, and religion sectors of humanity. The early church referred to this conspiracy as *“Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel,”* declaring they *“were gathered together”* against Jesus, whom God had anointed (Acts 4:27).

In Jesus, the Divine nature was displayed in a more precise and extensive manner than ever before. The testimony of creation, as impressive as it was (Psa 19:1-5), was but a faint whisper when compared to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Our Lord was *“a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst”*

of a people who had been cultured to receive Him (Acts 2:22; Rom 9:1-4). And what did they do? They “*crucified the Lord of glory!*”

They did not do this dastardly deed as barbarians, but as those who professed to have reasoned out the matter. They condemned Him to death upon the basis of their perverted understanding of the Law, and on the basis of expediency (Mark 14:64; John 11:49-50). Pilate thought it wise to consent to the matter because of political convenience (Mark 15:15).

God’s Assessment of the Situation

With remarkable clarity, the Spirit speaks on this subject, justifying those who rely solely on the power of the Gospel. “*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. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*”^{NASB} (1 Cor 1:21-24).

Neither Greek philosophy nor Jewish theology brought people to know God. Indeed, it was both that philosophy and theology that moved men to crucify the Lord of glory!

In His infinite wisdom, God knew the poverty of the human mind apart from Revelation. His Word is sufficient proof that this is the case. But to render humanity totally without excuse, He displayed the abysmal deficiency of worldly wisdom by saving men entirely apart from it. He ignored the Jewish quest for signs, and the Greek’s search for

wisdom, choosing to save men through a message—a revealed message.

The Natural Man Is Destitute

“*The natural man,*” cultured or not, “*does not receive the things of the Spirit*

have led Egypt astray in all that it does, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit”^{NASB} (Isa 29:11-15).

Paul, knowing the Gospel and firmly relying upon it, is not ashamed to declare

Neither Greek philosophy nor Jewish theology brought people to know God. Indeed, it was both that philosophy and theology that moved men to crucify the Lord of glory!

of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 2:14). When it comes to comprehending the things of God, the Spirit affirms the situation with no uncertainty: “*verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity*” (Psa 39:5).

The Spirit does not let this matter go, as though it was of little consequence. “*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness’; and again, ‘The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile’*”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 3:19-20). What God said of the most astute world thinkers in Isaiah’s time can be said of our day as well. “*The princes of Zoan are mere fools; The advice of Pharaoh’s wisest advisers has become stupid. How can you men say to Pharaoh, ‘I am a son of the wise, a son of ancient kings’ Well then, where are your wise men? Please let them tell you, And let them understand what the LORD of hosts Has purposed against Egypt. The princes of Zoan have acted foolishly, The princes of Memphis are deluded; Those who are the cornerstone of her tribes have led Egypt astray. The LORD has mixed within her a spirit of distortion; They*

the message that is unapproved by the world. He will not engage in a lengthy dialog to show the Gospel is harmonious with the wisdom of this world, for it is not. Nor, indeed, does He attempt to prove it according to the world’s criterion. All such efforts, however valuable they may appear, are a manifestation of shame. Those who attempt to show that the Gospel of Christ is **not** at a fundamental variance with the wisdom of the world bring no honor to Jesus by their efforts. Further, their attempts will not accomplish the work of God. That, among other things, is why Paul is “*not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.*” His lack of shame is not a mere sectarian statement.

NOT UNREASONABLE

It is not that the Gospel is unreasonable, and it must never be presented as though it is. In it, **Divine reason** is presented, which is the only valid reasoning. The “*wisdom of this world*” is a species of reason that has been repudiated by God. Consequently, it must also be disowned by us. In its place, the Lord offers a higher form of reason that is based upon faith. This reasoning is both satisfying and precise—so much so, that none who see it are ashamed to declare it. It is, in every way, superior and solitary.

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

^{1:16b} . . . of the gospel of Christ . . . Here is spiritual precision: “*the Gospel of Christ.*” It is not the gospel of the church, or of the Spirit, or of anything else finding its focus in this world. Concerning its origin, it is “*the Gospel of*

God” (Rom 1:1). Considered from the standpoint of what it brings, it is “*the Gospel of your salvation*” (Eph 1:13), the “*Gospel of peace*” (Rom 10:15), and the “*Gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). But when it comes to the substance of the

Gospel itself, it is the **announcement** of the Person, accomplishments, and present ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**THE GOSPEL
“Good”**

The Gospel is “good news.” It is not a good moral discipline, or a good law, but good “news.” It is inherently “good”—that is its nature. This is a message that speaks of benefits, as compared with requirements.

The Gospel is “GOOD news” in view of the circumstance brought on by sin. It is not “good” because of its impact upon economics, social circumstances, or political conditions. Those elevating such matters to undue importance will, by that very emphasis, abandon the Gospel. They will no longer perceive it as the ultimate good news.

There is no flaw in this message—it is “good.” It is like a thoroughly good tree, from which only good fruit can come (Matt 7:17-18). Nothing inherently bad can come from the Gospel of Christ. There is nothing about the news that it brings that is of itself morose or sullen. No matter how you look at it, it is good. It is beneficial and it is righteous, partaking of the character of God Himself. This is what makes opposition to the Gospel so reprehensible.

“News”

The Gospel is not a good idea, or a good philosophy. It is good “news”—a message that is beneficial, sound, and wholly sufficient. The word translated “Gospel” is an exceeding large one (εὐαγγέλιον—eu-ang-gel-ion). It emphasizes the **proclamation** of the message, as well as the **nature** of the message itself. This is the “good news” of something achieved by someone else in the behalf of humanity. It is a message that is not subject to change or updating.

The Gospel is a Divine announcement. It is the broadcast or report of something that has occurred in the behalf of men. It is not the announcement of possibilities, but of accomplishments. Unlike worldly news, this is news that never becomes obsolete or useless. When proclaimed in the twenty-first century, it is as fresh and powerful as it was when announced in the first century. The trends and preferences of the world have no effect upon the Gospel. New discoveries by the sons of men do not impact upon the Gospel, alter its message, or nullify its power. Nor, indeed, do they add any weight to it.

Entirely by Revelation

The Gospel in its entirety has come by revelation. Not a single syllable of the Gospel is a conclusion, or the result of human reason. Over and over this is emphasized in the Scriptures. From the standpoint of the benefits announced in the Gospel, they are said to be “revealed” to men “through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:10). The point of this particular affirmation is not **who** the men were through whom the revelation came, but the **NECESSITY** of the revelation: i.e., “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” (1 Cor 2:9). Unless God had undertaken to make them known to men there is no possible way they could have been perceived.

The great benefits announced in the Gospel were formerly hidden from men. As it is written, “the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been **revealed** by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Eph 3:5-6).

The “Gospel of Christ” could never have been compiled by men or angels. No created intelligence, regardless of its superiority, could have constructed the Gospel, even with the prophecies of the holy prophets in hand. It had to be revealed from heaven, through the Holy Spirit—and that at Divine discretion.

Hidden to the Prophets

There were prophecies of the coming Messiah, and some details about what would occur when He came—but they were all very obscure. The prophets through whom those revelations came were intrigued by what they said, but were not granted a clear understanding of them. As it is written, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been **reported** to you through those



who have **preached** the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into” (1 Pet 1:10-12).

Among the sons of men prior to Christ, the “holy prophets” rank the highest. Although they were inspired by God, yet they were not able to decipher the grandeur or the details of the central message they proclaimed. The message was so extensive, and so replete with spiritual advantages, they could only introduce it. And, even their introduction to it had to be revealed.

The word “Gospel,” therefore, includes these key elements.

- † It is essentially a good report, bringing glad tidings to the hearers.
- † It is fundamentally an announcement, not an outline of acceptable conduct, or a moral code of law.
- † It is a message that would never have been conceived or known had God not revealed it.

To my knowledge, those in Christ Jesus are the only people on the face of the earth who have a good message to proclaim. In fact, they are the only ones with a message—a report of glad tidings. All other religions, including many that profess to be from Christ, have a word that is nothing more than a set of rules and procedures. There is no essential news in their avowals. They have nothing to declare, affirm, or announce.

It should be apparent why Paul was not ashamed of such a marvelous Gospel. It towered above Grecian philosophy and the traditions of the Jews. It even dwarfed the Law, which was “*given by Moses*” (John 1:17), and “*ordained by angels in*

- † He was made to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- † In His death, He was cursed by God (Gal 3:13).
- † He gave His life a ransom for many (Matt 20:28).

The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are not intended to be an intellectual definition, to be handled as though it were a mere creed. Rather, it is a summation of the Gospel, which itself, contains many declared details.

the hand of a mediator” (Gal 3:19).

CHRIST

The Gospel is “*good news,*” or “*glad tidings,*” because of what it says, not how it is said, or who says it. It contains the message of “*the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*” He is the Subject of the Gospel. As soon as Jesus Christ is relegated to the background, the Gospel is no longer being preached, and thus Divine power “*unto salvation*” is no longer being experienced. This accounts for much of the spiritual impotence that is found among professed believers.

At this point, men are tempted to be too simplistic. They imagine, for example, that First Corinthians 15:3-4 is an exhaustive definition of the Gospel. “*For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how 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.*” This is not intended to be an intellectual definition, to be handled as though it were a mere creed. Rather, it is a summation of the Gospel, which itself, contains many declared details.

I am compelled to show the glory of these three cardinal points by pointing out the matters related to them. A remarkable number of insights are contained in them.

Christ Died for Our Sins

Christ’s death, necessitated because of “*our sins,*” is the subject of Divine elaboration. All of the points shown below are inherent in that death, and are the subject of extensive Divine exposition.

- † He bore, or carried, our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).

- † He took away the sins of the world (John 1:29).
- † He gave His life for the sheep (John 10:11).
- † No man took His life from Him, He laid it down that He might take it up again (John 10:17-18).
- † He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28).
- † We are justified freely through the redemption of Christ (Rom 3:24).
- † God has set Jesus forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood (Rom 3:25).
- † God commended His love to us in the death of Jesus (Rom 5:8)
- † We are justified through His blood (Rom 5:9).
- † We are reconciled to God through the death of His son (Rom 5:10).
- † We are buried by baptism into Christ’s death (Rom 6:3-4).
- † God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son (Rom 8:3).
- † God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom 8:32).
- † In His death, Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5:7).
- † We are bought with the price paid in Christ’s death (1 Cor 6:20).
- † If One died for all, then all are dead (2 Cor 5:14).
- † He died that we might no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us (2 Cor 5:15).
- † He gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
- † In His death, He redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13).
- † We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7).
- † We are made nigh unto God by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).
- † In His flesh, Jesus abolished the enmity, even the law of commandments

- contained in ordinances (Eph 2:15).
- † He gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse the church (Eph 5:26).
- † Christ died in order to present His church to Himself without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph 5:27).
- † He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- † In the cross, He plundered principalities and powers, making a public display of them (Col 2:15).
- † In His death, he delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10).
- † He died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we might live together with Him (1 Thess 5:10).
- † He gave Himself to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a special people, zealous of good works (Tit 2:14).
- † He tasted death for every man (Heb 2:9).
- † Through His death, He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
- † He obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb 9:12).
- † Through Christ’s blood, our conscience is cleansed, or purged, from dead works (Heb 9:14).
- † Through His death we receive the promise of an eternal inheritance (Heb 9:15).
- † The New Covenant, or “*will,*” has been sanctified by the blood of Christ (Heb 10:10).
- † In offering Himself in death, Jesus has perfected forever all who are sanctified (Heb 10:14).
- † Through His blood, we enter into the holiest place—the very presence of God—Heb 10:19).
- † The way to God has been dedicated through Christ’s death (Heb 10:20).
- † Through His blood, we are washed from our sins and made kings and priests unto God (Rev 1:5-6).

He Was Buried

The burial of Christ was not simply a technicality. He was active during the time He was buried. Too, it provided time to assure that He really did die, tasting death for every man in the fullest sense of the word. Here is also a point at which unity with Christ is realized.

- † In His burial He was “*numbered with the transgressors*” (Num 53:12).
- † While His body was in the tomb, He preached to the spirits that were

disobedient in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:18-20; 4:6).

- † In our baptism, we are *“buried with Christ”* (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- † The burial of Christ was *“the sign of the prophet Jonah”* to an adulterous generation (Matt 12:39-40).
- † His grave was made with the wicked, and the rich as well (Isa 53:9).
- † The woman with the precious alabaster box of ointment anointed Jesus for His burial (Matt 26:7-12).
- † The grave was not capable of holding the body of Jesus (Acts 2:29-26-32).

He Rose Again

The resurrection of Christ is the engine of our salvation—the source of its power. Over and over this is affirmed in Scripture.

- † In regeneration, we are united with Him *“in His resurrection”* (Rom 6:5).
- † The desire to know the power of His resurrection dominates those living by faith (Phil 3:10).
- † Jesus was declared to be *“the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead”* (Rom 1:4).
- † We are begotten again to a living hope *“by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Pet 1:3).
- † The resurrection of Christ is what validates our baptism (1 Pet 3:21).
- † The resurrection of Christ validated His death, and inducted Him into His intercessory ministry (Rom 8:34).
- † We are reconciled by His death, and saved by His (resurrection) life (Rom 5:10).
- † He is able to save us because, being raised from the dead, He *“ever lives to make intercession”* for us (Heb 7:25).
- † The blood of the cross obtained its effectiveness when, after His resurrection, Jesus entered into heaven with it (Heb 9:12).
- † The risen Christ, having entered into heaven, is now appearing in the presence of God *“for us”* (Heb 9:24).
- † The power employed to raise Jesus from the dead, is precisely the power that is now devoted to those in Christ (Eph 1:19-21).
- † Jesus was *“raised for our justification”* (Rom 4:25).
- † His resurrection is God’s pledge that we will also be raised (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14).
- † Jesus being raised from the dead, we

can now be joined to Christ and bring forth fruit unto God (Rom 7:4).

- † The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in believers, giving life to their mortal bodies (Rom 8:11).
- † Confessing the Lord Jesus with our mouth, and believing in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, results in our salvation (Rom 10:9).
- † If Christ is not raised, our faith is vain (1 Cor 15:17).
- † Believers are raised up together with Christ and made to sit with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
- † In His resurrection, we were *“delivered from the wrath to come”* (1 Thess 1:10).

CONCLUSION

There is no aspect of salvation that is not immediately related to the Lord Jesus Christ. Further, the association falls under one or more of these realities: The death, the burial, or the resurrection of Christ. A matter that does not connect with these essentials is unrelated to salvation. Further, at the point we are not identified with all three of these, we cease to be identified with Christ. God has made no provision for anyone to be saved

subject of the Gospel. Ponder the statements made of Him.

- † Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6).
- † Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).
- † Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (5:11).
- † It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Rom 8:34).
- † Christ came, who is God blessed forever (Rom 9:5).
- † Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness (Rom 10:4).
- † Christ pleased not Himself (Rom 15:3).
- † Christ also received us to the glory of God (Rom 15:7).
- † Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).
- † Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5:7).
- † God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor 5:19).
- † Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13).
- † Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph 5:25).
- † Christ Jesus came into the world to

The death, the burial, or the resurrection of Christ. A matter that does not connect with these essentials is unrelated to salvation. Further, at the point we are not identified with all three of these, we cease to be identified with Christ.

without being identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son.

The *“Gospel of Christ”* is the proclamation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It includes the insightful declaration of the result of these pivotal accomplishments, and their bearing upon our acceptance with God. There is no Apostolic writing that does not major on the preaching of the Gospel. It is found in all of their writings, and provides the logic and incentive for living by faith. **At some point, all of their doctrine intersects with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord.**

I cannot leave this matter without again emphasizing that Jesus Christ is the

save sinners (1 Tim 1:15).

- † Christ is appearing in the presence of God for us (Heb 9:24).
- † Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb 9:26).
- † Christ has made us free (Gal 5:1).
- † Christ has suffered for us in the flesh (1 Pet 4:1).

These are only representative of the consistent thrust of the Scriptures. When it comes to accomplishments, the premier and effective ones belong to Christ, and to Christ alone. Only what He has done provides a basis upon which the grace of God is conferred upon men through faith.

Salvation is only as near as the

Gospel is clear. Where the Gospel is suppressed, or pushed aside in favor of supposedly more relevant matters, the salvation of people is at stake. It makes no difference whether the people are presently alienated from the life of God,

newborn babes, or tenured saints – **if the Gospel is not preached salvation will not be accomplished.** God has made no provision for salvation without Gospel.

I realize all too well that this

perception is rejected by a significant number of professed believers. Yet, it is the truth, and is consistently and overwhelmingly affirmed and supported by the Scriptures. The *“Gospel of Christ”* has not lost its absolute centrality!

THE POWER OF GOD

^{41:16c} . . . **for it is the power of God . . .** Paul is elaborating on WHY he is *“ready to preach the Gospel”* to those who are in Rome (1:15). He already identified those who *“are at Rome also”* as *“beloved of God, called to be saints,”* whose *“faith is spoken of throughout the whole world”* (1:7-8). He is not speaking, therefore, about declaring the Gospel in the market places and halls of learning, although he doubtless is determined to do that also. At this point, however, he is focusing on those who are in Christ Jesus, loved greatly by God, and renowned for their faith. He is *“ready to preach the Gospel to them,”* persuaded of the advantages it will bring to them. He will open the Gospel more fully to them, for the Gospel is like a rich fruit of many tasty layers. Further, Paul had been granted unusual insight into the Gospel—an understanding to be shared as a rare jewel with those of *“like precious faith.”*

to bring people within hearing distance of that glorious Gospel.

While it has an appealing sound to it, those who represent the church as existing primarily for assistance of those in difficulty and need have seriously misrepresented the case. The *“church of the living God”* is fundamentally *“the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15). Lest there be some question about

especially precious to God, whose faith was proclaimed throughout the world, needed the Gospel, how much more many churches of our time, which give little evidence of either characteristic. Let the people of God place a high priority on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let none assume they have grasped more than a small measure of its magnitude. A message that affirms what the Lord has done cannot be small in any sense.

If those especially precious to God, whose faith was proclaimed throughout the world, needed the Gospel, how much more many churches of our time, which give little evidence of either characteristic.

THE POWER

Here we rise higher than the limits of human language. As ordinarily conceived, the word *“power”* is an exceedingly small receptacle, incapable of containing an adequate concept of the Gospel. Thus, the Spirit says *“the power OF GOD.”* The accent is thus placed upon God, not the power itself. In other words, the power is something **God** employs to accomplish His intentions.

NOT A PROBLEM SOLVER

While a considerable amount the Apostolic writings deal with problems and difficulties in the church, that is not the primary ministry of the Apostles. Nor were they sent as mere recruiters, aiming only to enroll individuals, so to speak, among the people of God, or to inflate their own number of disciples. Paul stated it well when he wrote, *“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect”* (1 Cor 1:17). Those who imagine this to be a denigration of baptism betray an inexcusable level of spiritual ignorance. No such notion is found in Scripture.

what constitutes *“the truth,”* the Spirit provides a marvelous elaboration. *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory”* (verse 16). All of that *“mystery”* pertains to the Lord Jesus, and is contained in the Gospel Paul is determined to preach.

THE GOSPEL ITSELF

Thus, the Gospel itself is the point of consideration: *“IT is the . . .”* It possesses indispensable spiritual properties that are necessary to our salvation. Furthermore, the Gospel has not lost any of these qualities, nor have any believers passed beyond their need of them: *“it IS the . . .”*

The word from which *“power”* is translated has long been the subject of academic comment. It comes from the word *δύναμις* (*dun-a-mis*), which some say equates to the English word *“dynamite.”* It all sounds plausible to the sophist: i.e., *“the Gospel is God’s dynamite.”* While it is true that the secondary meaning of *“dynamite”* is something having a powerful effect, it is still not an adequate word to use in our text. Dynamite is explosive, blowing things apart. But the Gospel brings things together.

The Means of Accomplishment

“The power” refers to the means employed by God to accomplish His purpose. It is effective in bringing about the fulfillment of what God has determined. This is the *“power”* that belongs to God (Matt 6:13). It is **only** effective to accomplish His purpose. This

The fundamental responsibility of the Apostles was to declare and expound the the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Any rebuke, correction, or resolution of difficulties was

All of this may appear to be an exercise in futility, but it is not. If those

power will not implement the will of men. It is not accessible in any sense to those who are not reconciled unto God. It is toward them *“who believe,”* and only so, as affirmed in Ephesians 1:19.

The *“power of God”* is always associated with the accomplishment of something. It is never related to mere theory, or to a pointless display. Thus, when Mary conceived the Savior, *“the power (δύναμις) of the Highest”* overshadowed her to accomplish the conception. When sick people came to Jesus *“out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem, the power (δύναμις) of the Lord was present to heal them”* (Lk 5:17). The *“preaching of the cross,”* to

those who are being saved, *“is the power (δύναμις) of God”* (1 Cor 1:18). In every case, God has an objective, and His *“power”* is the means of fulfilling or accomplishing it.

Mere Religious Display

Men must exercise themselves to come away from the tendency to desire mere religious display. We live in an entertainment-crazed culture, where amusement is a primary objective. This mind-set has penetrated the professed church, causing people to think more subjectively than objectively. By that, I mean their concept of religion is scarcely related to what God is doing. It has more to do with what they are doing.

Those in the grip of this delusion measure everything by its applicability to everyday life. They do not think in terms of what the Lord is doing, or the world to come, or of the inevitabilities of death and judgment. This condition is precisely why the Gospel of Christ is not afforded a place of prominence. Professed preachers find it much easier to speak on other matters—novelties that appeal to the self-seeking interests of men. That is why they are **not** *“determined”* to *“preach the Gospel”* with power and insight to those who are *“beloved of God”* and *“called to be saints.”* This is not an innocent and harmless circumstance, and God will hold all in strict account who either neglect or pervert the Gospel of His Son.

IN ORDER TO SALVATION

^{1:16d} . . . *unto salvation . . .* The *“power of God”* is employed to effect a purpose, to fulfill a Divine objective. It is not effective to accomplish anything unrelated to that purpose. This is precisely why the effective preaching of the Gospel requires some understanding of what God is doing. God has not called men to be robots that parrot a message. Rather, in Christ, men becoming *“workers together with God,” “fishers of men,”* and *“ministers”* by whom men *“believe”* (1 Cor 3:9; Matt 4:19; 1 Cor 3:5).

SALVATION

The gospel is the appointed means of effecting salvation—*“the power of God unto (in order to) salvation.”* He does not say initial salvation, but *“salvation.”* Salvation involves more than extrication from the guilt and power of sin, just as the salvation, or deliverance, of Israel involved more than coming out of the confines of Egypt.

The Case of Israel

Israel is set before us as an example of salvation. Their salvation was initiated when they came out of Egypt. For those who believed, it was culminated when they entered into the promised land of Canaan. Between those two points were a number of salvation-details. In addition to actually coming out of the land of Egypt,

the following was also included.

- † They all were under the cloud (1 Cor 10:1a).
- † They all passed through the sea (1 Cor 10:1b).
- † They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor 10:2).
- † They all ate the same spiritual food (1 Cor 10:3).
- † They all drank the same spiritual drink

them (Deut 31:4).

- † Bitter waters were purified for them (Ex 15:25).
- † A covenant was given to them (Ex 19-20).
- † The Jordan River parted for them (Josh 3:17).
- † The walls of Jericho fell down for them (Josh 6:3-20; Heb 11:30).
- † The city of Jericho was given them (Josh 5:2).

Salvation involves more than extrication from the guilt and power of sin, just as the salvation, or deliverance, of Israel involved more than coming out of the confines of Egypt.

Indeed, there was more involved in Israel bring saved than simply leaving Egypt! They had to pass through the Red Sea and the Jordan River at flood-stage. They had to be fed with manna in the wilderness and nourished with water from a rock in a desert place. Their clothing and their health had to be sustained, and their enemies repulsed. It was Divine power that accomplished it all!

So It Is In Salvation

So it is in salvation! When we are delivered from the guilt and power of sin, we are no more put on automatic pilot, than Israel was in the wilderness. They needed to be led in the day, and in the night as well. Even when they came to the borders of the promised land, enemies were confronted and victory had to be achieved. It was all through God’s power. So it is with those in Christ Jesus.

- (1 Cor 10:4).
- † They were led by a pillar of cloud by day (Psa 78:14a).
- † They were led by a pillar of fire by night (Psa 78:14b; Ex 13:21-22).
- † Though nomads for forty years, their feet did not swell (Deut 8:4; Neh 9:21).
- † Their clothing and shoes did not wear out (Deut 8:4; 29:5).
- † Enemy nations were conquered by

The largeness of our salvation serves to emphasize the necessity of the Gospel. The time in which we are blessed to live is “*the day of salvation*” (2 Cor 6:2). It is the time when salvation is being effected by the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ponder how the Spirit speaks of this salvation.

- † It is a “*helmet*” of protection (Eph 6:17).
- † It produces “*hope*” (1 Thess 5:8).
- † It is a “*great salvation*” (Heb 2:3).
- † It is an “*eternal salvation*” (Heb 5:9).
- † There are indispensable things that “*accompany salvation*” (Heb 6:9).
- † It is “*ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet 1:5).
- † It is the objective, or “*end*,” of our faith (1 Pet 1:9).
- † It is presently “*nearer than when we first believed*” (Rom 13:11).
- † God succors, or nourishes us, “*in the day of salvation*” (2 Cor 6:2).
- † We are to “*work out*” our own salvation “*with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12).
- † Holy angels are presently ministering to those who “*shall be heirs of salvation*” (Heb 1:14).

What is there about these expressions that would lead any soul to believe salvation had been experienced in its totality? What would lead anyone to imagine there is nothing more to salvation than has presently been experienced?

There are enormous vistas of this great salvation yet to be seen, to say nothing of being experienced. Our bodies are not yet “*saved*.” But they will be, and we are “*waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” (Rom 8:23).

Christ’s Intercession

The intercessory ministry of Jesus confirms that salvation has not yet been brought to its culmination. Thus it is written, “*Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:25).

The Intercession of the Holy Spirit

The work and intercession of the Holy Spirit is also required in this great work of salvation. “*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know*

not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26).

Our Own Involvement

We ourselves are involved in the process, working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, persuaded that it is God who is presently at work in us (Phil 2:12-13).

A Work in Process

Salvation is a Divine work-in-process. We “*SHALL be saved from wrath through Him*” (Rom 5:9). We “*SHALL be saved by His (intercessory) life*” (Rom 5:10). We “*are BEING saved*”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 1:18). “*For we are to God the fragrance of Christ*

It is not enough for people simply to be told what to do. There must be an incentive to do what is required. God has already shown us this cannot be accomplished through the Law. The Law was the “strength of sin” (1 Cor 15:56), but it had no strength to produce either faith or hope.

among those who are BEING saved and among those who are perishing”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 2:15).

Salvation is the process whereby we are being “*conformed*” to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29). We are advancing “*from glory unto glory*,” being brought to “*the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*” (Eph 4:15). From the subjective view, we are “*pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:14). Also, we are running the race that is set before us, “*looking unto Jesus*” (Heb 12:1-2). All of this comes under the umbrella of “*salvation*.”

Until we are fully “*like Him*,” with

Satan bruised under our feet, and “*ever with the Lord*,” we are “*being saved*” (1 John 3:1-2; Rom 16:20; 1 Thess 4:17). As long as we wrestle “*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Eph 6:12), salvation is not to be taken for granted.

Not Finished Yet!

If our salvation was complete, we would not require the intercession of Jesus. It would no longer be essential for the Spirit to intercede for us. There would be no need for the ministry of the holy angels. Our own spiritual aggression against darkness, and in pressing toward the goal, would be an absurdity if salvation had already been brought to its culmination.

THE APPOINTED MEANS

And what is the appointed means of bringing salvation to completeness? What is the “*power of God*” to effect the appointment to salvation (1 Thess 5:8)? It is the Gospel of Christ! That is “*the power of God for salvation*.” We embrace it to come into Christ, and we cling to it to remain in Christ. Thus it is written of the Gospel, “*By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain*” (1 Cor 15:2). There is no point where salvation moves you beyond the perimeter of the Gospel, or reduces it to something that is secondary or no longer essential. If the Son of God is presently appearing in the presence of God as a newly slain Lamb (Rev 5:6) – if that is what is required in heaven – how necessary it is for us to maintain such a view of Him on earth!

It is not enough for people simply to be told what to do. There must be an incentive to do what is required. God has already shown us this cannot be accomplished through the Law. The Law was the “*strength of sin*” (1 Cor 15:56), but it had no strength to produce either faith or hope. Therefore, being “*weak through the flesh*,” (Rom 8:3), it could not empower men for “*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*,” or constrain us to “*live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*.” Only the grace of God can do that, and the Gospel of Christ brings

that message (Tit 2:12). It is *“the gospel of the grace of God”* (Acts 20:24).

The Lord’s Table

Jesus instituted the Lord’s table to keep the Gospel alive and vibrant in our hearts and minds (1 Cor 11:23-28). This is not a mere formality, to be fulfilled out of a sense of obligation. Rather, it is an activity that brings us closer to the heart of the Gospel, and consequently within the influence of *“the power of God.”*

Incentive for Godliness

When the Spirit ministered rebuke or correction in righteousness, He consistently made an appeal to the Gospel of Christ. Remember that *IT* is God’s

power in order to effect salvation. A few examples will suffice to confirm this point.

- † Incentive to give of our resources to help needy brethren (2 Cor 8:9).
- † To provoke the avoidance of fornication (1 Cor 6:13-19).
- † To be longsuffering with our brethren, being tenderhearted and forgiving (Eph 4:32).
- † To purge sin from among us (1 Cor 5:7).
- † Discouraging a return to Law as a means of gaining Divine acceptance (Gal 3:10-13).
- † To receive one another (Rom 15:7).
- † The pursuit of humility (Phil 2:5-8).

Everything Relates to Salvation

In Christ, everything relates to salvation. Nothing pertaining to life and godliness is separate from salvation. Every single aspect of spiritual life is driven by the power associated with the Gospel of Christ. The knowledge of this single reality will produce a revolution among God’s people that can scarcely be imagined.

Wherever the Gospel is not being preached, salvation is not being implemented. God’s *“great salvation”* can neither be initiated nor maintained apart from the *“glorious Gospel of the blessed God.”* Settle it in your mind to give a high priority to the Gospel of Christ. Then you will find God giving a high priority to you.

TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVES

^{4:16e} . . . **to every one that believeth . . .**” Because of the low estimation given to believing God, this verse is often glossed. It is one of the great affirmations of the Spirit, pregnant with both meaning and power. It is not a deficient statement, or one that must be coupled with other affirmations to become effective.

Faith, or believing God, is what connects us with *“the power of God.”* Believing a word from God is always viewed as bringing advantage to the one believing. Disbelieving God always brings disadvantage to the one refusing to believe. The text before us accentuates the former. The Gospel of Christ *“is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”*

The effectiveness of believing is frequently stated in Scripture.

- † *“And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses”* (Acts 13:39).
- † *“That whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:15).
- † *“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).

- † *“I am come a light into the world, that whoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness”* (John 12:46).
- † *“. . . whoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43).
- † *“. . . whoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed”* (Rom 9:33).
- † *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth”* (Rom 10:4).
- † *“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst”* (John 6:35).
- † *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life”* (John 6:47).

- “confounded”* (1 Pet 2:6).
- † *“Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”* (1 John 5:1).

The strength of these texts is evident. In all of them, believing is the fundamental thing. It is the supreme qualification, and in every instance it is based upon the Gospel of Christ—the record God has given of His Son.

Care must be taken to avoid any view of God’s Word that minimizes believing. If someone imagines that believing has nothing to do with obeying, they must think again. Faith always obeys, as confirmed in the eleventh chapter of

The word “believeth” or “believes” is not referring to a point in time, or an event that took place in the past. This is something presently occurring. It is a trust and reliance that is in process now.

- † *“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”* (John 11:25).
- † *“And whoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die”* (John 11:26).
- † *“Behold, I lay in Zion a Chief Corner Stone, Elect, Precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be*

Hebrews. It is always unbelief that disobeys. Those who walk acceptably with God are called *“believers”* (Acts 5:14; 1 Tim 4:12). As already stated in the fifth verse of the first chapter, their obedience is the result of their faith, or believing.

WHAT IS BELIEVING?

Because of the general disregard of

A person, then, who IS believing is living in the assured persuasion of the truth of the Gospel. Its certainty has been so impressed upon the human spirit that, to the precise degree of that faith, the entire life is shaped in view of the realities proclaimed in the Gospel of Christ.

the value and effectiveness of believing, further consideration of it will be profitable. Remember, the Gospel of Christ IS the very power of God in order for salvation *“for everyone who believes.”*

Etymologically, the word *“believe”* has strong implications, but they are only introductory, and by no means exhaustive of its meaning. The word comes from πιστεύοντι (pis-teu-on-ti), which is in the present active mode. A precise translation would read *“is believing.”* The word *“believeth”* or *“believes”* is not referring to a point in time, or an event that took place in the past. This is something presently occurring. It is a trust and reliance that is in process now. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God in order to salvation to everyone who **is believing**. This casts an entirely different light on this verse than is ordinarily entertained.

Some read the verse with a mind to those who are alienated from God and lost in sin. To them, the text reads *“to everyone who WILL believe.”* But that is not what the text says. Others, convinced their aggressive involvement is not required in their salvation see the verse as saying *“to everyone who HAS believed.”* But that is not the word declared here.

This statement has no applicability whatsoever to someone who is not in the process of believing.

The Nature of Believing

“Believing” is not mere intellectual assent, or lifeless acceptance. It involves persuasion, confidence, and trust, or reliance on the truth declared. *“Believing”* is the verb form, or expression of, faith. Faith is defined as *“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb 11:1). The word translated *“substance”* is larger than a single English word. It involves confidence, assurance, conviction, and realization. By saying faith is the *“substance of things hoped for,”* the Spirit means faith makes them real to the individual, *“substantizing”* them to the soul. The things themselves are real, and the persuasion is real, reaching into the human spirit. The word translated *“evidence”* is equally large. It means verification, proof, and certainty. It means that **faith itself is the proof of the things “not seen.”**

A person, then, who IS believing is living in the assured persuasion of the truth of the Gospel. Its certainty has been so impressed upon the human spirit that, to the precise degree of that faith, the

entire life is shaped in view of the realities proclaimed in the Gospel of Christ. No human expression has the power of faith.

Demons Believe, But Not This Way

This is not the believing that is ascribed to demons. Of them it is written, *“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble”* (James 2:19). Their persuasion is not of the truth of the Gospel. They believe there is *“one God,”* conducting themselves with an acute awareness of their accountability to Him (Matt 8:29). Further, their persuasion of God has not come from the Gospel, but from their exposure to His immediate influence.

Let no person attempt to neutralize this text by equating demons believing there is *“one God”* with a reliance upon, or believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

An Unequivocal Statement

The unmitigated statement of this text should speak to our heart. The Gospel of Christ IS the power of God unto salvation to EVERYONE who is believing. The Spirit does not say it CAN be the power, but that it IS the power. It is not God’s power to salvation for SOME who believe, but to EVERYONE who believes.

What, then, ought to be our approach to believing? How should we regard it? With zeal, we must *“fight the good fight of faith”* (1 Tim 6:12), endeavoring with all that is within us to keep believing, trusting, and relying upon Christ Jesus. God has made a pledge in this statement, and will not repent of it. If we will exercise ourselves to believe the Gospel, the power of God will see to it that we stand at last, pure before the Lord.

THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO THE GREEK

^{1:16f} **... to the Jew first, and also to the Greek ...** There have arisen all manner of teachings in the church concerning the Jews. Many of them reflect an extremely distorted view of the word of God. Remembering that *“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,”* this text is to be viewed as precise and without flaw. The tendency to conform Scripture to

preconceived notions must be mortified, and our thoughts brought into harmony with Divine utterance.

THE JEW FIRST

First, if God has thoroughly repudiated the Jews, this statement could not be made. Not only is the Gospel God’s power unto salvation to the Jew, it is to

the *“Jew FIRST.”* The Spirit does not say the Gospel WAS God’s power unto salvation to the Jew *“first,”* but that it IS. The word *“first”* means first in rank as well as in time.

Elsewhere, the Spirit identifies three categories of people. They are *“Jews,”* *“Gentiles,”* and *“the church of God”* (1

Cor 10:32). The superior distinction is given to *“the church of God,”* to be sure, for that is the body of Christ. However, that by no means indicates that the Jews are no longer recognized by God.

Mentioned Elsewhere

This is not the only place the phrase *“Jew first”* is used. The other places will confirm to our hearts both the nature and declaration of this text. *“Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of THE JEW FIRST, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to THE JEW FIRST, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God”* (Rom 2:9-11). Thus we have three affirmations concerning the Jews being *“first.”* (1) In the experience of the power of the Gospel to those who are believing. (2) The punishment of every soul that does evil. (3) The gift of glory, honor, and peace to every soul who works good. **None of these have any significance whatsoever if God has no regard at all for the Jews.**

The Spirit also refers to Jews and Gentiles in expounding the nature of salvation. *“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one”* (Rom 3:29-30). Notice, the Spirit does not refer to a past arrangement, but a present one: *“IS.”* This text also places the Gentiles in second place: *“Gentiles ALSO.”* The same identity is ascribed in Romans 9:24. *“Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but ALSO of the Gentiles?”*

Rather than the Jews being summarily dismissed from Divine consideration, in Christ the Gentiles are made *“fellowheirs (with the Jews), and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel”* (Eph 3:6). In Christ Jew and Gentile are made *“one new man”* (Eph 2:15)—a condition with no significance if the Jews no longer have a Divinely recognized identity.

Gentile Distinction Recognized

To further show the absurdity of the

notion that the Jews have utterly ceased to be a people before the Lord, note that the Spirit continues to refer to *“the Gentiles.”* It is the existence of the Jews that allows for the term *“Gentiles,”* or *“Greeks.”* The word *“Gentiles”* obtains no significance apart from the *“Jews.”* Further, the Epistles refer to *“the Gentiles”* no less than 40 times. Outside of Christ, both Jew and Gentile still exist. Neither of them has ceased to be. In fact, **the ONLY place those distinctions are removed is in Christ** (Gal 3:28; 5:6; 1 Cor 12:13).

What About Jerusalem’s Destruction

Thus we have three affirmations concerning the Jews being “first.” (1) In the experience of the power of the Gospel to those who are believing. (2) The punishment of every soul that does evil. (3) The gift of glory, honor, and peace to every soul who works good.

Some, inordinately eager to justify the position that the Jews have been summarily rejected, trace it back to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It was at this point, they affirm, that the Jews were finally written off.

This destruction was foretold by the Lord Jesus. He even told WHY the judgment would come. It was because they rejected Him, not knowing the time of their *“visitation”* from on high. Our Lord wept over the prospect of that coming judgment (Luke 19:42-44). He also referred to this destruction when affirming the devastation of the temple (Matt 24:2; Mk 13:3). He associated this destruction with the *“abomination of desolation”* prophesied by Daniel. It would be so fierce that those with child would suffer, and running, or fleeing from the city would be required (Mk 13:14-20).

Did all of this mean a total rejection

of the Jews, as some affirm? Indeed not. The Lord spoke most precisely on this matter. *“But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* (Lk 21:23-24). Jesus left the door open, and we do well to consent to His word.

Categorical Statements

There is so much said on this subject it is a marvel that the erroneous doctrine to which I have referred has risen. Later in this Epistle, the Spirit will also refer to a time associated with the Gentiles. *“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in”*^{2NTV} (Rom 11:25).

The ninth chapter of Romans affirms the Jews STILL have certain advantages. Such a statement is foolish if they are no longer a people. *“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God”*^{NASB} (Rom 3:1-2). The advantages are detailed in the 10th chapter. *“Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen”* (9:4-5). If a person imagines this is referring to the church, or spiritual Israel, then the *“giving of the Law and temple service”* as well as the fleshly generation of Jesus, has come from the Gentiles.

The eleventh chapter of Romans develops this thought in a most extensive manner. Because we will expound it later, I will only list the strong arguments presented concerning the Jews.

† God has NOT cast away His people (11:1a).

- † Paul himself, an Israelite according to the flesh, confirms this did not occur (11:1b).
- † Just as surely as there was a remnant in Elijah’s day, so there is a remnant among this people today (11:2-5).
- † Israel has **not** stumbled so as to fall, or beyond recovery (11:11a).
- † Salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy (11:11b).
- † If their fall brought riches to the Gentiles, much more will blessing be brought by their recovery (11:12).
- † Paul’s Apostleship to the Gentiles was in order to provoke the Jews to jealousy, saving some of them (11:13-14).
- † If casting them away meant the reconciling of the world, the receiving of them will be life from the dead (11:15).
- † The “*firstfruit*” and the “*root*” are still “*holy*.” That is why the larger mass and the branches are “*holy*” (11:16).
- † Only “*some of the branches*” of the natural Jewish tree were broken off (11:17a).
- † Some of the Gentiles, a wild olive tree, have been grafted in “*among*” the Jews (11:17b).
- † Gentile believers are partaking of the nourishing sap of the olive root of Israel (11:17c).
- † The Jewish branches were NOT broken off so that the Gentiles might be grafted in. Salvation is NOT a replacement program (11:18-21).
- † God is able to graft the Jews in again (11:23).
- † It is reasonable for them to be grafted into their own tree once again (11:24).
- † Blindness “*in part*” has happened unto Israel (11:25a).
- † The blindness is only until the full number of the Gentiles are come in (11:15b).
- † The Deliverer will turn away ungodliness from Jacob (a name never applied to the church, 11:26).
- † God’s covenant to take away their sin is still in place (11:27).
- † Although presently they are “*enemies*” for the sake of the Gentiles, they are still “*beloved for the fathers’* (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) *sake*” (11:28).
- † The gifts and calling of God are without repentance (11:29).
- † Just as we Gentiles have obtained

mercy because of their unbelief, so through the mercy extended to us, they will also obtain mercy (11:30-31).

† All of this is a remarkable display of the arresting wisdom of God. It confirms His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out (11:33-36).

It is exceedingly difficult for me to imagine how a case for “*the Jew first*” could be established any more certainty!

God Has Not Forgotten

God has not forgotten the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Nor, indeed, has He blotted from His recollection the covenant He made with

Thus, those who say God has finished with Israel must give an account of themselves to God. They must also explain to us why the sun is still shining, and why the moon and the stars can be seen at night.

Israel—the promised New Covenant we presently enjoy, and over which Jesus is presiding.

One final word from Jeremiah will confirm the reason for the Gospel being the power of God unto salvation “*to the Jew first.*” I will give this marvelous prophecy from the NRSV. Hebrews 8:8-13 and 10:16-17 confirm that this is the New Covenant we are now enjoying.

“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all

know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31-34).

All who are acquainted with the New Covenant know that it is the framework in which our salvation is being accomplished. Outside of Christ, not one syllable of this covenant finds fulfillment.

The Lord did not end this promise through Jeremiah with these words. With solemnity and determination He added the following words, which He is never represented as withdrawing. “*Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-- the LORD of hosts is His name: If this fixed order were ever to cease from my presence, says the LORD, then also the offspring of Israel would cease to be a nation before me forever. Thus says the LORD: If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will reject all the offspring of Israel because of all they have done, says the LORD”* (Jer 31:35-37).

Thus, those who say God has finished with Israel must give an account of themselves to God. They must also explain to us why the sun is still shining, and why the moon and the stars can be seen at night. They are obliged to account for how the “*fixed order*” of nature could remain while Israel has been repudiated. Let them stand before us and give their measurement of the heavens, and tell how they have explored the foundations of the earth. If they can present such evidence, then we will acknowledge that God did “*reject all the offspring of Israel because of all they have done, says the LORD.*”

But if they must acknowledge the continuance of the sun, moon, and stars—and if they cannot measure the heavens or explore the foundations of the earth--then let them throw away their despicable doctrine, for it cannot be true! In their doctrine they have reproached God and contradicted His promise! Their teaching reveals the presence of unbelief and brings dishonor the God of Israel.

The Gospel IS the power of God unto salvation **"TO THE JEW FIRST."** Let none doubt it, or allow their hearts to entertain some imagination concerning the total rejection of the ancient people. Let us acknowledge the truth of our

Jew or pagan.

The Greeks, the Spirit declares, had a desire for wisdom. As it is written, *"the Greeks seek after wisdom"* (1 Cor 1:22). Because of this demand, they considered

considered secondary, salvation immediately begins to wither, and the believer becomes weak. It makes little difference what profession of faith is made, **apart from the Gospel of Christ salvation will not be realized.**

The Jews were the best in the religious realm, and the Gentiles in the cultural realm. But they both needed salvation, and the Gospel of Christ is God's power to accomplish that need.

Savior's own words: *"salvation is of the Jews"* (John 4:22).

AND ALSO TO THE GREEK

As I have pointed out in a previous lesson, the word *"Greek"* is not a geographical consideration, but a cultural one. At the time this Epistle was written, Greek was the universal language. It represented the world in its most refined and cultured state. However, in spite of the seeming disparity between oppressed Jews (whose only distinction was their revealed religion) and the self-developed superiority of the Greek world, the Jews ranked *"first,"* and the Greeks were viewed as *"also."* In fact, another word for *"Greek,"* as commonly known, is a non-

the *"preaching of the cross"* to be *"foolishness"* (1 Cor 1:23). The Apostles did not cater to this penchant, but preached *"Christ crucified."* Unlike impotent Grecian wisdom, the Gospel declares the *"power of God and the wisdom of God,"* neither of which were found in Grecian culture (1 Cor 1:24).

The Jews were the best in the religious realm, and the Gentiles in the cultural realm. But they both needed salvation, and the Gospel of Christ is God's power to accomplish that need.

CONCLUSION

Salvation in all of its aspects is accomplished through the Gospel of Christ. As soon as the Gospel is

This circumstance accounts for the spiritual poverty and moral weakness that is too often found in the churches. There is no *"power unto salvation"* apart from the Gospel of Christ. On the other hand, wherever the Gospel is declared in the insight of power of the Holy Spirit, salvation will become more evident through appropriate growth in Christ.

Whatever makes the Gospel seem irrelevant cannot be from God—unless it is a delusion, sent as a judgment for not loving the truth (2 Thess 2:10-12). In Scripture, when men refused to embrace the Gospel, they were told, *"but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles"* (Acts 13:46).

Not only, therefore, is the Gospel *"the power of God unto salvation, to every one who believes,"* it is something that can be rejected, thereby bringing the judgment of God upon the individual. Allow no teaching to enter your heart that makes little of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! It is the record God has given of His Son.

THE REVELATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

^{17a} ***For therein is the righteousness of God revealed . . .*** Here we begin the doctrinal portion of this Epistle—and it is lofty. Keep in mind, this is a declaration of the Gospel—an opening up of the good news. It will immediately be apparent to you that what is here proclaimed is rarely heard in *Christian* circles. In the sense of this text, I have scarcely ever heard any reference whatsoever to *"the righteousness of God."* This is, however, an extensive theme that will be expounded from this point through the conclusion of the eighth chapter.

"THEREIN"

The word *"therein"* refers to the Gospel of Christ. Not only is it *"the power of God unto salvation,"* the Spirit now

tells us WHY it is: *"FOR therein . . ."* I have rarely heard a message, or read an article, dealing with Romans 1:16 that associated it with the Divine explanation of its power, which is verse seventeen. I credit this significant omission to the effect of institutionalized religion upon those embracing it. A systematized religion has the tendency of imposing spiritual blinders upon the soul, producing extremely restricted understanding.

The Gospel is more than a simplistic message. It is a spiritual container in which much can be found. Too often the Gospel is viewed entirely apart from this fundamental consideration: it is an appointed receptacle that holds life-giving benefits. Further, it is what is IN the

container that makes it effective.

Illustrated In Nature

The Gospel is much like a complex fruit, containing many nutritious elements. A marvelous example of this principle is the peanut. From this seemingly uncomplicated crop George Washington Carver produced over 300 different products. They included cereals, oils, dyes, soaps, flavors, and food substitutes. He found a use for the nut, the shell, and the plants left in the ground. His work in this area is one of the remarkable achievements in this world.

By simply viewing a picture of a peanut in the shell, or of the nut within the shell, or of the plant in the ground,

these incredible things are not evident. It required someone with insight to open the possibilities of the peanut to us mortals. However, even if brother Carver (himself a believer in Christ) did not discover these uses, they were all still resident in the lowly peanut.

The Gospel Reveals Something

“*Therein is revealed . . .*” Whatever is “*revealed*” in the Gospel is what gives it effective “*power unto salvation.*” We are to understand that salvation cannot be realized apart from what is “*revealed*” within it. This is something that is found wherever the Gospel is found. It is not a mere part of the Gospel, but is revealed in the Gospel. The Gospel, then, sheds light on something—something that is required for our salvation.

The surface view of the Gospel—like looking at the peanut itself—is the proclamation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. These are the pillars upon which the Gospel are founded. However, it is what is made known by these pivotal accomplishments that brings “*power unto salvation.*”

This is the bane of declaring the Gospel from merely a historical perspective: i.e., “two thousand years ago.” It is also the weakness of seeking to buttress the Gospel with tangible evidence and logical proofs. Neither of those things, however useful they may appear, possesses the “*power of God.*” I suppose that both, like the law, are good if a man uses them lawfully (1 Tim 1:8). However, a considerable amount of effort is yet to be expended to support that supposition.

Remember, the Spirit is accounting for the power and effectiveness of the Gospel of Christ. The proclamation of the Person and accomplishments of Christ reveal what is now affirmed. Any Gospel that does NOT reveal this, is really “*another gospel,*” and is to be discarded as theological garbage.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

The “*righteousness of God*” is mentioned five times in this book. In every case, it is a pivotal deliberation (1:17; 3:5,21,22;10:3). This is not an

academic consideration—like learning a mathematical table—because it is “*revealed.*” Later, the Spirit will affirm “*the righteousness of God*” is “*manifested,*” or “*made known*” (3:20). This is, then, something to be perceived, comprehended, or understood.

Not Referring to God Being Righteous

This is NOT referring to an understanding that God is righteous. It is certainly the truth that “*God is righteous*” (Isa 41:26). Unquestionably, “*the LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does*”^{NKJV} (Dan 9:14). He is “*righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works*” (Psa 145:17). Whatever He has done is right, and is not to be questioned by mortals. His judgment, whether condemning or justifying, is always “*righteous*” (Rom 2:5; 2 Thess

I am persuaded the masses of professed believers have not yet been convinced of the necessity of righteousness. They have heard a Gospel so thoroughly diluted with the wisdom of this world that they can scarcely arrive at a valid conclusion concerning righteousness or Divine acceptance.

1:5). In delivering up His Son He was righteous (Rom 8:3). He is also righteous in justifying the ungodly (Rom 3:25).

However, this is not the sense in which “*the righteousness of God*” is used in this text—or in any other texts using that expression.

A Conferred Righteousness

The Gospel reveals a righteousness that God confers upon men—and it is His very own righteousness. The glorious Gospel does not make known that God is righteous, although that can certainly be seen in it. That revelation, however, has been affirmed from the beginning of God’s

dealings with men (Gen 18:25; Judges 5:11; Ezra 9:15; Job 36:3).

Righteous—“*the righteousness of God*”—is a premier consideration in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness . . .*” (Matt 6:33). This is a righteousness to be appropriated. Seeing this, Paul affirmed his life was lived in order to be “*be found in Him* (Jesus), *not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith*”^{NKJV} (Phil 3:9). He knew that righteousness was imperative to be accepted by God, and that he could not develop it himself.

I am persuaded the masses of professed believers have not yet been convinced of the necessity of righteousness. They have heard a Gospel so thoroughly diluted with the wisdom of this world that they can scarcely arrive at a valid conclusion concerning righteousness or Divine acceptance.

We must exercise ourselves to break free from shallow and distorted views of salvation. It is still true, “*the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor 6:9), and without holiness, “*no man shall see the Lord*” (Heb 12:14). Make no mistake about this, the unrighteous man has a mandate from heaven, and there is no way to avoid it with impunity. “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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*” (Isa 55:7-9). Unrighteousness, then, has to do with more than our deeds. It has to do with our way, or manners, and our thoughts as well. Unless we are righteous in both of those areas, our future is hopeless!

Two Ways to be Righteous

There are two types of righteousness mentioned in Scripture. One depends

upon men, and the other comes from God.

Of the Law

The first is called a righteousness which is *“from the Law.”* This is NOT a righteousness from God, but one proceeding from self-effort alone: *“my own righteousness”* (Phil 3:9). When Jesus comes, He will *“find”* all men. At that time, there will be no hope whatsoever for any person having only his *“own righteousness, which is from the Law.”*

In this righteousness, the individual fulfills the *“righteous requirements of the Law,”* carefully and without flaw doing everything that God requires. This *“righteousness”* is particularly described for us. Appropriately, the description is provided by Moses, through whom the law was *“given”* (John 1:17). *“For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them”* (Rom 10:5). The Levitical law declared, *“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD”* (Lev 18:5). Nehemiah also said of God’s laws, *“which if a man do, he shall live in them”* (Neh 9:29). Ezekiel made the same statement: *“which if a man do, he shall even live in them”* (Ezek 20:11,13,21). Jesus said the same thing in answer to a man asking about obtaining eternal life: *“Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live”* (Lk 10:28).

The Spirit declares that this approach has nothing whatsoever to do with faith. *“Yet the law is not of faith, but the man who does them shall live by them”* (Gal 3:12). The Amplified New Testament reads, *“But the Law does not rest on faith—does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith—for it itself says, He who does them (the things prescribed in the Law) shall live by them, [not by faith].”* This is too strong for those with a propensity for Law. But it is the truth!

Here DOING is compared with BELIEVING. Under Law, becoming righteous is traced back to DOING as its cause. Mind you, this is not the doing of God. Remember, the Law is *“not based upon faith.”* This is **not** speaking about

God working in us *“to will and to do of His own good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). The life of the individual is thus placed in his own hands. There will be NO Divine intervention, no new birth, and no provision for reconciliation. Being alive to God will depend solely upon the impeccable and flawless performance of the individual. That is the *“righteousness of the Law.”* A single offence voids all other seeming works of goodness, making the individual guilty of breaking every jot and tittle of the Law (James 2:10).

Let us imagine for a moment that we did, in fact, find someone who did everything they were commanded to do. Even though that is only an imagination, Jesus did tell us what would occur were such a person found. *“So likewise you,*

This righteousness must be revealed before it can be appropriated, confirming it does not proceed from man. Rather, it is brought to man—quite different from the righteousness of the Law.

when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’^{”NKJV} (Lk 17:10). Ponder what good word is ever said to an *“unprofitable servant!”* Tell me if there is so much as a spark of hope held out to such a servant.

But let us take the matter even further. Hear the Spirit as He reasons concerning our father Abraham, *“the friend of God.”* *“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 to boast about, but not before God”* (Rom 4:1-2).

If you have ever thought yourself equal to the challenges of the Law, quickly abandon such foolishness! The righteousness that comes from the Law is a vaporous one. It simply is not possible, for the Law *“was not made for a righteous*

man” (1 Tim 1:9). It can neither produce or sustain a righteous man. The Law itself is *“righteous,”* but it cannot produce a single righteous deed, or right a solitary wrong. Its ministry is that of condemnation, not justification. As a covenant, the law was *“the ministration of death,”* and *“the ministration of condemnation”* (2 Cor 3:7,9). It did not remove sin, but defined it and confirmed men were guilty of it (Rom 3:19-20).

Throughout history, men have had a propensity to imagine they could become righteous by keeping the very Law they had broken. Once broken, however, the Law cannot be mended together in such a manner as to produce righteousness. That should be apparent to every thoughtful soul. It will also produce a strong longing in the tenderhearted for a righteousness that is accepted by God. The Gospel announces just such a righteousness.

Of Faith

The Gospel reveals a righteousness that comes from faith. It is called *“the righteousness of faith”* (Rom 4:13), or *“the righteousness that comes by faith.”^{NIV}* This righteousness must be revealed before it can be appropriated, confirming it does not proceed from man. Rather, it is brought to man—quite different from the righteousness of the Law. This will be more fully developed in the next section.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

There is only one righteousness that is acceptable to God, and that is His own. Here is a spiritually technical point that will yield much benefit. Some have viewed this righteousness as the *“righteousness of Christ,”* even though no such reference is ever found in Scripture. This view sees Jesus as fully keeping the Law in our behalf. Because of His flawless obedience, His righteousness is then imputed to us. Although Jesus was flawlessly righteous, it is not His righteousness that is imputed to us. That is, it is not the righteousness developed in the arena of spiritual warfare that is given to us. It is God’s own righteousness that is granted to us because of our *“faith in His blood”* (Rom 3:25)—i.e. , our persuasion of its effect.

The purpose of Christ’s

righteousness life was not the development of a righteousness to be imputed to us. Rather, it was in order to qualify Him to make the required sacrifice that would atone for the sins of the world. It was in order that He might fulfill the righteous demands of God for reconciliation.

While the righteousness of our text does, indeed, come from God, it also

belongs to Him. It is a righteousness to which men submit themselves—not one that is developed by them. This is precisely the point developed in the tenth chapter. *“Since they (Israel) did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness”*^{NIV} (10:3).

Thus the Gospel not only reveals that

God Himself is righteous in reconciling the world to Himself, but that He graciously and willingly confers that very righteousness upon all who believe in Christ. This is a required righteousness, without which there is no hope of heaven. That is a righteousness that will stand uncontested before the tribunal of heaven, both now and in the last day. It is revealed in the Gospel of Christ, and appropriated by faith.

FROM FAITH TO FAITH

^{17b} . . . **from faith to faith** . . . ”

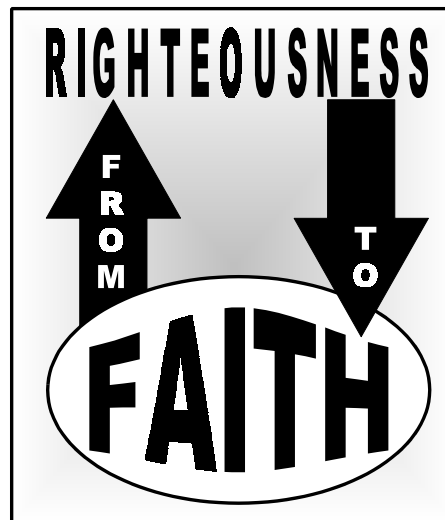
This is doubtless one of the most profound of all utterances. It declares the means by which righteousness is appropriated, and the effect it has upon the individual. The phrase *“from faith to faith”* is my particular focus. The thing that is revealed through the Gospel is this: the righteousness of God is *“from faith to faith.”* Other versions read, *“through faith for faith”*^{NRSV}, *“by faith from first to last”*^{NIV}, *“from faith unto faith”*^{ASV}, *“from start to finish by faith”*^{NLT}, and *“based on faith and addressed to faith”*^{NJB}.

The idea is that our experience of the righteousness of God springs from faith, then feeds, nourishes, and enhances faith. To put it another way, we must believe in order to be given the righteousness of God, and we must possess the righteousness of God in order for our faith to be perfected. Righteousness—the imputed righteousness of God—is the Divinely appointed link between *“first believing”* (Rom 13:11) and possessing faith when the Lord comes again (Lk 18:8). Fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold of eternal life (1 Tim 6:12) is contingent upon this righteousness. At no point is righteousness severed from faith.

PAUL’S TESTIMONY

It is no wonder Paul was so eager to be found possessing this righteousness in the last day, when nothing else will really matter. *“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness*

of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God



on the basis of faith”^{NASB} (Phil 3:8-9).

The relevance of this to the life of faith is confirmed in the Apostle’s next words. *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (Phil 3:10-11). **Thus the righteousness received by faith is seen as itself provoking further faith.** The more aware the believer is of the possession of the righteousness of God, the more strength faith gains.

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

The righteousness of God is appropriated by appointed means—**FAITH.** Apart from faith, it cannot be possessed. Later in this Epistle, the Spirit

will strongly affirm this to be the case. With a soul-jarring emphasis it is declared, *“with the heart man believeth unto righteousness”* (10:10). The NASB reads, *“with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness.”*

When early believers were lured into the snare of Law, they were reminded, *“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”*^{NKJV} (Gal 2:16). The word *“justified”* means to be *“made righteous.”* Not only is the individual exonerated from all sin, but is given a new and spotless nature—the *“new man.”* The *“new man,”* or the *“new creation,”* is nothing less than *“the righteousness of God,”* granted upon the basis of faith in and reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The perception of this will clarify First John 3:9 and 5:18.

And what is it that sparked that indispensable faith? Was it the Law? Indeed, not, for *“the Law is not of faith.”* It was the Gospel that brought the righteousness of God within our reach—that declared Christ died and has been exalted because He thoroughly pleased God in His atoning death. That is why it is written, *“faith comes by hearing”*—the hearing of the Gospel of Christ (Rom 10:14-17).

To put it another way, **the righteousness is offered by the Gospel and received by faith.** Someone has well said that when we are first born again, we see the Lord’s favoring look toward us – but at a

distance. As our faith grows, however, that favor of the Lord toward us is seen more clearly. This produces a bold confidence and determined perseverance. Without faith, it is not possible to obtain the righteousness of God. Further, without the righteousness of God, it is not possible for faith to grow. Thus His righteousness comes to us through our faith, and our faith is strengthened by His righteousness—*“from faith to faith.”*

This arrangement confirms to our heart that salvation is not a once-for-all matter—at least not from the participative point of view. Salvation is a work that can only be brought to a culmination while we are within the favor of God. It cannot be accomplished from a distance, or while

men are in a state of practical alienation from God. The imputation of the righteousness of God allows for the completion of the work.

Because this subject will be developed extensively in the third and fourth chapters, this should suffice to introduce it to us. Your own experience will confirm to you that there is scarcely a word being uttered in modern churches on this subject. Where this is true, the work of God is not being done, people are not being perfected, and victory is not being experienced.

Should a person choose to still cling to the foolish notion that the Gospel is not for the believer, let him ponder how

utterly absurd this text would be if that were true. The Gospel is as essential as it is to be found in Christ possessing the righteousness of God that comes by faith.

Now the text will elaborate on the phrase *“to faith,”* or *“in order to faith.”* We will see that it is **not** possible to remain spiritually alive without faith. Also, it will become apparent that faith is not possible—at any point of life in this world—apart from hearing the Gospel of Christ. Faith and the hearing of the Gospel are joined together, and cannot be separated.

The Gospel continues to be a feast of fat things, and wine one the lees, nourishing our faith.

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

^{17c} . . . *as it is written, The just shall live by faith.* Here is one of the most frequently quoted sayings in Scripture.

HABAKKUK

It is first affirmed by the prophet Habakkuk. He states it with a very personal tone. *“Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith”* (Hab 2:4). Here believing is contrasted with pride, so that the unbelieving soul is the proud one, and vice versa. The prophet also concludes that only personal faith can sustain the soul. One person cannot live toward God upon the basis of the faith of another.

GALATIANS

Paul concludes from this statement (*“the just shall live by faith”*) that it is **evident** no man is justified by the law. *“But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith”*^{NKJV} (Gal 3:11). Those, therefore, who fail to see this are blind.

Notice that living is associated with justification as well as being born again. Those imagining they can remain justified while believing only *“for a while”* (Lk 8:13-14) are in the grip of delusion.

HEBREWS

In the book of Hebrews, the Spirit

makes a strong case for the necessity of faith, showing that without it condemnation is inevitable. *“Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”*^{NKJV} (Heb 10:38-39).

Here, faith is contrasted with drawing back from God, shrinking into the bushes of delusion. From this perspective, faith is leaning and pressing toward the Lord. It is getting closer so He can be the better heard, and His hand can be placed upon us, as Jacob’s hands were placed upon Joseph’s sons.

AN EXPOSITION

The statement, *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith”* is now expounded by the avowal *“The just shall live by faith.”* This is a fundamental consideration.

THE JUST

A *“just”* person is a *“righteous”* person, or one whose life is marked by uprightness—as God views uprightness. The standard by which the state of rightness is measured is the will or character of God. Viewed from the standpoint of legality, the *“just”* person is one who can stand before the Divine tribunal and NOT be condemned.

Prior to the Law

NOAH. Prior to the giving of the Law, the first man said to be *“just”* was Noah. It is said of him, *“Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God”* (Gen 6:9). Considering the time in which he lived, and the scarcity of Divine revelation, Noah is a most remarkable man. Of the multitudes living at that time, he is the ONLY man who *“found grace in the eyes of the Lord”* (Gen 6:8). His righteousness was viewed in comparison with the wicked generation in which he lived: i.e., *“perfect IN his generations . . . “righteous before Me IN this generation”* (Gen 6:9; 7:1). From Noah to Abraham, nearly a thousand years, no person was said to be *“just”* or *“righteous.”*

ABRAHAM. In Abraham, God introduced the kind of righteousness experienced in Christ Jesus. Abraham was righteous, but not merely in comparison with his generation. His righteousness, or becoming *“just,”* was imputed to him. Thus it is written, *“And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness”* (Gen 15:6). This affirmation is the basis of Apostolic doctrine (Rom 4:3-6,9,11,20-25; Gal 3:6-14; James 2:23). The Psalmist also referred to this imputation of righteousness in Psalm 106:31). Thus we are introduced to a man that was MADE

righteous by God because of his faith.

THE LAW. Under the Law, being “just,” or “righteous,” had to do with approved conduct—meticulously keeping the Law. Viewed in the strictest sense of the word, Solomon said, “*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not*” (Eccl 7:20). It is further confirmed in the Psalms and this very Epistle, “*There is none righteous, no not one*” (Psa 14:1-3; 53:2-3; Rom 3:10). In the general sense of the word, there were people considered “just” because of their upright character and devotion to keeping the Law. Among them were Joseph, husband to Mary (Matt 1:19), Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist (Lk 1:5-6), John the Baptist (Mark 6:20), Simeon, who blessed Jesus in His infancy (Lk 2:25), Joseph of Arimathea, in whose tomb Jesus was buried (Lk 23:50), and Cornelius (Acts 10:22).

Our Text

When our text speaks of “*the just*,” or “*the righteous*”^{NASB,NIV}, it is not speaking of a comparative righteousness like that of Noah. Nor, indeed, is it speaking of people who are “just” in the sense of Joseph, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Simeon. This is **not** “just” as defined by the Law: i.e., “*Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man who DOES these things will live by them’*” (Rom 10:5).

In this text “*the just*” are those who have been MADE just. **Like Abraham, their righteousness has been imputed to them upon the basis of their faith.** This is the whole argument of the text. The Gospel is God’s power in order to salvation to all who believe that Gospel. Therein, by means of the Gospel, a “*righteousness from God*” is revealed (1:17; 3:20).

I must be emphatic on this point. This is not a mere technicality. The Spirit will reason on this precise point through the eighth chapter. It is one of the most extended developments of a subject (if not the most) in all of Scripture. We learn from this that men are easily blinded to this. We also see that no real progress will be made in spiritual life where this is not comprehended.

Now, the Spirit will tell us how the life, granted in justification, is maintained. He will declare how those who have gained God’s approval remain in that status. He will affirm how those who have been raised from death in trespasses and sins keep alive.

LIVING BY FAITH

“*The just shall live by faith*,” or “*The righteous will live by faith*.”^{NIV} Note, it does not say the just OUGHT to live by faith, but that they **will**. Their faith has brought them life, and their faith will

Here, faith is contrasted with drawing back from God, shrinking into the bushes of delusion. From this perspective, faith is leaning and pressing toward the Lord. It is getting closer so He can be the better heard, and His hand can be placed upon us, as Jacob’s hands were placed upon Joseph’s sons.

maintain that life—spiritual life.

“*Living*” is not mere existence. It is not simply being in a certain place, or maintaining a certain identity. In professed Christian circles, this is too often the view. Being “*alive*” involves being “*married*” to Christ and bringing forth fruit to God (Rom 7:4). It includes the capacity to hear “*what the Spirit is saying to the churches*” (Rev 3:22).

Being alive is running the race with endurance while “*looking unto Jesus*” (Heb 12:1-2). It is wrestling against the inimical powers of darkness (Eph 6:12), and waiting for God’s Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:9-10). It involves the “*fruit of the Spirit*” being found in us (Gal 5:22-25; Eph 5:9), and working out our “*own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12).

Those who are “*living*” are wearing the “*whole armor of God*” (Eph 6:10-17), “*hastening unto the coming of the day of God*” (2 Pet 3:12), submitting to God and resisting the devil (James 4:7). They are anticipating a “*better country*,” and thus consider themselves to be “*strangers and*

pilgrims on the earth” (Heb 11:13-14,16).

And how are these justified ones able to maintain that life? How is it that they are able to “*endure unto the end*”? **They are living by faith**, for that is how the person who has been made “*just*” lives. Elsewhere it is said, “*For we walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor 5:7).

How marvelously Paul testified of his own life in Christ Jesus. “*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*” NKJV (Gal 2:20). There simply is no other way to remain “*dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God*” (Rom 6:11).

The very thing that brought us life keeps us alive. The Spirit says it this way. “*As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him*” (Col 2:6). Faith constrains us to lean the weight of our souls upon the Lord, depending upon Him to “*bring us to God*” in a blameless and joyful state (1 Pet 3:18; Jude 24-25).

Faith and the Gospel

If “*the just shall live by faith*,” then how is that faith kept strong and vibrant? Settle it in your mind that there is no spiritual life where there is no faith! How can we “*continue in the faith grounded and settled*,” seeing as that is an absolute requisite to being presented before God “*holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight*” (Col 1:22-23)? **IT IS OUR EXPOSURE TO, AND EMBRACE OF, THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST!**

Do not imagine this to be an overly simplistic and powerless statement. Men may accent human effort, which is indeed required. But the Spirit will associate our faith with the Gospel, never allowing it to be sustained without that Gospel. Thus believers are admonished to strive together “*for the faith of the Gospel*” (Phil 1:27). And what is “*the faith of the Gospel*”? It is not the faith itself of which the Gospel speaks, for the Gospel does not speak of faith, but of the One in Whom faith resides. Faith “*comes*” us as we reach out, taking hold on the Gospel.

This is nothing less than the faith that *“comes from hearing”* the Gospel (Rom 10:14-17). Colossians 1:23 refers to a faith that does not allow us to be moved away from the *“hope of the Gospel”*—i.e., the hope produced by the embrace of the Gospel. When Paul determined to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith, he sent Timothy, a *“fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ”* (1 Thess 3:2). This is why Paul was ready to *“preach the Gospel”* to the believers in Rome. He knew it was the nourishing root from which faith springs

and by which it is also sustained.

If it is true that *“the just shall live by faith,”* then spiritual life cannot be found where faith is not present. Further, faith cannot come or remain independently of the Gospel of Christ. That is why we begin our spiritual lives by overtly participating in the Gospel through our baptism (Rom 6:1-8). It is also why we continue to refresh our hearts and minds by the regular remembrance of the Christ of the Gospel around the Lord’s table. **Faith will never take you beyond a need**

for hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for it cannot remain without that life-giving message.

Further, as Scripture affirms, the Gospel is anything but simplistic. It is more than an historical narrative. Neither, indeed, is it the statement of a lifeless theological creed. It is THE message through which God reveals what we so sorely require. How we need to hear it! It towers above all other messages, bringing life and hope to humanity, and nourishing and sustaining our faith.

CONCLUSION

We have dealt with one of the most profound passages of Scripture. It is ironic that it is often viewed as one of the more simplistic ones, and is therefore very much neglected. Many have made mention of this text only in reference to evangelism and reaching the lost. But the Spirit has associated it with being right before God and living by faith. The Gospel of Christ is an ongoing spiritual resource in which *“the righteousness of God”* is made known. The Spirit does not say this righteousness WAS revealed by means of the Gospel, but that it IS made known IN the Gospel.

No believer will go long without having to contend with the devil’s assault upon his sonship. Just as surely as Satan aggressively sought to bring Christ’s Sonship into question at the beginning and conclusion of His ministry (Matt 4:3-6; 27:43), so he will seek to bring your Divine acceptance into question. He will use adverse circumstances, false teaching, and even personal imaginations, to convince you that God has really not received you. When this happens, you must *“fight the good fight of faith,”* aggressively engaging the devil and his devices in order to keep the faith.

While all of your effort is involved, the real source of your victory is your faith. It, and it alone, *“is the victory that overcomes the world”* (1 John 5:4). And, if that is too ambiguous for you, the Spirit clarifies what is meant. *“Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* (1 John

5:5). The person who maintains that persuasion cannot lose!

And, how is it that the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God can be kept fresh? It is through the Gospel, and only through the Gospel! As meaningful as apologetic, historical, and archeological evidences may appear, which one of them has ever contributed one gram of substantiation that *“Jesus is the Son of God?”* The only source of proof is found in the Gospel, which itself is a revelation from God (2 Tim 1:10).

If the people of God are to be strong, they must hear the Gospel of Christ. Men of God must take this precious message and open its sustaining contents to the people. Their recollection of Jesus at the table of remembrance must be lifted above lifeless routine into the realm of invigorating life.

Let those who have correctly required believers to be baptized now take the Gospel and open to those *“baptized into Christ”* what really occurred in that singular event. None of them knew the fulness of that occasion when it took place, and precious few of them have a remotely adequate knowledge of its effects now. They are, because of a high level of spiritual ignorance, trusting in their baptism instead of the One into whom they were baptized. It is all in the Gospel of Christ.

Those who have a penchant for church patterns and organizations need to hear how it has been purchased by the

blood of Christ, and raised up to sit with Him in heavenly places. They need to be reminded of the remarkable and unparalleled power that is devoted to them, and how God is preparing to present the church to Christ as a spotless bride. It is all in the Gospel of Christ.

The Gospel is a great light from heaven. In a grand statement of our God, the Spirit affirms He *“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**”* (2 Tim 1:9-10).

What is there that is pertinent to any aspect of salvation that has no connection with *“life and immortality?”* Is there any commandment or obligation that has nothing to do with *“life and immortality?”* Is there any human relationship divorced from *“life and immortality?”* Is there a single aspect of the body of Christ that has nothing to do with *“life and immortality?”*

Let those who imagine the Gospel to be irrelevant point us to a single human responsibility or relationship having nothing to do with *“life and immortality”*

Of course, to ask these questions is to answer them. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, having to do with our

relationship to God through Christ, that is disassociated from "life and immortality." Here, in "life and immortality," the whole of our lives is encompassed. These deal with this world and the one to come; with fighting the good fight and obtaining the prize. Both living and dying are found in them. And it is all "brought to light," or illuminated, by the Gospel of Christ!



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 4



WRATH and UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

^{1:18}For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰For 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, so that they are without excuse, ²¹because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. ²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. ²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. ²⁸And 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; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³²who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:18-32^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

A righteousness from God has been made known through the Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God to accomplish salvation. This righteousness is appropriately described as “*the righteousness which is from God by faith*” (Phil 3:9). It is also represented as “*the GIFT of righteousness*” (Rom 5:17). It is

not conferred upon individuals because they have, through their own efforts, become worthy of such a bestowment – like the conferment of an academic degree upon one who has fulfilled all of the requirements for that degree. The bestowal of this righteousness from God is based entirely upon faith.

The Spirit will now confirm that this arrangement is an absolute necessity. Before the almighty God, righteousness can be obtained in no other way. When sin entered into the world, nature could provide no place through which it could exit. With it came the death sentence, which also could not be reversed by

natural means. To emphasize the nature of sin, the entrance of sin and death, siamese twins that cannot be separated, a single deed opened the door for them. It was not a mass of sin that brought death and all forms of malignancy into the world, but a single act of disobedience. Thus it is written, *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . . by the one man’s offense many died . . . For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation . . . by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one . . . through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation . . . by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”* (Rom 5:12-19).

NO ROOM FOR OPINION

There is no room for opinion or conjecture on this matter. Keep in mind, the *“one offense”* through which sin and death rushed into the world was not a murder, or some form of brutality. When compared with the deplorable results sin has provoked, that first deed appears quite small. But it was not small. Sin is never trivial. It is the NATURE of sin that is so reprehensible, not its appearance.

This section of Romans will confirm why sin is so utterly loathsome and repugnant to God. **It is not possible for righteousness to be produced by any person guilty of sin!** The condition spawned by sin can only grow worse. It can never become better. All efforts to correct the human condition through mental or physical disciplines are vain—absolutely unavailing!

This situation is not easily acknowledged by men. The wisdom of this world perceives humanity as fundamentally good, being in the process of development and improvement. This approach is not limited to non-religious wisdom, but is also found throughout the *Christian* community. It is not rare to find devoted *Christians* who are persuaded righteousness—the kind required by God—is the result of keeping a code, or measuring up to Divine standards for living. Significant theological battles have been waged through the centuries over these matters.

Our text will firmly establish that there would no need for a righteousness from God, were man remotely capable of fulfilling the Divine requirements for being righteous. As we will see, humanity needs more than mere direction. Sin has utterly corrupted every part of man, from his body to his soul. There is no part of that which is *“born of the flesh”* that is good or undefiled. It has been rejected in its totality, thus requiring the new birth.

THE EXTENT OF SIN

After the flood, God revealed to Noah that He would never again destroy all humanity as He did in that judgment. His promise is thus stated: *“Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is **evil from childhood**”*^{NIV} (Gen 8:21). Even Solomon knew *“there is no one who does not sin”*^{NIV} (2 Chron 6:36). The Psalmist said it, and the Apostles confirmed it, *“They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Psa 14:3; Rom 3:10).

DAVID SPEAKS

David was acutely aware of how sin had corrupted all of human nature. *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me”* (Psa 51:5). The Psalmist was not saying he was guilty of transgression from conception, but that he possessed a nature bent in that direction. It only needed opportunity to express itself. Thus he said, *“The wicked go astray from the womb; they err from their birth, speaking lies”* (Psa 51:5).

THE NATURAL STATE

The *“natural”* is the human condition apart from Christ. It is a cursed state in which no profitability can be found. This is what Jesus meant when he said, *“the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). Ultimately, the *“natural”* condition is traced back to Adam, and is visibly attested by our bodies (1 Cor 15:44-46). This part of us—*“the natural man”*—cannot take hold of the things of God. Thus, it is written, *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually*

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE WRATH OF GOD REVEALED (1:18A)
- II. WHEN RIGHTEOUSNESS IS SUPPRESSED (1:18B)
- III. INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES SEEN (1:20C)
- IV. THEY DID NOT GLORIFY HIM, NOR WERE THEY THANKFUL (1:21-23)
- V. GOD GAVE THEM UP! (1:24-26a)
- VI. THE VILENESS OF SODOMY (1:26B-27)
- VII. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MEN REFUSE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (1:28-31)
- VIII. WHEN MEN DESERVE DEATH (1:32)

discerned^{NKJV} (1 Cor 2:14).

In his natural state, man is in a futile and hopeless condition. As it is written, *“The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are futile”* (Psa 94:11). Again, believers are challenged to remember what they were before their induction into Christ—particularly us Gentiles. *“. . . 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”*^{NKJV} (Eph 2:12). The state of man apart from Christ is one of alienation (Eph 4:18), death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-2), and being under the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19).

CONFIRMATION

Our text will confirm this to be the case. Remember, the Spirit is elaborating on the revelation of the righteousness that comes from God by faith, and is revealed through the Gospel. Our first exposure will be to the Gentile world. We will see that a very real need for righteousness exists, and that man is not able to meet it.

Further, the situation is highlighted by the fact that God’s wrath has been revealed against ALL unrighteousness. He cannot make friends with it or overlook it. Divine acceptance demands that the individual be made righteous, else condemnation is inevitable. Few people have seen the gravity of the human circumstance brought on by sin.

The need for a righteousness from God is firmly established by the universal effect of sin upon our race, by Given O. Blakely

THE WRATH OF GOD REVEALED

4:18a *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . .* "The Spirit will now confirm that apart from Christ and the possession of the righteousness of God, man is in a condemned state. While men boast of God's love being upon the world, our text will affirm it is actually His wrath that is upon it. The Lord Jesus Himself witnessed to this condition. *"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God . . . He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"* (John 3:18,36). In this text, the focus is upon the total absence of righteousness apart from Divine imputation.

The picture is that all men have sinned, and are dominated by sin. They possess no righteousness of their own, and thus cannot stand before God. They are in a condemned state, and subject to the wrath of God, which is focused against the entire world.

Among other things, we see here that sin is actually antagonistic toward God. It provokes His wrath and calls forth His indignation, and that without exception.

THE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS EXPLAINED

There are a series of explanations in verses sixteen through eighteen. **First**, the reason for Paul's readiness to preach the Gospel to those in Rome is because He is not ashamed of the Gospel: *"FOR I am not ashamed of the Gospel . . ."* **Second**, he is not ashamed of the Gospel because it is God's power to effect salvation: *"FOR it is the power of God unto salvation . . ."* **Third**, the Gospel is powerful to accomplish salvation because a righteousness for men is revealed in it: *"FOR therein is revealed the righteousness of God . . ."* **Fourth**, the absolute need for a righteousness from

God is seen in His wrath and indignation against **all** ungodliness and unrighteousness: *"FOR the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . ."*

God cannot overlook unrighteousness, or be indifferent toward it. It is still true, God *"will by no means clear the guilty"* (Ex 34:7). He *"will not at all acquit the wicked"* (Nah 1:3). I realize it has become fashionable to say "God will take you just as you are." However, that is

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not altogether true. The very reason for Jesus was that God could NOT receive us just as we were. Settle it in your mind: there is only one Divine attitude toward ungodliness and unrighteousness: **WRATH!**

Eventually, the wrath of God will be unleashed against all sin—all *"ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."* That day is appropriately called *"the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (Rom 2:5). There is a *"wrath to come,"* and salvation prepares us for it (1 Thess 1:10).

What Is Wrath of God?

The wrath of God is violent—the breaking forth of the Divine nature against all that is contrary to it. It includes anger and vengeance, both of which belong to God. Scripture apprizes us that sin provokes Him to anger (Deut 4:25; 32:16,21; 1 Kgs 15:30; Psa 78:58; 106:29; Isa 1:4). The wrath of God is His

reaction to all that is contrary to, and conflicts with, His nature. It is the response of His holiness.

Our text states that the wrath of God is against ALL unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. There is no way for wrong doing (unrighteousness) and "ungodlikeness" (ungodliness) to avoid the wrath of God. If they are not put away, the person in whom they are found will be consumed by the wrath of God.

It is in this sense that *"our God is a consuming fire"* (Heb 12:29). Thus will He take *"vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power"* (2 Thess 1:8-9).

The awareness of this should destroy any casualness or tolerance men have toward unrighteousness and ungodliness. Whatever finely-spun theologies may be developed by men, the wrath of God is *"against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."* Men may affirm God loves us "warts and all," but that is not the truth. They may declare that "no matter what we do God loves us," but that is a corruption of the truth, not a proclamation of it. All such statements are designed to make men comfortable in their sin and deficiency. But faith will not permit us to be comfortable with what is not approved by God, and cannot enter into heaven. The doctrine of God's wrath being directed toward all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men needs to be declared.

THE GREEN TREE

Our text associates the revelation of the wrath of God with the Gospel of Christ. Something of it, therefore, must be perceived in the Gospel. In summary, the most extensive revelation of the wrath of God has, to this time, taken place when Jesus died. There the wrath of God was poured out upon the Son who bore all of the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).

In that awful hour, when Jesus was “made to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21), He endured the curse of the Almighty–Divine wrath. As it is written, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on

rejected their own Savior!

At this point, Jesus made an arresting statement. “For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (Lk 23:28-31). What was He saying? He Himself was the “green tree,”

Him up for us all” (Rom 8:32), what will be the experience of those who have chosen sin and remained a slave to it?

If you wonder what God’s attitude is toward sin—the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men—then consider what God did to Jesus when “the iniquity of us all” was laid upon Him (Isa 53:6). If He could not tolerate imputed sin, what about willing sin? The wrath of God has, indeed, been revealed through the Gospel. Man MUST possess righteousness, for no other state is acceptable before God.

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Thus the first argument for the necessity of a righteousness from God has been established. Unrighteousness is subject to the wrath of God! Either men obtain righteousness from God, or they will be consumed by His wrath. There are no alternatives to this. Outside of Christ, the best of human deeds are only unrighteousness and ungodliness. As Isaiah said, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa 64:6). There is no righteousness for men apart from what God confers upon them. The point of this text, is that they were incapable of saving themselves, and unworthy of a salvation from God. It is His mercy that will provide that remarkable salvation.

a tree” (Gal 3:13).

A most precise expression of this circumstance was given by Jesus while He was being led to be crucified. At that time, “there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him.” Turning to those lamenters, the Lord said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.” He then told them of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, which He had prophesied earlier. “For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.” What a dreadful judgment awaited those who had

not easily subjected to burning, or the fiery indignation of the Lord. He was “green” in the sense of being alive and productive, with no fault found against Him. There was no sin in Him, and Satan had nothing in Him (1 John 3:5; John 14:30). Yet, He “tasted death for every man,” was “cursed” by God, and experienced the withdrawal of the Almighty from Him. The wrath of God was poured out upon the Son in a manner described as cursing (Gal 3:13)!

Israel was like a dry tree, brittle, lifeless, and easily burned. Indeed, if the indignation of God was leveled against the Son who did not sin, what would the wrath of God do against those who were guilty of sin in the extreme? If, when the sins of the world were laid upon Christ, God did not “spare Him,” but “delivered

The introduction of a righteousness from God presumes an absolute need for it, for God does or offers nothing that is not necessary. It is not a luxury. No man is righteous by nature. Nor, indeed, can righteousness be gained by human effort.

WHEN THE TRUTH IS SUPPRESSED

^{48b} . . . who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

We will now see the reprehensible nature of unrighteousness. The KJV reads, “who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” This does not mean they maintain a grasp of the truth while themselves remaining unrighteous. Rather it means they **hold back**, or **hold down**, the truth through their unrighteousness. The word used

here (κατεχόντων) is a powerful one, meaning hold back, detain, restrain, check, hold down, and suppress. Barclay-Newman

The compound nature of unrighteousness is thus seen. Wherever it is found, truth is being suppressed and held down. By this we know that iniquity is aggressive. It is not, and cannot be, neutral toward the truth of God. It is not possible to entertain a preference for sin and remain in the favor of God. Nor,

indeed, is it possible to comprehend the things of God while remaining in the grip of unrighteousness.

THE TRUTH

“The truth,” in this case is the true knowledge of God. The reasoning of the Spirit will confirm this to be the case. Unrighteousness keeps men from knowing God, even though they stand in the middle of revelation. We must see this! It is not possible to know God and be

unrighteous at the same time. Those who affirm they have achieved such a feat have simply lied.

When Truth Fails

“Truth,” however, is not limited to the knowledge of God, although that is the primary subject of our text. It also has to do with any revelation of heavenly reality. Even though it has been revealed by God Himself, yet it can be suppressed. There are at least two expressions of this circumstance in the prophets. *“Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter. So truth fails, And he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him That there was no justice”*^{NKJV} (Isa 59:14-15). *“So you shall say to them, ‘This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth’”*^{NKJV} (Jer 7:28).

In both of these texts, the **effectiveness** of truth is the point, and not the truth itself. The truth of God cannot succumb, failing to have any vitality. However, when men attempt to place it like a *“jewel in a swine’s snout”* (Prov 11:22), surrounding it by their tradition and ways, the truth no longer works effectively. Thus it is said to have *“fallen in the street,” “failed,”* and *“perished.”* A stilted theology cannot accept this Scriptural perspective. Such moves men to believe God goes on working in their midst through the truth, even though they have embraced lying ways with both hands. But this is far from being the truth.

God requires cleanliness in those who bear the vessel of truth, just as foreshadowed under the Law: *“Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the LORD”* (Isa 52:11). The Word of God is “blasphemed” because of human conduct—something believers are admonished to avoid with all zeal. For example, as it is written, *older women are exhorted to “admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may*

not be blasphemed” (Tit 2:5). When David was chastened of the Lord for his sin with Bathsheba, the Lord gave this reason for the judgment: *“because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme”* (2 Sam 12:14).

In an arresting discourse concerning a massive falling away from the truth, Jesus declared, *“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”* (Matt 24:12). And why is this the

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case? **Because truth is suppressed by unrighteousness**, even as our text affirms. The Lord will not allow the truth to flourish where iniquity is preferred.

To put it another way, when truth is not loved, it is withdrawn from prominence. In a poignant statement of this case, the Spirit speaks with great specificity. *“... they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2 Thess 2:10-12). This principle applies to all manifestations of the truth, whether the rudimentary revelation of nature, or the more precise revelation of the Gospel of Christ. This is a truth little recognized in the religious community.

WHAT MAY BE KNOWN OF GOD

There are some things about God that **cannot** be known. As it is written, *“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever . . .”* (Deut 29:29). Our text now addresses things concerning God that **could** be known.

This is a great principle of Scripture. Men are held responsible for what they **can** know. When God has revealed something of Himself, and men do not avail themselves of that revelation, they are held accountable for their ignorance. Here again we behold a principle that is scarcely acknowledged in the contemporary church.

There is such an abysmal ignorance of the Word of God and His great salvation, that it is staggering. Even among *Christian* leaders, there is more ignorance of the Gospel than familiarity. It is not an innocent situation! When God places the truth—any facet of it—within our reach, He will hold us strictly accountable for laying hold of it and becoming familiar with it. Men who choose to speculate and philosophize about religion instead of embracing what *“may be known of God”* have, by that very action, suppress the truth! The word of God will **not** work effectually in those who do not believe (1 Thess 2:13). This sadly accounts for the powerless condition of many a professed believer. They have not taken hold on *“what may be known of God.”*

Our text is dealing with the Gentile world who had no word from God. Their testimony, as we will find, was the creation. If God held men responsible for not beholding Him in nature, what will be said of those who have not seen Him in grace, in the Gospel, and in the Person of Jesus Christ?

GOD HAS SHOWN IT TO THEM

Remember, we are speaking of man apart from either the Law or the Gospel. God did not hold men lacking these revelations responsible for beholding Himself as declared in them. They are only responsible for what God *“has shown them.”* I understand the emphasis of this text to be *“to them.”* That is, God has so arranged things that humanity can behold things concerning Himself. He has created them with a capacity to know Him, and strategically placed him to encourage that knowledge. Here is how Paul stated it to the lifeless Athenian philosophers. *“From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them*

and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

For some, this is too hard to receive,

but it is the revelation of God. God determined **WHEN** and **WHERE** "every nation of men" should live. He so positioned them in time and place that they would seek Him, extending themselves to find Him. This is the manner in which He made Himself known

to them. He placed them in an environment not only created by Him, but which loudly testified of Him. To be ignorant of God, therefore, is inexcusable, as the Spirit will now confirm. Revelation is always attended with responsibility.

INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES CLEARLY SEEN

⁴⁰For 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, so that they are without excuse . . . "From the very beginning, creation was structured to display invisible qualities of the Living God. All things were "made" in a deliberate manner, in order that God might be more fully known through them. This, of course, makes the evolutionary hypothesis a Satanic lie. There is not an ounce of truth to it at any level, or from any view. Those who attempt to blend Divine creation with evolution through, what is called, "theistic evolution," only betray their ignorance of God. They say God created the world, but did it over eons of time, employing the principle of evolution—which itself is nothing more than a theory. Every aspect of creation was deliberate, with nothing left to chance or long-term development.

This circumstance is precisely why the "invisible attributes" of God are "clearly seen" in the things that are made. There is a precision and harmony about them that cannot be accounted for apart from God. To say that God used lengthy periods of time to create the "worlds" (Heb 1:2; 11:3) is absurd, because time contributes to deterioration, not perfection. The very concept of "time" suggests a termination, and therefore continual demise.

Further, creation was accomplished by God's Word, which confirms its instant genesis. The vast creation was put together in a deliberate manner, and with a focused objective. But that formation was not a lengthy building process. Rather

it was accomplished by Divine fiat—His word. As it is written, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Heb 11:3). That "word" projected God's character and

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purpose, stamping them both on the entirety of creation like an artists signature on a painting.

Let those who are tempted to compromise with the purveyors of evolution return to a godly manner of thinking. They are suppressing the truth with their professed wisdom, and draw attention to the creation itself rather than the One who called it into being.

INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES

To the carnally minded, this does not seem reasonable: *clearly seeing invisible attributes*. But this is not speaking of mere physical vision. Rather, it is speaking of comprehension or perception. Beholding the creation, men should be brought to understand something about God Himself, the Creator whose signature is found in ever facet of His creation. These invisible attributes are "clearly seen," and are incontrovertible.

We will find, however, that sin has so dulled man's capacities that he does not perceive what is evident, or conclude what is inescapable. Remember, the Spirit is establishing the necessity of a righteousness from God. At this point He will confirm that **no person failing to know what can be known of God is righteous. Righteousness is not possible where God is not perceived or known.** That is an axiom with alarming ramifications.

ETERNAL POWER AND GODHEAD

And what is it that can be known of God through the creation? What are the "invisible attributes" of Him that are "clearly seen?" What is it that can be "understood by the things that are made?" It is His "eternal power and Godhead." Other versions read "eternal power and Divine nature,"^{NRSV,NIV,NASB} and "eternal power and Deity."^{RSV}

"Eternal Power"

Notice, the Spirit does not say "power," but "eternal power." This is a power that does not dissipate, and is always adequate to meet Divine objectives. This is the power that makes "all things possible" with God (Matt 19:26). This is a power to create and to sustain, initiate and maintain. The vastness of creation, as well as its duration testifies to such power. While all creation has been consigned to mortality, it does not appear that way to the unenlightened. It has outlasted all living creatures within its confines, including the highest of all creation, which is mankind.

"Eternal power" is what is otherwise referred to as "Omnipotence" or "Almighty." The understanding of this

power is perceived by what it has accomplished. In our text, the creation is the result of “eternal power.” In redemption, the overthrow of all opponents, and the safe arrival of the saints in glory will be declared the result of “eternal power.” As it is written, “*And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’*” (Rev 19:6).

Creation itself is not the primary focus of attention, but the God who brought it into being with His Word. His “eternal power” is the thing to be perceived, not the so-called power of nature. The evidence of that power is intended to provoke an earnest quest within man to know the One possessing it. Such power, it is assumed, cannot be ignored unless it is done deliberately—in quest for something deemed greater.

“Godhead”

The word “*Godhead*” appears three times in the KJV, NKJV, Webster’s English Bible, and Young’s Literal Translation (Acts 17:29; Rom 1:20 and Col 2:9). Other translations say “*Divine nature*,” NRSV, NIV, NASB “*Deity*,” RSV and “*Divinity*” ASV, Douay Rheims, Darbys This is a most difficult word to explain on a language level. Technically, the word means “*the state of being God*.” This is the first thing apprehended by faith, that “*God IS*” (Heb 11:6). Creation clearly affirms there is a God, a Divine personality that is eternal, and is by nature Head over all, and possessing all power. Those who question the existence of God are the most unreasonable and obtuse of all people. They have ignored what can be “*clearly seen*” by the world in which they reside.

The Testimony of Creation

The nineteenth Psalm affirms the consistent testimony of creation. “*The*

heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line (chord, voice, or message) has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world” NKJV (Psa 19:1-3).

Creation calls men upward, to a consideration of its Maker. The precision with which it continues, and the harmony with which it functions, speaks of a Creator and a purpose. Men have

excuse.” God will not leave sinners with an alibi for their sin! Nor, indeed, will He assume the credit for men’s failure to conclude there is an all powerful God.

Men must guard against the tendency to lapse into philosophizing at this point: i.e., Is it possible to know God by studying nature? Can man discover God on his own?, etc. All such speculations are foolish. God elsewhere affirms that “*the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 2:14), and that those in the flesh

Creation calls men upward, to a consideration of its Maker. The precision with which it continues, and the harmony with which it functions, speaks of a Creator and a purpose.

developed calendars and clocks upon the basis of the accuracy of creation. The seasons of nature are used to establish seed time and harvest time. All of this testifies to a God with eternal power. If men fail to see this, it is because they are willingly ignorant, considering other matters to be of greater significance.

WITHOUT EXCUSE

The Spirit will now confirm that although sin reigns uncontested among those outside of Christ—and although men stand sorely in need or a righteousness from God—yet they are “*without excuse*.”

While this may appear a mere technical point, it is not. Although sin has dulled man’s capacity, hardened his heart, and blinded his eyes, he is still “*without*

cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). Notwithstanding, man can conclude there is a God, and that He ought to be sought. God positioned all peoples for this purpose, and did it AFTER the fall (Gen 10:5,25,32; Deut 32:8).

Men are without excuse for not seeking God, as the following text will confirm. Their willful ignoring of the testimony of creation is inexcusable. I would venture to say that many missionaries do not present this truth, leaving lost people to expect their situation to be justifiable. But it is not. All men need a righteousness from God because they are fundamentally unrighteous. That condition is confirmed by their failure to seek the Lord, a vocation to which they were appointed, and for which they were positioned.

THEY DID NOT GLORIFY HIM, NOR WERE THEY THANKFUL

“²¹ . . . because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became

fools,²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” The Spirit will now trace the retrogression of humanity. He is

addressing the period described later: “*For until the law sin was in the world*” (5:13). The Lord will not allow man to excuse or explain his failure to be righteous. With unyielding tenacity, He will charge humanity with deliberately

and aggressively avoiding what could be known of God. He gave them the aptitude and the evidence, and they refused it all.

THEY KNEW GOD

The knowledge to which the Spirit refers is elementary—being aware of God’s eternal power and Divinity. They possessed a general knowledge of the existence, perfection, and eternity of God. This is not knowing God like men in this day of salvation. Notwithstanding, any knowledge of God can be productive, and the suppression of that knowledge, elementary though it may be, is disastrous.

Later, the Spirit will confirm that some inward light had been granted to man, by virtue of being in the image of God. Of the heathen it is written, *“who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness”* (2:15). Thus they possessed some knowledge of God, though certainly not the whole of it. But they were responsible for what they had received. Even in that very basic state, they are said to have *“known God.”*

Those who imagine that a little knowledge of God excuses men for their ignorance and waywardness must look carefully at this text. Knowing that God IS, and that He is eternal, is sufficient to induce men to earnestly seek Him, as they are appointed to do.

I cannot leave this point without mentioning additional sources of the knowledge of God. Adam and Eve had some acquaintance with God. Noah also possessed some key knowledge of God. There was a revelation of His way at the tower of Babel, as well as with ancients like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job—all before the Law.

THEY DID NOT GLORIFY HIM

By saying they *“did not glorify Him as God,”* the Spirit means they did not honor Him as He had been revealed to them: an eternal God with *“eternal power.”* They realized He existed, but refused to give Him honor as God. Knowing God in any sense brings with it a solemn obligation to worship and serve Him. God will not excuse men from these

responsibilities. Further, to glorify God is to glorify **Him only**, for He alone is God.

The idea here includes that of communicating the truth of God to others, of declaring what was known of Him, and thus bringing honor to Him. In this process they would have promoted a reverence for God, as well as a quest to know Him more fully. Because of their unrighteousness and appetite for sin, they chose to suppress the truth of God—to bury in the recesses of their minds what their conscience told them.

THEY WERE NOT THANKFUL

Those who imagine that a little knowledge of God excuses men for their ignorance and waywardness must look carefully at this text.

Creation testifies loudly and clearly that it has been made—made by God. That being the case, thankfulness should rise from those occupying the creation. There is to be an acknowledgment that what is possessed has come from the hand of God. But this is not what occurred in the Gentile world. Thanksgiving did not rise to God, even at the lowest level.

Here, I understand thankfulness not to mean being thankful for particular things, like food, clothing, etc. Rather, this is a thankfulness expressed in a fervent quest for the God of creation. He who made a universe of harmony and order, with beauty and grandeur, is surely capable of directing and blessing the affairs of men. But they were not thankful enough to pursue the knowledge of God, developing it and coming to know Him more. They did not use what they had!

Vain Imaginations

Notice how the failure of men to glory God and be thankful did not end there. Their thoughts then became futile: *“but became vain in their imaginations.”* The word *“imaginations”* does not mean

they were merely dreaming with no regard to practicality. Their reasonings, or thoughts, were profound in their own estimation, but futile and vain imaginations from God’s perspective (which is the only valid one). Other versions emphasize this: *“but their thinking became futile”*^{NIV} . . . *“they became futile in their speculations”*^{NASB} . . . *“but became futile in their thoughts.”*^{NKJV}

Since the manner in which a man thinks indicates what he really is (Prov 23:7), this means the world became pointless and meaningless in its living.

This is the condition that prevailed in Noah’s day. *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gen 6:5). Following the flood, God told Noah He would never again destroy all humanity with a flood. The reason was because no improvement would ever be realized in the natural man. *“The LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done”* (Gen 8:21). The idea is that man’s thoughts were given over to vanity as soon as he refused to give glory and thanksgiving to God. I am persuaded that few people see this as the outcome of rejecting the knowledge of God.

DARKENED HEARTS

When men do not avail themselves of the provisions of God, they must suffer the consequences of their negligence. Hearts that are not given to glorifying and thanking God will be filled with darkness. Jesus said, *“But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness”* (Matt 6:23).

This kind of darkness is not only the result of failing to glorify and thank God, it is imposed upon men by the God of judgment. This is nothing less than the withholding of light, which is the meaning of the word *“darkened”*: deprived of light.^{Strong’s} The ostrich, therefore, is not the only one deprived of wisdom (Job

39:13-17).

FOOLISH WISDOM

The irony of the situation is that men thought they were wise in their foolish thoughts. *“Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”* while wearing the badge of intelligence, they actually became simpletons. Abandoning the testimony of creation, they concocted their own ideas about God. Their ideas were not only wrong, they were in sharp conflict with the true God, who possessed *“eternal power.”* Rather than seeking for God to reveal Himself, they took it upon themselves to arrive at a knowledge of Him through their own reasoning. The extent of their ideas will be expressed in the next verse.

It should not surprise us that this tendency remains among all men. Tragically, it has even penetrated the so-called *Christian* community. Men are still developing their own ideas about God instead of embracing the revelation He has given. But all such wisdom is foolishness. How poignantly it is stated in First Corinthians: *“in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God . . . ”* (1:21). Left to themselves, and because of sin, men became fools, even though they professed themselves to be wise.

CHANGING THE GLORY OF GOD

The extent to which man fell is seen in the conceptions of God that he developed. In all of them—whether idols of wood and stone, or mental conceptions—there is a corruption of God. Our text states they *“changed the glory of the incorruptible*



BAAL

God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”

Men threw their energies into the creation of false gods, together with their images. They knew by the testimony of creation that there was a God, yet they refused to glorify Him as God. Instead, they constructed gods of their own making. A few that are mentioned in Scripture are listed below.

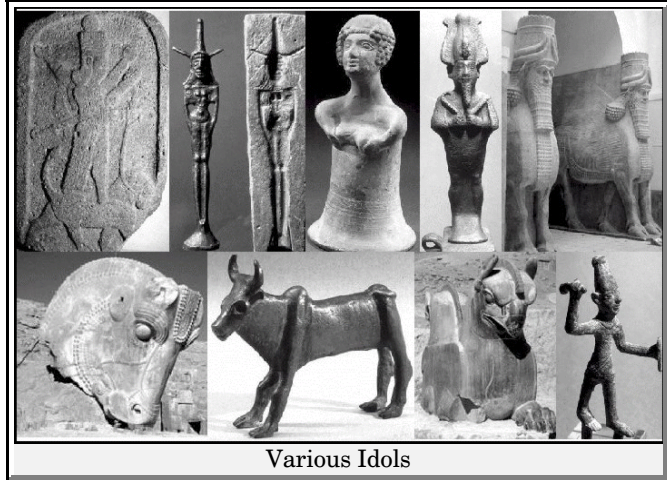
- Adrammelech, Mesopotamia (2 Kgs 17:31).

- Amon, Egypt (Nah 3:8)
- Anammelech, Babylonian (2 Kgs 17:31)
- Anat, Canaanites (Jer 44:19)
- Artemis (Diana), Greeks (Acts 19:35)
- Baal, Syria (1 Kgs 18:19)
- Ashima, Samaria (2 Kgs 17:30)
- Ash-toreth, Canaanites (1 Kgs 11:5)
- Baalberith, Shechem (Judges 9:4)
- Baalpeor, Moabites (Psa 106:28)
- Bel, Babylon (Jer 51:44)
- Chemosh, Moabites (Judges 11:24)
- Dagon, Philistines (Judges 16:23)
- Merodach, Babylonian (Jer 50:2)
- Milcom, Ammonites (2 Kgs 11:5)
- Moloch, Ammonites (Amos 5:26)
- Nergal, Babylonian (2 Kgs 17:30)
- Nibhaz, Avites (2 Kgs 17:31)
- Nisroch, Assyria (2 Kgs 19:36)
- Rimmon, Damascus (2 Kgs 5:18)
- Succothbenoth, Samaria (2 Kgs 17:30)
- Tamuz, Babylonian (Ezek 8:14)
- Tartak, Samaria (2 Kgs 17:31)
- Zeus (Jupiter), Greek (Acts 14:11-12)

Notice, they did not change God, but the *“glory of God.”* That is, they changed how He appeared to men. Instead of One characterized by *“eternal power”* and Divinity, they likened Him to things corruptible, beginning with man, and descending to the creeping things of the earth.

All of this was an attempt to conform God to human reasoning. Men were creating a god they could understand. Men only make an image of things they think they understand. You cannot make an image of a mystery, or a complex problem.

Further, their images reflected their ideas of God, which were gross and depraved. They were not content to liken God to a man, but even associated Him with beasts of the earth and serpents that slither along the ground. They also sought to combine human and animal traits, vainly attempting to explain Deity. Their



Various Idols

images were grotesque.

From another perspective, men deified both their lusts and their fears. They concocted fertility and love goddesses to allow the unrestrained indulgence of their depraved appetites. They made gods of their fears, thinking to gain some form of protection.

In all of this, they were zealous to change the glory of God, but not to retain Him in their knowledge. They were not content to seek Him as they were appointed to do, but made images as though they had finally comprehended Him. The universality of these attempts confirm the terrible effects of sin.

All of this is designed to teach us that men are incapable of developing a righteousness of their own. Further, their deeds were not innocent. We will find the judgment of God was leveled upon men for indulging in such a vain pursuit as *“changing the glory of God.”*

I cannot leave this section without drawing attention to the creation of many *Christian* gods in our day. Men have conjured up mental images of God that are devoid of truth, and a reproach to God. Some have conceived of God as tolerant of sin and indifferent to man’s moral uncleanness. Others have seen him as a God that saves men without their own involvement. Some perceive Him as primarily interested in improving life in this world. All of these are idols, just as surely as the golden calf and Nebuchadnezzar’s great image. They are purely the creation of men.

GOD GAVE THEM UP!

“²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. ²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions.” The Gospel announces a righteousness from God—an indispensable righteousness. With great power, the Spirit is confirming men cannot do without “a righteousness from God.” They have proved by their conduct that sin has blasted all of their capacities, so that they cannot think correctly about God. The fact that not a single soul has ever stumbled upon the truth about God proves this to be the case. No person has ever known God to any measurable degree independent of a Divine initiative. Further, the initiative had to be greater than a mere appearance in nature. While the whole creation testifies to the “*eternal power and Divinity*” of God, it cannot circumscribe the heart, sensitize the inner ear, or of clarify human perception. The universality of sin, without a single exception, makes this incontrovertible.

For this reason, God wrote off the entire natural order. He will even remove restraints of both conscience and providence from man, confirming what he will do when left to himself. Remember, this is a judgment incurred because the testimony of creation was ignored, men became unthankful, and went about to create their own gods.

WHEN GOD GIVES MEN UP

Those who imagine you can dabble in sin and still remain immune from Divine judgment need to consider this passage. Here is how God responded to those with no written Law from heaven or copy of the Scriptures. He “*gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.*”^{NASB}

God Can Restrain Men From Sin

From this we learn that, under

ordinary circumstances, the Lord does restrain men from excessive involvement in sin. Whatever you may think of the free will of man, you do well not to ascribe too much credit to it. On one occasion, God revealed His control of man’s involvement in sin to Abimelech, king of Gerar. He had taken Abraham’s wife Sarah to himself, supposing she was only Abraham’s sister. Coming to Abimelech in a dream, God told him, “*Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for*

No person has ever known God to any measurable degree independent of a Divine initiative. Further, the initiative had to be greater than a mere appearance in nature.

she is a man’s wife.” The king replied that he had not come near to Sarah, declaring he had not intended to take another man’s wife. God then explained to him, “*Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.*”^{NKJV} (Gen 22:2-6).

That is not the only incident of God restraining people. He did not allow Laban to hurt Jacob (Gen 31:7). He did not allow the hostile cities around the sons of Jacob to hurt them as they journeyed (Gen 35:5). When the Israelites observed their annual feasts, and the land seemed defenseless, God said “*For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land*” (Ex 34:24). Abigail confessed that God had withheld David from coming to shed blood. David acknowledged this was precisely the case (1 Sam 25:26,34).

Divine Restraint Can Be Removed

But lest men assume God will always keep them from deep and profound sin, the Spirit delivers the text before us. There comes a time when God can be so

provoked that all restraints are removed. In such a case, men are delivered over to the very pursuits that will cause their condemnation.

The human condition is so serious that, unrestrained, men are capable of the most heinous and unreasonable sins. Let men argue about whether we are “totally depraved” or not, and what that may or may be involve. But let us not allow our hearts to be distracted from the truth of the case. Apart from being in Christ, the heart of man is filled with all manner of impurities and sinful passions. The natural condition of man is well stated by the prophet Jeremiah. “*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*”^{NIV} (Jer 17:9).

It does not say God delivered them over to the devil—although there are occasions when this is done (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20). Nor, indeed, does he say they were delivered over to demonic powers, although the fall of spiritual Babylon is said to result in this (Rev 18:2). God delivered them over to the lusts of their own hearts! We will shortly see the devastating result of this action: God giving men over to the sinful lusts of their own hearts.

Thus, like the bottomless pit was opened by an angel from heaven (Rev 9:1), so God so judged men as to release the wretchedness that was inherent within them. Should anyone still doubt the need for a righteousness from God, let them ponder the depths to which men sink when they are given over to their lusts by God. Indeed, “*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb 10:31).

DISHONORING THEIR BODIES

The result of being given over to the lusts of their hearts was the degrading of their bodies among themselves. One of the indications of Divine judgment is the degrading of the body. This refers to all forms of moral impurity, and will be covered extensively in the succeeding verses.

The point to be seen here is that the body belongs to the Lord. As it is written, *“Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:13). The body is thus degraded when it becomes the means of self gratification through immorality.

The Spread of Evil In Our Day

The Western world is presently plagued with unprecedented outbreaks of immorality and the dishonoring of the body. Like plagues rushing out of control, men have been given over to unimaginable wickedness. Some of the vices that have become common include bulimia (episodes of binge eating and

This is a matter worthy of much thought.

EXCHANGING THE TRUTH FOR A LIE

The KJV reads, *“Who changed the truth of God into a lie.”* This is viewing the matter from a subjective viewpoint—what the people did. They did not change the truth itself, but their representation of it, for the truth is eternal, *“enduring to all generations”* (Psa 100:5).

The truth, as compelling as it is, was placed to the side in favor of a lie. Even though the creation testified to the eternal power and Deity of God, yet men

lusts of men, provoking them to go *“a whoring with their own inventions”* (Psa 106:39). How tragic to choose the lie!

THE CREATOR IS BLESSED FOREVER

“ . . . the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.” By saying the Creator *“is blessed for ever,”* the Spirit means that He alone is worthy of all worship and service. He only is to be honored, for He has made and upholds all things.

I have recently become acutely aware of how little honor is actually given to God. Although He is *“blessed for ever,”* men insist on speaking more of their works than of His. We learn from this text how serious it is to rob God of His glory, and become unthankful. In this passage the Spirit affirms that the outbreak of gross immorality is directly traceable to the failure of men to give God honor and thanksgiving.

Could it be that the unthankfulness of this generation, and its refusal to give glory to God has provoked the Lord to deliver it over to the lusts of its heart? Has God overlooked the credit men give to science, medicine, human innovation, and even the devil himself?

FOR THIS REASON

“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections . . .” This is now the second time we have read of God giving men up, or delivering them over, to something. Again, were it not for the *“goodness of God”* that leads men to repentance (Rom 2:4), this would have been the lot of all men.

Notice, God did not give them over to be controlled by *“vile affections”* because they were murderers like Cain, but because exchanged the glory of God for created things. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what was made rather than the Maker. How serious is that? *“For this reason God gave them up to vile passions.”*^{NKJV}

We will now see what these *“vile passions”* produced. Keep in mind that what we are reading is not the mere denunciation of the sins mentioned. Rather, it is an explanation for why they arose, and why they accelerated. **It was the result of God’s judgment.**

purging), anorexia (excessive dieting and weight loss due to the fear of being fat), fornication (all forms of immorality), use of narcotics (from tobacco and alcohol to hard drugs), bestiality (immorality committed with animals), homosexuality, and suicide. All of these are in near-epidemic proportions, and especially among the young. Professed authorities on these subjects have been able to do little more than identify the symptoms and affects of the abuses.

Why have these things arisen? Could it be that the unthankfulness of this generation, and its refusal to give glory to God has provoked the Lord to deliver it over to the lusts of its heart? Has God overlooked the credit men give to science, medicine, human innovation, and even the devil himself? Perhaps what we are seeing is a forsaken generation, paying the penalty for thrusting God out of its life. There is a severe penalty to be paid for rejecting the righteousness of God.

chose mythology, science, astrology, nature, and other lies. They *“exchanged”* the liberating truth of God for the bondage-creating lie. And why did they do so? Because God gave them over to their depraved hearts. In so doing, they became spiritually stupid, and thus began their descent into the quagmire of iniquity.

They chose to worship and serve the created things rather than the Creator. If we think this is too far from the people of our time, ponder the ecological absurdities that men have embraced in our day. *“Mother earth”* and *“mother nature”* have been so exalted that people extend themselves to protect animals and atmosphere, while killing babies and abusing one another. That is the kind of affect *“a lie”* produces.

As soon as men embraced the lie, the glory of God faded from their view. Simultaneously, all of the powers of darkness were loosed to inflame the base

THE VILENESS OF SODOMY

“^{26b} For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.²⁷ Likewise also the

men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing

*what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”*The modesty of

the Spirit in describing this situation is worthy of note. He speaks of reprehensible sins so as not to provoke the passions of the sinful nature. Yet, He speaks with enough clarity so as to remove any question concerning the “vileness” of the passions to which God consigned the unthankful.

The phrase “natural use” means instinctive intimacy between a man and a woman. Some of the more contemporary translations provide more crude language, unworthy of repeating here. The NASB reads “natural function,” while the NIV and RSV read “natural relations.”

The sin of reference is sodomy, which is consistently and powerfully condemned by God. The term men have assigned to this sin is homosexuality, which is more a term of man’s wisdom. The text declares the involvement of both women and men. Once again, an “exchange” is made—what is right for something that is wrong; the truth for a lie. The “natural use” is the one God ordained, and is the only means by which procreation can take place. The preference of sodomy was not merely “unnatural” (NRSV, NIV, NASB). The expression is much stronger than that. There are two words in the Greek text (παρὰ φύσιν). The first word means “adversatively, against, contrary to, without regard for, beyond.”¹ Barclay-Newman

The word “unnatural,” therefore, is too weak. The sin of sodomy conflicts with nature. It is contrary to it, and violates an order set in place by God Himself. Men have attempted to dignify the sin by calling woman-to-woman intimacy lesbianism. That makes it all more tolerable, and opens the door for the psychological analysts to ply their fleshly trade.

The Spirit continues on this matter, showing the extent to which “vile passions” carried their victims. “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful.”² NKJV Remember, this is the Holy Spirit speaking. What men call love, the Spirit calls “shameful.” The burning lust of men for men is not something

acquired in birth. It is a result of failing to glory God and be thankful. It is the consequence of being delivered over to vile passions by the God they neglected.

Sodom and Gomorrah

You may recall that this is the very sin that brought “the vengeance of eternal fire” upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Because this is vehemently denied by sodomites, I

The burning lust of men for men is not something acquired in birth. It is a result of failing to glory God and be thankful. It is the consequence of being delivered over to vile passions by the God they neglected.

will take the time to briefly rehearse that awesome event.

The condition of Sodom and Gomorrah was so vile the sound of it reached up into heaven. “And the LORD said, ‘The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.’” The nature of their sin was not explained at that point. Having sent two angels to destroy the city, the matter was made more clear. Appearing as men, these angels were entertained by Lot. After he prepared a great feast for them, and before they retired for the evening, the seriousness of the condition surfaced. “Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.’” After Lot rejected their request, the angels “brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great.” But their passions burned still stronger, even after the men were blinded. It is written, “they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway” (Gen 19:4-11^{NASB}). Here is a lust that refuses to be satisfied, driving men to unparalleled indulgence.

The Law

The Law, which was given to define sin (Rom 3:20), spoke directly to the matter of sodomy. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion”^{NKJV} (Lev 18:20). “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them”^{NKJV} (Lev 20:13). The texts are plain enough.

The Time of the Judges

The book of Judges contains an incident much like that occurring Sodom. The account describes an unnamed man of years. Returning from a day’s work, he saw a traveling man in the street of the city. The “old man” asked where he was from and where he was going. Upon learning the traveler was going to the house of God, and had no place to stay for the evening, he brought him to his own home. “Peace be with you! However, let all your needs be my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square. So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.”^{NKJV} They then spent some enjoyable time together.

The pleasantries of the evening was soon interrupted. The Scriptures say, “As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, ‘Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!’”^{NKJV} (Judges 19:16-22). Notice, the text says they were “perverted men.” The KJV says they were “sons of Belial” (an exact translation). The NIV reads “wicked men.” The NASB reads, “certain worthless fellows.” The RSV reads “base fellows.” The NRSV reads “a perverse lot.”

The text is clear enough. These men were wicked, perverted, and base. Their condition was revealed in their preference for men—a condition that violates nature, law, and grace. It cannot be justified.

The New Testament

In this day of salvation the announcement is made, “. . . *the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites . . .*” (1 Cor 6:9). The Law, it is affirmed, is for “the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy

thinking on the matter.

CLARIFICATION

The purpose of our text is not merely to emphasize the extremely corrupt nature of this transgression. It IS a sin that violates nature, law, and grace. However, this text is explaining WHY the sin became dominant. It was because men so provoked God, he gave them over to base

The purpose of our text is not merely to emphasize the extremely corrupt nature of this transgression. It IS a sin that violates nature, law, and grace. However, this text is explaining WHY the sin became dominant. It was because men so provoked God, he gave them over to base lusts, to fulfill them with zeal.

and profane.”^{NKJV} Listed in that category are “sodomites” (1 Tim 1:9-10).

Contemporary Translations

If you are accustomed to reading one of the contemporary versions of Scripture (^{NKJV, NRSV, NIV, NASB}), you are aware the word “sodomite” is not generally used in them. Alternate words are “perverted persons” (^{NKJV}), “male temple prostitutes” (^{NRSV}), “male shrine prostitutes” (^{NIV}), and “male cult prostitutes” (^{NASB, RSV}). These are employed in the Old Testament writings. What they fail to confirm is that a “male prostitute” was. In fact, a sodomite, or a man who was intimate with another man.

The exclusion of “sodomites” from the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9), appears to be more difficult to avoid. The KJV reads, “*abusers of themselves with mankind,*” thus emphasizing the deviate nature of the deed. The NKJV and NRSV read “sodomites.” The NIV reads “*homosexual offenders.*” The NASB reads “*homosexuals.*” The 1 Timothy 1:10 text reads much the same way. The KJV reads “*them that defile themselves with mankind.*” The RSV and NRSV read “sodomites.” The NASB reads “*homosexuals.*”

I have taken the time to explain this more fully because of the aggressive defense of sodomy that is being promoted in our day, and to which our children are subjected. Terms like “sexual orientation,” “sexual preference,” and others, are employed to break down the defenses even nature raises. But this sin is one of enormous magnitude. We must not allow Satan’s children to corrupt our

lusts, to fulfill them with zeal. Here is a sin that is the result of sin! It has arisen because men have refused to acknowledge, honor, and serve the Living God.

This particular transgression has reached new depths in our time. In history, it was associated with heathen religions. Sodomites did not identify themselves with Christ, but with the gods of sensuality and lust. In our time, however, there are sodomite churches and preachers. Traditional Christian denominations are now ordaining sodomites to the ministry, and we regularly hear of “gay Christians.” We are, indeed, living in a time of severe judgment, and we do well to give diligence to make our calling and election sure.

A JUST PENALTY

The “*indecent acts*” committed by these people are immediately judged by God. They “*received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*”^{NIV} This is an unusually strong statement, being the only one of its kind in Scripture. Other translations read as follows: “*received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.*”^{NRSV} . . . “*receiving in themselves due reward for their perversion*”^{NJB} . . . “*suffered within themselves the penalty they so richly deserved*”^{NLT} . . . “*getting in their bodies the right reward of their evil-doing*”^{BBE} . . . “*suffering in their own bodies and personalities the inevitable consequences and penalty of their wrong doing and going astray, which was [their] fitting retribution.*”^{AMPLIFIED BIBLE}

Extraordinary sins do not result

in ordinary retribution! This principle is included in the statement, “*Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later*”^{NKJV} (1 Tim 5:24). Some sin not only violates the written Law of God, but the unwritten law of nature. Such sins are especially foolish because they require the suppression of even natural understanding and inclinations. The sins of women exchanging “*the natural use for what is against nature,*” and men burning “*in their lust for one another, men with men,*” are such sins. They call for a more immediate penalty that makes the sinner more conspicuous: i.e., “*receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet* (appropriate)”.

Whether nations or individuals, those who have practiced such base sins have suffered unusual deterioration in both body and soul.

There is an impressive listing of “sexually transmitted diseases” (STD). Among them are AIDS (breakdown of the immune system, with no known cure), syphilis (highly infectious spread of lesions and deterioration effecting the skin, brain, and spinal chord), gonorrhea (inflammatory disease affecting personal parts, throat and eyes), Chlamydia (a disease that sometimes has no symptoms, and causes infertility in women), herpes (infectious disease related to cancer, which has no known cure), chancroid (an infection leaving a painful sore that often destroys tissue), etc.

Traditionally, these diseases have been found in epidemic proportions in the darker continents, noted for their religious corruption and idolatry. They are presently found in growing measures in our own country. While some innocent people have also suffered from these infectious diseases, they are the deserved “penalty” for extraordinary sin. They are a Divine judgment on a society that has rejected the knowledge of God.

Our Reaction

Should we have compassion on such sinners? Indeed we should! The Gospel is addressed to even these people. A notable example of this is found in the Corinthian church. Corinth was a place where many of these things were regularly practiced. Although a citadel of human wisdom, that wisdom was not able to keep men from rejecting God and descending into a moral pit. Because there was a tendency to

ignore the seriousness of these sins, the Spirit issued a strong warning to the brethren there. *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of*

God.” (1 Cor 6:9-10). In this text, the word translated “effeminate” (μαλακοί) means a man that is womanly, and even a young boy kept for relations with a man. The words “abusers of themselves with mankind” comes from ἀρσενοκοῖται, and means sodomite, or homosexual.^{Barclay-Newman} There is no chance that such people will inherit the kingdom of God. These are reprehensible sins—abominations.

After making this solemn pronouncement, the spirit adds, *“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor 6:11). The righteousness of God, therefore, can also be conferred on those who have been guilty of such unreasonable sins, yet have believed the Gospel and fallen upon Jesus.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MEN REFUSE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

“²⁸And 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; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful . . .”

The Spirit does not leave this subject quickly, or only touch upon it in a surface manner. He is establishing the absolute need for the righteousness of God. Men have no righteousness of their own, nor are they capable of producing one. When left to their own nature, they quickly descend into the bottomless pit of corruption. Apart from Divine restraint we are not able to know how profoundly wicked men would become.

We have just read of God turning men over to their own base lusts. Now He elaborates on that condition, firmly fixing in our hearts that this was a just judgment from God. It was not simply the sinful nature that carried men further into the abyss of iniquity, but God’s release of them to do so.

THEY DID NOT LIKE TO RETAIN GOD IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE

“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God”^{NIV} God created man in

His own image, and placed him in a world that bore testimony to His “eternal power and Deity.” Additionally, the Lord deliberate assigned the times and places to be occupied by men “that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27).

Every advantage was afforded to men in order that they might know God. If they would have followed their conscience,

Men have no righteousness of their own, nor are they capable of producing one. When left to their own nature, they quickly descend into the bottomless pit of corruption. Apart from Divine restraint we are not able to know how profoundly wicked men would become.

it would have led them to pursue the true knowledge of God. But they did not. What “may be known of God” was “manifest IN them, for God has shown it to them” (1:19). Yet, men “did not like to retain God in their knowledge.” They had no real appetite for the true God, and thus sought to develop their own.

A Deliberate Response

The action here is deliberate, and not inadvertent. They turned away from God, seeing no advantage in pursuing Him. It was an act of rejection, and there was nothing casual about it. When referring to the ultimate light, Jesus put it this way. *“And this is the condemnation, that light*

is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

The principle is the same, whether we are speaking of the light revealed through the creation, or the fullest light made known in Jesus. Men reject Divine light because they prefer darkness—sin and degradation. They prefer the darkness because it matches their deeds—it is where they feel more comfortable, and where they find their greatest satisfaction.

“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed”^{NKJV} (John 3:20).

This is another way of saying, “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it **is not** subject to the law of God, **neither indeed can be**” (Rom 8:7). And again, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for **they are foolishness** unto him: **neither can he know them,**

because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). The condition, however, was produced by man’s own corrupt appetite. This is not the way God made man, but is the direct result of sin.

A Description of Humanity

This passage is not a description of the baser segment of humanity, but of humanity as a whole. The emphasis is on the Gentiles, or those without a written Law from God. In the second chapter, the Spirit will show that the same principles apply to the Jews, who received a written Law from God.

The reference is to “men,” introduced

in verse 18, and elaborated on throughout the remainder of the chapter. There are some notables among our race who, before the Law, pursued God. Among them are Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job. They are most unusual men, and were also noted for their acknowledgment of sin. The sacrifice of Christ was for them also, for they too needed a righteousness from God.

In my judgment, we must carefully guard against concluding only some men refused to retain God in their knowledge, or that this is something less than a universal blight. The Spirit is convincing us of the essentiality of a righteousness from God—one that is given to men. With Divine precision, He is showing the effects that sin has worked among men. It has so corrupted the human nature that nothing from it is salvageable. There is no remnant of the Adamic nature that can be reshaped or made acceptable to God. A new birth is absolutely essential! That is an postulate of Scripture that cannot be ignored. Jesus said that apart from the new birth, the kingdom of God could neither be perceived nor entered (John 3:3,5). Scripture affirms that being a Jew or a Gentile is not what counts, but “*a new creature*” (Gal 6:15).

I must acknowledge that it was some time before the magnitude of this truth began to burst upon my soul. At the time, however, that it became more apparent to me, it was because I was the more convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of sin (Rom 7:13). This is precisely what this text is affirming to our spirits. It is showing us that sin consistently and aggressively descends into the pit. It never reaches upward, and never encourages a quest for God—never!

Sin—of which all are guilty—moves men to thrust God from their thoughts, rejecting the obvious testimony of His creation. It causes men to prefer darkness and move swiftly away from God. Even though sinners are given great advantages, they cannot reverse their downward direction. They are incapable of yielding anything acceptable to God. They need a righteousness from God. And their condition confirms it.

The Spirit will again show us the seriousness of the human condition. He will confirm that although God has compassion, and “*is love*,” yet He will not ignore man’s refusal to retain Him in their knowledge, and their preference for their sin.

One More Thing

One more word on this critical point. It is imperative that we see the

With Divine precision, He is showing the effects that sin has worked among men. It has so corrupted the human nature that nothing from it is salvageable. There is no remnant of the Adamic nature that can be reshaped or made acceptable to God.

seriousness of men’s disinterest in God. That should be glaringly apparent in this text. And yet, in confirmation of the wickedness of the times, this very attitude has entered into the professed church.

There is a staggering amount of disinterest in God and the things of God in the churches. More and more they are being given over to social issues, community projects, and the resolution of human difficulties. The proclamation of God’s word is not held in high regard, and the length and frequency of gatherings devoted to the things of God are being reduced to a bare minimum.

Who has not witnessed this remarkable phenomenon? And yet it is ignored to such a degree as causes the heart to tremble. This climate of disinterest has brought about a flood of unspiritual leaders, charlatans, and religious opportunists. Men of earthly expertise have supplanted those with the knowledge of God. Seminars and workshops majoring on trivia have become popular. Christian conventions are led by motivators, church-builders, administrators, and carnal specialists.

The quest of the modern church is not

for the Lord, but for success and earthly recognition. Its leaders receive their credentials from institutions rather than the Lord, and become specialists in things that will pass away. They are leading men and women in ignoring God. What they are calling successful does not have one ounce of support from the Word of God. In fact, it is diametrically opposed to everything Jesus and the Apostles taught. No longer is God unknown only among the heathen tribes of the world, or the philosophical citadels of an Athens or Corinth. Now He is unknown in the church. This is a shameful condition, as confirmed by this word to the church of God in Corinth, “*Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame*”^{NIV} (1 Cor 15:34).

Is This Germane?

Is this observation germane, or relevant, to the exposition of this text? Some might consider it to be a needless tirade. However, this is precisely the point of our text. This is being addressed to the people of God—the explanation for the universal descent of humanity into the quagmire of sin. The condition is traced back to men’s refusal to retain God in their knowledge. Is there anyone of sound mind that imagines God will be more tolerant of such a refusal among the professed church than He was among those lacking such an abundance of revelation? When men refuse to pursue and think upon God, regardless of their profession, they are on the precipice of Divine judgment, if not at its very center.

GOD GAVE THEM OVER

“*God gave them over to a reprobate mind,*” or “*a debased mind,*”^{NKJV} or “*to a depraved mind.*”^{NIV,NASB} A “*reprobate mind*” is one that is rejected and unacceptable in every way. The word translated “*reprobate*” is *ἄδόκιμον*, and means “*failing to meet the test, disqualified, worthless, and corrupted.*” This is a mind totally rejected by God.

Man already possessed this kind of mind because of sin. In His mercy, however, God had restrained men from the full impact of that mind. But now, because men had refused to retain God in their knowledge, and to confirm the utter

depravity of the fallen mind, God delivers men over to it, removing all restraints.

Let those who insist on elevating the human mind and the disciplines related to it, ponder this. **Apart from the sanctifying influence of the knowledge of God, the mind of man is depraved, rejected, and worthless. God will receive nothing from it.** This is precisely why we are born again, that we might be “renewed in the spirit of our mind” (Eph 4:23). Only then can the Law of God be served with our “mind” (Rom 7:25). In the state of nature, we are described as “alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” (Col 1:21). That very mind kept us enslaved to sin, thereby constituting us “unrighteous” in every sense of the word.

Something to be Pondered

Those who neglect their souls, refusing to hear the Gospel and not devoting themselves to seeking the Lord and His righteousness, must ponder this. They have overestimated the strength of the human mind and will. Countless people live in the imagination that they can turn their steps toward God whenever they want. Thus they choose to enjoy “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25), thinking they can change their minds whenever they desire. However, they have not considered that God can deliver them over to the power of the depraved mind, causing a rapid and irrecoverable moral downfall. If this is not possible, then our text has no truth in it.

Among other things, this confirms men are controlled by what they think, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he”^{NKJV} (Prov 23:7). Further, as we will see, to be delivered over to a “reprobate mind” locks one into iniquitous conduct.

THINGS WHICH ARE NOT FITTING

The result of being handed over to the domination of “a reprobate mind” is thus stated: “to do those things which are not fitting.”^{NKJV} Other versions say “things that should not be done,”^{NRSV} “to do what ought not to be done.”^{NIV} These are things disgraceful and shameful, unbecoming for those created in the image of God. Such things are in conflict with God and contrary to the Divine image man bears.

The Spirit has already mentioned the

reprehensible sin of sodomy. That sin, however, is the depths of sin—the extent to which human depravity can express itself. Sodomites, however, were not the only ones delivered over to their corrupt minds. We are now introduced to a most impressive list of transgressions. They are all the result of Divine abandonment—of being delivered over to a “reprobate mind.” Apart from the righteousness that comes from God, this is what the human nature produces.

FILLED WITH ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

“Being filled with all unrighteousness.” Other versions read, “filled with every kind of wickedness,”^{NRSV} “filled with every kind of wickedness”^{NIV} “filled with all manner of wickedness.”^{RSV} As soon as God gave men over to a “reprobate mind,” iniquity rushed in like a mighty tidal wave. **It confirmed what sin had done to the spirit of man.** It was not the mind of the devil to which men were consigned, but to their own mind! Notice the extent of sin’s expression in men: “filled,” “all unrighteousness.” That is, every part of their persons was affected, and every kind of sin was indulged. Rarely is such an extensive list of iniquity provided—and it is all because God gave men over to their own depraved minds. And, He did so because they refused to retain Him in their knowledge.

Unrighteousness

The general heading of these expressions is “unrighteousness”—the exact opposite of “the righteousness of God.” By **nature** unrighteousness is wrong—totally wrong. Legally, it is the violation of both the Nature and Law of God. All who are “unrighteous,” without exception, are excluded from the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). They are not and cannot be excepted by God.

Our text has stated, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” 1:18).

You must not fail to see the magnitude of the situation. Unrighteousness disqualifies one from Divine acceptance. As if that were not enough, it also suppresses the truth whereby men are made aware of the righteousness that

comes from God. Once this truth is perceived with any degree of clarity, men will be eager to give the total credit for salvation to the Lord and His Christ.

There is no need to comment further about the condition of those “filled with all unrighteousness.” It is a dreadful condition requiring the initiative of God.

FORNICATION. From πορνεία, por-ne-a, from which the word “pornography” is derived. This is a general word denoting all forms of immoralities. It includes illicit intimacy of any sort: adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, and incest.^{Barclay-Newman} With all disregard for God and His will, this sin drives one to satisfy the lower appetites of the human nature. It is particularly reprehensible. Fornication, unless repented of and abandoned, excludes one from heaven. Scriptures against fornication include 1 Cor 6:13; 10:8; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5.

WICKEDNESS. From πονηρία, pon-ay-ree-ah. This means intentionally practiced evil of all sorts. It is driven by evil purposes and desires.^{Barclay-Newman} This is nothing less than the erupting of a degenerate nature. There is no evil that does not appear enticing to those practicing wickedness. Scriptures on wickedness include Luke 11:39; Acts 8:32; 1 Cor 5:8 and 1 John 5:19.



COVETOUSNESS.

From πλεονεξία, pleo-nexia. This means a disposition to have more than one’s share, avarice, or greed.^{Barclay-Newman} Covetousness is called “idolatry” in Colossians 3:5, and is something with which we must contend. It comes from a fundamental dissatisfaction with what the Lord has given us. Scriptures on covetousness include Lk 12:15; Eph 5:3; Heb 13:5.

MALICIOUSNESS. From κακία, kak-ia. This means hateful feelings toward another, dislike, and ill-will.^{Barclay-Newman} The malicious person seeks to harm others in whatever way possible. Hatred dominates the heart to such an extent

that delight is taken at the pain of others. Scriptures on malice include 1 Cor 5:8; 14:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8.

FULL OF ENVY. From φθόνου, phthonou, meaning envy, or jealousy over the good success of another. ^{Barclay-Newman} Notice they are said to be FULL of envy, so that it dominates all they do and say. Envy causes a person to view everyone as a personal competitor. The success or blessing of another person is taken as an insult, and something of which the one that is envious is more worthy. Scriptures on envy include 1 Cor 13:4; 1 Pet 2:1.

MURDER. From φόνου, phonou, meaning murder, slaughter, or killing: violently and deliberately taking the life of another. ^{Barclay-Newman} Because of a fundamental disrespect for God Himself, the murderer seeks to take the life of another without a twinge of conscience. Like Cain, the murderer thinks he gains some sort of advantage by killing. Scriptures on murder include 1 Pet 4:15; 1 John 3:15; Rev 21:8

DEBATE. From ἔριδος, eridos. This means strife, contention, variance, discord, quarrels, and rivalries. ^{Barclay-Newman} The debater agitates the social waters, causing disruption and argument wherever he goes. He is not content until there is contention, with persons competing needlessly against another. This is the opposite of unity. Scriptures on debate include 2 Cor 12:20.

DECEIT. From δόλου, do-lou. This means treachery, fraud, to bait by misrepresentation. ^{Barclay-Newman} Here advantage is sought by deception. Scriptures on deceit include Mk 7:22; Rom 3:13; Col 2:8.

MALIGNITY. From κακοηθείας, kako-eth-ei-as, meaning meanness, spitefulness, a disposition to produce wickedness. ^{Barclay-Newman} A malignant person is like a walking time bomb. Wherever they are, trouble is apt to break forth like a plague. They are chief ministers of Satan. Scriptures on malignity include Romans 1:29.

WHISPERERS. From ψιθυριστάς, psithur-is-tas, meaning one who bears harmful

gossip against another, gossiper, talebearer, secret slanderer. ^{Barclay-Newman} The whisperer seeks to gain honor at the expense of another, spreading rumors, and defaming the name of others. Scriptures on whisperers include 2 Cor 12:20.

BACKBITERS. From καταλάλους, katalalous. This means one who speaks evil of another, evil speaking, and spreading evil reports. ^{Barclay-Newman} Like the whisperer, the backbiter does his work secretly. He raises evil reports, causing others to view his

Envy causes a person to view everyone as a personal competitor. The success or blessing of another person is taken as an insult, and something of which the one that is envious is more worthy.

target with disdain. Scriptures on backbiting include 2 Cor 12:20.

HATERS OF GOD. From θεοστυγείς, theos-tug-eis, meaning hating God, or hateful toward God. ^{Barclay-Newman} The hater of God thinks nothing of ignoring God, disobeying Him, or even become angry with Him or disagreeing with Him. He had rather justify himself than the God who will judge him. Wherever God is represented, whether in His Word of in His people, this person lashes out against the representation. Scriptures on hating God include Ex 20:5; Matt 6:24; John 7:7

DESPITEFUL. From ὑβριστάς, ubris-tas. This means injurious to others, insolent, puffed up with pride and heaping insulting language upon others, a violent aggressor, one with a superior attitude mistreating others. ^{Barclay-Newman} Not only does the spiteful person have evil desires and pride, but he is aggressive to throw it like acid upon others. Scriptures on spitefulness include Ezek 36:5; Matt 5:44; Acts 14:5.

PROUD. From ὑπερηφάνους, uper-ath-anous, meaning arrogant, haughty, an

empty boaster who brags of his position. ^{Barclay-Newman} The proud have nothing of which to boast, so speak about themselves in glowing and haughty words. Scriptures on the proud include Psa 40:4; Prov 15:25; James 4:6.

BOASTERS. From ἀλαζόνας, alazonas. This means arrogant boaster, braggart, show-off. ^{Barclay-Newman} This person loves to draw attention to himself. He wants the spotlight. Scriptures on boasters include 2 Tim 3:2; Psa 10:3; James 3:5.

INVENTORS OF EVIL THINGS. From ἐφευρετὰς κακῶν, eph-eur-e-tas kak-on. This means one who schemes or plans things that are injurious or harmful, one who thinks up ways of doing evil. ^{Barclay-Newman} Instead of using his God-given abilities to glorify God, this person finds new ways to sin and promote sin. Scriptures on evil inventions include Amos 6:5; Psa 99:8; 106:39; Eccl 7:29.

DISOBEDIENT TO PARENTS. This comes from γονεύσιν ἀπειθεῖς, gon-eu-sin ap-ei-theis, meaning to parents, disobedient or rebellious, one who is not persuaded to obey his parents. ^{Barclay-Newman} Here are children that are obstinate, and unwilling to yield to the parents God has placed over them. They will not give heed to their parent's will or counsel. Scriptures on disobedience to parents include Deut 21:18; 2 Tim 3:2.

WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING. From ἀσυνέτους, asu-ne-tous, meaning without understanding, dull, senseless, foolish, unintelligent. ^{Barclay-Newman} These blunder into pits of destruction because they are blind. They reason wrongly because they cannot see. Concerning the real facts and issues of life, they are stupid. Scriptures on having no understanding include Psa 32:9; 49:20; Isa 27:11.

COVENANTBREAKERS. From ἀσυνθέτους, asun-thet-ous. This means faithless, disloyal, covenant-breaking, not keeping a promise, untrustworthy, treacherous. ^{Barclay-Newman} This person's word is worthless. He only makes a promise in order to gain a personal advantage. He thinks nothing of throwing the promise away when it no longer is seen as self-promoting. Scriptures on breaking

covenant include Isa 33:8; 2 Tim 3:3.

WITHOUT NATURAL AFFECTION.

From *ἀστόργους*, as-tor-gous, meaning lacking normal human affection, devoid of natural affection, unloving, heartless.^{Barclay-Newman} Sin has so hardened this person that he crawls beneath the fence of nature. There is no heart in the person's life, as he is totally wrapped up in himself. Scriptures on the lack of natural affection

UNMERCIFUL. From *ἀνελεήμονας*, ane-le-a-mon-as. This means without compassion, pitiless.^{Barclay-Newman} Those in sore need are viewed as worthless in this person's eyes. He only thinks of what he can receive, and never of what he can give. Scriptures on unmerciful include James 2:13; Prov 21:13.

ALL SELF CENTERED

Notice that all of these sins are self

trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ^{NASB} (Gal 1:10). This approach has built many a mega-church, but it has never, and can never, please God. Such men are purveyors of flesh, and are to be given no honor.

ALL UNLIKE GOD

You will also note that these transgressions are totally unlike the God whose image we bear. That is the essence of sin: un-God-likeness.

When men pushed God into the background, they became "filled with unrighteousness," as it pervaded every aspect of their beings. Men cannot be good or right in any sense, where they refuse to retain God in their knowledge.

Men, when left to themselves, will become more and more unlike God. Their thoughts, words, and deeds, will confirm that is the case. Sin has set degeneracy in motion, and only the grace of God and the gift of righteousness can arrest it.

include 2 Tim 3:3.

IMPLACABLE. From *ἀσπόνδους*, as-pon-dous, meaning irreconcilable.^{Barclay-Newman}

Here is a person who cannot be tamed or toned down. His fierceness increases when attempts are made to be peaceable. Scriptures on implacable include Rom 1:31; Hosea 7:11. An implacable person is more beastly than manly.

centered. That is what sin does—it moves the individual to the center of all his considerations. There is therefore no room left for God or the things of God.

This is the reason a religion that caters to the self interests of men will not be blessed by God. *"For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still*

MAN NEEDS A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

The Spirit has shown us the need of a righteousness from God, and has done so with great power. When men pushed God into the background, they became "filled with unrighteousness," as it pervaded every aspect of their beings. Men cannot be good or right in any sense, where they refuse to retain God in their knowledge. That is an inviolable principle.

WHEN MEN ARE DESERVING OF DEATH

⁴² . . . *who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*" How desperately this truth must be grasped. There is a marked tendency within the professed church to excuse those who do not know God. "How can they know to do any better," some vainly reason, "seeing they have never heard the truth about God?" To the sophist, this may appear to be sound reasoning, but it is not. It is believing in Jesus Christ that is said to require hearing (Rom 10:14-17), not pursuing God or living within an awareness of Him. There, faith is the issue. In our text it is not. The issue in our text is the refusal to proceed on the basis of the rudimentary knowledge of God that was available to man. It is that men refused to "retain God in their knowledge," however inferior men

may think that knowledge to be.

Now the Spirit affirms men actually possess more knowledge of God than they are disposed to admit. The NRSV reads, "They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die." The NIV reads, "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death." We are speaking of a world "without excuse" (Rom 1:20), and we do well to avoid trying to give it one. No purpose is served by alibiing for sin.

How is it that men knew "the righteous judgment of God, that those do such things are worthy of death?" We are not speaking of those subjected to the testimony of the Gospel, or even to the Law, but to that of nature. Yet, such are said to have known of God's righteous judgment, that those doing such things are deserving of death.

There is, as confirmed by Romans 2:14-15, a lingering consciousness of God and His ways that defies human explanation. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." That knowledge, however inferior it may be to the knowledge of God experienced in Christ Jesus, rendered all sin inexcusable, particularly the eagerness to commit it. The epitaph over the entirety of humanity is, "without excuse!"

It appears this knowledge was intuitive, part of the Divine imagery in man. It was so strong that considerable effort was required to subdue it. That this is true can be seen in the human

propensity to moral law, even in crude and undeveloped societies.

But there is more to this matter than that. God brought three severe judgments upon men prior to the Law.

Adam and Eve

The first of these judgments took place in Eden. In it, the parents of the human race were consigned to death because of disobedience (Gen 2:17; 3:24). The notion that they kept this a secret is too absurd to even consider. The activities of their first two sons bore witness to their obvious testimony of the cause of death, and the need for sacrifice.

Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years—nearly a millennium. Because the entire race sprang from him (Gen 3:20; Acts 17:26), this knowledge was no doubt passed along among men. Humanity knew about God’s judgment, and for nine hundred and thirty years, had a walking testimony to that fact among them. Adam lived well past the births of Enoch and Methuselah, and Lamech. He also lived more than 500 years after (2970 B.C.) the beginning of Sumerian civilization (3500 B.C.). The knowledge of the judgment in Eden must have been considerable.

The Flood

Then there was the flood—another Divine judgment resulting in unprecedented death. Noah lived well into the lifetime of Terah, Abraham’s father. The Egyptian, Babylonian, and Hititte empires were also formed in his lifetime. Word of the flood penetrated into multiple civilizations as the experience of Divine judgment was reported.

The three sons of Noah, who all went through the flood, were the ones through whom the whole earth was populated. It should be obvious that they did not forget the time of cursing they endured. *“Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated”*^{NKJV} (Gen 9:19). Commensurate with the spreading of the population came also the recollection of the flood. Nearly every civilization has some record of a flood.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah occurred around 1868 B.C. Not long after that, major civilizations developed, including Europe and Britain (1800) and dynasties in China (1766). The knowledge of that destruction was doubtless conveyed among them.

Thus, purely from an academic viewpoint, we can see the possibility of rather extensive knowledge about the judgment of God. Add to that the plagues of Egypt (1480), and it becomes apparent mankind could not plead ignorance

The point of this text, is that they were incapable of saving themselves, and unworthy of a salvation from God. It is His mercy that will provide that remarkable salvation.

concerning the judgment of God.

All of these judgments confirm that transgressors are *“worthy of death.”* By suppressing the truth given to them, and indulging their sinful appetites without restraint, they forfeited their right to live—and they knew it. However, they chose to suppress that knowledge.

Mark it well, those who refuse to retain God in their knowledge really have NO right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” politics notwithstanding.

However, in His infinite mercy, God has provided a way to extricate men from their dilemma. The point of this text, is that they were incapable of saving themselves, and unworthy of a salvation from God. It is His mercy that will provide that remarkable salvation.

APPROVAL OF WICKED PRACTICES

The wickedness of the human heart is further evidenced by the things men approve. Even though they knew God’s judgment was against such things, *“they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”*^{NASB}

The NRSV reads, *“but even applaud*

others who practice them.” Wicked men can be applauded by putting them into influential offices. They can also be approved by patronizing the corrupt music and entertainment they produce.

Here we behold the corrupting nature of sin. Rather than fallen men enjoying their Creator, whose image they bear, they take delight in others who break His law and contradict His nature. In so doing, their conscience is salved, but their condemnation becomes more sure.

This very principle was announced by James to those in Christ, warning them of the consequences of preferring and giving honor to the enemies of God. *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4). **You cannot “approve” those who sin against God and still remain in His favor.** The word of Jehu to king Jehosaphat is certainly appropriate here. *“Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you”*^{NKJV} (2 Chron 19:2).

Thus all men are found richly deserving of God’s wrath. Like the prodigal, they have squandered their resources. Now they stand stripped of every vestige of righteousness and stand powerless and helpless before the Lord. They need a righteousness from God, for they have none of their own, nor are they capable of producing one.

Man must be aware of this natural condition before the salvation of God obtains any benefit, or is even seen as necessary. When the Law was given, it accentuated the realities declared in our text, *“so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful”*^{NKJV} (Rom 7:13). When faith perceives this, the revelation of a righteousness from God becomes *“the joyful sound”* (Psa 89:15). The feet of those bearing the Gospel then become beautiful, as men begin to pant for the living waters that flow from the Gospel of Christ.

But take this knowledge away—the

knowledge of the awfulness of sin—and neither the Gospel nor the righteousness of God will be seen as indispensable. Men will thus think nothing of shelving the

Gospel in interest of things they deem more important and relevant. Unless that view is abandoned in favor of the truth, it will become the occasion for Divine

judgment and ultimate condemnation. Men do need a righteousness, and it can only come from God! You cannot get more serious than that!

CONCLUSION

I must again state the Divine purpose for this extensive condemnation of sin. We may be tempted to left our vision rest upon the sins rather than upon the point that is being made. The Spirit is establishing our need for a righteousness from God. That righteousness is appropriately called the “*gift of righteousness*” (Rom 5:17). It is not the recognition of the goodness of man, but a ferment that recognizes the total absence of goodness within man.

There is no salvation apart from this

righteousness, but only condemnation. That is the stern reality of the case. Thus it is written, “*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:21). Making you the righteousness of God is just as necessary as making Jesus to be sin for you. Salvation cannot exclude either one. Further neither of them could have occurred without God. He is the One who “*made*” Jesus “*to be sin.*” He is also the One who made you become “*the righteousness of God in Him.*”

The only real input we have had in this matter is our sin. It was our sin that was placed upon Christ. That included all of our best efforts and works, all of which were “*filthy rags.*”

SOMETHING GREATER

Our text has dealt with the world, but there is a principle to be seen here that must not be overlooked. If God was so harsh with the world for rejecting the testimony of nature, what will be His reaction to those who reject His Son, and the record He has given of Him?

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 5



GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

^{2:1}Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶who "will render to each one according to his deeds": ⁷eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, ⁹tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹For there is no partiality with God. ¹²For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law ¹³(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; ¹⁴for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) ¹⁶in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. (Romans 2:1-16^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

In order to firmly fix in our minds the absolute necessity of a righteousness from God, the Spirit is showing us the impact of sin upon humanity. He is removing every vestige of hope in the flesh, confirming it to be utterly corrupt. In Adam there is nothing but death, for

"*in Adam all die*" (1 Cor 15:22). The argument is devastating. Jesus assured us of the impotence of the "*flesh*," or the natural part of us, coming from Adam, when He said, "*That which is born of flesh is flesh.*" His point is that this condition requires the new birth: i.e., our

natural birth itself requires that we be "*born again*" (John 3:3-6). There is no way that flesh can rise above the one from whom it was born—Adam. Men are "*sinful*" by nature as well as by deed. In fact, it is their nature that compels them to sin, and causes them to stumble.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. INEXCUSABLE (2:1)
- II. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD (2:2-3)
- III. THE GOODNESS OF GOD (2:4)
- IV. TREASURING UP WRATH (2:5A)
- V. GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT REVEALED (2:5B-10)
- VI. NO PARTIALITY WITH GOD (2:11)
- VII. SIN AND THE LAW (2:12)
- VIII. NOT HEARERS, BUT DOERS, ARE JUSTIFIED (2:13)
- IX. A WRITING IN THE HEART (2:14-15)
- X. THE DAY GOD WILL JUDGE (2:16)

However, the Spirit does not say that men can do nothing but sin—although that is technically the truth. Although that approach has been taken by some theological persuasions, it is not the Divine manner. Those limiting themselves to such reasoning will find themselves involved in endless arguments with the unlearned. Men will argue that humanity has not been thoroughly contaminated by sin, but retains some vestiges of goodness.

Man has in particular, they will argue, retained the power of choice and reason, and thus can be salvaged. While there is an element of truth to this, it is lacking in both incentive and power.

The Spirit shows us the affects of sin, and does not theorize about it. Already, He has declared that, although surrounded by unquestionable evidence of the “*eternal power and Divinity*” of God, men chose to worship

and serve the created rather than the Creator (1:19-25). Delivered to his own lusts, a staggering moral plummet took place, where men conducted themselves “*contrary to nature*” in debasing and reprehensible sins (1:26-27). Others, who did not stoop to that level were characterized by a wide range of degenerate behavior that sharply contrasted with the Divine nature (1:28-

31). Rather than seeking the God of Whom nature testified, they found their pleasure in sinful peers, who had also fallen short of the glory of God (1:32).

Thus, with great effectiveness, we have been shown both the power and universality of sin. But the thread of reasoning does not stop here. There remains a segment of humanity that appears to have risen above all of these reprehensible vices. Through culture, the flesh has been so polished as to make it appear acceptable. But it is not. Men have only masked sin. Their outward sanctity is only pretension, and within, like the Pharisees, they are “*full of dead men's bones*” (Matt 23:27).

All men need the righteousness of God. The idolater, sodomite, and those expressing attitudes and works contrary to the Divine nature stand together in a common need. Now we will see that the sanctimonious need a righteousness from God also. No man is excused from sin, and thus all men need a righteousness from God—the righteousness of God Himself. All men need this righteousness

INEXCUSABLE

“^{2:1} Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” No one has been able to escape the devastating effects of sin. Yet, there are some who imagine that they have, because they are able to subdue the outward expressions of it. Such people take it upon themselves to judge others upon the basis of their external achievements. Thus the cultured Greeks thought nothing of referring to the less cultured as “*Barbarians*.” The Spirit is confirming, however, that the Gospel is a message to “*both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians*” (Rom 1:14). They stand together in their need for a Savior and a righteousness from God. The disciplines of both body and mind, however admirable they may appear, are no substitute for the righteousness of God. Although these things have been held in high regard by men, they are not honored by God. As our

Lord said, “*for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God*” (Lk 16:15).

One might remonstrate, pointing to men like Cornelius, whose prayers and alms came up before God for a “*memorial*” (Acts 10:4). He was neither Jew nor born again. Some might object, “How is it that his works were received by God?” Although his works were, indeed, honorable, they had no saving efficacy. God did not pronounce Cornelius “*righteous*” because of his prayers and alms. Instead, he sent a man to tell him what he “*ought to do*”—words where by he and his house “*will be saved*” (Acts 10:6; 11:13-14). He too needed a righteousness from God. The conduct and prayers of Cornelius indicated he had seen his need of the Lord, having no righteousness of his own. That sort of individual is not described in this text. Rather, it is the person who assigns value to his own accomplishments, and speaks derisively of

those who have not measured up to his pretentious standards. You will immediately recognize the presence of this attitude in the religious community.

The Jews will be the particular focus of this chapter, although that focus does not exclude the moralists extant among the Greeks.

INEXCUSABLE

The word “*inexcusable*” is an unusually strong one. It leaves no room for negotiation or explanation. It means without excuse, or indefensible. God will not allow the individual to explain the reasoning behind the condemned action, because no acceptable rationale can be offered for it.

There are those who do not approve of idolatry, sodomy, and the various vices that have already been mentioned. They would raise their voice in protest of such things, yet still perceive no need for a

righteousness from God. This would include men like Socrates (469-399 B.C.), Plato (428-347 B.C.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), and those influenced by their thinking. They exalted thought, and even probed the spiritual nature of man. Yet, to a man, they all rejected God. Such men are representative of some of the individuals now addressed in our text. The indictment will also include the Jews, who clung to religious form, but lacked the power that comes through the Gospel alone. In principle, it will also include those who identify themselves with Christ, yet do not seek a righteousness from God.

THOSE WHO JUDGE

The attention of the Spirit is now turned to hypocrites, who pass judgment upon others, yet have no regard for their own need of righteousness. This is not the “*righteous judgment*” of which our Lord spoke (John 7:24). This is rather the hypercritical judgment of Matthew seven. “*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye*” (7:1-5).

This is a judgment that results from men “*measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves*” (2 Cor 10:12). Their own boastful achievement is the criteria by which others are judged. But, like the Pharisees, only the outside of their lives is clean. Of them, Jesus said, “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*” (Matt 23:27-28). In fact, apart from the salvation effected by the Gospel that is all men **can** clean—the outside. Only God can purify the heart. To put it another way,

men cannot change their own nature. As Jeremiah put it, “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*” (Jer 13:23).

The point of the text is not simply that sitting in judgment upon others is wrong. The point being established is that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God. Those who refuse God’s righteousness, placating their own conscience with the imagination that they have achieved a righteousness of their own, are the subjects of this admonition.

SELF-CONDEMNATION

The outward show of goodness is not sufficient to establish that one is righteous. Sin has contaminated man at

The point of the text is not simply that sitting in judgment upon others is wrong. The point being established is that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God.

his very core, so that sin dwells in him, and is at home in him. Even the seemingly best of people have this problem. As Paul confessed, “. . . *sin that dwells in me . . . evil is present with me . . . another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind . . .*” (Rom 7:17,20,21,23).

The presence of the principle of sin within us should keep us from having a condemning spirit. It is only the “*new creation*” that is pure before God, and that “*workmanship*” belongs to the Lord alone (Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10).

Although in principle this text applies to the cultured Greeks, it more fully applies to the Jews. The Gentiles had been given the testimony of nature. The Jews had been given the fuller testimony of the Law. Every possible advantage had been given to them, so that, if it was possible, they could have become righteous through their own works. They are described as “*Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the*

service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). Truly, they excelled in advantages.

Because of their distinction from all other nations, they sat in judgment upon them. But their natures remained the same as the nations they condemned, even though it was often subdued. To such Jesus says, “*Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned*” (Luke 6:37).

ILLUSTRATED IN DAVID

Although David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), he also stood in need of a righteousness from God. His nature had been polluted by sin even as others. In him, we find an example of the kind of judgment our text mentions.

When David sinned with Bathsheba, it was a most grievous sin in the eyes of the Lord. It is written, “*But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD*” (2 Sam 11:27). Because David’s conscience had not yet stricken him, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to confront him about the matter. Nathan related an account of two men: one rich, and one poor. The rich man had large flocks and herds, while the poor man had only “*only little ewe lamb.*” He had “*bought and nourished up*” the little lamb. In fact, it grew up with him and his children, and ate the man’s food and drank from his cup. A certain traveler came to the rich man’s house. Instead of taking from his own bountiful flock, the rich man “*took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.*” It was a pathetic thing to do.

Upon hearing of this gross injustice, David became incensed. “*And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man*” (2 Sam 12:1-7). Nathan continued, “*Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out*

of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his

wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon" (v. 7-9). This is one of the most tragic incidents of all Scripture. It shows the need of a righteousness from God.

That is the kind of judgment we are dealing with. It is a judgment that sees and judges harshly wrong doing on the part of others, yet fails to recognize the

corruption within self. There is no person who does not have the seeds of corruption within. Even it is not expressed frequently, or the appearance of it is kept down, yet it disqualifies one being called righteous. That condition—the natural state of all men—demands that a righteousness be received from God. There is other option if one is to be received by the Living God.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

"But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

It is essential that we understand "the judgment of God" to be an expression of His nature, or Person. It is something that cannot be forever suppressed. Eventually, God will confront and condemn everything and everyone that is contrary to Him. It is inevitable. His throne is "prepared . . . for judgment" (Psa 9:7), and the preparation is not in vain. Not only does "mercy and truth" go before His "face," but, He declares, "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne" (Psa 89:14; 97:2).

JUDGMENT THROUGH JESUS

These qualities have not disappeared in Jesus. Rather, He has come to affirm them forever. As it is written, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isa 9:6-7). Eventually, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10), for God "will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Not one small portion of His judgment

will be compromised at that time. It will be thoroughly righteous, and in complete keeping with His Divine and holy nature.

This circumstance is what required the atoning death of Christ, for sin could not be removed in any other way. Only those whose sins have been "covered," and to whom the Lord will "not impute

He then judged sin, as compelled by His own nature. In this outpouring of His wrath, Jesus was "made a curse," thereby confirming the indignation of God that is toward all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men Gal 3:13).

REMEMBER THE PURPOSE

Remember the purpose for this text.

It is to confirm the need of a righteousness from God. Not only is man lacking a righteousness that stands the test of Divine judgment, He is not capable of producing such a righteousness.

It is essential that we understand "the judgment of God" to be an expression of His nature, or Person. It is something that cannot be forever suppressed. Eventually, God will confront and condemn everything and everyone that is contrary to Him. It is inevitable.

The wrath of God is against ALL unrighteousness and ungodliness of men (Rom 1:18). Earlier, those who stopped short of a quest for God, creating false gods and images of them, have been shown to be unrighteous and without excuse (1:19-25). Too, those who have stooped to the sin of sodomy have been proved particularly reprehensible. Their conduct was the result of being

turned over to the base passions of the flesh (1:26-27). Additionally, those who did not fall into the baser sins (only because God did not deliver them over to such base lusts), were given over a "reprobate mind." Their own nature and way of thinking caused them to be "filled" with all manner of unrighteousness (1:28-32).

Now, the Spirit is showing that those having a more refined appearance have not managed to extricate themselves from sin. In the case of Gentile philosophers, the sinful nature remained, corrupting them within. The Jews, even in covenant

sin," will survive the judgment day. No wonder such people are called "blessed" (Psa 32:1-2; Rom 4:6-8).

SIN JUDGED IN JESUS

In Christ, the judgment of God against sin was fulfilled. As it is written, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). In this case, "the flesh" was Christ's flesh, which bore only "the likeness" of sinful flesh. By imputation, our sins being placed upon Him, God made Jesus "to be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21).

with, and blessed by, the true God, were likewise in bondage to sin. Although they experienced miraculous deliverance, direction, and provision, their nature remained unchanged. Even when they were given a Law from heaven, and Prophets to correct them, they remained fundamentally sinful. They are described as a *“disobedient and gainsaying (contrary) people”* (Rom 10:21).

Armed with the Law, and a unique status with God, they sat in judgment upon others, while doing *“the same things”* as those they judged.

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO TRUTH

Our text reads, *“We are SURE that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.”* ^{KJV} Other versions read *“we KNOW . . .”* This word (*“sure,”* or *“know”*), means perceive, see, or understand. This is the description of a dominating understanding—one that cannot be avoided. **God cannot overlook the sinful nature!** His character will not allow Him to do so. Even when our sins were placed upon the pure Lamb of God, His judgment broke forth against it. His judgment is *“according to truth.”*

This expression (*“according to truth”*) means in strict keeping with the real situation. It also speaks of conformity to God’s own nature. Those who willingly entertain a preference for sin will be exposed when God *“judges the world.”* Their judgment will **not** be according to their profession. Nor, indeed, will it be according to a theological position they embraced and propagated. It will be *“according to truth.”* If, for example, they are Jews, and can boast of having the Law, the Divine service, the covenants, and all manner of other benefits, they will still be judged *“according to truth.”* It is what they are within that will determine their destiny. The due consideration of this reality will make sin distasteful.

Those who do **not** possess the righteousness of God will be judged according to their own righteousness, and it will **not** stand up under Divine scrutiny! I am persuaded this is not generally known in the *Christian* community—at least not in any satisfactory measure. The failure of men to speak of the righteousness of God, and

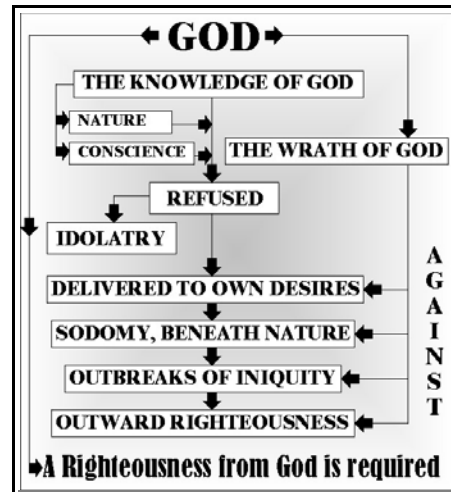
its conferment upon men through Christ, confirms this to be the case. God will not play games with people, pretending they are something they are not. He will have no respect of persons, but will judge all men *“according to truth.”*

His judgment will be **“AGAINST”** those who practice such things as have been described (1:19-32). It makes little difference whether they are flagrantly practiced outwardly, or entertained in the privacy of the heart and mind. For it to be any other way would require that God *“deny Himself,”* and He **CANNOT** do that (2 Tim 2:13).

The person who *“does”* sin, or allows its expression, must not think for one moment that he will *“escape the judgment of God.”* Such a person is deceived. It makes no difference what official theology he has embraced, or how convinced he is that he is safe in his sin. Jesus came to deliver men from wrath, saving them from their sins (Matt 1:20), and making them free from its power and consequences (John 8:36). Those who remain under the dominion of sin have not been delivered or freed, and the judgment of God is against them. This condition cannot be covered up by a theology that says once they are saved they are always saved, or that they cannot lose their salvation. All such teachings are an attempt to misrepresent God and His great salvation.

ONLY ONE HOPE

There is only one hope, and that is to possess *“the righteousness of God!”* No other righteousness, however acceptable it may appear to men, will be recognized by



God. Furthermore, the righteousness of God is not intended to make us analysts of our peers, but acceptable to God. That is its sole purpose.

ONE FINAL TIME

Lest it escape our attention, permit me to state the intention of this text once again. The judgment of God is against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. There is no possible way for this to fail of fulfillment. Those who rely upon their own righteousness, and even judge others while doing so, will also be subject to this devouring judgment.

Unrighteousness is the necessary consequence of sin—Adam’s sin. Thus it is written, *“through the offence of one many be dead . . . judgment was by one to condemnation . . . by one man’s offence death reigned by one . . . Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation . . . by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”* (Rom 5:15-19).

To confirm this is the case, God turned men over to their own corrupted minds, and a descent into the quagmire of sin resulted. The only reason some segments of our race, particularly the Jews, did not descend as far as others was owing to Divine restraint, not human discipline. Delivered over to the corruption of the human heart, there is no depth to which humanity will not fall.

Thus, those who judge others worthy of condemnation, while themselves failing to appropriate the righteousness of God, will be judged harshly. They too possess a corrupt and defiled heart. The things for which they condemn others are actually resident in their own hearts, even though they may succeed in subduing a public outbreak of them.

The point is that they also need the righteousness of God—the righteousness that is announced by the Gospel of Christ. It is not acceptable to merely be clean outwardly. Men need real righteousness. The judgment and consequent wrath of God is against everything else. God is greatly to be praised for providing a righteousness that will stand in the day when He judges the world through Christ. Be eager to possess it. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” These words may appear harsh, but they are not. They are more like the passionate words of a gracious individual trying to convince a perishing person to come out of a condemned and burning house. Those who do not possess the righteousness of God, and particularly those who are going about to establish their own (Rom 10:3), must see the situation correctly. Such might imagine that the absence of Divine visitation upon them is indication that God approves of them. They thus reason, “If God is not punishing me, He must receive me and place worth upon my good works.” But this is not at all the case. The Spirit will now show us the graciousness of God in forbearing the punishment of the self-righteous.

THE ACT OF DESPISING

The word “*despise*” is an usually strong one. Coming from *καταφρονεῖς*, it means to treat with contempt, look down upon, and think nothing of. More particularly, it means “to treat with neglect, disregard, despise, disdain, or think little or nothing of.”^{Thayer} This is not an intellectual sin, as though a person thought upon the goodness of God and replied, “I hate God’s goodness, and want nothing to do with it.” Rather, something that is despised is NOT thought upon. It is pushed to the back of human thought in preference for other things. Thus, to despise the goodness of the Lord is to consider it unworthy of extended thought or energetic pursuit. The consideration of Divine goodness is rejected in favor of other priorities.

Those who ponder God’s “*goodness and forbearance and longsuffering*” will come to the same conclusion as Jeremiah. “*It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not*” (Lam 3:22). With understanding, those who do not despise these Divine qualities will say with Jacob, “*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and*

of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant” (Gen 32:10).

To despise the Lord’s “*goodness and forbearance and longsuffering*” is to fail to come to these conclusions. It is to neglect to see that only the withholding of Divine wrath has kept sinners alive. Only the longsuffering of the Lord has stopped them from dropping into hell. Rather than God recognizing their good works, He has had to restrain Himself from destroying them because of their deeds. That is the real situation.

One of the treacherous traits of lukewarmness is that it leads one to despise what is sorely needed for recovery and acceptance. We are living in such a time. Men—religious men—seem blissfully

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unaware of, and disinterested in, the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God. It is a most serious condition.

THE RICHES OF HIS GOODNESS

“*. . . the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering . . .*” The goodness of God is a rich repository for the soul. When the Lord revealed His glory to Moses, He described the disclosure in these words: “*I will make all my goodness pass before thee*” (Ex 33:19). As “*the Lord passed by before Him,*” the Lord Himself “*proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth*” (Ex 34:6).

Goodness

The “*goodness*” of man does not “*extend*” to God (Psa 16:2), but God’s “*goodness*” is “*laid up for those who fear*” Him (Psa 31:19). The Divine attribute of “*goodness*” includes kindness and a gracious attitude. It accents that sinners have not provoked God to act contrary to His own nature.

The expression “*riches of His goodness*” emphasizes the abundance of kindness and gracious consideration. However, His goodness must be properly understood. Rather than constraining God to merely tolerate the insolence and self-righteousness of man, it is an expression of the intention to convert men to Himself, turning them away from their own vanity. This will be further developed in the following comments.

“Forbearance”

The “*riches*” of God’s “*forbearance*” speaks of His leniency toward those deserving His wrath. It is true that God prefers mercy over sacrifice (Hos 6:6). The Lord forbears pouring His wrath upon men in order that He might show mercy to them. That is His preference. He is not looking for a reason to condemn men, but for an opportunity, so to speak, to save them.

Longsuffering

The “*riches*” of His “*longsuffering*” stresses the Lord’s “*patience, forbearance, longsuffering, and slowness in avenging wrongs.*”^{Thayer} One of the very wonderful attributes of our God is “*slow to anger.*” As it is written, “*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever*” (Psa 103:8-9). Again it is written, “*The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy*” (Psa 145:8).

In pleading with Israel, Joel appealed to the longsuffering of God—His slowness to anger, and preference to bless the people. “*So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful,*

slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm^{NKJV} (Joel 2:13). This is God's nature.

In his foolish protestation of God showing mercy on Nineveh, Jonah said he knew God was longsuffering. *"I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm"* (Jonah 4:2). He was correct in this observation, but was unaware that the message he delivered to Nineveh was the means God chose to be gracious.

The longsuffering of God is actually *"space to repent,"* allowing for man to turn his face toward the Lord, and engage in a fervent quest for Him (Rev 2:21).

THE TRAGEDY OF NOT KNOWING

*" . . . not knowing that the goodness of God . . . "*Already humanity has been charged with not retaining God in their knowledge (1:28). Now the Spirit reveals the affects of that action. It brought men to the point where they did NOT know the means through which they could be brought to repentance.

Wherever it is found, this is an inexcusable ignorance. God has made Himself known to men. That revelation confirmed that He is good, forbearing, and longsuffering. When this is not *"known,"* a condition is introduced that will, if not corrected, eventually lead to condemnation. As it is written, *"when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 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. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed"* (2 Thess 1:7-10).

The Spirit moved Peter to state the reality and value of God's longsuffering, relating it to salvation. *"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^{NKJV} (2 Pet 3:9). Divine longsuffering is not a mere idea.

The world says, "What you do not know cannot hurt you." But nothing could be further from the truth. In the Kingdom of God, ignorance is lethal, and not knowing is disastrous.

BEING LED TO REPENTANCE

" . . . the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance . . . " However, all is not hopeless, praise the Lord! The *"goodness of God,"* duly considered, will provoke repentance in those who have been deceived and hardened by sin. **It is true that those who are favored by God, regardless of the extent of that**

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favor, have despised His goodness if they remain impenitent.

If men will ponder *"the goodness of God,"* allowing their hearts and minds to dwell upon it, it will lead them to any required repentance. This is the best way to come to repentance, much to be preferred over His chastening. This is the aspect of spiritual life to which the Spirit referred when He said, *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world"* (1 Cor 11:31-32). Rather than stubbornly continuing in sin, seeking their own fleshly satisfaction, men ought to ponder how good God has been to them. He has not dealt with them *"according to"* their sins (Psa 103:10). By this, the Spirit means God's judgments have been less harsh than the sins of men deserve.

Even in His punishments, God is good, allowing for men to be sensitive and come to Him. No wonder it is twice stated in Scripture, *"but I will correct thee in*

measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jer 30:11; 46:28). His judgment never goes beyond the boundary of God's character.

All of this is designed to provoke men to repent of their refusal to retain God in their knowledge. It is intended to turn them from seeking their own ways to seeking the Lord, to which vocation they have been appointed (Acts 17:26-27).

We must never permit this truth to escape us: *"the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."* It LEADS us when we ponder it, thinking upon the good things He has done, and of His tenderness toward us. This will only come., however, when the seriousness of transgression and the need for a righteousness from God are duly considered. When these two conditions are not contemplated, the goodness of God will not lead us.

Divine influence is required if repentance is to be realized. Traditionally, men have described repentance as a change of mind, and, indeed, that is the truth. However, changing a mind that has been devoted to sin is no small task.

It is equivalent to a leopard changing its spots, or an Ethiopian the color of his skin (Jer 13:23). Notwithstanding that difficulty, repentance is imperative. As Jesus said, *"but unless you repent you will all likewise perish"* (Lk 13:3,5).

Repentance Is A Gift

Jesus has been exalted to *"give repentance"* (Acts 5:31). Thus the Savior is said to have been sent from God *"to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities"* (Acts 3:26). When the Gentiles turned to God, early believers assessed the remarkable event in these words: *"Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life"* (Acts 11:18). That is why Jesus said repentance was to be *"preached,"* or declared (Lk 24:47). When servants of God are endeavoring to recover sinners, they are to do so believing *"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"* (2 Tim 2:25-26). That provides a great incentive to recover sinners.

Our text has revealed the manner in which the Lord gives repentance. It is not an overpowering or crushing of the human spirit, but a gentle leading into a change of mind. It occurs as the sinner is exposed to the marvelous goodness of

God, particularly as declared in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have taken the time to briefly elaborate on this because I am persuaded this aspect of repentance is not generally

known. I believe this accounts for the lack of emphasis upon the Gospel of Christ, as well as the unacceptable level of moral deficiency and weakness within the professed church. It is a most serious condition for which much grace is needed.

TREASURING UP WRATH

“^{6a}But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath . . . ”

HARDNESS AND IMPENITENCE

Here is truth worthy of extended consideration. Hardness and a lack of repentance (“*impenitence*”) always go together. Men do not repent because their hearts are calloused and hard. Also, their hearts become even more stony because they do not repent. A lack of repentance is never innocent, incidental, or to be treated as though it were not lethal to the soul. Unless a person repents, hell is sure.

“*Impenitence*” is more than simply not repenting. It is REFUSING to repent, obstinately clinging to sin under the delusion that it brings advantage.

When men struggle with making the right choice, it is because of hardness of heart. We do well not to adopt an approach that leaves them thinking they have a lot of time to make up their minds concerning the Lord. Away with long-term orientation programs designed to prepare people to become Christians. Where did such a foolish notion originate? Let there be a return to the urgency of turning to the Lord.

Moses

Moses said, “*I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore CHOOSE life, that both thou and thy seed may live*” (Deut 30:19). He did not say “think,” but “*choose!*” The choice was to be made, and made at that time. “*Choose life.*”

Joshua

Joshua challenged the people, “*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*” (Josh 24:25). If the people refused to serve the Lord, Joshua demanded that they decide that very day which god they were going

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to serve. He would not let them imagine a state of indecision was allowed.

Elijah

When Elijah confronted four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, he first challenged the children of Israel. “*How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him*” (1 Kgs 18:21). He did not see remaining in the state of indecision as in any way advantageous. He called upon the people to make up their mind, and do it then!

John the Baptist

When John the Baptist arrived on the scene, sent by God (John 1:6), he confronted a spiritually sterile people. He did not provide an orientation course to

ease the transition from disinterest to interest. Instead he cried out, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Matt 3:2). He did not mean “think about repenting.” His was a summons to repent NOW, else they would miss the blessing.

The Lord Jesus Christ

When Jesus came out of the wilderness, having been tempted of the devil, He began to preach “*Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt 4:17). There was nothing casual about His word. He did not provide an academic study to acclimate people to a new way of thinking. His call was to repent NOW!

MORE ON THE HUMAN CONDITION

As is characteristic of the Gospel, our text is providing more insight into the condition of sinners. In particular, it is showing the state of everyone who does not possess the righteousness of God. Remember, the point being developed is that **men need a righteousness from God**. It is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Already the Spirit has shown us that human nature has been so corrupted that men left to their own devices descend into unimaginable depths of sin. There is not a soul that will rise higher, seek God, or become righteous, if delivered over to the desires of their mind.

Secondly, those who have achieved some degree of external refinement (whether Gentiles by philosophy or Jews by the Law) are nevertheless under condemnation. They too need a righteousness from God, because their own righteousness is nothing but filthy rags, to be quickly discarded (Isa 64:6).

Now the Spirit gives us another reason for eagerly seeking to obtain “*the righteousness of God*” that is announced in the Gospel.

WRATH CAN BE TREASURED UP

“*You are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath.*” The Spirit has already told us that God’s wrath is against “*all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.*” God cannot make peace with sin, and consequently not with sinners. In due time, the wrath of God will break forth against all who are not reconciled to Him. Our text refers to that time as “*the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous*

believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”^{NASB} (John 3:18,36). For the righteous, treasures in heaven are increasing. For the wicked, the wrath of God is increasing.

The very day in which the righteous will be rewarded is the one in which the wicked will be punished. For the righteous, it is the “*day of redemption*” (Eph 4:30). For the unrighteous, it is “*the day of wrath,*” “*the great day of His wrath,*” and “*the wrath of the Lamb*” (Rev 6:16,17).

Accenting this aspect of the Lord’s return (i.e., that the righteous will be rewarded and the unrighteous punished), the Spirit says the following. “*You who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 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. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, WHEN HE COMES, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed” (2 Thess 1:7-10). Thus, the very day when Jesus comes to be glorified in His saints, and admired by all who believe, will be the day when He takes vengeance on all who know not God and obey not the Gospel.

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, all men are storing up for that day. Either wrath or blessing is being “*stored up.*” God is not indifferent to the way people respond to Him, even though His longsuffering is so interpreted by sinners.

A CONSIDERATION

We live in a time when the urgency of appropriating salvation has been replaced with a sort of gentle tolerance of unbelievers. It is not often that you hear a clarion call to choose who you will serve NOW. In fact, there has been a whole religious thrust to reduce the chaffing effect of the word of God. This has proceeded from the wisdom of men.

The new theological jargon is “*seeker-friendly.*” It is a purely psychological view, with no substantiation in Scripture whatsoever. It does not view seeking as declared in the Word of God, but views someone coming to “*church*” as a seeker. A gentle atmosphere is sought that takes care not to intrude upon the supposed “*seeker.*” There is a consequent reduction in edification and the nurture of the saints, which is the sole purpose for believers gathering together (1 Cor 14:26). The appearance, content, and length of the gathering is tailored for those who are NOT in Christ – a most peculiar strategy.

When once the gravity of the situation registers upon the soul, all such efforts will be replaced by Gospel-centered, God-glorifying, saints-edifying efforts. In such an environment, men will be pressed to make up their minds—to choose who they are going to serve. Sinners must be reminded of their real status in order that the Gospel may obtain a good sound to them. As long as they refuse to choose the Lord and obtain His righteousness, they are storing up wrath for themselves. It is not pleasant to consider such a thing. But that is what causes it to have a challenging effect upon the soul. It is the truth—revealed truth.

ONCE AGAIN

Lest I wander too far from the intent of the text, allow me to again remind you of its purpose. We are hearing the Spirit confirm that we NEED the righteousness of God. God will accept NO righteousness that we have achieved on our own. He will ONLY receive the righteousness He gives to men through faith in His Son.

Further, if we tarry to receive that righteousness, wrath is being stored up for us. The wrath of God is AGAINST all of the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men—which is whatever has not come from Him.

The choice before all men is, righteousness from God or wrath from God. There are no other alternatives. The Gospel puts God’s righteousness within our reach. It also provides incentives to seek and appropriate that righteousness. If it is refused, Divine indignation is stored up for that person, and will be poured out on judgment day. There is no good reason for men to continue in sin.

The fact that God is longsuffering does not mean He has forgotten His wrath. Rather than pouring it out upon the wicked immediately, it is being stored up as well as held back.

judgment of God.”

There will be differing measures of that wrath, as seen in this text. Those who have long resisted the Lord will experience larger measures of that wrath and indignation “*which shall devour the adversaries*” (Heb 10:27). In somber tones the Spirit speaks to those clinging to their own righteousness, and refusing to obtain the righteousness of God. “*You are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*”^{NASB}

Just as the truly righteous are laying up for themselves “*treasures in heaven,*” so the unrighteous are “*storing up wrath for*” themselves (Matt 6:19). The Lord does not forget the labors of the righteous (Heb 6:10) or the hardness of the wicked. The fact that God is longsuffering does not mean He has forgotten His wrath. Rather than pouring it out upon the wicked immediately, it is being stored up as well as held back.

Jesus spoke of this same condition when describing those who did not believe on Him. “*He who does not believe is condemned already . . . he who does not*

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT REVEALED

“^{6b} . . . and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶who will render to each one according to his deeds: ⁷eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, ⁹tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The “day of wrath” will be more than a Divine explosion of anger and destruction. That will surely occur, but it will flow from the righteous character of God. It will not be like a mere man losing his temper. A burst of wrath from man confirms he has lost control of himself, but that is not what will happen in the day of God’s wrath. It will be a time when the “righteous judgment” of God will be made known directly, and not by testimony, as it is now.

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

In this world, God gives indications of His “righteous judgment.” It is declared in the Gospel, which announces the judgement of God against sin. When He made Jesus “to be sin for us,” God “condemned sin in the flesh” of His Son (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 8:3). Divine judgment has also been revealed in the descent of men into moral degradation, as they were given over to baser lusts because of their refusal to retain God in their knowledge (1:25-27). The judgment of God was further revealed as men were delivered over to a “reprobate mind” to do things that are not fitting (1:28). In all of these things, God’s judgment was righteous.

But these judgments are only token ones. They are designed to awaken slumbering sinners. Much of the judgment of God is being withheld, lest the race of man be consumed in it.

There is an appointed day, however, when the judgment of God will no longer be restrained, or mingled, as it were, with mercy. It is then that the fulness of Divine judgment will be made known. The absolute correctness of this judgment will also be revealed in a most precise manner. God will be “justified” in all of His sayings, particularly those relating to His judgment (Rom 3:4). No one will be sent to hell unjustly. No person will be gathered to be forever with the Lord unrighteously. There will not be a dissenting voice heard throughout all the universe. That God is impeccably just and righteous will be evident, and the mouths

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of all the ungodly will be stopped.

How frequently the “righteous judgment” of God is declared in Scripture. “He shall judge the world in righteousness . . . He loveth righteousness and judgment . . . He shall judge thy people with righteousness . . . But judgment shall return unto righteousness . . . righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne . . . the righteous judgment of God” (Psa 9:8; 33:5; 72:2; 94:15; 97:2; Thess 1:5).

The heavenly chambers will echo with praise in that day—extolling the righteous judgment of our God. “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. . . . true and righteous are thy

judgments . . . true and righteous are his judgments” (Rev 16:5,7; 19:2). The righteousness of God’s judgments will be perceived. Then, there will be no sympathy for the ungodly, and no tolerance of their wicked ways. No tears will be shed because of the damnation of the ungodly.

While we are in the world, our hearts seek for the reconciliation of the lost, and we weep over the sin of the sinner. God is longsuffering toward them, and His grace is offered to them. But when the “righteous judgment” of God is unveiled, all of that will abruptly end. The “day of salvation” will conclude, and the “door of hope” will be closed.

ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS

All men will be dealt with in strict accordance with their deeds, or what they have done. This is a consistent proclamation throughout Scripture, and is disruptive to stilted theology. Judgment will be “according to” the works, or deeds, of men. “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Rev 20:12-13).

Jesus said, “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt 16:27). Paul said, “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). Of the wicked it is said, “whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor 11:15). Of the godly it is declared, “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Cor 3:8). Our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The righteous judgment of the Lord is indiscriminating, and based on righteous criteria, by Given O. Blakely

Sowing and Reaping

In the "righteous judgment" of God, the law of sowing and reaping will be brought to fruition. This is a law that begins in this life, and will be culminated in the day of God's wrath and righteous judgment. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 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 6:7-8). **No person will reap what they have not sown!** Those who have made no investment in their souls, refusing to be "led by the Spirit," will NOT receive eternal life. Those who have followed their own will, rejecting the good and perfect will of God, will not enter into the "everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:11). Conversely, those who have lived by faith and walked in the Spirit, will be joyfully received into the presence of the Lord.

A considerable percentage of professed Christians appear to live in complete insensitivity to this fact.

ETERNAL LIFE

"To those who by persistence in doing good **seek** glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life."^{NIV} This text sharply conflicts with much theology, and sadly so. The Holy Spirit here associates "eternal life" with "doing good." Many are unable to make such an association. Yet, the Spirit is very precise in His expression. He does not say they are saved because they do good. Rather, **there is an underlying quest that compels these people to do good—and it is that quest that sanctifies their doing.** Further, it is not merely "doing good" that will be rewarded, but "**persistence in doing good,**" or "patient continuance in well doing."^{KJV}

Doing Good

Just what is "doing good?" To some, it may be seen as simply being neighborly, or the avoidance of doing obviously wrong things. But this is not the case, for that kind of behavior is based upon the flesh, and not the Spirit.

Here the Spirit shows us the impact

of "a righteousness from God" upon the individual. Righteousness is not only imputed to us, it is effective in enabling men to live godly. Thus men so energetically engage in the pursuit of eternal life that their whole lives are restructured by that pursuit. "Doing good" refers to being personally involved in the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom 12:2). At the lower end, it is doing "good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10). At the high end, it is being perfected by God working within us "in every good work to do His will" (Heb 13:20). In every case, it is personal involvement in the will of the Lord.

There is an appropriate way in which the promises of God are to be sought. This is not only an activity of the mind. It includes the marshaling of all our resources in the quest.

There is an appropriate way in which the promises of God are to be sought. This is not only an activity of the mind. It includes the marshaling of all our resources in the quest. "Doing good" involves the subordination of the flesh, living by faith, and walking in the Spirit.

Seeking for Glory

"Doing good" is not the fundamental thing, but a means to the fundamental thing. In the doing, men are seeking for "glory." The Gospel announces that glory can be obtained because of the satisfactory work of Jesus. The soul that believes that Gospel engages in a fervent pursuit of that glory.

The eternal purpose of God includes the glorification of all who are in the Son. As it is written, "and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom 8:30). The consummate experience of the righteous will occur at the appearing of the Lord. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:4). If that does not take place, life has been lived for nothing, and everything has been vanity!

The resurrection of the dead is the occasion when our bodies will be transformed to be like that of our Lord. Thus it is said of the body, "It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory" (1 Cor 15:43). The Spirit also says of this circumstance, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil 3:21).

Seeking for glory assumes a fundamental discontent with our present situation. We are not discontent with the treasure we have, but with the vessel in which is presently resides (2 Cor 4:7). It is "the flesh" that offends us, for it lusts against the Spirit, competing for our hearts (Gal 5:17). The faithful ever confess, "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 law of sin" (Rom 7:24-25). Glorification will remove the circumstance of contention. No longer will we find "another law" in our members, "warring against" the law of our mind (Rom 7:23).

Faith moves us to aggressively "seek for glory." It makes us discontent with the wilderness of this world, and a body destined to return to the dust. The Word of God knows nothing of a person in Christ with no interest in "glory." The desire for it is inherent in the new creation. It must not be subdued or ignored, for to do so is to forfeit the prize.

Seeking for Honor

The child of God desires recognition from God. Having been delivered from this "present evil world according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal 1:4), the believer places no value on the accolades of the world. But faith is not content to remain unrecognized or unacknowledged. It seeks for the public recognition of God Almighty. At once you will recognize this is a foreign thought to many professing Christians. However, it is the truth.

Jesus once chided His enemies, "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the

honor that comes from the only God?^{”NKJV} (John 5:44). On another occasion, the Holy Spirit explains some chief rulers who believed on Him did not, for fear of being put out of the synagogue, confess him. *“For they loved the praise of men more than **the praise of God**”^{”NKJV} (John 12:43).*

In comforting believers, the Spirit refers to the time when God will openly honor the saints. *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise **will come from God**”^{”NKJV} (1 Cor 4:5). There are people whom *“the Lord commends”* (2 Cor 10:18). That commendation will be made public on the day of the Lord.*

In another poignant saying, Jesus said, *“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, **him My Father will honor**”^{”NKJV} (John 12:26). The persuasion of the truth of this promise has a powerful influence upon the soul. It will compel the believer to think, speak, and live in order to obtain recognition from God in the day of Christ. It neutralizes the adverse affects of the world’s rejection, and the failure of even religious peers to appreciate our labors. Though little known, here is a wonderful aspect of salvation and hope: diligently continuing in well doing in anticipation of receiving honor from God.*

Seeking for Immortality

The new creation cannot acclimate to death. Life is everything—eternal life. Yet, *“it is appointed unto man once to die”* (Heb 9:27). It is true of every believer, *“but though our outward man **perish**, yet the inward man is renewed day by day”* (2 Cor 4:16). The perception of that circumstance produces an intense longing for *“immortality.”*

Immortality is a quality possessed by God alone. As it is written, *“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; **Who only hath immortality**”* (1 Tim 6:16). The promise of immortality is inherent in the Gospel, which brings it to light (2 Tim 1:10).

Immortality will occur for the believer when death is totally eradicated. As it is written, *“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must **put on immortality**. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have **put on immortality**, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death is swallowed up in victory**”* (1 Cor 15:53-54). This is a state in which no aspect of our persons will diminish or wane in any sense. We will thus be perfect in spirit, soul, and body, conformed to the image of Christ. What a blessed contemplation! Immortality is something for which faith seeks. It is not content with death or the deterioration that is associated with it. Faith can only reside where there is life.

life through Jesus Christ our Lord^{”NKJV} (Rom 5:21). Without righteousness, there can be no *“eternal life.”*

The required righteousness, however, does not come from men, but from God. It is not developed by men, but imputed to men. Further, the Spirit has confirmed the universal need of this righteousness.

Now the Spirit has confirmed that the righteousness that is given to us upon the basis of faith, engages us in the pursuit of glory, honor, and immortality. That is imputed righteousness working within us. Whoever consistently sets about to do good, earnestly seeking for glory, honor, and immortality, will be granted the fulness of eternal life. This will be a righteous and true conferment, for all of God’s judgments are righteous.

What can be said of a religion that does not encourage such a quest? What element of goodness can be found in any approach to God that leaves the individual disinterested in seeking for glory, honor, and immortality? Is there any one capable of sound thought that can conclude God will dignify such an approach by granting eternal life? To ponder the question is to answer it.

Men seek immortality by faithful continuance in well doing. Thus, they are not overwhelmed by the hardships of life. Once again, this is not a common perspective in the modern church.

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Eternal Life and Seeking

We must be careful not to miss the intent of this passage. Humanity has been indicted for NOT seeking after the Lord—for refusing to retain God in their knowledge. Even though all of nature, and their conscience as well, shouted out for men to *“seek the Lord,”* they stopped short of finding Him. Even though God strategically placed man in both location and time so that he might *“seek the Lord”* (Acts 17:26-27), he did not do so.

“Eternal life,” while a gift from God (Rom 6:23), is also the consequence of righteousness. Thus it is written, *“as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign **through righteousness** to eternal*

INDIGNATION, WRATH, TRIBULATION, AND ANGUISH

“But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil.”^{”NASB} If we are tempted to think this is simply a theological discourse, designed to assure that we maintain a correct doctrinal statement, we must think again. The total absence of ambiguity, and the absolute sobriety of the text assures us of its criticality. This is not small thought, or something around which elaborate arguments are to be developed.

Without the righteousness of God, men are shut up, or confined, to their own corrupted resources. Because our text has introduced us to a list of despicable sins, men might be tempted to think of sin and rebellion only in terms of gross

immorality and obvious infractions of God's Law. The Spirit thus provides a grand summation of sin so we may understand that it excludes men from the Kingdom of God.

Selfishly Ambitious

The KJV version reads "contentious." That is, the person seeks his own will so aggressively that he contends with everyone who does not feed his self-centeredness. The NRSV and NIV read "self-seeking." This reveals how those without the righteousness of God are primarily interested in themselves, and not the glory of God. The NASB reads "selfishly ambitious." This emphasizes that such people are aggressive to fulfill their own personal interests, which have made no provision for honoring God. In its essence, sin makes the individual self-centered, even though all men are made in the image of God. That is confirmed in the very first sin, when Satan lured Eve into thinking more of herself than of God.

Not Obeying the Truth

Truth, or ultimate reality, is to be obeyed. It is not to be ignored. To fail to obey the truth is to "reject" it^{NIV}, obstinately refusing to yield to its demands. Looking at this matter from a more practical point of view, truth is what God has revealed about Himself and His purpose. The very fact that truth is to be "obeyed" shows it conflicts with the natural will of man. Obeying the truth involves abandoning self-will, and energetically buying the truth, determined not to sell or forfeit it (Prov 23:23).

Obeying Truth the Pictured in Baptism

A classic example of obeying the truth is found in our baptism. In that case, the truth, of doctrine, is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Obeying the truth is becoming intimately associated with all of those facts. We are "crucified with Him" (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20), "buried with Him" (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12) and "raised up" like Him (Rom 6:4; Col 3:1). Much is made of this in Scripture.

Because of being so joined with the truth, baptism is referred to as obeying with the heart the "form of the doctrine" (Rom 6:17). Thus we are brought into

harmony with the truth.

NOT obeying the truth is failing to conform to it. It is refusing to subscribe to its demands and thrusting it away. Bewitched by false teachers, the Galatians regressed into a state where they did "not obey the truth" (Gal 3:1; 5:7). This is a consequence for rejecting the righteousness that comes from God.

Those subjected to the truth of God, regardless of its magnitude, will be held responsible for failing to obey it.

Obeying Unrighteousness

While those refusing to receive the righteousness of God decline to obey the truth, they DO "obey unrighteousness." They reject godly impulses in favor of ungodly ones. They yield to what is NOT right, while rejecting what IS right. In

Those subjected to the truth of God, regardless of its magnitude, will be held responsible for failing to obey it.

fact, they reject the truth in order that they may follow evil.^{NIV}

Jesus described this disobedience in vivid words. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:19-20). Second Thessalonians 2:12 refers to this condition as believing "not the truth," but having "pleasure in unrighteousness."

The Reward

What will be the result of those who are "self-seeking," "do not obey the truth," and "obey unrighteousness?" The word is sobering. "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." There are some approaches to preaching and teaching that

do not even allow for such expressions. These are "words . . . which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor 2:13). It is not possible to ignore or minimize them without suffering the consequences. Candidly, I am persuaded that a significant percentage of professed Christians do not believe these words.

Indignation

Indignation is the boiling over of Divine wrath. It is the venting of the nature of God against those contrary to it. Such indignation is consuming. As it is written, "fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Heb 10:27). This is a passionate and consuming anger.

Wrath

The very word is arresting. This word emphasizes the focus of God's anger against His adversaries. It will be concentrated on "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). It is also depicted as coming "upon the children of disobedience" (Eph 5:6; Col; 3:6) whose conduct has been directed by Satan himself.

There is an aspect to this that should jar all men from their complacency. While those in Christ have "not been appointed to wrath" (), Divine wrath does still exist, and believers are to be mindful of it.

God has represented Himself as "willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known" (Rom 9:22). Not only is "wrath" an aspect of God's Person, it cannot be eternally subdued. Eventually, it will be directed toward all who have refused to pursue the knowledge of Him, and have rejected His righteousness.

Tribulation

The wicked will be punished with "tribulation," trouble^{NRSV}, or anguish.^{NIV} If men cannot be persuaded to seek the righteousness that comes from God, let them ponder the outcome of being found without it! Their trouble will begin in this world, and particularly just prior to the coming of the Lord and the consequent passing of the heavens and the earth (2 Pet 3:10-12). They will call for rocks and mountains to fall upon them as they anticipate the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:15-16). That will only be the beginning of their tribulation.

The greatest of all tribulation will occur when the unrighteous are cast *“into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mk 9:44,46,48). Let no person doubt it, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

Anguish

Anguish is personal torment. While indignation and wrath come from God, tribulation and anguish are the experiences realized by men through them. There is a hopelessness in *“anguish.”* *“Anguish”* means narrowness

Those supposing obtaining a righteousness from God is not that important, must consider the alternative. Remember, the point of this passage is to confirm our need for the righteousness of God. If men do not avail themselves of it, they will suffer the due penalty for their disobedience.

JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK

Because the Jews have been given more, more is required of them. They were the first to hear both the Law and the Gospel. The entire ministry of Jesus was spent among them. All of the

the day when the righteous judgment of God is revealed against anything and everything unlike Himself.

GLORY, HONOR, AND PEACE

In order to build the faith and hope of the saints, the Spirit reaffirms, *“but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”* (v 10). What a marvelous promise, and how essential it is that we hear it often.

Notice the addition of the word *“peace.”* What a precious contemplation that is. In this world saints experienced resistance to working *“what is good.”* The resistance came from within, from the *“flesh”* (Gal 5:17). It came from the devil himself (1 Pet 5:8-9). It also came in the form of persecution, evil speaking, and the general opposition of the ungodly (Matt 5:11-12). The saints of God will eventually be delivered from all opposing influence and struggles, Peace will be given to them that is unequalled. In the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord will extend *“peace like a river”* (Isa 66:12).

They were the first to hear both the Law and the Gospel. The entire ministry of Jesus was spent among them. All of the prophets testified to them. Thus, the stricter accountability will be required of them.

of place, dire calamity, and extreme affliction. It is when the soul is pressed as in an olive press, and no relief is experienced.

All men suffer *“tribulation”* *“anguish”* to some degree. For the believer, they are experienced only in this world—and even then, only in measure. They not only recover from these times of grief, but are made the better for them. But for the unrighteous, this is not so. When God pours His indignation and wrath upon them, they will never recover, and never realize comfort in any form.

prophets testified to them. Thus, the stricter accountability will be required of them. Revelation is wed to responsibility.

Because the *“Greeks,”* or the most cultured among the Gentiles, are not innocent, indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish will come upon them also. There is no respect of persons with God.

Wherever a soul is found that continues doing evil, these judgments will occur. The only alternative to doing evil, is to obtain a righteousness from God. It is the only thing that will stand the test of

Once again, this arrangement is *“to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”*^{KJV} Thus both punishment and reward will begin with the Jews. God forbid, therefore, that should imagine they no longer have any recognition in heaven! If they are first in experiencing the power of the Gospel (1:16), first in punishment (2:8-9), and first in reward (2:10), how can they have lost all identity with the Lord? We do well to have *“the mind of Christ”* on this matter. If God so regards them, who is man to despise them? Let us acquiesce with the Lord.

NO PARTIALITY WITH GOD

“1 For there is no partiality with God.” Here is an aspect of God that is repeatedly proclaimed. Moses declared, *“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe”* (Deut 10:17). King Jehosaphat charged the judges of the land, *“Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment.”*

Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes” (2 Chron 19:6-7). Elihu was right when he said to Job, *“Yet He is not partial to princes, Nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; For they are all the work of His hands”* (Job 34:19). Peter said to the household of Cornelius, *“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality”*

(Acts 10:34). Speaking of some who had exalted themselves due to their expertise in the Law, Paul said, *“But from those who seemed to be something; whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man; for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me”* (Gal 2:6).

Because God is no respecter of persons, every man will receive according

The righteous judgment of the Lord is indiscriminating, and based on righteous criteria, by Given O. Blakely

to his investments. God will not be mocked. As it is written, *“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). In somber tones, the Spirit says, *“But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality”* (Col 3:25).

Peter adds a word on this matter also, confirming that life is to lived in view of this certainty. *“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear”* (1 Pet 1:17).

And what does all of this mean? Why is it emphasized so much? It is because men tend to trust in a profession, or in an outward identity with God. Thus the Jews relied upon what they were called, and made their boast in the Law, which was, as a covenant, given exclusively to them (Rom 2:17). Because that matter is addressed later in this chapter, I will forgo further comments at this time.

While men tend to distinguish themselves from others by their creeds, names, and proper positions, these are not the primary distinctions. To be sure, God will not condone the embrace of a lie, or holding to doctrines that are not true. However, neither will He condone the person or church who is meticulous in doctrine, but fails to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). We have the church in Ephesus as an example. *“I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love”* (Rev 2:2-4).

THE SEPARATION OF THE RACE

According to the flesh, the sons of men were separated with Israel in mind. Thus it is written, *“When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the children of Israel”* (Deut 32:8).

Now, that is a noble distinction. Yet, it did not give the Jews cause to imagine they were not guilty of sin, or did not require a righteousness from God. Jerusalem was destroyed as well as Babylon! David was punished as well as

loving everyone the same. Thus, they affirm, God loves the drunkard as much as He does the fervent servant of the Lord. No such representation is ever given in Scripture. In fact it contradicts what is said about God’s attitude toward people. For example, God referred to David as *“a man after My own heart”* (1 Sam 13:14). He also affirmed *“Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated”* (Rom 9:13). The Lord referred to Abraham as *“My friend”* (Isa 41:8). John was *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* (John 20:2). God told Israel *“if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people”* (Ex

The blight of spiritual mediocrity and indifference are so common, few people consider them to be of any consequence at all. If such views are acceptable with God, then He a respecter of persons, and does show partiality.

Cain. There is no partiality or respect of persons with God. That is a truth it is to our advantage to grasp more fully.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Suffice it to say, multitudes of professed believers are conducting their lives as though God DID respect persons. Even though they lack the righteousness of God, they imagine they are received by God because of their position, or the church they attend, or some other imagination. They are not endeavoring to fight the good fight of faith, and thus lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). Yet, they imagine they are saved, or at least that they stand a good chance of getting into heaven.

The blight of spiritual mediocrity and indifference are so common, few people consider them to be of any consequence at all. If such views are acceptable with God, then He a respecter of persons, and does show partiality.

Unable to receive this, some affirm that God’s lack of partiality is revealed in

19:5). In Jesus, that kind of preference is brought to its apex. It is said of those in the Son, *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people”* (1 Pet 2:9). Do you imagine God loves everyone the same, or that there are none who are favored before Him?

Being no respecter of persons means **God will not violate His character to either accept or reject men.** He will remain true to Himself, for He *“cannot deny Himself”* (2 Tim 2:13). If a non-Jew like Cornelius prays and gives alms out of a good heart, his prayers and alms will come up before God (Acts 10:4). If a disciplined church like Ephesus, noted for testing the false prophets, is found lacking love for Jesus, they will be rebuked and threatened with removal (Rev 2:1-4). There is no respect of persons with God. In confirmation of this, His judgment will *“begin at the house of God”* (1 Pet 4:17). God will not overlook the lack of righteousness—not even among those of His own house!

SIN AND THE LAW

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.”

The Spirit continues to bring home to our hearts the need for a righteousness from

God. He has already shown that human nature is so corrupt it embraces sin eagerly, and does not engage in a continual effort to know God and appropriate His righteousness. All are guilty, none are innocent. All are deserving of judgment and condemnation, and none have attained unto true righteousness. Rest assured, God would

the lake of fire. Rather, it is to confirm their need of a righteousness from God. It is also designed to show us that apart from Divine intervention that righteousness will not be appropriated.

The Gentiles sinned *“without the Law,”* but they did not sin without testimony. They had the witness of both

that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet 4:6). He is doubtless referring to an earlier statement he made regarding Christ preaching to *“spirits.”* *“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water”* (1 Pet 3:18-20).

Thus, in the judgment of those who had no law, they will not be measured by what they did not obtain. Rather, they will be judged in accordance with what was given to them.

not provide His righteousness for us if we did not stand in need of it.

We will now see that the entrance of the Law did not change the human condition. Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles were deterred by the Law. Sin continued to ravage the race, thereby confirming its need for a righteousness from God.

Remember, God is no respecter of persons, and thus shows no partiality. **Whether sin is committed in the absence of Law, or while one is in possession of it, it still is subject to the wrath of God.**

SINNING WITHOUT THE LAW

Notice, the text does NOT say those sinning *“without law”* will be excused because they received no law from God. Neither, indeed, does it say those who sinned without the law will be judged without the law. Those are contrivances of men that obscure the reasoning of the text. Those who have sinned without the benefit of Divine law will *“perish,”* or be destroyed without it.

The purpose of this text is not to explain why people will be consigned to

nature and their conscience, and both are powerful witnesses. They had to suppress the truth, as meager as it may appear, in order to continue in their sin.

Thus, in the judgment of those who had no law, they will **not** be measured by what they did **not** obtain. Rather, they will be judged in accordance with what was given to them. The Spirit has already shown us that the Gentiles failed to listen to the testimony of nature and their conscience. In so doing, He is removing all excuse for sin from men. He is confirming that there really is no one who, of themselves, is righteous. There is a universal need for righteousness among the Gentiles. Further, they are not innocent in the matter.

I am careful to say that we must not press this text beyond the point being made by the Spirit. Universal condemnation is NOT the point, but universal need—and there is a great difference between the two. As to the eternal status of those who were *“without law,”* that is an arena in which we are not licensed to operate.

Peter informs us that *“the gospel was preached also to those who are dead,*

I realize great controversy rages over these texts. In my judgment, it is far better to take them as they stand, acknowledging they are most profound, extending beyond the perimeter of human knowledge. Believing it will help us refrain from making unwarranted judgments concerning others.

SINNING IN THE LAW

While the Gentiles sinned *“without law,”* the Jews did so *“in the law,”* or under the tutelage of the Law. With all of its meticulous instructions and precise definitions, it could not remove man’s basic tendency to sin. Even with its many threats, it remained powerless to change the human nature. The spirit does not say those who did not sin under the Law will be exonerated by the Law. Sin is again assumed, for the Lord is establishing there is no one who does not need the righteousness of God.

Just as the Gentiles will be held accountable for listening to nature and their conscience, so the Jews will be held accountable for listening to the Law. They will be measured by the very Law in which they made their boast. That law will not support them. They are basically sinful, and the Law cannot pronounce such a person righteous.

NOT HEARERS BUT DOERS ARE JUSTIFIED

“⁴³ . . . for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified . . .” Here is an appeal to the Law itself,

which possessed a righteousness of its own. Elsewhere it is called *“the righteousness of the law”* (Rom 2:26; 8:4). Such a righteousness is purely idealistic,

and no person actually possesses it. Those who imagine they do are only deceived. Paul referred to this kind of righteousness as a *“mine own righteousness, which is of*

the law” (Phil 3:9). He knew that kind of righteousness would not hold up before the throne of God. It did not depend upon God, but upon men. That is why Paul called it *“my own righteousness.”*

There is an advantage to hearing the Law, but it is not total advantage. As it is written, *“What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God”* (Rom 3:1-2). As our text will show, the Law gave no lasting advantage simply because it was heard or received. The advantage came in the DOING of it.

The Law promised life, or justification, to the doer. *“And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them”* (Ex 20:11). *“Ye shall*

therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5). Nehemiah affirmed this also (Neh 9:29). Ezekiel declared this to be the case (Ezek 20:11,13,21). Jesus announced this principle to a certain lawyer (Lk 10:28). Paul affirms it to the Romans (10:5) and the Galatians (Gal 3:12).

THE DOERS OF THE LAW

This is not a suggestion that such a person exists. Rather, it is affirming what the Law promised. It was a sincere promise, yet one which required more than man could give. The Law had to be done in its entirety, from the ceremonial to the moral requirements. The summation of the Law should have made it apparent that it was never intended to give life. *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your*

soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart” (Deut 6:5-6).

With an expertise that can only come through the Spirit, Paul has shown that no member of the human race has qualified for the justification, or life, offered by the law. After all, the Law *“is not made for a righteous man”* (1 Tim 1:9). That is, it was not a moral yardstick to identify who is really righteous. Instead, it pointed out that no one was righteous, but that all had gone astray. As it is written, *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:19-20).

A WRITING IN THE HEART

“... for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.” Verses fourteen and fifteen are the conclusion of a parenthetical phrase that began in verse 13. The entire parenthesis (vs 13-15) is an elaboration of verse twelve, *“For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.”*

The point is that God has provided all men with a law. Formally, it was written on tables of stone, and given as a covenant to Israel. But it was also given intuitively, blazoned upon the conscience of those who did not receive it upon tables of stone. Now the Apostle takes that matter further. He will confirm the Gentiles are not innocent, even though no covenant of law was made with them. They did receive something.

This is spiritual reasoning, necessary because of man’s inclination to justify himself and excuse his sin. The flesh does everything it can to produce a justifiable reason for transgression. However, the

Even though man has fallen and is the slave of Satan, he still retains a likeness to God. That likeness is found with the thought processes. There remains in sinners a tendency toward Divine law.

Spirit will not allow excuses to be given. All men have ignored something in order to sin. With the Gentiles, it was their conscience.

“DOING” BY NATURE

“... for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law.” Even though man has fallen and is the slave of Satan, he still retains a likeness to God. That likeness is found with the thought processes. There

remains in sinners a tendency toward Divine law. Every nation, whether primitive or cultured, has sought to enforce some kind of law. They have developed rewards for keeping this law, and punishment for violating it. While all of the laws do not reflect the truth of God’s law, yet they reflect the *“work of the law,”* which is to define wrong and provide penalties for its violation.

All of this is done apart from any Divine coercion, and in spite of the devil’s promotion of lawlessness. It is not the result of education, or social influences that have molded the character of the Gentile world. *“By nature”* means the described work has resulted from something born in us, as distinguished from something developed through mental disciplines. This natural law is faintly mirrored in the brute creation. The ant, for example, provides food for itself in the summer, and gathers in a harvest, *“having no guide, overseer, or ruler”* (Prov 6:6-8). Bees know how to build cells and store honey. Beavers know how to cut wood and build dams. All of this is done intuitively, without a written code. It is a testimony to us.

Man, who is a higher creation than the creatures of nature, also possesses intuitive powers. They are of a higher order. Men must learn to build, store, plant, and sow. But when it comes to right and wrong, good and evil, a sense of it remains, even though eroded by iniquity.

In this verse, “*doing*” does not mean fulfilling all of the details of the Law intuitively. Rather it means endeavoring to develop and enforce some moral standard. Thus many, if not all, heathen nations have laws concerning murder, theft, honoring parents, and the like. They also have ways of enforcing those laws, ensuring they are not violated to the detriment of their society. Thus they “*do instinctively what the law requires.*”^{NRSV} They seek to manage human conduct.

The Spirit is not speaking of an exact replica of the law within the human conscience, but only a faint image of it. Just as the Divine image within man has been marred by sin, so the instinctiveness of right and wrong are crude and incomplete. Yet, this circumstance renders men without excuse.

Every Man Enlightened

There is an expression in the Gospel of John that illumines this passage. It speaks of the Lord Jesus coming into the world. Of that entrance it is written, “*That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*”^{NKJV} (John 1:9). The phrase of interest is “*which gives light to every man.*” This phrase does not change, whether we read the verse as saying the enlightening One was coming into the world, or everyone that comes into the world is enlightened.

Viewed from the standpoint of our text, this accounts for the Gentiles doing by nature the things contained in the law. A sort of inner illumination was given to them—a remnant of the Divine image which shows the necessity of avoiding evil and doing good. It is not adequate to save a person, but it is sufficient to remove all excuses for sin, and confirm that a righteousness from God is needed.

LAW UNTO THEMSELVES

“... these, although not having the

law, are a law to themselves.” Having no written law is not the same as having NO law. By saying the Gentiles were “*a law unto themselves,*” the Spirit means their intuitive knowledge of right and wrong was to them what the Law of Moses was to Israel.

The Gentiles were just as responsible for living up to their inner law, as the Israelites were for living up to the Law of Moses. Their law was a lesser one, but still needed to be obeyed.

In this passage we learn that men are not as destitute of spiritual knowledge as Satan would have us believe. That condition accounts for the complete rejection of human righteousness, regardless of the level of enlightenment enjoyed. The righteousness of men can never be anything but partial and inconsistent. Both of these traits are unacceptable to God, and will not survive the day of judgment.

The conscience is not a perfect judge, for it can be distorted and fragmentary in its conviction. However, the smallest restraining and compelling power is honored by God.

THE WORK OF THE LAW

“... who show the work of the law written in their hearts.” The “*work of the law*” is the impression of the need for discriminating between good and evil. The work is crude, but the likeness of God’s law is perceived. The worst of societies have known there are things to be suppressed and things to be encouraged.

If you were to take the details of their concepts, they would not agree with the law. Some societies allow for murder, adultery, and other forms of immorality. The “*work of the law*” is seen in the attempt to structure life, identifying good and evil. There is a sense that God “*is,*” and that He should be worshiped and

served. Thus men have created idols and given themselves to the service of what they conceive to be greater than themselves. Technically, they are wrong. Yet their very actions confirm “*the work of the law*” within them. They knew enough to make their sin indefensible.

By saying the work of the law is “*written in their hearts,*” the text means it is part of their nature—born into them by Divine appointment. It is an aspect of the Divine image that men bear.

THEIR CONSCIENCE

“... their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.” The conscience, one has said, is equal to a thousand witnesses. It is ever present with us, and will not let us go. It can condemn us or approve us. It is like a judge that presides over the lives of men.

The conscience is not a perfect judge, for it can be distorted and fragmentary in its conviction. However, the smallest restraining and compelling power is honored by God. God will hold men accountable for their response to their conscience.

The conscience testifies to the work of the law written upon the heart. It shouts out to men when they do wrong, and commends them when they do good. All of this is highly limited, particularly regarding the Gentiles. Yet, it is sufficient to provoke them to seek the Lord and a better understanding.

THEIR THOUGHTS

By nature, the Gentiles contend with a condemning and approving conscience. In their thoughts men without the true knowledge of God wrestle with a sense of right and wrong. The Divine image within man is marvelously confirmed by this circumstance. The conscience produces thoughts that aggressively condemn wrong, or set about to justify what is conceived to be right.

The worst of men have thought more about good and evil, and right and wrong, than they are willing to admit. We know this is the case, because the Holy Spirit argues that men are inexcusable before

God because of **thoughts** induced by their conscience.

By nature, men call themselves into their own moral court. In it, their conscience testifies to the character of their work. The thoughts of men are like lawyers that plead the case to the conscience. Some thoughts are accusatory, and others argue for the acquittal of the person.

There is no individual who does not

KNOWLEDGE of right and wrong. It is NOT speaking of a will, or basic desire, to do good and avoid evil. That is an important distinction to see. If one doubts this to be the case, ponder that, without exception, *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

Sin has so corrupted men that they WANT to sin—want to please themselves. This is a dominating desire, and is so strong all men suppress retaining God in their knowledge. That is why they do not

but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Rom 7:18). Alas, this is too hard for some to receive. Within the Christian community there are some who contend this is not true of believers—even though one of the premier believers confessed it.

If the sanctified will cannot perfectly carry out its desires, what of the will that remains under the domination of sin? What power of nature enables the will to prefer good and hate evil? There is no such power in the natural man. If this were not the case, it would not be necessary to be born again (John 3:3-6).

This passage has dealt with knowledge, not will. It has also confirmed the knowledge was suppressed and rejected in preference for personal gratification. This is true of all men, whether they be Jew or Greek.

By nature, men call themselves into their own moral court. In it, their conscience testifies to the character of their work. The thoughts of men are like lawyers that plead the case to the conscience.

contend with this form of inner examination. Some, because of their love for sin, eventually sear the conscience, silencing its voice and thus breaking down the last barrier to deep involvement in sin. But the fact that they had to contend with their conscience, and think about what they did, confirms the work of the law was written upon their heart. How precious is a good conscience!

NOT SPEAKING OF THE WILL

This passage is speaking of the

seek the Lord. That is why the Lord has to *“seek”* them, else they will never be found (Lk 19:10).

Men must guard against the tendency to place too much emphasis upon the will of man. It is not as strong as some have imagined. Even after we have been *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17), our wills cannot fully implement what they desire. As it is written, *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me,*

A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

Again, the point of these powerful arguments is that men need a righteousness from God. This is the righteousness that is revealed in the Gospel. It is a righteousness that can only be appropriated by faith.

It is man’s Unrighteous condition that compelled him to choose and serve sin. He is fundamentally unrighteous, and stands in need of another righteousness which is not his own (Phil 3:9).

THE DAY GOD WILL JUDGE

“6 . . . in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” With the parenthetical statement completed, the Spirit now returns to the thought initiated in verse twelve. The full thought is as follows, *“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law . . . in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel”* (v. 13,16). That is, the time when those without law and those with law will be judged is *“in the day when God will judge”* all men. This is *“the judgment”* to which all men have been appointed (Heb 9:27), and which no man can avoid.

“The secrets” of reference include the *“thoughts”* mentioned in verse fifteen; i.e., *“their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”* These were not publicly uttered, but were kept within. Men struggled with their own sins, even though they did not always acknowledge such struggles. Saul of Tarsus was not the last person who found it hard to *“kick against the pricks”* of a goading conscience (Acts 9:5; 26:14). By the grace of God, he was brought out of the condition because he placed a high value on his conscience, always honoring it in accord with the level of his understanding (Acts 22:3-4; 23:1; 24:16; 26:6). He too, in spite of honoring his conscience, needed a righteousness from God.

In the end, in the day of judgment, we will find that no person continuing in sin was truly innocent. We must beware of any tendency to excuse sin, or imagine we have no need of a righteousness from God. If men will be judged for not honoring their untrained conscience, what will be the portion of those who have heard the Gospel of Christ, and have willingly remained in sin?

This is the judgment that will result in *“eternal life”* for those seeking for glory, honor, and immortality. It is also the judgment where *“indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish”* will be passed on every soul of man that does evil” (2:7-9). It is appropriately called

“*THE day*,” for the day of judgment is always viewed as singular (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Rom 2:5; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:71 John 4:17; Jude 6).

BY JESUS CHRIST

God is going to judge the world by His Son. That will cast the judgment in the most favorable light, for the Son walked in this world, facing the devil, relying upon God, and tasting of the human experience. Therefore it is written, “*Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead*”^{NKJV} (Acts 17:31). It is Jesus who has been “*ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead*”^{NKJV} (Acts 10:42). The judgment seat belongs to Him. Therefore, “*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*”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:10).

This is particularly important. The Gospel is the good news concerning Christ. Inherent in that wonderful message is the availability of a righteousness from God. That

righteousness will carry us through the judgment, passing all Divine scrutiny. However, the day of judgment will be a dreadful day for those who have rejected this righteousness from God, choosing to develop their own imagined righteousness. This is a most serious consideration, to which all men do well to take heed.

Christians are hearing about the day of judgment, the reward of the godly, or the punishment of the ungodly. Where that condition exists, the Gospel is really not being preached.

The Gospel of Christ is against the backdrop of the conditions described in our text. It assumes universal guilt and

The Gospel of Christ is against the backdrop of the conditions described in our text. It assumes universal guilt and helplessness. It also assumes the essentiality of a righteousness from God, and the total unacceptability of a humanly developed righteousness.

ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL

Paul often refers to the Gospel as his own (i.e., Rom 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8). He does this because it had been committed to him as a stewardship, and he was the custodian of it. He had also entered into it, being himself joined to the Lord and partaking of its benefits.

Why is it that the judgment of the secrets of men is associated with the Gospel? This is a totally foreign thought to many believers. These days, few

helplessness. It also assumes the essentiality of a righteousness from God, and the total unacceptability of a humanly developed righteousness.

The fact of imminent judgment, and the devouring of God’s adversaries bring an urgency to the Gospel that all discerning souls realize. It is all “*according to*” the Gospel. Those who imagine the Gospel to be simplistic do well to look more closely in it. They will soon behold marvelous things.

CONCLUSION

The gravity of the text reviewed should be apparent to all. Sin has brought a condition upon humanity with wide sweeping affects. Men have been left “*inexcusable*.” The corrupt human nature has consistently ignored the testimony of nature, the witness of the conscience, and the unmistakable voice of the Law. Even when men knew God, they thrust the knowledge from them. They refused to retain Him in their knowledge. They also ignored their conscience, finding reasons to continue in their sin. Even when given the written law of God, men excused their proclivity to sin and sat in judgment upon those with the same vices as themselves.

Until these things are properly seen, little value will be placed upon “*the righteousness of God*” that is revealed in the Gospel. As long as men retain the

deluded view that they are good, or that the capacity for goodness remains in them, they will see no need for a righteousness from God.

In salvation, God has not only provided for the needs of men, but for the expression of His own graciousness. Although He owes nothing to any person, He has graciously provided His own righteousness to them, undeserving though they be. His Son assumed all of their liabilities, thereby allowing God to remain righteous in justifying fallen man. That justification includes the complete exoneration from guilt. It also includes the conferment of a righteousness that will stand the test of Divine judgment. Even the revelation of the “*secrets of men*” will diminish that righteousness. It ought to be clear that this righteousness is indispensable.

I have every confidence that a firm persuasion of a need for righteousness, together with the glorious sound of the Gospel, will produce the right response. However, where the conviction of a need for “*the righteousness of God*” is lacking, and where the Gospel is not being proclaimed, men are shut up to condemnation. It is a situation from which they cannot extricate themselves. They must both be delivered, and receive righteousness and eternal life as gifts from God. Without these, there simply is no hope.

When we begin to assign values, let the preeminent ones go to God, Christ, the Gospel, and this “*great salvation*.” Let us place such a high premium upon the righteousness of God that we will not allow an evil heart of unbelief to rob us of its presence and blessing.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 6



BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES ARE GUILTY

(BOTH NEED A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD)

^{2:17}Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written."
(Romans 2:17-24^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. BOASTING IN FLESHLY DISTINCTIONS (2:17a)
- II. CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH (2:17b-18)
- III. THINKING THAT IS TOO HIGH (2:19a)
- IV. FORM AND REALITY (2:19b-20)
- V. SCRIBES AND PHARISEES AGAIN (2:21-22)
- VI. BOASTING IN THE LAW (2:23)
- VII. THE NAME OF GOD BLASPHEMED BECAUSE OF THOSE WEARING HIS NAME (2:24)

The flesh possesses an inherent tendency to overestimate natural capacities. Although God has spoken at length concerning the fall of man and his need for justification, men continue to think they can measure up to God's requirements if only they have enough information. This is not the truth, and the

Spirit is effectively confirming that in this text. He has shown the universal and consistent decline of humanity when left to their own resources. The Gentiles and Jews stand together in this assessment. Neither God nor Satan forced humanity to decline. At the very seat of their being, where the will resides, they chose what God had condemned.

Nature itself shouted to them of God's "eternal power and Godhead." Their own conscience cried out in objection. Still, whenever men were delivered over to their own wills, they plummeted downward. There were not exceptions.

All of this is most unpleasant to the

flesh. It does not want to hear of its own deficiency and corruption. Nevertheless, God does not spare bringing these things to our attention. If we are going to seek "first" God's righteousness (Matt 6:33), we must first be persuaded that we have none of our own. With powerful words, the Spirit is confirming this is the case. In our own selves, we are unrighteous. In fact, the very best part of us (our righteousnesses) are filthy rags before God, to be disdained and discarded with haste (Isa 64:6).

Now the Lord will show further evidence of the deep corruption of mankind. He will focus upon the people who received more than any other society, the Jews. Although unparalleled advantages were given to them, they still did not rise from the moral pit into which sin had cast humanity. They had more

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

information than anyone else. They were blessed above all others. They were given every possible benefit apart from regeneration, and yet sin dominated them, and did so ruthlessly.

Because of the strength of this argument, I am compelled to restate the advantage they received. It is staggering to consider. If external favor is sufficient to induce righteousness, the Jews would

certainly have been righteous.

They were given God's own words. *"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God"* (Rom 3:1-2). Advantage and advance, however, are not the same. If receiving the Word of God is of itself sufficient to correct human

conduct, then a moral change should have been evident in Israel. But it was not! Even with such a marvelous advantage, flesh remained unchanged.

Now the Spirit will confirm it is not possible to obtain Divine acceptance by means of conferring blessings upon the flesh. It is not possible to have more fleshly distinction than Israel, and yet it was not adequate to make them righteous.

BOASTING IN FLESHLY DISTINCTION

2:17a *Indeed you are called a Jew . . .* "In all of the world, and throughout all history, there is only one nation that has achieved formal acceptance by God. That is the Jewish nation. This does not set well with the nationalist, but it perfectly accords with the Scriptures. Hear the Word of the Lord.

flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil 3:4-6).

peoples were classified as "Gentiles," or "the nations." They had no overt distinction before God. Only the Jew possessed that.

With great power, the Spirit will show that no name, national identity, or mere profession will gain the approval of God. If the Jews, favored above all fleshly people, needed a righteousness from God, there can be no question about every one else requiring it.

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 14:2). *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt"* (Deut 7:6-8). These are only representative of a number of similar Divine affirmations (Deut 26:18-19; 28:9-10; Ex 19:5-6).

All fleshly glorying is wrong. However, if it were allowed, it could only be based upon fleshly distinctions created and recognized by God Himself. These belonged exclusively to the Jews.

CALLED A JEW

The word "Jew" is used thirty-two times in Scripture. It is first used in the book of Esther, where it occurs no less than eight times. All of them refer to Mordecai, carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonian captivity. Jesus is called "a Jew" (John 4:9), as well as Peter (Acts 10:28), Aquila (Acts 18:2), Apollos (Acts 18:24), and Paul (Acts 22:3). This section of Romans has affirmed the Gospel is God's power unto salvation "to the Jew first" (1:16). Eternal reward and punishment will also be "to the Jew first" (2:9-10).

Notice, there is not a solitary reference to anything unrelated to "Jewry." There is no reference to any Grecian learning from Tarsus (if he had even participated in such). No earthly credentials were cited, whether academic supremacy or oratorical skills. All fleshly glorying is wrong. However, if it were allowed, it could only be based upon fleshly distinctions created and recognized by God Himself. These belonged exclusively to the Jews.

The word "Jews" occurs forty-five times, also being mentioned first in the book of Esther. The mother of Timothy is called a "Jewess" (Acts 16:1), as well as Drusilla, the wife of Felix the Governor (Acts 24:24). I only mention this to point out the recognition and use of this term by the Holy Spirit.

PAUL'S PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

To confirm this distinction is absolutely unique, Paul cites the fleshly advantages he had. **They ALL pertained to his identity with Israel.** "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the

THE POINT TO BE PROVED

The Spirit is stripping from humanity all self-confidence, showing that all men need a righteousness from God. He will particularly focus upon the Jews, for they alone had an outward basis which appeared to justify boasting. All other

The only reason for the distinction of this people is God's choice and blessing of them. Surely, if

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

fleshly distinction can bring Divine acceptance, the Jews will qualify.

God's exclusive dealings were with them. *"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen"* (Rom 9:4-5).

Adoption. God made them His own people—*"adoption."* Above all other peoples, they belonged to Him Ex 19:5; Deut 7:6; 10:15; 26:19). He focused His attention upon them, even populating the world with them in mind (Deut 32:8). They belonged exclusively to Him.

Glory. The Lord revealed Himself to them, showing them facets of His Person that were not vouchsafed to any other people—*"glory."* They saw more of the Lord than any other people. His glory led them, fed them, and protected them. When He spoke, He spoke to them. When He revealed Himself, He did so to them.

Covenants. Almighty God made agreements only with them. He made certain promises to them, showing His commitment to them—*"covenants."* He told them if they would obey Him, they would receive unprecedented blessings. Perhaps you have not thought recently of the magnitude of some of those promises.

- ▶ No male or female would be barren among them or their cattle—Deut 7:14.
- ▶ God would bless their water and their bread—Ex 23:25a.
- ▶ He would take sickness away from them—Ex 23:25b.
- ▶ He would make all of their enemies turn from them—Ex 23:27.
- ▶ He would drive all of the enemies from their land in one year, lest the beasts of the field multiply against them—Ex 23:29.
- ▶ He would bless them in the city and in the field—Deut 28:3.
- ▶ God would bless the offspring of the people, land, cattle, and sheep—Deut 28:4.

- ▶ Their baskets and kneading bowls would be blessed with an abundance of food—Deut 28:5.
- ▶ They would be blessed when they came in, and blessed when they went out—Deut 28:6.
- ▶ God would cause their enemies to be smitten before them, and run seven different ways—Deut 28:7.
- ▶ He would command a blessing upon their storehouses—Deut 28:8a.
- ▶ Everything they put their hand to would prosper—Deut 28:8b.
- ▶ They would be plenteous in goods, offspring, cattle, and crops—Deut 28:11.
- ▶ The heavens would give rain to them at the proper time—Deut 28:12a.
- ▶ They would lend to many nations, and never borrow—Deut 28:12b.
- ▶ God would make them the head, and not the tail—Deut 28:13.

were given directions on how to approach God. No other nation had a tabernacle, or a God-honored priesthood. No other sacrifices were acceptable, and God's glory filled no other dwelling devoted to Divine service. It all belonged to them. *"The service"* refers to the activities related to the tabernacle, and later the Temple (Ex 27:19; 30:16; 39:40; Heb 9:6,9). It belonged exclusively to the Jews.

The promises. The promises of a Savior and a new and effective covenant were given to the Jews (Lk 1:54,55,69-74; Acts 2:39; 3:25-26; 13:32-33). No other people received promises of either a Savior or a new covenant. It is said of the Gentiles, they were *"strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world"* (Eph 2:12).

The fathers. This term refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the progenitors of the Jewish people. It also included the faithful leaders of that unique nation (Acts 3:22; 13:32; Rom 11:28; 15:8; Heb 1:1). There were no Gentile priests, prophets, or kings among the people of Israel. When it came to God-blessed progenitors, they all belonged to Israel.

There were no Gentile priests, prophets, or kings among the people of Israel. When it came to God-blessed progenitors, they all belonged to Israel.

These are only a sampling of the covenants God made with Israel. If Divine commitments alone can make men better, these surely would have been effective.

The Law. The giving of the Law was an historical epoch. In this revelation, God communicated a moral code of remarkable precision. Sin was defined, and the Sovereignty of God revealed. **If Divine tutelage in the matter of right and wrong is sufficient to spark a change in humanity, this certainly would do it.** Even the giving of the Law was most marvelous. They received it *"by the direction of angels"*^{NKJV} (Acts 7:53). Galatians 3:19 reminds us *"it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."* The Ten Commandments, the *"words of the covenant"* (Ex 34:28) were written by the very finger of God (Ex 31:18). No one else was so favored.

The Service. The worship of God belonged exclusively to them. They alone

Jesus came from their lineage. Even the Lord Jesus, according to the flesh, came from Jewish ancestry (Rom 1:3). The promised *"Son,"* whose name would be called Immanuel, was promised to them (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7). The lineage of the Lord Jesus, according to the flesh, is strictly through Jewish ancestry. Although Luke does trace Christ's lineage back to Adam, it is through the ancestors of the Jewish race.

GROUND FOR BOASTING?

People boast of being an American, but what is that to compare with being a Jew! Above being a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29), Paul was a Jew. Our text will affirm, however, that this was no ground for boasting before God. The mouths of all who are not righteous before God are, by that very condition, stopped by God. It makes no difference what they have received, or how unique they have been according to the flesh. The flesh, even when blessed by God, cannot produce

acceptable goodness.

We will see this is a most relevant

facet of the truth. Those in Christ *“have no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3). God will allow *“no flesh to glory in His sight”*

(1 Cor 1:29). You may be sure, if Jewish flesh cannot glory, no flesh can. They own the only fleshly distinction before God.

CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

“2:17b . . . and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,¹⁸ and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law . . . ” Here is an extensive delineation of *“confidence in the flesh”*—or glorying in external, or apparent advantage. This is particularly reprehensible since the new creation has *“no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3), for in the flesh *“dwells no good thing”* (Rom 7:18). It *“profits nothing”* (John 6:63), even when given every possible advantage.

REST ON THE LAW

This does not speak of a love for God’s law, as expressed in Psalm 119:97. *“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”* Those who were upbraided were merely boasting in their possession of the Law, not the keeping of it. It was as though they had received a valuable and rare relic, but found no real utility for it. Their reliance upon the law was, as someone has said, *“blind and mechanical.”*^{Robertson} The possession of the Law, as well as their academic understanding of it, was thought to have made them superior. Jesus put it this way to the Pharisees. *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39).

By resting, or relying, upon the Law, they trusted in what God had given rather than in God Himself. The fact that He gave them the Law was taken as a sign of Divine approval. Because of the blindness of their heart, they were unaware that the Law was given *“that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* (Rom 3:19).

MAKE YOUR BOAST IN GOD

The Living God was viewed more as

a national treasure than as the Sovereign God of heaven. He belonged, as it were, to them. Thus they failed to see the situation correctly. They belonged to the Lord, He did **not** belong to them, as though He was their private possession.

In this case, although the Jew was living in condemnation, he glorified in

Of course, Jewry is the only religious institution God has ever sanctioned—and that was only until the entrance of the Savior into the world. If such boasting is not allowed for the Jew, you may be sure it is soundly condemned in institutions that are purely of human origin.

God being, as he thought, the God of the Jews. Later the Spirit will point out the absurdity of such an assumption. *“Is He the God of the Jews only? is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also”* (3:29).

To *“boast in God”* is to view Him as exclusively identified with an institution—in this case, the Jews. Of course, Jewry is the only religious institution God has ever sanctioned—and that was only until the entrance of the Savior into the world. If such boasting is not allowed for the Jew, you may be sure it is soundly condemned in institutions that are purely of human origin.

KNOW HIS WILL

Knowing the will of God is ordinarily

commendable, and is the objective for every child of God (Rom 12:10). But that is not the case here. This is a prideful, or boastful, knowledge. It is not the spiritual knowledge of the will of God (Col.1:9-10). Here the knowledge of the Law is vainly placed above the doing of it. **The law did not pronounce the blessing upon those who “KNEW” the Law, but those who DID it** (Gal 3:12). The propensity of the Jews to glory more in knowing that in doing is epitomized in the Pharisees. Once, when they sent officers to arrest Jesus, the men returned without Him. The Scripture records the dialog between the officers and the Pharisees. Here is how they reasoned. *“Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, ‘Why have you not brought Him?’ The officers answered, ‘No man ever spoke like this Man!’ Then the Pharisees answered them, ‘Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him. But this crowd that **does not know** the law is accursed.”*

The Law did not say the person who “does not know the law is cursed.” Rather, it declared *“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* (Gal 3:12; Deut 27:26). Being an expert in what God requires does commend the individual to God. That is not sufficient ground for boasting.

To view it another way, knowing all of the answers cannot make a person righteous.

APPROVE THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT

Again, approving things that are excellent is the objective for every true believer. As it is written, *“And this I pray,*

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent" (Phil 1:9-10). However, that is not the condition described in this text. This is a self-confidence produced by the flesh. It approaches the "approval" in question from a purely academic viewpoint.

This type of approval was seen in the Pharisees, who sat in judgment upon the conduct of even Jesus and His disciples. Thinking themselves experts in the Law, they bound their own perception of the Law upon others. That perception, however, was a human tradition, and not the real meaning of the Law. Matthew provides us a vivid example of this kind of reasoning. "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Matt 15:1-3).

The scribes and Pharisees were not the last people to bind their own tradition upon others, imagining themselves capable of "approving things that are excellent."

INSTRUCTED OUT OF THE LAW

According to Divine mandate, the Jews were taught out of the Law from early childhood. As it is written, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut 6:7).

This was good knowledge, and not to be despised. However, it did not make the individual righteous, regardless of the extent of the knowledge gained. At the very best, the Law, together with the Prophets, were able to make the submitted one "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15), but it could not bring the experience of salvation. That comes through Christ alone. As it is written, "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face

of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). That is quite different from glorying that one has been "instructed out of the Law." Such is vain boasting that places no value on Christ.

There is a significant point made in this text. Possessing the word, even having a sense of its meaning, is not sufficient to make a person righteous. Even if the individual is able to explain the circumstances under which Scripture was written, giving the historical context and profound language significations, it has no affect whatsoever on making the person righteous before God. A church, for example, that possesses the truth is not necessarily one that is commended by it. Some may boast of being "the New Testament church," imagining that their pattern and manners commend them

hope of Divine acceptance. That only comes through faith in Christ.

The Church at Ephesus

Recalling the church at Ephesus will suffice to confirm what we have said. Much like the Jews of old, they were experts in evaluating the conduct of others. They were even commended for their condemnation of gross doctrinal corruption. However, the single flaw they had was sufficient to cause their rejection if they did not repent. They had neglected Jesus Christ, who is made our righteousness. Here is the record. "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your

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before God. That is much like boasting in being a Jew, having the Scriptures, and being able to approve things that are excellent.

The purpose of redemption in Christ Jesus is not to produce a flawless organization. It is not to build a spiritual tower of Babel, the result of a unified human initiative. God is not seeking to restore the church at Jerusalem, or the commendable one at Philippi. His objective is not to fill every church with certain spiritual gifts. It is not even to assist men in building and maintaining a godly nation. All of those things may have a place, but it is certainly subordinate to the purpose of God.

The Divine initiative has always involved paving the way for the righteousness of God to be given to men. Without that righteousness, there is no

patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent" (Rev 2:1-5).

It should be evident that this type of conduct did not end with Ephesus. Many a person and church are living in practical alienation from God. Their love has cooled and their vision has dimmed. They may boast in their intellectual grasp of Scripture, and may point us to the precision of their religious activities. All of that does not make them righteous.

THINKING THAT IS TOO HIGH

^{19a} . . . and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes . . . ” Here the Jews are chided for thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. They did, indeed, gain Divine advantage in receiving the Law (Rom 3:1). They were a chosen people, and were favored above all other nations on the face of the earth. But none of that was owing to their own doing. Divine initiative brought it all.

The confidence of reference comes from being wise in ones own eyes (Prov 26:12). God’s view of such confidence is declared by the prophet Isaiah. “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa 5:21). This is not a confidence that comes from a sense of Divine acceptance or the experience of the grace of God. It is the result of thinking exposure to the truth, and an academic understanding of it, qualifies the individual to instruct others in the ways of the Lord. Let it be clear, this is emphatically not the case.

THE EXAMPLE OF NICODEMUS

Nicodemus is a case in point. While there is no evidence that he was a judgmental man, or that he was unduly harsh with others, the Lord pointed out his fundamental deficiency in spiritual matters. With a tone of authority Nicodemus said, “*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*” Quickly, Jesus announced that a new birth was necessary before one could “see” or “enter” into the Kingdom of God. After a brief elaboration, Nicodemus, with all of his acquaintance with the Law, still did not understand. He replied, “*How can these things be?*” It was then that our Lord exposed the depravity of a merely human understanding of the Law. “*Art*

thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:1-12). As I understand it,

As valuable as erudition is, it is not the heart of kingdom-understanding. A disciplined and logical mind, and a thorough acquaintance with the text of Scripture are not to be despised. However, neither are they to be elevated as though they were sufficient in themselves. They have no impact at all upon human character.

Nicodemus was not being obstinate, but had not yet seen the deficiency of nature in the matter of comprehending the things of God.

SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

As valuable as erudition is, it is not the heart of kingdom-understanding. A disciplined and logical mind, and a thorough acquaintance with the text of Scripture are not to be despised. However, neither are they to be elevated as though they were sufficient in themselves. They have no impact at all upon human character. They cannot change the affection or renew the heart. Neither, indeed, can they bring righteousness to the person possessing them. That is the point of our text.

There is a higher form of understanding. It does not promote pride,

or “puff up” those who have it, as earthly knowledge does (1 Cor 8:1). This is “*spiritual understanding,*” and it comes from God. It is the RESULT of true righteousness, and not the cause of it. Paul prayed for believers to have this kind of understanding. “*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col 1:9-10).

THE DESCRIBED PLIGHT

Those addressed in our text considered others “*blind,*” those who were “*in darkness,*,” “*foolish,*” and “*babes.*” That assessment, however, was not determined by the attainment of the people, but by comparing them with themselves. They were judged to be such simply because they were not Jews. They had not received the Law, and did not have an understanding of it. The haughty Jews, on the other hand, considered themselves “*guides,*” “*light,*” “*instructors,*” and “*teachers.*” This was not because they were any better in the eyes of the Lord. It was not because their hearts were more pure, or because they were righteous in the eyes of the Lord. It was solely upon the basis of external, or fleshly, advantage.

As real as that advantage was, however, it had not changed their character, cleansed their hearts, or made them pure in the eyes of the Lord. Their flesh was more cultured, it is true. However, it was still flesh, for “*that which is born of flesh is flesh,*” and can be nothing else. They too needed a righteousness from God. That necessity disqualified them from sitting in judgment upon others.

In this text, the real necessity is not moral purity, but receiving a

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

righteousness from God. That does not allow for immorality, but provides strength to kill it at its root—in the heart. To put it another way, righteousness from God brings with it a hatred for sin. That is because we become “*partakers of the Divine nature*,” which is repulsed by all forms of sin, whether they are expressed externally or not.

INSTITUTIONAL DEFICIENCY

In our time and place, institutionalism has been equated with

life in Christ Jesus. The institution trains and authorizes those who will speak for the Lord. The credentials conferred upon such people have nothing whatsoever to do with being born again, possessing the righteousness of God, or being taught by God. They are precisely the same kind of credentials of which the Jews boasted—except they are not as credible as theirs. The Jews DID receive the law from God, and were singularly blessed by Him above all people. No nation has ever enjoyed such a favored status—or any status at all,

for that matter.

In my judgment, those who exalt the institution owe us an explanation. What is it that excludes them from the rebuke of this very text? Have they been excluded in the matter of requiring a righteousness from God? If not, how is it that they speak so little of it, if, indeed, they ever do? This passage is certainly relevant to our day. It has all the freshness and power it did to the Romans. It is the peculiar prerogative of God’s word to always be relevant.

FORM AND REALITY

^{19b} . . . *having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.*²⁰ *An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.*” Here the Spirit develops a critical distinction between empty profession and spiritual possession.

“FORM”

Something that has “*form*” is made accessible to the human mind. “*Form*” is the orderly presentation of reality. It is not the reality itself, but so clothes the reality that it becomes useful. Thus, until the earth took form, no real purpose was served by it, and the glory of God could not be seen in it. “*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep*” (Gen 1:2; Jer 4:23). Until, however, the earth took form, it was not a suitable arena for the working of salvation in its midst.

Baptism

In the sixth chapter of this book, baptism is referred to as “*that form of doctrine to which you were delivered*” (6:17). It is a depiction of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Yet, it is not the reality of those things. Unless there is a real participation in them, neither obedience nor baptism has really occurred.

The Humility of Christ

When Jesus entered into the world,

He “*took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*” (Phil 2:7). But the matter extended to more than mere form. He fulfilled the form to the most exacting degree. “*He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Phil 2:8), and “*was tempted in all points like as we are*” (Heb 4:15).

Therefore, in our text, the ultimate possession is not merely the “*form of knowledge and of the truth.*” That is an advantage, but not the ultimate advantage. The Jews, however, rested in their possession of the “*oracles of God,*” even though in their hearts they were at

parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom” (Psa 51:6). The truth must be part of the individual before it brings eternal advantage. It cannot simply be housed in the memory, or embraced as a formal creed.

One aspect of the New Covenant that is especially precious pertains to this very matter. In His promise of the New Covenant, God said, “*I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts*” (Jer 31:33). Hebrews 8:10 reads, “*I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.*” This refers to a basic change in the nature of man. The Law of God is thus harmonious with the renewed human spirit. The individual finds it to be his preference, and continual subject of meditation (Psa 1:2).

The truth must be part of the individual before it brings eternal advantage. It cannot simply be housed in the memory, or embraced as a formal creed

THE LAW, NOT AN END OF ITSELF

The Law was not an end of itself. That is, it was not enough to simply have received it. To boast, therefore, in the knowledge of it was unwarranted. It was possible to be an expert in the sayings of the Law, and yet be totally lacking in righteousness before God. It was not intended to produce confidence in men. Rather, it was a schoolmaster, or tutor, “*to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Gal 3:24). Duly heeded, the Law will convince men of their need for a Savior, constraining them to call upon the name of the Lord.

variance with them. **The shell of the truth is not enough.** A mere academic, or theoretical knowledge is not sufficient to save the soul.

Truth within

God desires truth to be found in the inner recesses of man. As it is written, “*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward*

You see, then, how serious a condition is being described by the Spirit. Rather than bringing the Jews to an acute awareness of their need for a Savior, they imagined that they were exalted above all others by the mere possession of the Law. Thus they sat in judgment upon others, while failing to seek after a righteousness from God.

knowledge of these men.

Perhaps you have heard someone boast of knowing what the Scripture means through contextual, language, or historical considerations. Some have even said it is not possible to understand the Scriptures unless one has a working knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew. It all

have no spiritual power. It would be a time of falling away and strong delusion. The prophecy is relevant to this text. In Romans, the Jews are being upbraided for their feelings of superiority, even though they stood in need of a righteousness from God just like the Gentiles. The prophecy of reference confirms that precisely the same attitude became prevalent in the Gentile church.

Ultimately, true knowledge comes from acquaintance with God, through Christ, and by the Spirit. Although some may flinch at such a declaration, they cannot overthrow it. There is not a single aspect of salvation that can be experienced independently of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

*“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having a form of godliness but denying its power.** And from such people turn away!”^{NKJV} (2 Tim 3:1-5).*

Remember, the point of this passage is to show that all men need the righteousness revealed in the Gospel of Christ. Even those with expert knowledge of the Law need this righteousness. Their knowledge does not make them righteous.

may sound quite innocent, but it is not. It comes under the very subject of our text.

Ultimately, true knowledge comes from acquaintance with God, through Christ, and by the Spirit. Although some may flinch at such a declaration, they cannot overthrow it. There is not a single aspect of salvation that can be experienced independently of fellowship with the Father and the Son. Just as there is no valid work without faith, there is no spiritually valid knowledge that is developed solely by man. Our text is a sound condemnation of those who imagine such a knowledge does exist.

The Kingdom of God is so revealed that the form, or external identity, can be maintained, while lacking its inner power. The “power” is found in the righteousness of God which comes by faith. Where that righteousness is not found, there can be no spiritual power. Where it is found, confidence in the flesh is destroyed, for God has determined *“That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (1 Cor 1:29).

KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP

Confirming that fleshly knowledge (as compared with “*spiritual understanding*”), puffs up the flesh, behold how these people viewed those they instructed. They imagined themselves to be instructors “*of the foolish,*” and “*teachers of babes.*” And what was the basis of this observation? Was it spiritual immaturity, or a lack of acquaintance with God through Christ? Indeed not. Those so judged had simply not measured up to the donnish

FORM WITHOUT POWER

The Spirit declared a time would come when religion would flourish, yet

Even those with every possible external advantage need a righteousness from God. That should be apparent from the Gospel itself.

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES AGAIN

“²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”

subdue the flesh, for that can only be done through the Spirit. As it is written, “*if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live*” (Rom 8:13). In the energy of the flesh, men may change the appearance of the sin, but they cannot change its nature.

with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:20-23). Suffice it to say, an appearance of wisdom is not sufficient.

THE NECESSITY OF A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

Where the righteousness of God is not possessed, religious men are shut up to inconsistency. They will not be able to

The Impotence of Mere Discipline

In addressing this very matter, the Scriptures speak of the worthlessness of religious discipline, or procedures that rely on regimen. “*Therefore, if you died*

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

The “*basic principles of the world*” are carnal means of controlling the appetites of the flesh. At the highest end, they are represented in the Law and its attending ordinances. At the lowest end they are regimens and procedures developed by men to restrain an outbreak of wrong doing. They are also employed to culture the person from a mere external point of view.

Nearly all contemporary teaching on morality falls into this category—“*Basic principles,*” or rudiments, “*of the world.*” They are not spiritual in nature, nor do they produce spiritual results. They do have an appearance of wisdom. That is why those who hawk them to the spiritually ignorant are so successful in convincing men of their worth. But it is a “*self-imposed religion,*” void of any Divine influence. God is not in it, nor is salvation central to it. **It is an attempt to regulate the flesh without God or Christ.** The rules imposed upon men by this approach “*lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*”^{NIV} It cannot take away the desire to sin, which is the problem with fallen man.

difficulty—uncleanness within. Sin has defiled man at the very center of his nature. That is precisely why he needs a righteousness from God.

Referring to this condition, Jesus declared this about man’s righteousness. “*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*”^{NKJV} (Matt 5:20). How is it that our righteousness could “*exceed*” that of the Pharisees? It certainly could not come by mere human discipline, for they were masters at that. Jesus said they made their external lives “*clean*”—something

of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:6-9).

Ponder the gravity of the matter we are considering. Here was an approach to God that left people unchanged within—full of hypocrisy and iniquity. It left their hearts far from God, moved them to prefer the traditions of men, and caused them reject the commandment of God. Is it possible for a condition to be more serious?

I have taken the time to view the scribes and Pharisees because it is directly related to the attitude now condemned. This frame of mind is altogether too common in our day, and needs to be exposed for what it is. It may produce “*nice*” people, and aid in developing outward culture. However, it is not accepted by God. His requirement is that man possess the righteousness given by Him, and revealed in the Gospel.

Nearly all contemporary teaching on morality falls into this category—“*Basic principles,*” or rudiments, “*of the world.*” They are not spiritual in nature, nor do they produce spiritual results. They do have an appearance of wisdom.

DO YOU NOT TEACH YOURSELF?

“*You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?*”^{NKJV} Formalistic and lifeless religion has the trait of making people judgmental of those who do the very things found in

themselves. Speaking to teachers, the Spirit says, “*The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits*” (2 Tim 2:6). In this case, the teacher must first ingest the word he declares. That is another way of saying “*teach yourself.*”

In our day we have seen several examples of *Christian* teachers who have revealed their own abysmal ignorance of living unto God. Some of them fell into the very transgressions they vehemently denounced. Why do such things occur? **Because apart from the righteousness of God, no real change takes place within the individual.** And even if the righteousness was once obtained by faith, if it is not maintained by faith, the individual will revert back to inward uncleanness.

The Scriptures refer to this condition as “*always learning and never able to*

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

This approach to controlling eruptions of immorality was employed by the scribes and Pharisees. By its very nature, this course of action dealt only with the outward man. Thus Jesus severely indicted them. “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*” (Matt 23:25-28).

You see how their self-imposed rules did not correct the seat of man’s

relatively few professed believers have managed to do. However, that was not enough, for it did not address the matter of inward corruption.

The seriousness of this offense is worthy of special notation. In dealing only with outward conduct and appearance, the Pharisees had embraced a religion that honored God with the mouth, yet maintained a distance from Him in the heart. In so doing their worship became vain, as they laid aside the commandment of God. Jesus said it this way. “*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men; the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment*

come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7). It is a most serious circumstance. The Spirit will now develop this more fully, showing that sin remains dominant wherever the righteousness of God is not found. He will show that the spirit of the Law went far beyond mere appearance. **Sin CANNOT be subdued by Law, nor can righteousness be attained by disciplines invented by men.**

DO YOU STEAL?

“You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” It appears there is an allusion to the fiftieth Psalm. “But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him’”^{2NKJV}(50:16-18). Thus, the person who condones the thief partakes in his sin. But there is more to this than that.

The command of God forbids ALL stealing, or theft. Some stealing takes place by stealth, where unlawful gain is realized by deception. Thus, “extortion” is soundly condemned, with the promise those who practice it will be excluded from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:10). The Pharisees practiced this form of stealing. Of them, Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses” (Matt 23:14). It might astound you to know how much of this sort of thing goes on in the Christian community.

Peter warned of teachers who were actually thieves, exploiting people for personal advantage. “By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words” (2 Pet 2:3). Jude said of them, “For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit” (Jude 11).

Souls of Men

The Scriptures also speak of thieves who barter with the souls of men. They actually traffic in people, enslaving them to their foolish philosophies. Speaking of Babylon the great, the false church

perpetrated by Satan, the Spirit says the following. “And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, **AND BODIES AND SOULS OF MEN**” (Rev 18:11-13).

Here two forms of slavery are

The souls of men belong to God, and God alone. Thus it is written, “All souls are mind” (Ezek 18:4). God alone is the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9). To barter in the institutional arena with the souls of men is unspeakably wicked.

described: bodily and spiritual. We are familiar with the former, when men were made slaves to other men. Many are not as familiar with the latter, when the souls of men are shackled to the traditions and manners of men.

The souls of men belong to God, and God alone. Thus it is written, “All souls are mind” (Ezek 18:4). God alone is the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9). To barter in the institutional arena with the souls of men is unspeakably wicked. You should know that religious men have made great names for themselves and fattened their coffers at the expense of “the souls of men.” They were thieves!

Again, the Pharisees surface as an example of this kind of activity. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt 23:15). The

word of God refers to such individuals as “menstealers,” or “kidnappers” (1 Tim 1:10). There is far more of this kind of activity in the religious world than one might think.

Robbing God

There is another form of stealing that is particularly reprehensible. It is stealing from God—robbing Him of what belongs to Him. Through Malachi, God upbraided the children of Israel for this very sin. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation” (Mal 3:8). Some will object that tithing has nothing whatsoever to do with us. But that is a human assessment, not a Divine one. Anyone imagining that robbing God no longer occurs is not thinking properly.

The point of our text is the person’s religion actually permitted, and even encouraged, these things. That is how corrupt man is by nature. **If he does not have a righteousness from God, he will actually seek to justify his wickedness in his religion.** This is done while preaching the Law, as though it did not apply to him.

DO YOU COMMIT ADULTERY?

“You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery?”^{2NKJV} It is enough to mention that a high degree of immorality exists among those who declare the Word of God. Explanations have been offered for this, but none of them are acceptable. **The reason for lapses into immorality among preachers and teachers is that they have NOT obtained a righteousness from God.** Thus, seeking to establish their own righteousness, they fell prey to the sin that was within their own members.

Spiritual Adultery

There is another form of adultery that is altogether too common in the churches. It is friendship with the world—obtaining worldly manners, and

joining in affinity with it. James soundly condemns this in his Epistle. *“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:1-4).

Here is a most significant word, appropriate for our day. Professed believers were experiencing wars and fights among themselves. They had such strong desires for pleasure, that they caused trouble among the saints to satisfy them. Rather than denying worldly lusts, they cultured them, even at the expense of their own brethren. They fought among themselves. Their prayers were futile, for they only sought to satisfy their own quest for pleasure.

If ever there was a vivid picture of the Christian world, this is it. Divisions, wars, and tumults are altogether too common, as people seek their own interests above those of God. The average congregation has also battled through such things, where board meetings and congregational meetings erupted into red-faced arguments.

The Spirit traces these things back to their source. **It is the result of friendship with the world!** The people have prostituted their affections, giving them to the world instead of to the Lord. James frankly calls such *“adulterers and adulteresses.”* They have been unfaithful to God, and have thus become His enemy. That is not a suggestion, but is reality!

Lest we miss the point of our text, the Spirit is confirming the need for a righteousness from God. Without this righteousness, even those who preach and teach are powerless to subdue the expressions of the flesh. They may master

outward refinement and culture, but their sinful natures will remain alive and well.

DO YOU ROB TEMPLES?

“You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” The KJV reads, *“thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?”* The word *“sacrilege”* is a significant one. It comes from a word that means to “remove sacred property, or rob temples.” **The idea is that one who professes to hate false religion, still seeks to profit from it.**

Seen In Israel

When Israel overthrow heathen nations, they were always commanded to destroy their idols. None of them were to be kept for any reason. The words of the Law were particularly strong on this. *“You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it*

To attempt to place the jewel of redemption in a setting of the world’s wisdom is to rob the temple of idols. It is to defile the temple of God. It is something that nullifies the power of the Gospel and makes the cross of Christ of “none effect.”

for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing”^{NKJV} (Deut 7:25-26). **What God had cursed could not be desired or kept by the people of God.**

You may remember that Achan brought a curse upon all of Israel for coveting and taking *“the accursed thing.”* The result of his deed is thus described, *“and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel”* (Josh 7:1). This was a form of sacrilege—defiling the people and things of God by bringing what God has cursed into their presence.

The Perception of Paul

Himself possessing the righteousness of God, Paul was particularly sensitive about this matter. For example, he knew the Lord had rejected the wisdom of this world, declaring it to be foolishness. Thus it is written, *“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain”* (1 Cor 3:19-20).

But it is not enough to merely say this. His understanding of this moved Paul to refuse to seek to gain from what God had condemned. That is why he wrote, *“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect”* (1 Cor 1:17). And again, *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:1-2). And again, *“And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”* (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Not A Small Matter

Do not think this is a small matter. **To attempt to place the jewel of redemption in a setting of the world’s wisdom is to rob the temple of idols. It is to defile the temple of God.** It is something that nullifies the power of the Gospel and makes the cross of Christ of *“none effect.”* Peter said, *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 1:16).

There is a phenomenal amount of this kind of thing in the Christian world. Whether it is in the area of motivation, organization, presentation, or professed scholarship, **the manners of the world are being employed to promote the Gospel and make disciples.** It is not

acceptable! The realm God has rejected is not a well from which professed believers may draw!

Sacrilegious Offerings

Sacrilege also takes place when defiled and unacceptable offerings are presented to God. Again, Israel provides us with a concrete example of such sacrifices. Their offerings, because of their deficiency, actually incensed the Lord. *“And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably? Says the LORD of hosts . . . But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and My name is to be feared among the nations”^{NKJV} (Mal 1:8,14).*

Today, it is exceedingly difficult to find a congregation, or even a person, that is offering their very best to the Lord. Every Lord’s day, people gather to offer to God the dregs of their intellect, emotion, and will. They have expended their energies in worldly pursuits, and now offer God what is left.

In keeping with its marriage with the world, the professed church structures its program to accommodate such pretension.

The average gathering of believers does not require much from them, but is convenient for the flesh. It is a more serious matter than some think.

Profaning the Holy

through the temple. He was acutely aware that what had been given to God was not to be used for ordinary purposes. It was sacrilege.

In our day, this frame of mind is

Integral to this text is the fact that a lack of the righteousness of God shuts men up to inconsistent religion. The flesh will not allow a person or a group who refuses God’s righteousness to be spiritually consistent.

Jesus soundly rebuked those who defiled God’s temple by driving them out of it. The incident is most arresting. *“So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves’” (Matt 11:15-17).*

Notice, Jesus did not even allow people to carry wares, or useful equipment, through the temple. That would be like forbidding people to carry their shopping bags or cooking utensils

almost unknown. A consciousness of God, together with a commitment to purity, is not at all common. People have been lulled to sleep by counterfeit religion, not aware that their religious offerings actually anger God. They are guilty of sacrilege. Were this single perception to be grasped by the modern church, it would violently interrupt its entire program.

Shut up to Inconsistency

Integral to this text is the fact that a lack of the righteousness of God shuts men up to inconsistent religion. The flesh will not allow a person or a group who refuses God’s righteousness to be spiritually consistent. Flesh is not capable of pleasing God, and those who remain in its power are also incapable of pleasing Him. In fact, they will only anger Him. We must have God’s righteousness.

BOASTING IN THE LAW

“²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” Remember, the Kingdom of God ONLY allows for boasting, or glorying, in the Lord. As it is written, *“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (2 Cor 10:17). Salvation is so structured as to exclude all other boasting. *“God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: [in order] **That** no flesh should glory in his presence. But of*

*him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: [in order] **That**, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Cor 1:27-31).

Here the nature of the flesh is again confirmed. Although the Jews were given every possible fleshly advantage, yet they gloried in the Law instead of the Lord who gave it. That is the nature of the flesh, in which *“no good thing”* can be found (Rom 7:18). That simply is what it does.

BOASTING IN THE LAW

The Jews did not boast in the content of the Law, or that it was the Law of God. Rather, they boasted in their possession of it, as though having it made them acceptable with God. Jeremiah said it this way, *“How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us’”* (Jer 8:8). Jesus said it this way, *“Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life”* (John 5:40).

The Jews boasted that they had a Law from God, and other nations did not. They had scribes who were expert in the text of Scripture itself. They were familiar with the Law, and could talk about it,

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

even enforcing it upon others.

In a sense, they had made an idol out of the Law, admitting to its value, yet not letting it bring them to conviction and Christ. It is much like the way they viewed the brazen serpent, through which many were healed in the plague of fiery, or poisonous, serpents. When Hezekiah became king, he took the idols out of the land. At that time, we learn how the Israelites had viewed the brazen serpent. *“He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan”* ^{NKJV} (2 Kings 18:4). **When one does not possess the righteousness of God, there is a proneness to this sort of conduct.**

For the Jews, sin had so dulled their senses that they made no correlation between a holy Law and holy conduct. They thought it was sufficient to possess the truth without loving and obeying it.

This type of mentality is not as uncommon as some may think. Although it has degenerated from boasting in the Law, or Word of God, the spirit of such boasting is found in sectarianism. It is not unusual to hear people boast of their religious heritage, how they were raised, and the tenets to which they hold. We are not the sons of a religious movement, but of God Almighty. No doctrinal position has sanctified us, and no institution has reconciled us to God. No church father died for us. If any man glory, let him glory in the Lord! No other glorying is allowed.

GOD IS DISHONORED WHEN HIS LAW IS BROKEN

“ . . . through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?” This is not **asking** if they were dishonoring God. The sense of the text is, “After making your boast in the Law of God, how can you dishonor God by breaking it?” It is an appeal to the human conscience, to awaken it from the slumber induced by pride in appearance, imagining that it gave some sort of eternal advantage.

Having the truth is of no advantage to those who *“do not obey the truth”* (Rom 2:9). To have a working knowledge of the good message of salvation is of no value to those who *“obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thess 1:8). On a more evident level, a people who preach unity, yet do not practice it, are a discredit to God. A group that teaches holiness holds no advantage if they themselves are not holy. Those who preach salvation in a most precise and procedural manner bring

It is not unusual to hear people boast of their religious heritage, how they were raised, and the tenets to which they hold. We are not the sons of a religious movement, but of God Almighty.

no glory to God if they themselves are not in fellowship with Him.

Not only do men need a righteousness from God, they dishonor Him by their disobedience. As evident as this may appear, Satan has been unusually successful in obscuring this to many.

Take, for example, a doctrine that teaches people are spiritually secure, even though they are morally deficient. A host of passages may be cited to confirm this is the case, convincing people that once their name is written in the Lamb’s book of life, it can never be blotted out. Just as the Jews *“boasted”* in the Law and their national status, these people *“boast”* in their supposed salvation, and their assumed status as *Christians*. But God is *“dishonored”* by their sin, regardless of what they imagine their status to be.

But let us pursue this matter of *“dishonor,”* for the pretended theologian may imagine it to be of no consequence. The Spirit acknowledges that, in a larger sense, God’s *“house”* has dishonorable ones within it. Yet, they are not acceptable people, but those through whom God works, like Pharaoh of old.

There are two passages that deal with this Kingdom reality.

Romans 9:21-22

The first is Romans 9:21-22. *“Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for **dishonor**? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath **prepared for destruction.**”* The premier example of this is found in Pharaoh, raised up by God to show His power, and declare His name throughout the whole earth (vs 9:17-20).

There is a technical, yet vital, point being made here. First, those who insist on being disobedient and walking in their own way, are still under the government of God. He will use their wickedness for His own purpose. Ultimately, their self-will does not serve themselves, but God. God will be honored through them, but they themselves will be destroyed. Sin will never bring an advantage to the sinner!

The vessel of dishonor is depicted as objecting to Divine judgment. Hearing that God’s will is served even in the disobedience of the wicked, the recalcitrant replies, *“Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?”* (9:19). It is as though one like Pharaoh said, *“If God has gotten honor for Himself through me, why am I condemned. I could not stop His will, but only became a part of it.”* But such a reply is soundly rebuffed by the Lord. *“But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘hy have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, **from the same lump** to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”* ^{NKJV} (9:20-21). God did not make Pharaoh unrighteous—he was that way by nature, just as surely as were the Israelites. Both were from *“the same lump.”* Yet, God orchestrated the affairs of both Pharaoh and Israel to bring glory to Himself, causing their deeds to bring honor to Him.

Had Pharaoh sought the Lord, or called upon His name, or repented, he

would have been received. The same word given to wicked Cain, applied to him: *“If you do well, will you not be accepted?”* (Gen 4:7). But when men do NOT well, they are NOT accepted, even though God will ultimately be glorified, even through them. Thus it is written, *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?”*^{NKJV} (2 Cor 2:15-16).

Like A Great Net

It is in this sense that the Kingdom of God is like a great net, cast into the sea of humanity. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”*^{NKJV} (Matt 13:46-50).

Notice, **both the wicked and the just were within the net**—under Divine control. Ultimately, they served God’s purpose, not their own. This is one of the ways in which God *“works all things together for our good”* (Rom 8:28).

For professed believers to concoct doctrines that excuse wickedness, or make it appear as though it were inconsequential, is inexcusable. Those who insist on sinning will still be used for God’s ultimate glory, but it will be at the expense of their own salvation.

2 Timothy 2:20-21

The Spirit informs us that within the professed body of Christ, there are people to be avoided. They largely consist of false teachers, who allow for the dominance of flesh. John the beloved said of such people in his day, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us;*

but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19).

Paul referred to such individuals as *“vessels of dishonor,”* affirming they were to be avoided by men, even though they were used by God—used for ignoble purposes. *“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”*

Paul gives two examples of vessels of *“dishonor”* in this passage. They are

If men continue in sin, it is because they are dominated by the flesh, not by faith in Christ. Further, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). They dishonor God in their sin, and God will not honor them for it.

“Hymenaeus and Philetus,” whose teaching was like deadly cancer to the church. They taught *“that the resurrection is already past,”* and consequently *“overthrew the faith of some”* (vs 17-18). Their wickedness, however, did not overthrow the purpose of God. *“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity’”* (v 19).

The *“eternal purpose”* of God is not overthrown by the wicked. Their own wickedness, however, will exclude them from all of its benefits. Their destruction will not be diverted even if they accompanied with, and went out from, the Apostles themselves, like those of John’s day. Even though they are influential teachers in the church, like Hymenaeus

and Philetus, they will not escape.

Not A Diversion

All of this is NOT a diversion from our subject. I have shown that dishonoring God is NOT something allowed among His children. Furthermore, only His remission and the conferment of His righteousness can remove such dishonor. There is no advantage to having the truth of God if men still dishonor God. In fact, salvation delivers men from lives that dishonor the Lord. His own righteousness demanded such a resolution.

GOD IS NOT UNRIGHTEOUS

I must pursue this subject further. The Spirit is confirming our absolute need of the righteousness of God. He is showing us that no amount of external advantage can qualify us for Divine acceptance. Even when God separates a people for Himself, showers upon them unparalleled favors, gives them His own holy Law, and subdues their enemies before Him—those benefits cannot change their nature. In giving all of those blessings, the Lord only confirmed the sinfulness of the people. They needed a righteousness from God.

Galatians 2:17-19

This truth, however, is not easily appropriated. Men continue to imagine they are sanctified by having the truth instead of walking in it (3 John 3). Therefore, the Spirit reasons with us. *“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God”*^{NKJV} (Gal 2:17-19).

The point of this passage is that **Christ cannot foster sin**. Sin never is the result of fellowship with Christ! Jesus never leads a person to dishonor God. Jesus came to *“destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8), **not** to allow them to spring up in His people. Men may find it reasonable to explain sin, but God does not. He has already explained sin, and it

Even with all of the advantages given to them by God, the Jews still needed a righteousness from Him, by Given O. Blakely

needs no further explanation. It flows from what we are by nature, not what we are by grace. If men continue in sin, it is because they are dominated by the flesh, not by faith in Christ. Further, *“they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Rom 8:8). They dishonor God in their sin, and God will not honor them for it.

Under the Law, sin broke forth, awakened by the Law that was contrary to defiled human nature. Thus it is written, *“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”* (Rom 7:8-11).

Rather than the Law giving those possessing it a reason to boast, it brought

out how defiled their nature was. Sin had put man at variance with God. He was *“alienated”* from God, an *“enemy”* of God, and unable, in his own power, to please Him. To boast, therefore, in having the Law, was the height of absurdity.

While the Law stimulated sin, however, the righteousness of God does not. The grace of God does not yield the results found in the Law. It will never encourage or condone sin—never! Further, where God is dishonored, no association with grace can be professed. It is the flesh that has produced the dishonor, and remission and reconciliation must be sought diligently. Personally dishonoring God and causing others to dishonor Him exclude people from Divine acceptance.

This all confirms the need for a righteousness from God. **All boasting**

that is not in God is wrong. It cannot be justified, and must be abandoned. If the Jews could not boast in the God-given law, how foolish it must appear in heaven for Gentiles to boast in their religious heritage! I realize this is common, but it is strictly forbidden by both the Word and nature of the Living God.

In salvation, men are extricated from the flesh, or their natural condition, not made more firm in it. The Jews were, so to speak, the best of all *“flesh,”* and yet they needed a righteousness from God. Their **ONLY** distinction was what the Lord had done to and for them. And yet, with all of that, they were still unrighteous. **Until a righteousness from God is received, men will only bring dishonor to God.** The Gospel, under the convincing power of the Spirit, will confirm that to tender hearts.

THE NAME OF GOD BLASPHEMED BECAUSE OF THOSE IDENTIFIED WITH HIM

²⁴For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, as it is written. Here is a tragic circumstance—God’s name defamed because of those identified with Him! The Jews, who were custodians of the revelation of God, actually brought dishonor to Him among the heathen. Isaiah referred to this condition. *“Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the LORD; and My name continually every day is blasphemed”* (Isa 52:5).

The idea of this passage is that Israel was oppressed by the Assyrians and Chaldeans. Yet these hostile nations had no earthly claim on Israel. They were only used of God to punish His people for their wickedness. Still, the heathen blasphemed God every day because of the Jews—because of the weakness and reproach their own sin had brought upon them. Had the Israelites been righteous, the Assyrians and Chaldeans would not have conquered them, and God’s name would not have been blasphemed, despised, or cursed.

Ezekiel also mentions the matter of God’s name being dishonored among the heathen because of Israel. In my judgment, this is the specific passage to which our text refers. *“When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name; when they said of*

The name of God was *“blasphemed”* as the heathen boasted that their gods had overcome the God of the Hebrews, who had parted the Red Sea. They concluded because God did not rescue His people He was too weak to do so. The heathen were prone to think this way,

When the name of God is blasphemed because of those wearing His name, it is because of their unbelief, addiction to sin, and their failure to appropriate the righteousness of God. It will do no good to spout religious slogans and doctrinal positions. If the flesh dominates the people, it is because they have NOT received the righteousness of God.

them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land.’ But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went’” (Ezek 36:20-22). Think: profaning God’s name! The very words cause the soul to shudder.

whether the Jews were unfaithful or not. This was the challenge Pharaoh hurled into the face of Moses. *“Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go”* (Ex 5:2). When wicked Sennacherib wrote to Hezekiah, he said, *“Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be*

delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?" (2 Kgs 19:10-13).

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the heathen speak reproachfully of the Living God. **However, when it is done because of the misconduct of His people, that is quite another matter.**

Before developing this further, I want to affirm this condition reveals a need for a righteousness from God. **When the name of God is blasphemed because of those wearing His name, it is because of their unbelief, addiction to sin, and their failure to appropriate the righteousness of God.** It will do no good to spout religious slogans and doctrinal positions. If the flesh dominates the people, it is because they have NOT received the righteousness of God. They are NOT living by faith. Their profession is inconsequential, and utterly without worth. These are strong assertions, to be sure, but I will show they are the truth.

A WORD FROM JESUS

Jesus spoke of offenses, or stumbling blocks, that would be cast before men. *"Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"* (Matt 18:7). Lest we think this to be a mild word, remember that all who cause offense will be removed from God's Kingdom. As it is written, *"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness"*^{NKJV} (Matt 13:41). This is precisely why Jesus upbraided the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-28).

Immediately preceding this verse (Matt 18:7), Jesus spoke of those who cause even the youngest to be offended. *"But whoso shall offend one of these little*

ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6). That certainly confirms the gravity of the situation.

It is possible for a person, or even a group, to become a stumbling block—for their words and conduct to cause people to stumble when they hear of God or Christ. Solemnly, believers are told to see to it

As soon as we depend upon our own righteousnesses, which are as "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), we subject the name of the Lord to shame. We should not balk at this, for Jesus has already told us, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing"

they do not place a "stumbling block" in their "brother's way" (Rom 14:13). Their liberty is not to become "become a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Cor 8:9).

Our text takes the matter even further, showing that the name of the Lord is often blasphemed among those who do **not** know Him BECAUSE of those professing to be His people. Suffice it to say, if the name of the Lord is reproached, it had better not be because of us! Because considerable attention is given to this matter in Scripture, it will be profitable to consider it.

YOUNGER WOMEN AND WIVES

Two admonitions are given to young wives and mothers to zealously avoid giving an occasion for outsiders to speak reproachfully of God and His word. *"Therefore I desire that the younger*

widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1 Tim 5:14). This solemn admonition is preceded by alerting younger widows of the liabilities of idleness. *"And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not"* (v. 14). That condition would result in Christ's adversaries speaking reproachfully of Him, His word, and His people. With zeal, this is to be avoided.

The spirit also addresses women that are already married, admonishing the older and more mature women to assist the younger ones in God-honoring conduct. *"That they [the older women] may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed"* (Tit 2:4-5).

THOSE WITH MASTERS

After being joined to the Lord, some saints remained under the yoke of slavery. While the circumstance was certainly not ideal, those within it were to live and serve in an exemplary manner. *"Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed"* (1 Tim 6:1). The enemies of God look for an occasion to speak reproachfully of God's Person and teaching. If those "under the yoke" of slavery are to zealously avoid causing this to happen, what of those who are free? It seems to me that an even greater responsibility is placed upon them. As it is written, *"as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God"* (1 Pet 2:16). And again, *"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"* (Gal 1:13).

DAVID'S EXPERIENCE

One of the great tragedies of

Scripture is when David sinned with Bathsheba. Due to the mercy of God, David did recover from this terrible sin. As it is written, *“David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite”* (1 Kgs 15:5). A word of caution ought to be given to those who feel at liberty to speak of the many sins of David. This is the word of the Spirit concerning him, and it is the height of foolishness to contradict it with some humanistic view of the man after God’s own heart.

Even though recovery was realized, yet David had caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Because of this, the child born out of that iniquity died. Here was God’s word to David. *“However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die”* (2 Sam 12:14). The seriousness of causing the *“enemies of the Lord”* to blaspheme is evident.

How is it that such things can occur? It is not because of God’s righteousness, but because of our natural corruption. We need His righteousness! As soon as we depend upon our own righteousnesses, which are as *“filthy rags”* (Isa 64:6), we subject the name of the Lord to shame. We should not balk at this, for Jesus has already told us, *“I am the vine, 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).

Whether men like it or not, God is judged by what men see in His people. When we let our light shine, they will behold our *“good works,”* and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt 5:16).

DEMEANING THOUGHTS OF GOD

Demeaning thoughts of God ARE largely owing to the inconsistencies of those wearing His name. Who among us has not confronted irreverent views of caused by such. A considerable point of this is made in the book of Revelation, and is worthy of some comment.

In my judgment, we are living in the midst of spiritually perilous times. It is a time when a form of godliness is embraced, while its power is rejected. Not only is there a corruption in doctrine, but appetites are cultured for the things of this world. Legion is the name of those who have a worldly view of preaching, music, leadership, and evangelism. This type of religion was astounding for the Apostles to consider.

When John was given to see the great *“harlot,”* which is the false church, he marveled at its appearance and power. Here is the record. *“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’ So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which*

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was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I

marveled with great amazement” (Rev 17:1-6). There are several things here that are of particular significance.

1. The vision is of a woman.
2. The kings of the earth commit fornication with her.
3. The inhabitants of the earth are made drunk with the wine of her fornication.
4. She is carried along by associations with blasphemy.
5. The woman is arrayed with royal garments.
6. In her hand is a cup filled with abominations, which are directly related to her fornication.
7. Her name indicates her true character is not apparent.
8. She begets harlots.
9. She is the cause of the abominations in the earth.
10. She has advanced her cause at the expense of the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus.

This is an arresting picture of the false church—Satan’s fabrication. That is why it is associated with fornication. She comes in the name of Christ, yet has chosen to commit spiritual fornication with the world. Both the rulers and the inhabitants of the earth are affected by her presence and manners. Boldly, this corrupt form of religion has even shed the blood of the saints of God in order to advance her own ways.

This form of *Christianity* was first advanced on a large scale by the Roman Catholic church. For many centuries, this was not acknowledged by its leaders. However, we have lived to see a significant admission of guilt by the Pope himself. On March 12, 2000, in a mild yet epochal confession Pope John Paul said, *“We are asking pardon for the divisions among Christians, for the use of violence that some have committed in the service of truth, and for attitudes of mistrust and hostility assumed toward followers of other religions.”*^{Victor L. Simpson, Associated Press}

Historians estimate that over 50,000,000 Protestants were slain by the

Roman Church during those bloody years. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. She pioneered an alliance with the governments of this world, and helped to usher in State religion. Her strength was found in her form, or organization. Whether in its ceremonies, officials, or ornate cathedrals, appearance was vaunted above substance.

From this type of religion came a host of spiritual harlots. A heterogenous mixture of heaven and earth and flesh and Spirit was attempted. It survives to this day, and is unusually rampant in our time. This is form without power (2 Tim 3:5). It is a religion that allows for men to come in sheep's clothing, who are ravening wolves within (Matt 7:15).

Mother of the Earth's Abominations

At this point we can see a correlation with our text. The corrupt church is the mother of spiritual harlots promoting a coalition with the world under the guise of religion. But that is not all. She also is the mother of "the abominations of the earth," promoting corruption even among those who do not know the Lord. The world is actually worse because of polluted religion. The name of God is thus

blasphemed in both word and conduct because of professed followers of Christ. It is too evident to deny.

This situation reveals a critical need for a righteousness from God! The

Lord be blasphemed among the heathen because of it. There is no alternative to this indispensable righteousness. The Jews are an indisputable case in point. If they, after all of the unique benefits they

There is only one thing that can correct this condition. That is a righteousness from God. Where this is not found, it is inevitable that corruption will occur in religion, and the name of the Lord be blasphemed among the heathen because of it. There is no alternative to this indispensable righteousness.

corruption of reference proceeded from corrupt people. Corrupt deeds can only come from a corrupt source. It is ever true, "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree **cannot** bear bad fruit, **nor can a bad tree bear good fruit**" (Matt 7:17-18). The Lord has stated conditions that are impossible—they cannot happen!

There is only one thing that can correct this condition. That is a righteousness from God. Where this is not found, it is inevitable that corruption will

received, were unable to avoid this circumstance, nothing more needs to be said to justify the Spirit's conclusion. **Men need a righteousness from God!** That is precisely why the Gospel announces it is available through Christ Jesus.

No other form of goodness or imagined intellectual superiority will be acknowledged by God. At some point, human efforts must be abandoned in favor of believing God. The condition of the modern church is proof enough that this is the case.

CONCLUSION

This text has been usually strong, as the nature of truth has been expounded. The Gospel has revealed a righteousness from God, and it is one that is required. The modern church has become so used to philosophical and psychological preaching, that it can scarcely bare to hear a firm word from God.

The Spirit has shown from their idolatry, deep immorality, and wicked expressions, that the Gentiles could not arrive at a righteousness of their own. He has confirmed that the testimony of nature could not awaken any purported goodness within man. Nor, indeed, could his wisdom retrieve him from the fall, change his nature, or make him righteous.

The well of human wisdom is not deep enough to produce life-giving water.

Those who draw from it will find it is a "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer 2:13). Natural powers of analysis cannot bring men to the proper conclusions, or compel to act effectively upon what glimmers of truth they see, whether in nature or in Law. When left to himself, man descends into the bottomless pit of flesh. This is a hard truth for proud man to learn, but it must be learned.

Turning to the Jews, the Spirit wields His sword with unparalleled effectiveness. He shows that man has fallen so far that surrounding him with Divine benefits will not change his nature. As confirmed in the most privileged nation in the history of the world, heavenly gifts only served to establish man's need for a righteousness from God. Without grace, they availed nothing.

Given an elite status and a flawless Law, behold what happened. The Jews rested in form, and cared nothing for the substance. They became arrogant, as though they had achieved their status through their own efforts. They gave no heed to the festering eruptions of iniquity within them, and settled for a whitewashed appearance. Whether or not men argue about the possibility of avoiding such a condition, the fact is that it was NOT avoided.

It is true, there were holy men here and there who rose above their peers. Before the Son of God entered into this defiled world, the sons of men had some noble representatives. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the holy Prophets, and John the Baptist stand as giants among the offspring of Adam. But

not a single one of them would boast of their achievement! None of them, however, would claim a righteousness of their own making, or trace their success to their own wisdom. Faith made them superior! They all recognized their need of the Lord, righteousness, and Divine direction.

O, that men could see it! Apart from the righteousness of God, men are shut up to inconsistency. Worse than that, their supposed righteousness is summarily

rejected by God. He will have none of it. They must be *"made the righteousness of God"* in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:21). That is something God does, not man!

Those who have some representation of truth, yet do not have the righteousness of God, will tend to think they are exclusive, sitting in judgment upon others. I have come from this type of heritage, and its fruits are too abundant to contest. Of all religious bodies, those who imagine themselves to be the exclusive people of

God, or to have a monopoly upon the truth of God, are the worst. That is precisely why Jesus said to the pious chief priests and elders, *"Verily I say unto you, That the publican and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"* (Matt 21:31).

When division, hatred, and lifelessness are spawned in a religious environment, it is because the righteousness of God has not been received. This is the message of our text.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 7



REAL CIRCUMCISION

^{2:25} For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

(Romans 2:25-29^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHEN CIRCUMCISION IS UNPROFITABLE (2:25)
- II. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE POINT, NOT THE SIGN (2:26)
- III. EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS DO NOT EXCLUDE THE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (2:27)
- IV. JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE (2:28)
- V. REAL IDENTITY (2:29)

The matter of receiving a righteousness from God, or being justified, is the most critical concern in Scripture. Nothing is more important than this. If God does not recognize us as righteous, there is no chance of being saved, for *“the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Cor 1:9).

The Spirit has already declared *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”* (Rom 1:18). There is no possibility of this not taking place. The Divine nature will eventually break forth in consuming fury against everyone and everything contradictory to it. It is only *“the longsuffering”* and *“goodness of God”* that keeps this from occurring now. However, these marvelous qualities will not continue toward those who are ungodly—those who lack the righteousness of God.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ESSENTIAL

To further confirm this reality, the Spirit confronts those who imagine they can develop a righteousness on their own. *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”* (Isa 64:6). If some protest, saying

this only applied to the Jews, and not to everyone, all doubt is decimated by this word. *“The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Psa 14:2-3; 53:2-3; Rom 3:10). Although men argue over this fact, it is actually beyond debate. This is a Divine assessment, and must be addressed if men are to be saved.

Even though the salvation of God is being accomplished with the extensive involvement the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, men are tempted to think little is required of them. Satan has succeeded in deluding them into believing God will graciously overlook their situation. Too, they also are convinced a minimal amount of input is required of them. To further complicate the matter, the absolute necessity of a total change in the

character of the individual is seriously doubted among many wearing the name of Christ.

The Law confirmed God cannot be

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith" (Heb 11:39).

THE MINISTRY OF CONDEMNATION

The Law confirmed God cannot be served seasonally, or in activities that are adjunct to life itself. This is precisely how the Israelites worshiped and served the Lord. This was not the heart and soul of their life, but an addition to it.

served seasonally, or in activities that are adjunct to life itself. This is precisely how the Israelites worshiped and served the Lord. This was not the heart and soul of their life, but an addition to it. Furthermore, it was a burdensome one to them. They saw no correlation between serving the Lord and life itself. That is why they said, *"You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?'"*NASB (Mal 3:14).

While we may be tempted to chide the Israelites for their inconsistency, care must be taken NOT to miss the point being made by the Holy Spirit. It is simply this: men without the righteousness of God cannot live acceptably to God, because they are fundamentally unlike Him. The only change that can be made is through faith, which accounts for the unusual men and women prior to Jesus. Their superiority was not due to more hearty effort, or the greater discipline of their mind on their part. It was their faith that made them unique. As it is written,

The law was a ministry of condemnation. Yet, those under it tended to view it as the means to their justification. The third chapter of Second Corinthians provides a vivid picture of the Law and its relationship to our natural condition. Although *"glorious,"* it was *"the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones"* (v. 7). It produced death, not life. For this reason, it was called *"the ministration of condemnation"* (v. 9), because it revealed the alienated condition of men.

Furthermore, the Law has no transforming power. It could not change the human condition, but only identify it. Concerning the forbidden tree, the Lord told Adam, *"in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Gen 2:17). Indeed, *"by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Rom 5:12). A chasm was thus created between man and God that was too vast to be bridged by human effort—any human effort, regardless of size or longevity. Only God is able to resolve this problem!

The Law was delivered to confirm this was the case. It was not given to remedy the situation, but to clarify, and even compound, it. Thus it is written, *"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound"* (Rom 5:20). And again, *"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"* NKJV (Rom 7:13). The nature of sin was not changed, or increased by the Law. Rather, its wickedness became more apparent.

If man could recover from sin on his own, the ministry of the Law would not have been necessary. Sin, in such a case, would not have been *"exceedingly sinful,"* but merely a human weakness.

It is one of the ironies of humanity that in spite of this pointed ministry of the Law, those who choose it as a means to reach God become self-confident. They think nothing of putting their trust in their own abilities. It is no wonder Paul wrote, *"For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me"* (Rom 7:11).

Because of these circumstances, the Spirit drives the point home of our need for a righteousness from God. He is going to reason with our hearts, showing there is no possible way to remain honest and avoid the conclusion that our own righteousness, under any and every circumstance, is unacceptable to God. In order to do this, HE will focus on the highest and most notable mark of the Old Covenant - circumcision.

WHEN CIRCUMCISION IS PROFITABLE

"2:25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision."

It is tragic that so very little is known of *"circumcision"* within the modern church. It was a most significant ordinance, acquainting men with tokens of a Divine covenant. In its various forms, the word *"circumcise"* is mentioned no

less than fifty-three times in Scripture (Gen 17:11,12,13,14,23,24,25,26,27; 21:4; 34:15,21,22,24; Ex 4:26; 12:44,48; Lev 12:3; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Josh 5:2,3,4,5,7,8; 7:22,23; Jer 4:4; 9:25; Lk 1:59; 2:21; John 7:22; Acts 7:8; 10:45; 11:2; 15:1,5,24; 21:21; Rom 2:25,26,27,28,29; 3:1,30; 4:9,10,11,12; 15:8; 1 Cor 7:18,19; Gal 2:3,7,8,9,12; 5:2,3,6,11; 6:12,13; Eph 2:11; Phil 3:3,5; Col 2:11; 3:11; 4:11; Tit 1:10).

ASSOCIATED WITH ABRAHAM

Circumcision is first mentioned in relation to Abraham. When Abram was ninety-nine years of age, after Ishmael was born, the Lord appeared to him. At that time, the Lord said, *"And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly"* (Gen 17:2). This was in keeping with the Lord's promise to Abraham approximately three years earlier, and prior to the conception of Ishmael. *"On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To*

your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates; the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (Gen 15:18-21). The only covenant made with men prior to this was made with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:9-17). The covenant with Abraham, however, differed significantly from that with Noah. That covenant established safety for Noah and his family during the flood. It also assured the world would never again be destroyed with a flood.

The covenant with Abraham, however, was one of blessing. At the time God made this covenant, he changed Abram’s name to Abraham. “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations” (17:5). Having promised the land of Canaan to Abraham for “an everlasting possession,” the Lord said, “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you” (17:10-11). The requirement applied to every male offspring of Abraham, of all generations, and to any foreigner among them as well (v 12).

The requirement was exacting, with no leniency at all. The covenant of God would be ratified in the flesh of Abraham’s progeny. “He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (v. 13-14).

The covenant was further defined as being through Isaac’s lineage, and not that of Ishmael. When Abraham suggested that the covenant might be fulfilled through Ishmael, the Lord said, “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son,

and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him . . . But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year” (17:19,21).

In faith, Abraham obeyed the voice of the Lord. “Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him” (Gen 21:4). Stephen referred to this occasion in his eloquent defense of the faith. “Then He gave him **the covenant of circumcision**; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day” (Acts 7:8).

JUDAISTIC TROUBLERS

The early church was troubled with legalistic judaizers. There were those who insisted that circumcision was still incumbent upon all in covenant with God—even those in Jesus Christ. On one occasion “certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). To the unspiritual mind, it all seemed to make sense. After all, Jesus had given no indication that circumcision would be abrogated. The few words He said about it did not seem to indicate the ordinance would ever end (John 7:22-23).

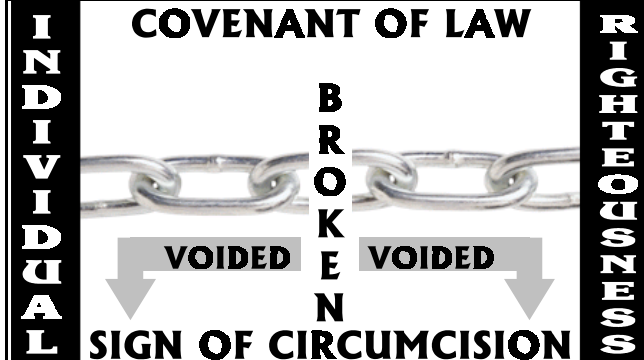
These law-binders could point to chapter and verse to confirm their insistence that all males be circumcised. There was no question about the wording of these texts. “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh **for an everlasting covenant**” (Gen 17:11).

The Galatians confronted false teachers who “compelled” them “to be circumcised” (Gal 6:12). These teachers, besides having corrupt hearts, did not know the nature of the new covenant.

Four hundred and fifty years after Abraham, Moses spoke of the necessity of a higher form of circumcision. “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deut 10:16). Realizing they were incapable of doing this, he also foretold of the time when God would accomplish the circumcision of the heart. “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). A “better covenant,” “established upon better promises” was needed if men were to become truly righteous (Heb 8:6).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

I have taken the time to briefly review the background of circumcision because of the general ignorance concerning it. Also, considerable will be made of circumcision in this book. It



You may recall that Joseph and Mary also honored this covenant, circumcising Jesus when He was eight days old. “And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb” (Lk 2:21). That took place about 2,000 years after the circumcision of Isaac.

A SIGN AND SEAL OF THE COVENANT

In delineating the truth of justification by faith, Paul brings up Abrahamic circumcision. Because we will cover it extensively in the fourth chapter, it will suffice to only mention it here. In Genesis, the Lord said circumcision was the covenant of God “in your flesh.” Referring to the same truth, Paul wrote, “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised” (Rom 4:11). That sign was the proof of the covenant. It was known to the possessor, but was hidden from the view of others.

therefore behooves us to have a working knowledge of it. Briefly stated, it was an external sign of a Divine covenant.

A BREAKER OF THE LAW

The Spirit now confronts the legalist with an arresting consideration. *“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision”* (2:25). Those who imagined that possessing the sign and the seal was all there was to it were simply wrong. Conforming to outward requirements was never intended to be a basis of confidence before God—not even in Abraham. **It is never right to put faith in “the sign and the seal” rather than in the God of the covenant.**

Even under the First Covenant, circumcision brought no personal advantage apart from obedience to the law. *“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law.”* Remember, the subject of discussion is being righteous before God. Under the Law, Divine acceptance was granted upon the basis of DOING, not being circumcised. Thus it was written, *“For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who DOES those things shall live by them’”* (Rom 10:5). Note, righteousness is here equated with life. This is spiritual life, or being recognized by, and in fellowship, with the Lord.

Righteousness and the Law

Righteousness, or spiritual life, was not promised because men were circumcised, but ONLY if they did precisely what the Law said. Hear it again from the words of Moses. *“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man DO, he shall live in them: I am the LORD”* (Lev 18:5). Permit me to call Nehemiah to the witness stand. *“ . . . yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man DO, he shall live in them)”* (Neh 9:29). Hear Ezekiel the prophet affirm the same thing. *“And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man DO, he shall even live in them”* (Ezek 20:11). Hear the Lord Jesus

Himself as He spoke to a man inquiring what he should DO to inherit eternal life. After telling him to keep the commandments, Jesus *“said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this DO, and thou shalt live”* (Lk 10:28). Again, the Spirit says to the Galatians, who were retrogressing to Law for justification, *“And the law is not of faith: but, The man that DOETH them shall live in them”* (Gal 3:12).

Circumcision Did not Negate the Requirement for Perfect Obedience

Circumcision did not take the place of DOING to obtain life, or righteousness. Remember, the Old Covenant offered righteousness strictly upon the basis of perfect compliance with its demands. Under it circumcision was a sign that the

Circumcision did not take the place of DOING to obtain life, or righteousness. Remember, the Old Covenant offered righteousness strictly upon the basis of perfect compliance with its demands.

individual was within that covenant. If, however, that Law was broken, circumcision was invalidated.

The books of Moses are filled with the names of those who were severely punished, and even died, because they broke the law. Their circumcision was not sufficient to exempt them from Divine judgment. Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-3), Korah and his cohorts (Num 16:19-32), and over 600,000 who refused to obey, and thus fell in the wilderness (Num 14:26-34). Who can forget Saul being stripped of his kingship (1 Sam 16:1,14), or Samson losing his strength (Judges 16:20). All of these people were circumcised, but it was of no avail when they became obstinate and disobeyed the Lord.

When it came to the matter of righteousness (which is the subject of discussion), the Jew’s disobedience invalidated their circumcision.

Inclusion in the Old Covenant, which was confirmed by circumcision, required complete obedience to the Law. Where this did not occur, no confidence could be placed in circumcision. Life and acceptance were not offered **because** the people had been circumcised. Rather, they were circumcised because they were chosen and blessed by God. To boast, therefore, in the *“sign and the seal”* brought no glory to God.

WHY BRING THIS UP?

This is not a mere discourse on circumcision. The Spirit is addressing the Jews who thought themselves worthy to judge others simply because they were a chosen people. They trusted in their possession of the Law, and boasted in the ordained seal of circumcision.

To state it more succinctly, they were trusting in what they had been given, rather than in the Giver. The Spirit is taking this boast away from them. He is confirming that our acceptance is strictly based upon faith, and that it alone can appropriate the righteousness of God.

WHEN ORDAINED SIGNS ARE NEGATED

The Jews were not the last persons to rely on signs for confidence. Many still imagine they can take the place of faith, which alone can appropriate the righteousness of God (Rom 3:22,26; 4:5; Phil 3:9). It is vital to understand the principle proclaimed in this text.

There is extensive teaching on this matter in the Apostolic writings. Yet, it is generally ignored by the masses, in favor of some external and visible evidence of imagined Divine approval.

Not of Works

When it comes to the appropriation of righteousness, the cause is not human achievement. Strict adherence to the Law, for example, will NEVER result in justification. *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20). The *“deeds”* demanded by the Law had to be perfect, with not the slightest deviation from the Divine requirement.

The appropriation of grace is absolutely essential. Yet, works cannot take hold of grace. Only faith can seize the grace of God. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works, lest any man should boast**”* (Eph 2:8-9).

The salvation and calling of God were not induced by our works, but by His own determined objective. They were driven by His grace, not our accomplishments. *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began**”* (2 Tim, 1:9).

Our experience of the kindness and tender love of God was not His response to our own works. Salvation came through MERCY, not recognition of our attainments. *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, **not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**”*^{NKJV} (Tit 3:4-5).

Men will remonstrate at this declaration, saying we are not saved by faith alone, but by works (James 2:24). But James is not speaking of obtaining justification, or righteousness, but of confirming its presence. Faith works, and consistently so—but it is never the result of work. When we become *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4), that nature works within us *“both to will and to do”* (Phil 2:13). But it is not conferred upon us because of our works. Men are not righteous because they live for God, but live for God because they are righteous.

Allow me to be even more simplistic. Men are not born again because they are good, but are good because they are born again—and only good men can do good works. To put it in the words of our blessed Lord, *“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit”* (Matt 12:33).

The reason for this arrangement should be obvious. A religion that places

confidence in human achievement or benefits conferred by God Himself, has no need for Christ. In such a case, there is really no need for an Intercessor in heaven, or a powerful Holy Spirit within. The point in all such religion is what men can and ought to do, NOT what the Lord has done.

The Old Covenant was precisely that kind of covenant. It relied upon the people, promising life to those who DID what the Law demanded. Such a covenant was *“weak through the flesh”* (Rom 8:3), not bringing righteousness to men. The New Covenant is certainly not another covenant of the same order. It is a

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different kind of covenant, with a superior foundation and better promises.

Trusting in Evidences

There is a proneness in men to base their faith on evidence, rather than in the Living God. In some circles, this is even thought to be commendable. But it is not. You may recall that Thomas once said, *“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* Eight days later, when Jesus again appeared to His disciples, Thomas was also present. Confronted with the evidence of a real risen Savior, Thomas cried out, *“My Lord and my God.”* Jesus then pronounced a blessing—**BUT NOT UPON THOMAS.** *“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: BLESSED are they that have NOT seen, and YET HAVE BELIEVED”* (John 20:25-29).

Lest we miss the point, circumcision was the evidence—the sign of the covenant. It could not gain access to God for those who had transgressed the covenant. Disobedience reduced the circumcised person to the same condemnation leveled

against the Gentiles.

TRUSTING IN ORDINANCES

Just as the Jews, under the First Covenant, were prone to trust in ordinances, particularly circumcision, so those in Christ are tempted to trust in the ordinances delivered to them. The Jews, you may recall, made an idol out of the brazen serpent, burning incense to it (2 Kings 18:4). The brazen serpent was given by God, and was the means through which healing was brought to disobedient Israelites. Yet, it was never intended to take the place of God. So it is with blessed ordinances that have been given through Christ to us. They are from God, and are not to be despised or rejected. Yet, they are not intended to take the place of the Lord, or become the objects of confidence.

Baptism Into Christ

Our baptism into Christ is one of the great occasions of life. It is the point at which we are identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3-6). This is the one thing Peter *“commanded”* the household of Cornelius to do (Acts 10:48). There is never a question about the necessity or benefits of baptism in Scripture. Like Jewish circumcision, it is, of itself, always viewed in a favorable manner.

However, our baptism is neither the objective or foundation of our faith. As indispensable as it is, it cannot make up for a lack of faith. The commandment is, *“He that **believes** and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). Unless it is coupled with faith, baptism brings no advantage whatsoever to the individual.

Let it be clear, God does not, nor do we, recognize any individual who refuses to be baptized. If the Pharisees were judged for not submitting to John’s baptism (Lk 7:30), what can be said of those who do not submit to one ordained by Jesus? But woe be to the person who trusts in his baptism rather than in the Christ into whom he was baptized! Baptism is the means, not the objective, even as with all other acts of obedience. It is not to be despised, nor is it to be vaunted to the most prominent place.

Partaking of the Lord’s Supper

Here is another ordinance put into place by the Lord Jesus Himself. Like baptism, it relates to His vicarious death, and is to be held in the highest regard. Jesus said, *“Do this in remembrance of me”* (Lk 22:19). *“ALL”* of His disciples are to partake of it (Matt 26:27). His disciples are to examine themselves and *“eat of that bread, and drink of that cup”* (1 Cor 11:28). This is not, therefore, an ordinance to be trifled with, as though it were inconsequential.

The Corinthian’s failure to properly partake of this supper led to the visitation of Divine judgment upon them (1 Cor 11:27-31).

But let no person imagine that eating at the Lord’s Table exempts one from the necessity of having the righteousness of God. There is no magic in this table which allows corruption to remain in the hearts of those partaking of it. A church that faithfully partakes of this table is not necessarily commended of God, as seen in the case of Corinth. Nor, indeed, is it to be treated as though it could be forgotten or approached with casualness. Participation in it, however, is not to be the source of our confidence.

Assembling Together

Early in the history of the church, people began to develop a *“manner”* of forsaking the assembling of the saints. Thus the admonition is given, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Heb 10:25). Assemblies should increase, and the exhortations to not forsake them, *“so much more,”* as we see the day approaching. *“The day”* has been viewed in a variety of ways, and all of them have some merit. Among them is the day our Lord returns, the time of judgment upon Jerusalem, the day of judgment, and the first day of the week itself. However you may choose to view it, gathering together is not to be despised.

However, if men rely upon the attendance of the assembly to take the place of personal righteousness, they have sinned, just as surely as those who relied upon circumcision. There is nothing about the assembly of the righteous that

compensates for a lack of faith, or a failure to appropriate the righteousness of God.

None of this diminishes the importance of these ordinances—any more than our text lessened the place of circumcision under the Old Covenant. Under the Law, it was not possible to have

There is no magic in this table which allows corruption to remain in the hearts of those partaking of it. A church that faithfully partakes of this table is not necessarily commended of God, as seen in the case of Corinth.

a more significant seal in the flesh than circumcision. It was so vital that those accepted by God were called *“the circumcision,”* and those who were not were called *“the uncircumcision”* (Rom 3:30; 4:9; 15:8; Eph 2:11).

But when it comes to the matter of ultimate Divine acceptance, *“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God”* (1 Cor 7:19). At some point, the individual must be brought into harmony with the Law of God, not being at variance with it. As it is written, *“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom 8:3-4). This occurs when men are given the righteousness of God. We will now see that this is directly related to being born again, or receiving a new nature. The argument is weighty, showing that a person’s nature, or character, is the real point with God.

That takes precedence over the *“sign”* of the covenant, although it does not obviate the *“sign”* or *“seal”* of any given covenant. The possession of

righteousness is the fundamental thing. Without it, nothing else is of value.

WHEN THE SIGN IS VOIDED

Because of the strength of this text, I must reaffirm it. For the Jew, when God’s law was broken, circumcision lost its significance. To state it another way, when men do not have the righteousness of God, it makes no difference what ordained *“seal”* they possess, they are NOT accepted by God.

Does This Not Produce Hopelessness?

The sophist will object that this removes hope from all people. How can we account for the acceptance of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David? The Spirit shouts back to us that they were accepted because of their *“FAITH.”* In fact, that is the point of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The word *“circumcision”* is not mentioned a single time in that text, even though most of those cited were Jews.

Apart from faith, all is hopeless. That is the point of our text, for faith alone can appropriate the righteousness of God. That is why Paul pressed *“to be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is FROM GOD BY FAITH”* (Phil 3:9).

Some object, saying *“works”* are part of salvation. Indeed, they are—but not the foundational part. They are not what supports the tree, nor are they the primary evidence of Divine grace. Works—valid works—are the fruit, and not the root. They are **what** we are recreated for, **not why** we were recreated. As it is written, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10)! They are the evidence of righteousness, and not the cause of it. The one who *“does righteousness”* IS righteous (1 John 3:7). In the case of holy works, righteousness is the cause, not the effect. Further more, the means through which righteousness is conferred is faith. This sharply contrasts with the Law, which conferred righteousness upon the basis of doing.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE POINT, NOT THE SIGN

“²⁶ Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?”

In this verse, the Spirit tears down two walls that have plagued the church. **The first is sectarianism.** This has led people to trust in positions, creeds, and ordinances, removing their faith from God. As a result, they have sat in judgment upon other people who have not subscribed to their traditions. **The second is self confidence.** This leads the individual to rely upon surface evidences, while lacking the real righteousness of God. Remember, the Spirit is establishing our need for the righteousness of God. This is a righteousness that can only be experienced by faith. Therefore, it escapes the sectarian and the self confident.

CIRCUMCISION INFERIOR TO THE LAW ITSELF

Under the First Covenant, or the Law, the Law itself was the point, not its attending ordinances. Do not imagine this means the ordinances were inconsequential or of no significance. God forbid!

The Example of Moses

To confirm that the Spirit is not demeaning circumcision under the Law, but rather refusing to allow men to trust in it, let us consider Moses. There is a very brief account given of this great man of God that confirms the importance of circumcision. The Lord had just told Moses to go to obstinate Pharaoh and give him a most grievous message. *“So I said to you, ‘Let My son go, that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your first-born.”*^{NASB} On the way, the Lord met Moses, and *“sought to kill him.”* The reason for this intent, we find, was that Moses had failed to circumcise the son he had through Zipporah, daughter of *“the priest of Midian.”* It appeared as though Moses was totally insensitive of the situation, but his wife was not. The record reads, *“Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at*

Moses’ feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’ So He let him alone. At that time she said, ‘You are a bridegroom of blood’-- because of the circumcision” (Ex 4:24-26).

I give this example to remove any temptation to think of circumcision as optional among the Jews.

Stipulations of the Law

The Law also spoke clearly on this matter, making circumcision incumbent for every man child in any Jewish house, be he bond or free. *“And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it”* (Ex 12:48).

that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised” (Josh 5:2-7). The Lord’s response to their action is noteworthy. *“This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you”* (Josh 5:9). Circumcision was certainly not an optional or insignificant ordinance!

The Law Was Superior

Our text confirms the superiority of the Law to circumcision. *“If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?”*^{NIV}

I understand this to be a hypothetical statement. The Spirit is reasoning with us, showing that the Law was superior to circumcision, and was the reason for its existence. Although circumcision was strictly required by the Law, keeping the Law had greater weight than being circumcised. A Gentile who kept the Law, even though uncircumcised, was far superior to the Jew who was circumcised, yet disobeyed the Law. That was a hard pill for the Judaizers to swallow!

The point is that keeping the Law was the intent of making a covenant with Israel, not a mere fleshly distinction. They were brought into covenant with God in order that they might walk in His statutes and judgments. If, then, an uncircumcised Gentile was found walking in those judgments, the objective of God was being served in him, even though he did not have the sign and seal of the covenant in his flesh.

Let me emphasize that this is a spiritual form of reasoning. The Spirit is not suggesting that such a person exists, for he has already declared the Gentile world guilty of sin. He is showing us the Divine manner of thinking. God does NOT look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. As it is written, *“for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”* (1 Sam 16:7). Faith reckons on God’s consideration, ignoring that of man.

Remember, the Spirit is establishing our need for the righteousness of God. This is a righteousness that can only be experienced by faith. Therefore, it escapes the sectarian and the self confident.

Joshua Circumcises the Men

To further show the importance of circumcision, Joshua addressed the matter when the children of Israel arrived at Jericho. BEFORE they took the city, there was something that had to be done. The record speaks for itself. *“At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people*

Let there be no mistake about this, God prefers, and will ONLY accept, the individual who is righteous. That is why the Gospel reveals *“the righteousness of God.”* There is no other way to be received by Him.

The Example of Cornelius

Although not a thorough example of our text, the Gentile Cornelius reveals the truth of it. He was not a Jew, but was a military man, *“a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.”* It is said of this man, *“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly”*^{NIV} (Acts 10:1-2). The angel of the Lord appeared to him announcing, *“Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God”*^{NKJV} (Acts 10:4). He then directed Cornelius to send for Simon Peter, who would tell him *“words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved”* (Acts 11:14).

How is it that God honored this man’s gifts and prayers? He was not a Jew—not among the covenanted people. Later, when with Cornelius, Peter confessed, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him”* (Acts 10:34-35). His acceptance did not obviate the need for Christ, or *“words”* instructing him in the matter of salvation. However, God did honor him by opening the door of salvation to him.

My Own Experience

For many years I have noticed that many, classed as “sectarians” by my brethren, have more godly traits than their critics. While in the grip of a sectarian manner of thought, I considered myself to have embraced the true New Testament way. It was not due to any unwavering faith I possessed, or a strong hope or full assurance. I had none of those things. I rested in a church pattern, a proceduralized approach to salvation, and the observance of God-ordained ordinances. The matters in which I rested were not wrong. In fact, they were right, and fully supported by the Word of God.

Yet, I was repeatedly confronted

with a most disconcerting circumstance. When my heart was hungry for the things of God, or I yearned for deep spiritual fellowship, I could not find it among my brethren. Their respect for and knowledge of the Word were seriously deficient. The full assurance of faith and a strong hope could hardly be found among them. The good things that were historically proclaimed among the people had nearly passed into oblivion.

I found myself attracted to people

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who had an obvious love for the truth, yet who lacked a fuller understanding of the Word. They seemed to have a heart for the things of God. They practiced things with which I was not comfortable, yet I was endeared to their spirit. They were more holy than the people with whom I was identified. They seemed more acquainted with the spirit of the Scripture, and were easier to instruct.

For many years this was a source of confusion to me. I felt I was doing wrong in extending the right hand of fellowship to those who were seriously wrong in some of their perceptions. But my heart and conscience would not let me forget the tenderness of their hearts, their love for the truth, and their fervency to serve the Lord. Some of these people opened new vistas of thought to me. Others were sources of great encouragement in the good fight of faith.

Since those struggles associated with my early years in Christ, I have found a great liberty in the belief of the truth. I still am not able to condone error, nor do I want to become able to do so. But I can acknowledge the superiority of an

individual who has an appetite for the truth, yet lacks knowledge of it, over a person who spouts pious platitudes about the truth, yet has no yearning for it.

MAN’S PROPENSITY TO TRUST IN EXTERNALS

There is a strong propensity in men to trust in external things. By its very nature *“flesh”* seeks to ignore *“the righteous requirements of the law,”* settling only for *“an appearance of wisdom”* (Col 2:23), or a *“form of godliness”* (2 Tim 3:5). This was the plight of the church in Laodicea who said, *“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.”* Yet, in the Divine assessment, that church was *“wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”* (Rev 3:17). They were not the last church who was not what they appeared to be.

The Word of God warns us about glorying in appearance—religious appearance. We read of those who *“boast in appearance and not in heart”* (2 Cor 5:12). The Galatians were warned of teachers who *“desire to make a fair show in the flesh”* (Gal 6:12). Jesus Himself commanded, *“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment”* (John 7:24).

When this view of values is brought into the church, great damage is done. If the Jews, who had ordained appearances, were forbidden to glory in them, what may be said of the fabricated appearances concocted by the Gentile church?

The things that commend men to God are not seen as commendable by the world—even the religious world. A single example will suffice. *“But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold,*

we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

That is a vivid description of righteousness, or spiritual life, and how it appears in the world. Let me remind you that righteousness is, in our text, being equated with spiritual life.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW

“Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law . . . ” More modern translations read “the righteous requirements of the law.”^{NKJV, NASB, NRSV} The idea is that the ordinances of the Law defined righteousness. Those living up to them were, therefore, righteous. It made no difference whether

they were Jew or Gentile.

The “*righteousness of the law*” is consistently contrasted with the righteousness that comes from faith. Again, it is written, “*For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them*” (Rom 10:6). There is a slight difference in the meanings of Romans 2:26 and 10:5. In the first, “*the requirements of the law*” are depicted as the **means** through which men become righteous. In the latter, “*righteousness*” is the condition pronounced by the law upon the perfectly obedient person.

While the Law was a covenant made with Israel, it was indiscriminating in its offer. If “*the man*” who did what the Law

demanded was not a Jew, the promise still applied to him. If he did not, the condemnation of the law also applied.

The Jews, therefore, had no right to boast in their possession of the Law, or the sign and seal of circumcision. Neither the “*words of the covenant*” nor the “*sign of the covenant*” had altered their unrighteous state. They too stood in need of a righteousness from God. It is ever true, “*the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate*” (1 Tim 1:9). The boastful Jew was oblivious to this because of hardness of heart.

Alas, this is infinitely more than a history lesson! It unveils a human tendency that is to be mortified.

EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS DO NOT EXCLUDE THE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?”

With convincing relentlessness, the Holy Spirit continues to drive home to our hearts that external advantages are not spiritual ones. They do not bring the people closer to God, or give them the edge when judged by God. This particular line of reasoning is not suggesting that those with no revelation had actually measured up to Divine requirements. It is a hypothetical argument, looking at the matter as though the Jews were actually right in boasting of their superiority. The outcome of such thinking is devastating.

HYPOTHETICAL REASONING

This kind of reasoning (hypothetical) concedes an assumption for the sake of argument. This form of reasoning tests the validity of a pattern of thought that is actually false. One such case is also found in the parable of the pounds. One recipient took what was given to him, and over which he was an appointed steward, and “*put it away in a napkin,*” or handkerchief. When confronted by the master, he excused his slothfulness by saying he was afraid of the owner. “*For I*

feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow” (Lk 19:21-22). The owner soundly rebuked the man saying, “*Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?”* (Lk 19:22-23).

The “*wicked servant*” sought to justify his slothfulness by appealing to his

wicked servant’s assessment of the Master was right, he should have worked harder than the others.

Here is a fulfillment of Christ’s solemn warning. “*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*” (Matt 7:1). In regard to our text, the Spirit is showing that people judged to be inferior by those holding only external benefits may very well be involved in the judgment their critics.

Those not favored with unusual benefits, yet whose faith and works exceeded their peers, will have a part in judging those who had special favors, yet lived no better than others.

totally wrong perception of the master. The master was NOT “*austere*” or harsh. Neither, indeed, did he reap where he had not sown. In fact, he had sown a “*pound*” to this very servant. However, judgment was meted out just as though what the man said was the truth, i.e., “*Out of your own mouth I will judge you.*” If the

Those not favored with unusual benefits, yet whose faith and works exceeded their peers, will have a part in judging those who had special favors, yet lived no better than others. This consideration is worthy of some exploration. The Scriptures do have considerable to say about this condition.

JUDGED BY PEOPLE WITH INFERIOR BENEFITS

There are several instances in Scripture where the subject of our text is confirmed.

Nineveh

Nineveh was an unusually wicked city, yet repented when told destruction was on the way. The message to which these people were exposed was straightforward: *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”* (Jonah 3:4). There is no record of a summons to repentance, or a single word of hope that was held out. The message delivered to them by the word of the Lord would be considered by some to be a negative one.

The response of the people of Nineveh is one of the great occasions of history. *“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them”* (Jonah 3:5). A decree came from the king that was honored by the entire city. *“Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?”* (John 3:7-9). There have been few such occurrences in history, and none so significant as the repentance of Nineveh itself. It was not a Jewish city, and had no resident prophet or law from God.

Of this city, Jesus said, *“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here”* (Matt 12:41). They did not have the Law, yet turned from their wicked ways. Thus, as our text proclaims, Jesus declared they would rise up with the generation that heard Jesus, and soundly condemn it. And why so? Because they received less, yet did more! They repented at the declaration of a curse. What will be done to those who have not repented at the hearing of the Gospel of Christ, God’s power unto salvation?

Queen of Sheba

There is another remarkable incident in Scripture that serves to open this text to us. It is that of the Queen of Sheba, from the southern tip of Arabia. It is written, *“Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions”*^{NKJV} She came to Jerusalem *“with a very great caravan--with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones--she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.”*^{NIV} She was not disappointed, for *“Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her.”*^{NKJV}

The response of the Queen is one of the most articulate and perceptive

They did not have the Law, yet turned from their wicked ways. Thus, as our text proclaims, Jesus declared they would rise up with the generation that heard Jesus, and soundly condemn it. And why so? Because they received less, yet did more! They repented at the declaration of a curse.

responses ever uttered by a Gentile. *“It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness”*^{NKJV} (1 Kgs 10:1-7). A matchless response, indeed!

Jesus spoke of this Queen, who came from a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Like the men of Nineveh, she also would play a prominent role in the

day of judgment. *“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here”* (Matt 12:42).

And what is the wisdom of Solomon to compare with that of Christ, *“in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Col 2:3). She will verily stand up and condemn those blessed with far more than she had, yet who did comparatively nothing with it.

Some Others

There are others worthy of mention, concerning which time allows but a few remarks. **Rahab** the harlot, Gentile occupant of Jericho, believed the report concerning the Jews and their God, and hid the spies. She was blessed by being spared and found her place in the very genealogy of Jesus (Josh 2:1-2; 6:23-25; Matt 1:5).

Ruth, of the Moabites, who were forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:3), chose the people of God over her own. The result, she became one of the great women of Scripture, was the grandmother of David, and was also in Christ’s genealogy (Ruth 4:13-17; Matt 1:5).

There was also the **Syrophenician Woman**, a Greek, who besought Jesus to cast a demon out of her daughter. Even though the Lord appeared to ignore her, and even discourage her by saying it was not proper to give the children’s bread to dogs, yet she pressed in for the blessing. *“Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.”* To my knowledge, she is the only one to whom, these words were said. *“For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter”* (Mark 7:26-29).

There was also a **Centurion** who besought Jesus to come and heal his dear servant, who was at the point of death. When Jesus said *“I will come and heal him,”* the centurion’s faith rose up. *“Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers*

under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." And what will be the response of our Lord to this Gentile? Here is the only recorded occasion where Jesus marveled at someone's faith. "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so

be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour" (Matt 8:5-13).

In all of these cases, those with fewer benefits excelled those who had received much more. They proved to be better stewards of the less, that others were of the more. But their excellence was not the end of the matter. As our text says, "And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, **will he not judge you** who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?"^{NASB} Those who have received much, yet done little with it, will face those who did much with less.

Every person needs a righteousness from God. There is no theological persuasion that pushes one beyond this need. There is no Divine ordinance that removes this necessity. From the first to the last of our lives, the righteousness of God is needed. Those who have sensed this, seeking to please the Lord, and yet were ignorant of the Word that so states this need, will judge those who, with Bible in hand, go about to establish their own righteousness.

I cannot emphasize the importance of this text too much. We are living in a day, and among a people, where this is scarcely proclaimed or known.

JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE

²⁸ **For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh."** Here the Spirit comes to grips with the real nature of human identity with God. It is not in the flesh, but in the [human] spirit. He is going to take the ultimate external evidence and show that it is not sufficient proof of Divine acceptance. In Christ, the religion of the flesh has been exchanged for the religion of the spirit.

This text is not saying there are no longer "Jews," or that such an external distinction no longer exists. The absurdity of such a postulate is seen throughout this book. He is speaking to Jews. Paul carried a great burden for these people, his kinsmen according to the flesh (9:1-3). He categorically states God has not cast away His people Israel (11:1). The Spirit affirms there is yet a remnant among them, according to the election of grace (11:5). Only "some of the branches" were broken off, leaving the tree and the root still, in tact (11:17-21). His covenant to take away their sins is still in place (11:26-27). They are still "beloved for the father's (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) sake (11:28). The prospect of them receiving mercy remains (11:31).

THE OUTWARD JEW

What IS being affirmed here is that God's acceptance of the individual has

never been based upon the flesh, or external matters. Faith has ALWAYS been the criterion by which Divine acceptance was realized. Those approved by God were **always** people of faith (Heb 11:2,6,39). At this point, we must resist the temptation to launch out upon the sea of speculation, seeking to determine who was saved and who was lost under the Old Covenant. That is not the purpose of this text, and it must not be ours.

The point here is that earthly lineage does not equate to spiritual lineage. Even though men could trace their roots back to Abraham himself, that did not make them true children of Abraham.

In the Divine economy, there was a race within a race—**true** Jews within the Jewish people. This will be developed at length in the eleventh chapter. The point here is that earthly lineage does not equate to spiritual lineage. Even though men could trace their roots back to Abraham himself, that did not make them true children of Abraham. Appearance is not the vehicle of Divine intent. It is too small to contain heavenly abundance.

The Example of Ishmael

Take the example of Ishmael. Abraham was his father, and he was circumcised (Gen 17:23). Yet, he was not a child of promise, or a true Jew. It is written, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh (Ishmael) persecuted him that was born after the Spirit (Isaac), even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal 4:28-31). The promise of God came through Isaac, not Ishmael, though both were offsprings of Abraham (Gen 21:12; Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18).

The Example of Esau

Here is a case even more pronounced than that of Ishmael. Ishmael did have a different mother than Isaac, although they had the same father. But notice the case with Esau. He and his brother were twins, with the same mother and the same father. Both could trace their family roots back to Abraham, but both were not true children of Abraham, or real Jews. As it is written, "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to

election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, *The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*" (Rom 9:10-13). In this case, Jacob was a Jew within the Jews, and Esau was not.

Remember, the ONLY nation God has ever recognized as a whole is the one He created. Yet, even within that nation, only those who believed were His.

The real Jew is the one whose inner man is in fellowship with God, who is living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It is the person who is in Christ, who sprang from that nation, yet became the progenitor of a new race.

CIRCUMCISION IN THE FLESH

As Valuable as circumcision in the flesh may appear, it is no longer the mark of distinction with God. It was a type of real circumcision, but was not itself the

When the Spirit declares the ultimate fleshly people, and the ultimate external mark, did not make people accepted with God, He denounces all fleshly distinctions.

Satan has been aggressive to distort the understanding of men on this point. It further appears that he has been unusually successful in his efforts. Countless professing Christians trust in their religious heritage just as the Jews trusted in theirs. From Catholic to Protestant men boast of their religious roots, thinking that is what makes them acceptable to God. They hold to the correct doctrines like Ephesus, but they are not holding to the Lord of glory by faith. This is not to be construed to mean that doctrine is inconsequential, or that no good things can be found in religious heritage. It IS to be understood, however, that our faith and confidence are not to be placed in these things. Such misplaced trust will cost men their souls.

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real circumcision. It belonged to the order of flesh and blood, which cannot enter into the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). The flesh is the weakest part of our constitution, and therefore cannot be the place of spiritual identity. As one has said, "The true mark of distinction is not in the weak body, soon to be laid in the grave."^{Joseph Beet}

WHY IS THIS POINT MADE

The Spirit is making this point because of the proneness of men to trust in the flesh and external manifestations. This tendency did not end with the Jews, but continues in the Gentile church. The Spirit does not take up every instance or possibility of men trusting in the flesh, but goes to the ultimate fleshly distinction—the Jewish people and the sign of circumcision. Just as the Law was the ultimate moral code, so Jewish distinctions were the ultimate in fleshly glory. They stand for all glory in flesh.

Still others find their confidence in experiences in the flesh. These cover such things as viewing baptism as a mere outward sign, with no regard to its accompanying inner birth. Again, the sophist will see this as a denigration of baptism—but this is not at all the case. The value of our baptism is directly related to our faith. It is, after all, the one who "believes and is baptized" that will be saved (Mk 16:16).

An additional corruption of faith is found in those who place great confidence in evidences that accompany the reception of the Holy Spirit. They equate external evidences with the Spirit Himself, imagining they could never be fabricated or falsified. They trust in them, and vaunt them above faith and even Christ Himself. This is not to be taken as a rejection of all external evidences. Rather, our faith is not to lie in such things. If the ultimate

sign in the flesh, circumcision, did not prove a person was of God, you may rest assured no fleshly sensation or experience can do so.

THE FLESH IS NOT THE REALM OF CONFIRMATION

The flesh, because of its rejection by God, is not, and cannot be, the area of Divine confirmation. If flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God, and He has rejected all fleshly distinctions, how is it that men imagine great spiritual confirmations are made in the flesh? If "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8), why would God place the sign of Divine acceptance there? Would that not pull people back into the flesh from which grace delivered them?

Jesus said, "The flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63). But this is not true if that is the place where Divine acceptance is confirmed. Paul confessed, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom 7:18). Again, this could not be true if the superior blessings of God were realized in and confirmed by fleshly experiences.

I am careful to say that this is not a diatribe against all experiences in the body. That such things do exist, and that many of them are legitimate, cannot be denied. But they are NOT what makes us the children of God, nor are the proof that we are the sons of God. They are tangential, and are not to be placed in the same category as faith. Experience are the tributary, not the river.

Men tend to treat experiences in extreme manners. Either they make them primary, or assign no value to them at all. Both approaches are wrong. It is never right to exalt something that occurs in the body. Neither, indeed, is it appropriate to lead people to believe there are no outward benefits in salvation.

The Gospel helps us to place the exclamation point after the promises, and receive the benefits with which God loads us "daily" (Psa 68:19). However, grace will not allow us to trust in the benefits, or rely upon them to identify our acceptance with God. Honest hearts know such things can be removed from us. They are not guaranteed to us during our brief tenure in this world.

REAL IDENTITY

“²⁹ . . . but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”

Here is one of the most definitive texts of scripture. It lays the axe to the root of the tree of flesh, and unveils the true nature of life in Christ. Remember, this is a delineation of the need for, and characteristics of, the righteousness of God. It is a view of salvation, being in Christ, or being born again. This text will confirm that the essential change made in men is **within**. The character is changed, motives transformed, and everything becomes new. This is a view of the “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17).

The distinction that is now proclaimed is not found in nature, or the natural state of men. It cannot be traced back to Adam, or a state experienced in natural birth. The Spirit has already confirmed that both Jew and Gentile stand in need of a righteousness from God. Neither of them are righteous by nature, and both are sinners by choice.

It is axiomatic that inward change can only be initiated by God. Under the old covenant, the Lord issues a challenge. The purpose of this challenge was to confirm men can only be changed by God. *“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked . . . Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved . . . Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”* (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4,14; Ezek 18:31). How succinctly God stated the case through Jeremiah. *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil”* (Jer 13:23).

Men may philosophize about the

freedom of the human will, and the inherent ability of men to better themselves. Such thoughts are all vain and pointless. If man was able to extricate himself from sin and create a new heart for himself, there would have been no need for Christ Jesus.

God placed man in His creation, and endowed him with His own nature. The creation continually testifies of the eternal power and Divinity of God. Man’s conscience prodded him, excusing and accusing him. A precise and holy law was given to him, defining sin, and providing remarkable incentives to be holy. But sin dominated the race anyway, and did so consistently and without a solitary exception, saving for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. **Moral and essential change must come from God, or it will not come.**

It is axiomatic that inward change can only be initiated by God. Under the old covenant, the Lord issues a challenge. The purpose of this challenge was to confirm men can only be changed by God.

This principle is stated in Scripture. *“Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”* (Psa 127:1). The new birth is totally the work of the Lord. We are “*begotten*” by God (1 Pet 1:3; James 1:18). The birth is accomplished “*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:13). This does not mean men are not involved, but it is not in a causative or initiatory way. Their role is ancillary, not central.

Man can only change the outer man, and even then, he is severely limited. *“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?”* (Matt 6:27). There is a challenger for the “worker.”

INWARD IDENTITY

True identity is found within, not in the flesh, bloodline, or lineage. For this reason, God does not look upon the appearance, but “*on the heart*” (1 Sam 16:7). He alone “*knows the hearts of all the children of men*” (1 Kgs 8:39). When the Jews affirmed “*We are Abraham’s descendants,*” Jesus acknowledged they were that in the flesh. *“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants.”* Yet, when they rejoined “*Abraham is our faith,*” Jesus replied, *“If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.”*^{NASB} (John 8:33-40). They were NOT Jews inwardly.

When the Scriptures say “*inwardly,*” they speak of the spiritual part of man, where the Divine imagery is found. This is the “*hidden man of the heart*” (1 Pet 3:4), or the “*inward parts*” (Psa 51:6; Jer 31:33). If the individual is not identified with the Lord in that section, there is no saving identity at all.

To put it another way, if men are estranged from God in their thoughts, they are altogether estranged from Him. Even though they may honor Him with their “*lips,*” if their heart is “*far from Him,*” all of their worship is vain, and their religion pointless. When Jesus walked among men, He said of that generation, *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt 15:8-9). They were not Jews inwardly.

Why Does He Use the Word “Jew?”

Why does the Spirit refer to a true “*Jew?*” why not a Christian? That would seem more appropriate to many, some of which hold disdain for the word “*Jew.*” It is because He is contrasting appearance with reality, and the Jew is the only fleshly appearance God has ever honored. No other fleshly lineage as ever been held forth as superior. Even a physical people

chosen and ordained by God hold no eternal advantage if they are not inwardly the people of God.

God's View Is the Only View

This is the Lord's assessment of the situation, and no other view is valid. It makes little difference how illustrious the historical heritage may be, if the individual is not reconciled to God and being conformed to the image of His Son, all claims to godliness are only pretentious.

The religious climate of our day should confirm to your heart what a serious matter is being unveiled in this text. It is exceedingly difficult to find a people possessing a preference for God and a living hope. Sectarian walls have been erected that have obscured the "Sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2), constraining people to trust in their denominational names and doctrines like the Israelites did in the name "Jew," and in their possession of the Law of God.

But if God will not allow men to trust in a distinction He made, you may be sure He will condemn trust in distinctions He has not made.

Our association with God is "inwardly." Our thoughts, meditations, preferences, hates, and loves are the context in which Divine fellowship is realized. When God is not "in all their thoughts," it is because men are wicked, walk in pride, and seek not after God (Psa 10:4). Men are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them" (Eph 4:18).

Many of us have lamented over the lack of spiritual appetite in our generation. Churches are known for their concessions to the flesh. While the business, entertainment, and athletic world's increase their demands upon the time of people, the church is reducing its demands. Brevity and shallowness are in vogue more than ever, and entertainment and sundry distractions have filled the church-calendars. Vast bodies of people are quite content to spend less time hearing the Word of God than they in eating breakfast or lunch.

Is it all innocent, and no matter of concern? Indeed, it is not. It evidences that we are living in a time when the church will accept people who are not Jews "inwardly." However, God does not accept such people as His, and the time they spend in simulated worship is vain and pointless. Unless they acquire a spiritual appetite, there is not a shred of hope held out to them in the Word of God.

A CHANGE OF HEART

"... and circumcision is that of the heart..." The heart is the inmost part of man, just as the body is the outmost part. It is here, in the heart, where the essential

The heart is the inmost part of man, just as the body is the outmost part. It is here, in the heart, where the essential change must be made.

change must be made. The prophets spoke of a time when men would receive a "new heart." "A new heart also will I give you... and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26). This is something for which David longed, yet it was not available for his generation. "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psa 51:10). A "clean heart" is a "new heart"—a special creation of God. Like other saints prior to the enthronement of Jesus, David was "not made perfect without us" (Heb 11:40).

The Stony Heart Removed

Note, there is a two fold action fulfilled in this promise. First, the stony heart is removed, and second a heart of flesh is given. Thus, obstinance and rebellion are removed, and submission and sensitivity are granted in their place. The removal of the stony heart commences when the Lord opens the heart so men can give heed, or respond, to

the Word of God (Acts 16:14).

Where stony hearts remain, a most serious condition exists. Its presence negates any profession of identity with Christ. While we must take care not to be quick to judge men in this matter, we must not allow ourselves to excuse hard hearts that will not yield to the word of the Lord. Again, unless that condition is corrected, there is no hope for the person.

Dominated by Sin

The picture presented here is that of a heart that has been overgrown with sin. That mass of sin is called "the body of the sins of the flesh," or "the body of the flesh" (Col 2:11). It is a condition that renders the heart insensitive and calloused to God. Stephen described the state as being "uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51). Speaking through Moses, God charged that generation with having "uncircumcised hearts" (Lev 26:41). Jeremiah spoke of those who were "circumcised with the uncircumcised" (Jer 9:25). That is, although they were circumcised in the flesh, their hearts remained unchanged. Ezekiel spoke of those who were "uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh" (Ezek 44:7,9).

This is a state that finds the individual dominated by sin. It is the ONLY alternative to being received in Christ Jesus. Without this circumcision of heart, profession counts for nothing, works are but filthy rags to be discarded, and the individual is an enemy of God. It is when the sinful nature rules the whole person, shutting out the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and riveting the person hopelessly to a condemned world. It is appropriately described as being "being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh," or sinful nature^{NIV} (Col 2:13).

Let there be no ambiguity on this matter, as though there were any hope at all for the person enslaved to sin and dominated by the flesh. Before coming into Christ, we were "the servants of sin" (Rom 6:16). Also, in that state, we possessed no righteousness at all, much less the righteousness of God. As it is

written, "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness" (Rom 6:20). Men live in sin because they are enslaved to it. As Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34).

In order to be saved, or receive a righteousness from God, the flesh must be cut away from the heart. This brings sensitivity to God and a love for the truth, which is the secret to overcoming sin. This procedure is what constitutes a "new heart." It is a Divine operation in which the "flesh," or sinful nature, is separated from our essential persons.

Performed by Christ

This marvelous work is accomplished by Jesus Christ, and is associated with our baptism into Him. It is called "the circumcision of Christ." Baptism itself is not the circumcision, but the occasion during which it is performed. Colossians 2:11-12 declares this truth with great beauty and power. "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working (operation^{KJV}) of God, who raised Him from the dead."

In separating "the body of the sins of the flesh," Christ removes its power and dominion over us. This results in the remission of sins, or the removal of personal guilt. It also clarifies our vision of, and sensitivity to, the Lord, produces a great love for His Word, and brings righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).

In this circumcision, the mass of sin, or the principle of sin, is not obliterated, but separated from the part of us that is born again. The sixth chapter of Romans states it this way. "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 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 6:5-7).

Let me emphasize that "done away with," or "destroyed,"^{KJV} does not mean the principle of sin is no longer existent, but that it is no longer part of our real persons. That is why we are exhorted, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom 6:12). It has been cut away from us, yet remains in our earthen vessels. The seventh chapter of Romans will deal with the fierce war between the

The new heart has a love for the truth and a hatred for sin. It longs for the courts of the Lord, and admits to being a stranger in the world. Unless these conditions exist, the person has not been born again, and is under the control of sin.

new heart and the circumcised flesh.

The new heart has a love for the truth and a hatred for sin. It longs for the courts of the Lord, and admits to being a stranger in the world. Unless these conditions exist, the person has not been born again, and is under the control of sin. In saying this, I do not mean to oversimplify the situation. There are numbers of God's people who, because of faulty teaching, are not aware of the circumcision of the heart, or a new heart. They therefore interpret their struggle with sin as evidence they are not of God. However, when this truth is taught in power, those whom God has received in Christ will recognize the truth of the matter. They will see that their longing for purity and discontent with failures are evidence of a new heart. They are Jews indeed, and have received "the circumcision of Christ."

A CHANGE OF SPIRIT

"... and circumcision is... in the spirit, and not in the letter..." The expression "in the spirit" is both objective and subjective. Subjectively, or from the

standpoint of experience, it refers to the human spirit, or the expressive of man. Objectively, or from the view of its Source, it is the Holy Spirit who actually accomplishes the change. This is involved in being "born of the Spirit," as Jesus said, "... that which is born of the Spirit is spirit... so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:6,8).

Those circumcised in their spirit have a new disposition. It is described in second Corinthians in this way. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (5:17). In this marvelous new creation the objective of God is realized. "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).

Those with new hearts and spirits worship God out of a sense of preference, and not because of the demands of the Law. Thus those in Christ are described in this manner. "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3). Because of the atoning death of our Lord Jesus, God is able to fulfill His promise, "I will put a new spirit within you... a new spirit will I put within you" (Ezek 11:19; 36:26).

Not In The Letter

"... and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter."^{NASB} The "letter" is the written Word without a corresponding writing in the heart. It involves directing basically wayward people with rules and regulations. Until the Word of God is found within the heart of man, it remains in the "letter," and is powerless for the individual.

A religion of the "letter" not only does not contribute to spiritual life, it actually kills those attempting to serve God in that manner. The Old Covenant was a word of the letter, alienating its constituents from God because they had

no heart for the law. In a marvelous explanation of this circumstance, the Spirit says, “. . . *who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious . . . For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory*” (2 Cor 3:6-9).

When a good and holy Law comes from God, it condemns all whose nature is in conflict with that Law. Thus it becomes a letter that kills, a ministry of death, and a ministry of condemnation. The Law does not permit a person to try and be better, for all such efforts are vain. The heart and spirit of fallen men are so corrupt they cannot be salvaged. A new heart and a new spirit must be given. In Christ Jesus, praise the Lord, that is precisely what takes place.

This is an aspect of spiritual life that is not commonly known. The ignorance of this fact has spawned all sorts of erroneous doctrines and views. Legion is the name of those imagining their fundamental disagreement with God will be overlooked by Him. It will not. That is why He has provided such a full and glorious salvation. Because it was necessary for Him to remain just, as well as be the Justifier of the believer, He had to provide a way that would allow “*the gift of righteousness*” (Rom 5:17) to be given to men. Upon the basis of Christ’s vicarious offering, God could remove the heart of stone and grant a malleable heart of flesh to those believing on His Son. He could justly give them a new heart and a new spirit, thereby making their nature harmonious with His own. What a marvelous transaction!

THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANT

We cannot fail to mention the nature of the New Covenant, and how significantly it differs from the Old one. In the New Covenant, truth is internalized, becoming a part of the believer himself. The Spirit refers to this process in Jeremiah, and confirms it to be the

covenant now being administered by Jesus in the book of Hebrews. “*I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts . . . I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . . I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them*” (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10; 10:16).

Try as you may, you cannot trace these incredible accomplishments to men. They are a Divine work, and are therefore effective to accomplish His purpose. Faith enables us to be the recipient of this grand work, but the doing of it belongs to the Lord. As it is written, “*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*”^{NKJV} (James 1:21). Let it be clear that the Word of God is not able to save the soul as long as it is not engrafted, or implanted in the inward man. But when it is joined to the human spirit, it obtains such a Divine power as is necessary to be loosed from

When a good and holy Law comes from God, it condemns all whose nature is in conflict with that Law. Thus it becomes a letter that kills, a ministry of death, and a ministry of condemnation. The Law does not permit a person to try and be better, for all such efforts are vain.

the dominion of sin, and receive the righteousness of God by faith.

PRAISE FROM GOD

“*. . . whose praise is not from men but from God.*” The word “*whose*” refers to the true Jew, whose heart and spirit have been circumcised by the Lord. Such will receive “*praise from God.*” God will honor those who have availed themselves of His grace, believed the record He has given of His Son, and received His righteousness.

Here again is a facet of redemptive

truth that is not commonly known—at least not to any measurable degree. Religion that is nothing more than a “*form of godliness*” that “*denies the power thereof*” (2 Tim 3:5), knows nothing of receiving praise from God. It rather covets the praise of men, and is willing to make significant concessions to get it. If anyone is tempted to think in this manner, it is good to remember this word from the Apostle Paul. “*For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ*”^{NKJV} (Gal 1:10).

Honor from God

Those who seek honor from men cannot believe in Christ. Such a quest depletes the soul, blinds the eyes, and hardens the heart. That is why Jesus said, “*How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?*” (John 5:44). In sharp contrast with those benighted souls, Jesus said of Himself, “*I do not receive honor from men*” (John 5:41). That was not His objective, and He did not alter a single word or work in order to receive such passing admiration. However, what will be the portion of those who fervently sought for the honor only God can give? How will they appear in the great day of judgment. There is no need for conjecture on this matter. The Lord has spoken. “*To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life*” (Rom 2:7).

Loving the Praise of Men

While Jesus walked among us, His presence was so powerful “*many*” of the “*chief rulers*” believed on Him. Notwithstanding, they had too high of a regard for the religious dignities of their day, and therefore did not confess Christ publicly. The comment of the Spirit on this occasion is arresting. It interprets similar incidents that arise in our day, when people are exposed to more truth than they are willing to admit. “. . . *among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*” (John 12:42-43).

To be sure, those Pharisees will be held accountable for hindering others. As Jesus said to them, *“for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in”*^{2NKJV} (Matt 23:13). But those who chose to be applauded by men rather than God will not be excused either. In my judgment, there is too much of this *“spirit of fear”* in the churches.

The Father Will Honor Those Who Serve Jesus

Jesus promised that those who served Him would be honored by the Father Himself. Herein is a glorious promise, and it needs to be heard

God as an incentive for endurance and faithfulness. He knows that the opposition and unappreciation of men tend to wear upon the soul, causing discouragement. Further, Satan uses such occasions to tempt us to compromise, quit, or even deny the Lord. For this reason, a strong exhortation is issued to all who are laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God”*^{2NKJV} (1 Cor 4:5).

Lord as He cries out to that nation, *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth”* (Amos 3:2). They were *“a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth”* (Deut 7:6). Yet, that status could not effect a change within them.

Of those very people it is written, *“Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, And those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, And they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them; But they rebelled in their counsel, And were brought low for their iniquity”* (Psa 106:40-43).

Thus all needs are met in the “new creation.” The needs of men are addressed, as well as those of God. Men needed a new nature so they could please the Lord. God needed man to be new so He could bless him.

Righteousness could not be brought to men by external benefits, special fleshly status, and a unique covenantal *“sign”* in the flesh. If flesh could ever offer an advantage, it would have done so for those people. But it did not! *“The flesh profiteth nothing,”* even when blessed, pampered, and exalted above other flesh.

frequently by those fighting the good fight of faith. *“If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor”* (John 12:26). How the hearts of those in Christ yearn for the *“Well done”* of their Father! And it will surely come to pass.

ALL NEEDS ARE MET IN THE NEW CREATION

Thus all needs are met in the *“new creation.”* The needs of men are addressed, as well as those of God. Men needed a new nature so they could please the Lord. God needed man to be new so He could bless him. The blessing could NOT come through Adam. It had to come through Christ and a new creation.

Let it stand as it is written: *“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness”* (Rom 10:10). And why is this so? Because Jesus has satisfied God in His death, and is pleasing Him in His intercession (Isa 53:11-12). He has made it right and holy for God to confer His own righteousness upon the person who believes the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). Indeed, we do have *“so great salvation”* (Heb 2:3). See to it that you do not *“neglect it,”* or be pulled into the broken cistern of trusting in the flesh. *“Have faith in God!”* (Mark 11:22). Make it your aim to appropriate the righteousness of God, and to do so at any cost! You will not regret it.

If it were not important for us to know of the praise of God, Jesus would not have spoken so clearly of it. He Himself was motivated by the joy held out to Him, the extent of which we are incapable of knowing. As it is written, *“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Heb 12:2).

Hold Out for the Praise of God

The Spirit holds out the praise of

None of these needs could be met by the Law, or any other external means. Even when God chose a people, blessed them with unparalleled benefits, and provided them with marvelous incentives, yet they remained obstinate and disobedient. Never before nor since that ancient nation has there been a fleshly people so blessed of the Lord. Hear the

CONCLUSION

The passage we have considered is a foundational one. It introduces us to the nature of man, God, and the salvation He has provided. It has confirmed that there are no external advantages that can make men righteous—even God-conferred ones. Further, fleshly distinctions cannot compensate for the lack of God’s

righteousness. The apex of such notabilities was found in Israel, and still they remained fundamentally sinful and in need of a righteousness from God.

There is another thing to be seen here that is of special significance. Abraham, the father of those who believe

(Rom :1,12; James 2:21), was the *“friend of God”* (James 2:23). He towered above others, and remains a giant among men until this day. Yet, he could not pass righteousness to his posterity. Although a whole nation was blessed because of him, yet that very nation still stood in need of a Savior, and a righteousness from God.

If this is the case with Abraham, whom God identified as *“the father of us all,”* what can be said of the “church fathers,” or “restoration fathers,” or some other cluster of godly men? How is it that anyone would think their religious heritage made them acceptable before God, or gave them the edge over other peoples? The same may be said of religious movements, of groups of churches claiming some sort of uniqueness before God.

I come from a background that placed a significant emphasis on recent religious history, and particular movements that had embraced some facet or facets of the truth. In such an environment, little, if any, emphasis was ever placed on a righteousness from God. Correct procedures, patterns, and external observance seemed to lull people into spiritual sleep. It is not that the people were particularly sinful. Many of them were commendable in many ways.

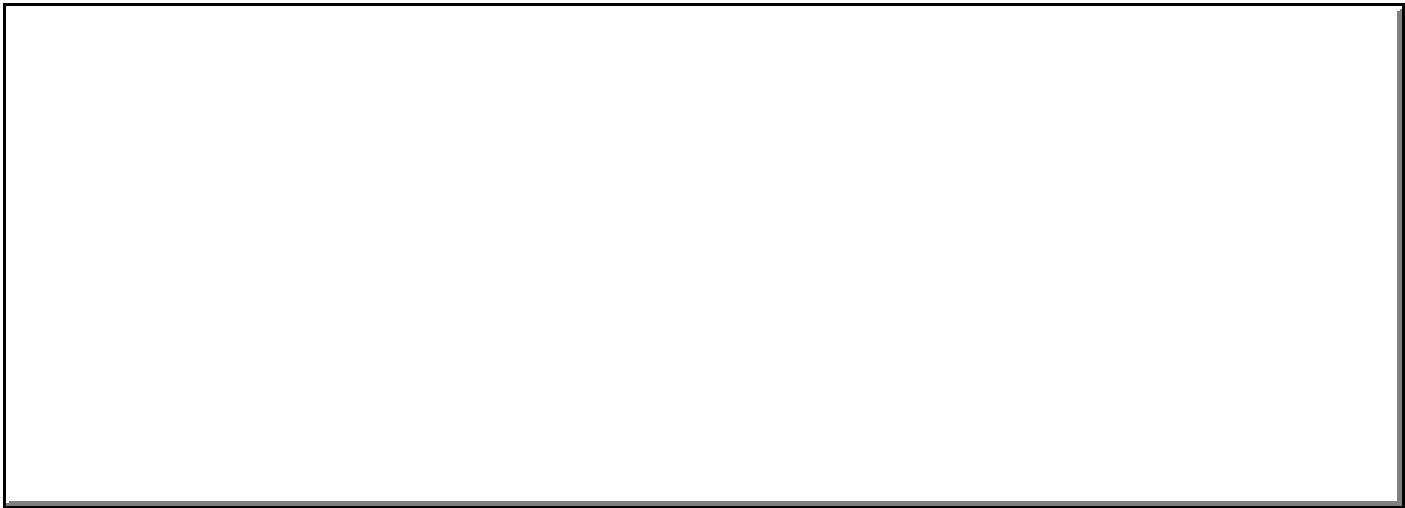
However, it is the nature of an outward emphasis to produce a spiritually lethargic people. It did in Israel, and it still does.

There is no advantage in precision—God-ordained precision—if men are still at variance with God in their hearts. If men do not have the righteousness of God, revealed through the Gospel, it makes no difference what else they may have.

There looms on the horizon of time a coming day, when the secrets of men will be judged by Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16). At that time, we will see clearly that those who sought first the kingdom of God AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS will have the advantage over all others. There will be people whose candlestick was removed, even though they held to all of the right doctrines, and opposed the ones that were wrong (Rev 2:4). There will also be those who have done *“many wonderful works,”* prophesying in Christ’s name, and even

casting out demons. Yet, Jesus will say to them that He *“never knew”* them, commanding them to depart from His presence (Matt 7:22).

It is imperative that professed believers take seriously the appropriation of the *“righteousness of God.”* This is not something that is achieved automatically. It comes *“by faith”* – it is a righteousness *“which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith”* (Phil 3:9). The believer must fight to maintain his faith (1 Tim 6:12). Faith must be nourished, fed, and bolstered by the Word of God (1 Tim 4:6; Jude 20; Col 2:7). If this is not done, righteousness will not stay with us. That is precisely why the Galatians were warned, *“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith”* (Gal 5:4-5). That price is too great to pay!



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 8



GOD'S JUDGMENT IS JUST

^{3:1} What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ² Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. ³ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴ Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged." ⁵ But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) ⁶ Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? ⁷ For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? ⁸ And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"?; as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.
(Romans 3:1-8^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. IS THEIR JEWISH ADVANTAGE? (3:1-2)
- II. SOME DID NOT BELIEVE (3:3)
- III. LET GOD BE TRUE (3:4)
- IV. OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS DEMONSTRATES GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (3:5-6)
- V. TRUTH INCREASED THROUGH A LIE (3:7)
- VI. A FALSE CHARGE (3:8)

The Kingdom of God is characterized by unique thought patterns. They are not after the manner of this world, and even appear foolish in the eyes of men. God has made a comparison between His thoughts and ways and those of men—men in their best fleshly state. "Let the wicked forsake

his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith 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" (Isa 55:7-9). This is a universal indictment.

The "unrighteous man" is anyone without the righteousness of God. With great power, the Spirit is convincing us that no offspring of Adam possesses that righteousness by nature. Nor, indeed, have any of them achieved that righteousness through their own efforts. There are no exceptions to this. The ONLY Man who has ever lived to whom, righteousness was NOT imputed, was the Lord Jesus Christ – and He was NOT a

son of Adam, but the "Seed" of the woman (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4). To every other person judged to be righteous, that righteousness was a "gift," not an achievement. It came from God, not from human effort.

In order to comprehend the things of God, there must be an abandonment of the "natural" way of thinking. The things of God simply cannot be comprehended on that level. As it is written, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). That is why the apostles spoke in spiritual words, expressing spiritual thoughts in words employed by the Holy Spirit. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"^{NASB} (1 Cor 2:13).

The passage before us employs this Kingdom method in an obvious way. The passage makes no sense whatsoever to the natural mind, and thus is corrupted by many. It is too high for any one who is not in Christ Jesus.

Here we find a form of spiritual reasoning that is most powerful. He is going to show us that no human conduct can alter the Person of God. God will not become unrighteous because man is unrighteous. Nor, indeed, is He righteous because of man's response to Him. He is always just and righteous in His judgments. Man, regardless of his activity, only accentuates God's righteousness.

Ponder the questions that will be addressed in this passage. They will be answered in the wisdom of God.

- ▶ What advantage has the Jew?
- ▶ What is the profit of circumcision?

- ▶ What if some did not believe?
- ▶ Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?
- ▶ If our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say?
- ▶ Is God unjust, who inflicts wrath?
- ▶ If the truth of God has increased through my lie to his glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?
- ▶ Why not say, "Let us do evil, that good may come?"

To actually deal with these interrogations is strange to the flesh, or "the natural man." However, they introduce a form of spiritual reasoning that is essential to a valid understanding. These questions are all provoked what the Lord affirms, and are answered upon that basis of that affirmation.

Circumstance is not the proper environment for godly deliberation. We

must guard against such imaginations.

These questions are based upon certain realities: (1) The Jew, (2) circumcision, (3) some did not believe, (4) the faithfulness of God, (5) our unrighteousness, (6) the righteousness of God, (7) God inflicts wrath, (8) the truth of God increases. None of these can be changed by mere human activity. They are all conditions we must confront. All of them are very real, and are not mere hypotheses, or human suppositions.

In this section the Spirit answers the objections that will be raised to what has been said to this point. These are objections presented from a Jewish point of view. In answering them, however, the Spirit not only speaks to Jews, but to all. He will confirm that God is absolutely righteous in all of His judgments. All who disagree with Him are, by virtue of their disagreement, unrighteous.

IS THERE A JEWISH ADVANTAGE?

3:1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. The NIV reads, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?"

Here we come into sharp conflict with

circumcision both came from the Lord. They were Divine distinctions among men, originated by the Lord of glory. What thoughtful person is willing to affirm there is no advantage to being chosen by God and granted a sign of His covenant in their flesh?

Our thinking must be brought into accord with the Lord, else the Scripture will yield no benefit to us. **When man's**

He does not ask what advantage the rich man has, for riches give man no advantage. Neither is the wisdom of men the point from which godly reasoning proceeds. Do not miss the power of this reasoning! The Spirit does not ask us if kings of the earth have an advantage, or those who are expert in some field of earthly endeavor. He asks what advantage the Jew has, for Jews alone can trace their national origin to the Living God.

With great care, the Spirit approaches this subject. He does not ask what advantage the philosopher has, for God has repudiated the philosophies of men. He does not ask what advantage the rich man has, for riches give man no advantage. Neither is the wisdom of men the point from which godly reasoning proceeds.

And when it comes to something men have done, the question is "What is the profit of circumcision?" He does not ask about the profit of earthly organizations, expert business acumen, or other areas of human accomplishment. All of man's righteousness, or very best achievements, are as filthy rags before God (Isa 64:6). The question is "What is the profit of circumcision?"—an ordinance of God.

much of the theology of our time. Many with whom I have had contact would not answer this interrogation as the Spirit does. They would emphatically declare that there was no advantage to being a Jew, or having the seal of circumcision. But they are wrong—seriously wrong. In their position they have maligned God, who chose and led the Jews, giving them the Law and the prophets as well. The distinction of being a Jew, and the uniqueness of the sign and seal of

theology does not allow the hearty embrace of the expressions of Scripture, it is to be discarded as chaff. It is not true, and hence is not profitable, but detrimental to our faith.

THE HIGHEST FLESHLY ADVANTAGE

With great care, the Spirit approaches this subject. He does not ask what advantage the philosopher has, for God has repudiated the philosophies of men.

Particularly for the Jew, the Lord is now going to confirm they are inexcusable before God. They had no righteousness of their own—even when given remarkable advantages. If there is any question about the impotence of the "natural man," the Spirit will now lay the axe to the tree of human reasoning. He is going to prove

flesh did not improve itself, even when given advantages from God. Men may argue about whether it was possible for them to become righteous or not, but the fact is no one did.

“MUCH EVERY WAY”

Nearly every major translation reads the same way (a rare phenomenon of itself): “*Much every way*,” or “*Much in every way*” (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV). The NASB reads, “*Great in every respect*.” “*Much every way*” means, however you look at it, there **ARE** advantages to being a Jew and being circumcised. Robertson says of this verse, “So it means the overplus of the Jew is much from every angle.” Word Studies

The facts that “*all have sinned*,” and that “*there is none righteous*” do not mean no one has had an advantage, or received special favors. Rather, sin had taken such a toll upon the human spirit, that no amount of fleshly benefit could correct the situation. It is essential that this is perceived to some degree, else the necessity of sending Christ into the world will not be perceived or appreciated.

This is precisely why Jesus is NOT preached in much contemporary religion. It is because the need for Him is not perceived. Men continue to cling to the notion that some goodness remains in fallen man. They overestimate the strength and freedom of the human will, and thus relegate Christ into the background. This is a sin of the greatest magnitude.

THE JEW’S CHIEF ADVANTAGE

No matter how you look at the subject, the Jew’s had the advantage over all others. However, there was a “*chief*” advantage that towered over all of the others. “*Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God*.”

The Oracles

The word “*oracles*” means the sayings, message, or utterances of God. The word also carries the connotation of brevity, in the sense of being introductory. These beginning communications from God included everything from the words uttered at Mount Sinai to the promises of

a coming Savior. The literal meaning of the word is “Divine communications.” A paraphrase of this verse could read, “Chiefly because to them were committed the very words of God.” That is the idea being communicated.

Notice, the Spirit does not say “*Scriptures*,” although that is, in fact, how the Word of God was given to them. He does not view the Word from an academic viewpoint, i.e., writing, but from the standpoint of its origin. Keep in mind that the Jews had been in possession of God’s Word for over 1,500 years. It had been copied hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times, and translated into other languages. Yet, the Spirit refers to “*the oracles of God*,” just as though that Word had been freshly spoken.

This is precisely how the Scriptures

This is precisely how the Scriptures are to be viewed. They are not to be regarded as the writings of mere men, or copies of the original, or a book that has been handed down through the generations. When we limit our view of Scripture to being the writings of men, we dull the edge of the Spirit’s sword.

are to be viewed. They are not to be regarded as the writings of mere men, or copies of the original, or a book that has been handed down through the generations. **When we limit our view of Scripture to being the writings of men, we dull the edge of the Spirit’s sword.** While there is nothing particularly wrong about referring to what Moses said, Isaiah said, Paul said, etc., that is not the most noble view of God’s word. These are all men God used, and their words are to be viewed as God’s word to men – “*the oracles of God*.”

At the time of this writing, the Jews

had only scrolls and books, and none of them were original. Yet, the advantage of the Jew (current advantage) consisted in possessing the very communications of God. I do not wish to labor this point, but draw attention to it because of the approach made to the Scriptures by much modern theology. They are approached with a degree of criticism and skepticism that is related to unbelief.

The Spirit never provides men with the option of determining which portion of Scripture is valid and which is not. With a consistency that never varies, the Scriptures are treated just as though in them we were hearing God speak out of heaven. They are “*the oracles of God*.”

The Advantage

The thought that God confined His communications to the Jews is a staggering consideration. He entrusted His Word with the people He had called and cultured. It was to their advantage to know what the Lord had said. Here, in the Word of God, the mind and will of God are contained. Through it, men come into some acquaintance with God, how He thinks, and what He is doing. That is an advantage! The Jews were the keepers of the only sacred books the world had seen. No other writing was given “*by inspiration of God*” (2 Tim 3:16).

This means it is a disadvantage to be ignorant of what God has said. That is particularly true when it is willing ignorance—i.e., having the Word, but not being acquainted with it. In our time, there is an unprecedented ignorance of the Word of God within the professed church. As a rule, its leaders are abysmally uninformed concerning the Scriptures. They choose to be specialists in other things. Such men, however notable they may appear, bring only disadvantage to the saints of God.

The Point

Lest we miss the point of our text, even the undeniable advantage of having the oracles of God yields no satisfactory results unless hearing is mingled with faith. This is the point being made, that in spite of every advantage, the Jew still stood in need of a righteousness from God.

As a people, they did not rise above others in this respect. As it is written, *“For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it”* (Heb 4:2).

While the possession of *“the oracles of*

God” are a distinct advantage, and is not to be despised or questioned, **it is not the ultimate advantage.** That is why Jesus said to the Scripture experts of His day, *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life”* (John 5:39-40). The chief

advantage of the Law and the Prophets is found in persuading men they have no righteousness of our own, and desperately need a Savior. Those brought to such a conclusion have profited from the Scriptures. They have, by those Scriptures, been made *“wise unto salvation”* (2 Tim 3:15). That is the ultimate of advantage.

SOME DID NOT BELIEVE

“ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?”

We now come to a section of unusually strong spiritual reasoning. It will become apparent to you that this is not an example of human philosophy. Nor does it conform to the rules of human logic. This very passage has been used to promote some *“damnable heresies”* (2 Pet 2:1) that lead men to believe God will take them to heaven even though they choose to live in sin. It is to our advantage to know the truth that is being expounded in this remarkable text.

“SOME OF THEM”

The manner in which this statement is made takes hold of our minds. *“What if **SOME** did not believe?”* This same form of reasoning is found in the eleventh chapter, and in First Corinthians. *“And if **SOME** of the branches be broken off. . .”* (Rom 11:17). *“Neither be ye idolaters, as were **SOME** of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as **SOME** of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as **SOME** of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as **SOME** of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer”* (1 Cor 10:7-10). Hebrews 3:16 says, *“For **SOME**, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by*

Moses.”

In all of these references, those who believed were in the minority, and those who fell were the vast majority. From the standpoint of numbers, those who did **not** believe were **“many.”** Thus, in First Corinthians 7:5, the Spirit refers to the

of the spies (Num 14:1-6). But this was not the end of the matter. When a report was made to *“all the children of Israel,”* the people chose to believe the faithless spies, rejecting the testimony of Joshua and Caleb. As a result, the unbelievers were all excluded from the promised land. God only allowed Joshua and Caleb to enter, and the *“little ones”* who had not yet come of age (Num 14:30-33).

The *“footmen,”* or fighting men, of Israel numbered 600,000 (Ex 12:37; Num 11:21). If we just considered that number, excluding the women, the percentage of unbelievers was 99.9999666%. The percentage of those believing was .000033%. A statistician would consider *“some”* believed, but the Lord of glory says

*“some did **NOT** believe.”* The heavenly equation, therefore, might be stated in this manner. 600,000 less 2 equals *“some.”*

I once explained this to one of my daughters this way. Those who do not believe are counted as nothing. They are *“not a people”* (Deut 32:21; 1 Pet 2:10). Those who do believe counted for one. Therefore we read, *“There was A MAN in the land of Uz, whose name was Job”* (Job 1:1). Thus, in the case of Israel in the wilderness, 599,998 times zero equals zero, while two times one equals two. Joshua and Caleb were fully recognized by the Lord, while the rest are described as

THE REASONING OF THE FLESH

For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?

FLESH

For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?

And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"?

SEEKING TO JUSTIFY SIN

very same group of people as *“many.”* *“But with **MANY** of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”* Other versions accent the proportionate aspect of the numbers: *“**MOST** of them”* (NKJV, NASB, NIV).

In this text *“some”* reflects a Divine perspective. While those who did not believe were actually the majority, they were outweighed by those who DID believe. Take, for example, Joshua and Caleb. When Israel spied out the promised land as a prelude to entering it, these men were two of the twelve spies sent out. They were the only two who believed the land was given to them by God—one sixth

“some” who “did not believe.”

Those having a propensity to numbers should consider how God counts people. We do not have any idea of the number of people who perished in the flood, but we know exactly how many were saved—eight (1 Pet 3:20). We also have no idea how many people perished in Sodom and Gomorrah, but we do know how many escaped out of it—three (Gen 19:30).

SOME BELIEVED

The point of our text is that there were believers. Everyone did not reject God’s testimony. Among the chosen people great men stood out. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Caleb, David, the Prophets, etc. The presence of these believers, though the numeric minority, confirmed how wicked the unbelievers were. It also shows that God always receives those who believe His Word and trust in Him.

The failure of men to believe is NOT owing to any deficiency or lack of clarity in “the oracles of God.” That is why unbelief is consistently condemned in Scripture, regardless of where it is found. While I can only speak for myself, I am alarmed at the unbelief that is found in the professed church. It is in such staggering proportions that it is mind-boggling. The Word of God is questioned, and often challenged, by the very people who claim identity with Christ. It is a matter of deep concern.

UNBELIEF DOES NOT NULLIFY GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

“What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?”^{NASB} Here is a most powerful form of reasoning. Does the fact, for example, that the unbelieving Jews fell in the wilderness mean that God proved unfaithful to them? Was His promise to them voided by their unbelief? The Spirit will take up this identical argument in regards to the Jews’ rejection of Christ in the eleventh chapter. It is, therefore, a pivotal point of consideration, and to be given serious thought.

First, only those who disbelieved fell in the wilderness. God brought Israel into Canaan, just as He promised. He had never committed Himself to bring the unbelieving and faithless into the land of promise. Their unbelief did not void the promise of a coming Messiah, or invalidate one word of His “oracles.” In a blast of fury, God did not make an end of believers, nor did He call back His promises of a Savior and a New Covenant. He held to His revealed purpose, even though “some” were excluded because of

His mighty angels, 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. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:7-9). Is there a soul so naive as to think such people never believed, or had never escaped the pollution of the world? Remember, these are words spoken to the church, and that for a reason.

The failure of men to believe is NOT owing to any deficiency or lack of clarity in “the oracles of God.” That is why unbelief is consistently condemned in Scripture, regardless of where it is found.

It is possible to come out of Egypt, yet never get into Canaan. It is also possible to get out of Sodom, yet be destroyed in route to safety, like Lot’s wife. Jesus admonished us to “remember” her (Lk 17:32). It is possible for God to make a man a king, then reject him for his disobedience (1 Sam 16:1).

In all of these cases, and more, God did not withdraw His promises. He did not adopt a new purpose, abandoning the one He had revealed. The unbelief of men did not cause Him to be unfaithful. The “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11) moved along, and those who believed continued to be blessed.

God Is Faithful to His Character

God not only is faithful to His Word, He is also faithful to His character. He “cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:13), or act in contradiction of His Person. He cannot overlook a believer, and He cannot countenance an unbeliever. He cannot promise something He will not do.

Again, a strong argument will be made of this in the eleventh chapter. There the Spirit will confirm that Israel has not been abandoned. There present state is only “until the fulness of the Gentiles” (Rom 11:25). That is the Word of the Lord, and it makes little difference what men may think of it. Those who affirm God has thoroughly cast away His people Israel, have not told the truth. What is even more, they have represented God as going back on His covenant with them, and being unfaithful to His Word. The teaching of such men must not be allowed among believers.

their unbelief.

There are those who hold that God will take professed believers to heaven, even though they stumble on in the darkness. These false prophets say that God made a commitment to such people, and will not withdraw from it, even though they prove faithless. However, their reasoning is flawed to the core. First, God has made no commitment for good to anyone who does not walk by faith. In fact, He affirms, “Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”^{NKJV} (Heb 10:38-39).

God has made some commitments concerning those who do not believe, who are disobedient, and who do not know Him. “. . . he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16). “. . . when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with

The ONLY Jews rejected by God are those who do not believe. The Gospel is still the power of God to them “*first*” (Rom 1:16). On Pentecost every single Jew who believed, receiving the Word gladly and being baptized, were added to the church (Acts 2:41). This acceptance prevails to this day, confirming that God is faithful. If God does not reject a person because they are a Jew, then he has not summarily rejected the nation. If “*glory, honor, and peace*” will be given “*to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first . . .*” (Rom 2:10), then God has not written off the Jews. They are still recognized and offered salvation.

Let none imagine, however, that this

makes the slightest provision for the acceptance of those who refuse to believe. Their unbelief will not make the faithfulness of God to His own word and character void. They WILL be rejected because of their unbelief. If this is not so, then the Lord has not spoken truth concerning the destiny of unbelievers.

Further, and for purposes of clarification, nothing in God’s word suggests that an unbeliever never was a believer, or that a believer can never become an unbeliever. Those are suppositions created by men. Jesus spoke of those “*who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away*” (Lk 8:13).

The Spirit also exhorts believers, “*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God*” (Heb 3:12). It is folly, therefore, to affirm such a condition cannot occur. In fact, such a thought quenches and grieves the Spirit of God

Our text reminds us that God has pledged certain reactions to both believing and not believing. Because there is no unfaithfulness with God, it is not possible for an unfaithful person to be blessed, or a faithful person to be cursed. Either of those would require God to deny Himself, and He is incapable of doing that. God is ever faithful!

LET GOD BE TRUE!

“Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: ‘That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged.’”

The question has been posed, “*For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?*” The answer is emphatic. “**Certainly not!**” The KJV version reads, “*God forbid!*” Although not accurate etymologically, “*God forbid*” projects the spirit of the text—namely that such a statement will not be allowed by God, as the rest of the verse attests. Other versions read, “*By no means,*”^{RSV} emphasizing there is no provision for such a conclusion to be entertained. The NASB reads, “*May it never be,*” reflecting the response of faith which is repulsed by such a thought. The NIV reads, “*Not at all,*” which highlights the absurdity of the thought that God could be unfaithful.

This verse must not be viewed through an academic set of glasses, as though it were merely a rhetorical argument. The character of God and the salvation of men hang in the balance. If God is unfaithful, how can He be trusted? And, if men can be unbelieving and still be saved, precisely what is the point of salvation? If God can receive people fundamentally unlike Himself, why is there a need for a Savior at all? What, then, is the purpose of the

atonement? And what sense is there to reconciliation?

The whole point is that God “*cannot deny Himself.*” He cannot accept sinners into His fellowship and remain righteous. He would, in such a case, have to abandon His prerogatives of judgment. The very thought of such things is repugnant to the righteous.

LET GOD BE TRUE

This expression does not suggest that man has any role whatsoever in God being, or remaining, true. Rather, it poses a conflict between the perception of men and the declaration of God. The exhortation is to reject any suggestion

made ineffective by the lack of believing on the part of man. The person rejecting God’s Word will pay the penalty for doing so, but will not deprive the Word of its effectiveness, or God of His faithfulness. The blasphemy of men, and their rejection of the Word of God are like weightless notes on the balance of eternity. God remains faithful in all of His promises and affirmations.

The Example of Esther

We have an example of the faithfulness of God in the book of Esther. Although God Himself is not mentioned in this book, yet His providence and power are clearly seen in it. When the Jews were threatened by wicked Haman, Esther’s uncle, Mordecai, informed Esther of the plot. He charged Esther “*that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.*” Although she was the Queen, she was fearful to go before the king. She thus informed Mordecai of her reasoning. “*All the king’s servants, and the people of the king’s provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these*

We are not to allow our minds to entertain the imagination that God’s Word is voided or made ineffective by the lack of believing on the part of man.

that the Word of God is not precisely the truth. To approach the Word of God with any element of doubt reproaches God.

Permit me to be more specific. We are not to allow our minds to entertain the imagination that God’s Word is voided or

thirty days.”

Being strong in faith, Mordecai refused to accept this answer. Knowing that God was faithful, he boldly sent word back to Queen Esther. *“Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, THEN SHALL THERE ENLARGEMENT AND DELIVERANCE ARISE TO THE JEWS FROM ANOTHER PLACE; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”* (Esther 4:5-14). Mordecai knew God was faithful to His promises!

This type of faith let’s *“God be true,”* bringing benefit and protection to the believer. However, notice that if Esther refused to be the means through which God worked, she herself would pay the due penalty: *“but you and your father’s house will perish.”* Thus the Lord would react to unbelief precisely as He said He would, as well as He would to belief.

The Mind of the Flesh

It should not surprise you that the fleshly mind balks at letting *“God be true.”* If some word of God is not preferred, or jars against preconceived notions, the carnal mind is quick to find a way that justifies rejecting the word. Perhaps it is an historical position, a distorted view of Scripture itself, or some contextual consideration. Some imagine they can get rid of the Word by an appeal to etymological considerations, or some position that sees a particular word as no longer relevant. Indeed, unbelief is creative in its attempts to avoid letting *“God be true.”*

It is for our good that we are admonished to confront such tendencies militantly, throwing them down with our strong weaponry (2 Cor 10:4-5). Any view that neutralizes Divine commitments, or presents God as retracting His promises, is from the devil. Unless cast down in faith, embracing it will prove to be the undoing of the soul.

As we will see, every person will eventually confront God, and every syllable uttered by God will be found true. Wherever men have contradicted God, or refused to let Him be true, a strict accounting will be given. Men must be quick to come away from false views, and embrace the Word of God as it stands.

GETTING TO THE POINT

With God-glorifying precision, the Holy Spirit is showing that the judgment rendered upon the Jews did not negate God’s pledge to them. The promise made to Abraham would be carried out, even though *“some”* of them would fall through unbelief. The Spirit will provide an extensive exposition of this in chapters nine through eleven.

I am fully aware that I am in a geographical area where this is emphatically denied. But those who contend the Jews have been totally abandoned are wrong—seriously wrong. Our text is reasoning against such vanity

It should not surprise you that the fleshly mind balks at letting *“God be true.”* If some word of God is not preferred, or jars against preconceived notions, the carnal mind is quick to find a way that justifies rejecting the word.

of thought, showing that God has not recalled His promises to the ancient people, even though a considerable number of them have been cut off.

AND EVERY MAN A LIAR

See the strength with which the Spirit speaks. He makes no allowance whatsoever for a conflict between the words of men and the words of God. He does not appeal to interpretations, laws of hermeneutics, and contextual considerations. He takes us back to the thus saith the Lord, and soundly condemns all who are at variance with it.

Not only are we to let *“God be true,”* but we are also obliged to let all who contradict Him be liars. Their supposed credentials are not honored in heaven.

The NASB reads, *“Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar.”* If believing God means I must discount everything every man has said, then let it be so! If believing God means I must relinquish the doctrines of men, then let it be so! If it means I must no longer listen to certain teachings, then I will listen to them no more! If it involves withdrawing from some people, then do it.

This is not a call to be factious, for that is a work of the flesh. However, there are teachings and religious bodies who make it exceedingly difficult to believe God. Some views of God make it nearly impossible to let *“God be true.”* They cast a mantle of doubt upon the Word of God, and cause people to trust in men rather than in the living God. It should not surprise you that some people actually give very little of their own persons to God. They are depending on their church, or their position, to carry them safely through the judgment. But it will not happen!

It is true, our text is a hypothetical presentation. He is not suggesting that every man is a liar, for there are those who *“speak the truth in love”* (Eph 4:15). There are faithful ministers *“as the Lord gave to every man”* (1 Cor 3:5). There are those who *“speak the truth in Christ”* (1 Tim 2:7). The point of this text, however, is that every believer be resolute in his determination to believe God. Whatever the repercussions of letting God be true, even if it is accepting every contradicting person to be a liar, let it be so! Since we will face Gof, let Him be true!

GOD WILL OVERCOME

“. . . as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.” This statement is taken from Psalm 51:4. *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.”*

Here is an expression of true repentance.

David's Repentance

This was David's penitential Psalm when convicted of his sin against Uriah. He had contradicted God in his conduct, then complicated it with a command concerning Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. God said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14), yet David did. God said, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" (Ex 20:17), yet David did. The Lord said, "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex 20:13), yet David sent Uriah into the heat of the battle, making his death certain. God said, "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex 20:15), yet David stole Uriah's wife.

Will God let this matter go unchallenged? Indeed, He will not. In a subtle way, God had been judged. His Word had been ignored, as though it was unjust and could be broken with impunity. You already know the account. God sent the prophet Nathan to David to confront him with his sin. The result was that David repented, eventually writing the 51st Psalm (2 Sam 12:7-20).

David was willing to "Let God be true, and every man a liar." In the end, he came to his senses. His faith compelled him to seek for God to be justified in "ALL of His sayings." He did not seek to justify himself, but brought his will into harmony with that of his Lord. He took hold of this immovable and irrevocable truth: "**GOD IS TRUE!**" When clothed in his right mind, the man after God's own heart did not question that God was right. He therefore brought his will into alignment with that of his Lord.

But allow me to take this matter a little further. God had made a promise to David, that He would raise up from the fruit of his own body, a King to sit upon his throne (2 Sam 7:12). This was BEFORE David's transgression with Bathsheba, and against Uriah. Did David's unfaithfulness negate that promise? Indeed, it did not, even though it cost David great sorrow and affliction. How well it is stated in the 132nd Psalm. "The LORD hath sworn in truth unto

David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne."

David was eventually brought back to the Lord and His commitment. In so doing, he justified God, showing Him to be faithful, and himself unfaithful. The variance between him and God was settled this side of the veil.

THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

The promises and commitments of God are not in harmony with the mind of the flesh. In fact, they sharply conflict with it. Abraham is a case in point. We will see that he also justified God, accounting that He was true.

When God promised Abraham he would be a father of many nations, it contradicted all natural laws. Indeed, it was something that was impossible from

DID NOT CONSIDER HIS OWN BODY, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), AND THE DEADNESS OF SARAH'S WOMB. He DID NOT WAVER at the promise of God through unbelief, but was STRENGTHENED IN FAITH, giving glory to God, and being FULLY CONVINCED that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness'" ^{NKJV} (Rom 4:17-22). Our faith Abraham "let God be true."

The text continues that this was not written for Abraham's sake alone, "but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (4:24-25).

WHEN GOD IS JUSTIFIED

The thought of God being justified is not a strange one. There is a word said about those who were baptized by John, that touches on this subject. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God **against themselves**, being **not** baptized of him" ^{NKJV} (Lk 7:29-30). In submitting to John's baptism, the people were letting God be true, and every man a liar.

Abraham was old—even past the age of begetting children. His wife Sarah was barren, and could not bear children. How would Abraham react to the promise of God? Would he let God be true?

the standpoint of the flesh. Abraham was old—even past the age of begetting children. His wife Sarah was barren, and could not bear children. How would Abraham react to the promise of God? Would he let God be true?

The Word of God speaks clearly on this point, bringing great honor to God, and revealing the superiority of faith. "(As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations') in the presence of Him whom HE BELIEVED; God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, **CONTRARY TO HOPE, IN HOPE BELIEVED**, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.' And **NOT BEING WEAK IN FAITH**, he

The Pharisees and lawyers, however, in **not** being baptized by John, rejected "God's purpose" for them, thereby judging the Lord. For whatever reason, when they rejected God's counsel, they proved they were liars. What is more, if they did not resolve this conflict before they left this world, it will be brought up once again on the day of judgment.

PERILOUS TIMES

One of the perils of our times is the popularity of questioning God and judging His Word. Also, some theologies rob the people of a sense of God's greatness, teaching them to rely upon their own abilities, and affirming that God no longer intervenes in the affairs of men. Such thoughts evidence unbelief.

All of this is done under the false guise of superior wisdom, and understanding. The fruit such approaches to Scripture have yielded confirms the source from whence they came. It has reproached God, neutralized the effect of the truth, and weakened His people.

God's word always corresponds with reality. It is never philosophical in nature, but declarative of the real situation. His Word is always spoken with the panorama of all things (past present, and future) in mind. It also strictly conforms with His eternal purpose, which never varies.

THE DAY

There is an appointed day in which the Lord will judge *"the secrets of men by Jesus Christ"* (Rom 2:16). In that day every variant thought will be exposed. God will be shown to be true before an assembled universe, and no one will dispute the case. Those who are bold enough to judge God now, will themselves be judged by Him. As well, the very word they have refused to accept will judge them. As Jesus said, *"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day"*^{NKJV} (John 12:48).

The thought of men judging God is fearful to consider—but that is precisely what takes place when they do not embrace His word. Those who declare they are angry or upset with God because of their lot in life have judged Him! Those who balk at His commandments, not obeying the Lord, have judged Him! Those who refuse to preach the message He has given of His Son have judged Him! But in the end, God will overcome.

In the *"great and notable day of the Lord,"* all words and thoughts that

contradicted the Word of God will be brought to light. It will be made clear that God was judged unfit to be believed by the transgressors. There will be no suitable defense for contradicting the Lord, or refusing to receive what He said and did without doubting. Before an assembled universe, it will become apparent that *"God is true."* Everything from false gospels to misplaced emphases will be

some erroneously conclude. He has not denied the Divine origin of the Jews, nor the advantages and favors granted to them. He HAS confirmed that sin so dominated them, they could not change their condition, even when they were given such marvelous advantages. They too needed a righteousness God. The worth of these advantages is not diminished by their failure to take hold of

In the *"great and notable day of the Lord,"* all words and thoughts that contradicted the Word of God will be brought to light. It will be made clear that God was judged unfit to be believed by the transgressors. There will be no suitable defense for contradicting the Lord, or refusing to receive what He said and did without doubting.

dashed to the ground as the truth of God is lifted high.

A due consideration of these realities will change the way men refer to the Word of God. It will alter the way they preach, and what they emphasize. That, of course, is why these things are written.

Hear the words again, and stand in awe of our God. *"That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged."*^{NKJV} That speaks of ultimate confrontation—one that cannot be avoided!

THE SPIRIT GUARDS AGAINST FALSE CONCLUSIONS

In this passage, the Holy spirit carefully guards against false conclusions. The indictment of the Jews is not to be construed as proof that God has abandoned His covenant with them, as

them by faith.

SOMETHING PRACTICAL

There is a very wonderful practical truth to be seen here. Even though the Law has pronounced us guilty and condemned us, yet a recovery from our helpless condition can be realized. God has promised those who call upon His name will be saved (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13). God is justified in that saying every time someone calls upon His name, believing His Gospel, and yielding to His will. It makes no difference how deeply a person may have sinned, or how dull the sensitivity of the heart may have grown. If that person will hear what the Spirit is saying, God will hear from heaven, deliver the individual, and receive praise from his mouth (Psa 50:15). Thus, even in this world, God will be justified in His sayings. Every believer is proof of that, which brings great joy to the heart.

IF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS DEMONSTRATES GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

"But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a

man.)⁶ Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?" Here is a lofty form of spiritual reasoning. God is the heart of the reasoning, and His

purpose is its direction and focus.

What is *"our unrighteousness?"* It is more than wicked deeds, or immorality, as

ordinarily perceived. It is being unlike God in both thought and deed.

It includes unbelief. *“For what if some did not believe?”* (3:5). An unbelieving heart is an *“evil heart of unbelief”* (Heb 3:12). Unbelief is the preeminent sin of which the Spirit convicts men. As it is written, *“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin . . . because they do not believe in Me”* (John 16:8-9). A failure to embrace the Gospel, or to trust in the Lord with all of the heart, is unrighteous, and cannot be overlooked by the Lord. As a rule, however, I have found the modern church does not regard unbelief in this manner.

It also includes the ungodliness that characterized the Gentile world, a general state of moral decline. *“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them”* (1:32). Lives that are basically self-indulgent are unrighteous lives. When the will of God is exchanged for self-will, the individual is proved to be unrighteous, and worthy of condemnation.

There is also the personal sin committed by David, which stands for all personal acts of unrighteousness. *“That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged”* (3:4; Psa 51:4). While the nature of sin remains the same, some sin works itself out in reprehensible human conduct. Some of the infamous sins of Scripture include the following.

- (1) Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit.
- (2) Cain murdering Abel.
- (3) The attempt to build the tower of Babel.
- (4) Ishmael mocking Isaac.
- (5) Esau despising his birthright.
- (6) The selling of Joseph by his brethren.
- (7) The murmuring of Israel.
- (8) The refusal of Israel to go into Canaan.
- (9) The rebellion of Korah.
- (10) The betrayal of Jesus by Judas.

“Our unrighteousness” is any aspect of life that is at variance with the Lord. Unbelief is at the core of unrighteousness. A state of spiritual deterioration is found in all unrighteousness. Unrighteousness also erupts in specific acts that dishonor

“darkened” (Rom 1:21). No matter how you culture and discipline the mind of the natural man, God has *“destroyed the wisdom of the wise,”* and reduced the *“understanding of the prudent”* to *“nothing”* (1 Cor 1:19).

Men have modified the heinousness of sin and transgression by giving it other names: sickness, addiction, life style, chemical dependence, inherited tendencies, family curses, alcoholism, homosexuality, mistakes, etc. By employing these fallacious terms, sin is not seen as worthy of punishment.

Thus, when Paul speaks *“as a man,”* he is showing us the absurdity of human reasoning. He is putting forth a argument that flesh presents to justify its involvement in sin. Here is how flesh reasons. **If God forgives sin, and if my exoneration from sin glorifies God, then why should I be concerned about sin? If God is honored by remitting my sin, why is sin so bad?**

This Is How Flesh Reasons

Particularly when exposed to the Gospel of Christ, this IS how the flesh reasons. Because fleshly reasoning has been dignified by shallow religion does not remove this proclivity. Whether men acknowledge it or not, the reason for continuance in sin is because it is not viewed as a serious and perilous condition. If sin were viewed by men as seriously as it is by God, religious counselors would be out of business over night! Sinners would flee for refuge to Jesus, to procure remission and cleansing from sin, thereby receiving grace to say **“NO”** to ungodliness and worldly lusts (Heb 6:18; Tit 2:12), and power to live by faith.

God and bring judgment on the individual. Speaking of this latter view, the Spirit says, *“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow (“superfluity”^{KJV}) of wickedness . . .”* (James 1:21).

Thus, *“our unrighteousness”* covers the entire spectrum of sin. It cannot be perceived by simply comparing ourselves with others, or confining ourselves to certain immoral acts.

I SPEAK AS A MAN

Here Paul acknowledges that he is not putting forth a valid argument, but showing the fleshly perspective of things. Through the Spirit, he is going to show the absurdity of such reasoning. Apart from Jesus Christ, it is ever true of man, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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”* (Isa 55:8-9). As to the thoughts of unregenerate man, God Himself speaks. *“The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity”* (Psa 94:11). When men fell into sin, and the Divine image was marred within them, they *“became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was*

Men have modified the heinousness of sin and transgression by giving it other names: sickness, addiction, life style, chemical dependence, inherited tendencies, family curses, alcoholism, homosexuality, mistakes, etc. By employing these fallacious terms, sin is not seen as worthy of punishment. Rather, they produce a sort of sympathy for the transgressor, as though they had been victimized against their will. But all such reasoning is *“as a man.”* It is NOT an expression of *“the mind of the Lord,”* but is in militant opposition to it.

The strong wording of this text dashes this kind of reasoning to the ground. It is a form of reasoning that is *“as a man,”* not as a Jew! It represents the way flesh thinks, and unless abandoned in favor of

“the mind of Christ,” will bring the judgment of God upon the individual.

PUTTING A HANDLE ON THE TEXT

The wording of the text significantly differs from the manner in which religious people are accustomed to talk. Much of that difference is owing to the deviate manner of their thinking. Notwithstanding, some clarification of the reading of the text will prove helpful.

Here is how the text reads in various versions. “But if our unrighteousness **commend** the righteousness of God, what shall we say?”^{KJV} “But if our wickedness **serves to show** the justice of God, what shall we say?”^{RSV} “But if our unrighteousness **brings out** God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say?”^{NIV} “But if our injustice serves to **confirm** the justice of God, what should we say?”

First, the Spirit is handling an objection presumed to be offered by ungodly men. The argument He is addressing might be stated this way. “**If the righteousness provided by God through Christ, has been accented by the grievous nature of our sin, why should God punish men for their sins?**” To put it another way, “If God is glorified by imputing His righteousness to sinners, is it not unrighteous for Him to punish sinners?”

The Spirit is unveiling the real manner in which flesh reasons. A refusal to accept the righteousness of God, and an insistence upon continuing in sin, are excused upon the supposition that God is love, and is longsuffering toward man’s waywardness. In due time, it is thought, God will help me change.

DOES OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS CONFIRM GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS?

In a sense, our unrighteousness does confirm the righteousness of God—but not in the way that flesh reasons. The very word “**UNrighteousness**” declares there is a standard that is contradicted by the sinner. There is an Image from which man has fallen, and concerning which he comes short (Rom 3:23). In this sense, therefore, the righteousness of God is

confirmed by our unrighteousness, i.e., by the stark contrast of human nature with the Divine nature.

From another view, the fact that God raises us from death in trespasses and sins demonstrates His marvelous righteousness. He is thus proclaimed to be “*just and the Justifier of him that believes in Jesus*” (Rom 3:25). He is NOT unrighteous to accept those who come to Him through the Son, because of the thorough atonement accomplished in His death. God is glorified by the transformation of sinners!

When the wrath of God comes against sinners, is it wrong? Was it wrong for Him to judge Cain? Is there a soul who is willing to affirm it was wrong for God to disrupt the building of the tower of Babel? Was it wrong to drive the wicked inhabitants out of Canaan, giving their land to Israel?

But this is not the view being addressed in our text. The question is one posed by the flesh, seeking to justify involvement in sin. We know this by the extension of the question. “*Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)*”

IS THERE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS WITH GOD?

When the wrath of God comes against sinners, is it wrong? Was it wrong for Him to judge Cain? Is there a soul who is willing to affirm it was wrong for God to disrupt the building of the tower of Babel? Was it wrong to drive the wicked inhabitants out of Canaan, giving their land to Israel? Because God sent Israel into the seventy year Babylonian captivity, can He be charged with being unrighteous, inconsiderate, or forgetful of His promises? When Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem, leveling the Temple and ravaging the Jews, was God being

unrighteous?

If God is glorified in showing mercy, why did He not forgive them, and lavish His love upon them? This is how the flesh reasons. It seeks to divert the attention away from its own recalcitrance and wickedness to God Himself. The flesh seeks to justify the sinner IN his sin, rather than seeking justification FROM it.

Although flesh does not reason in these precise words, the Spirit identifies its real mode of thought. He does not give credit to the flesh, or allow it to express itself in its own words. The truth of the matter is that those refusing to receive God’s righteousness see no real need for it. They are content with their own manner of life. When God punishes them because of their ways, they impute unrighteousness to God, saying He was not fair, or was inconsiderate, or did not understand the real situation. Like Jonah, they become angry with God, even thinking they are right in doing so (Jonah 4:4,9).

This is the root of men become angry or upset with God. They are seeking to justify themselves, and are doing so at the expense of God. It is not an innocent reaction, but a blasphemous one, contradicting every aspect of faith.

Men are not to presume upon the grace of God, or imagine that God will be good to them just because they are His “*offspring*” (Acts 17:28-29). They must not allow themselves to think sin will be ignored by God, or left unpunished. The goodness of God by no means justifies involvement in sin. The forgiveness of God is no reason to suppose He does not hate it, or will not punish those who continue in sin. God’s goodness leads to repentance, not to transgression!

HOW SHALL GOD JUDGE THE WORLD?

“*God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?*” Here is an arresting consideration. If God is not right in punishing the wicked, how could He then judge the world? The day of judgment itself would then prove to be an act of unrighteousness—in fact, the ultimate act of unrighteousness.

If men are not personally responsible for their sin, how can God judge them for their sin? If sin is only a helpless technicality addressed and overthrown by grace, what reason is there to judge the world at all? How can God judge the world if it is not personally at fault?

It should not surprise us that the judgment of God is a most unpopular subject in the contemporary church. Many young believers have never heard it proclaimed. The organized church has been inoculated with spurious theology, and no longer thinks of the day when *"God will judge the world in righteousness by that Man"* (Acts 17:31).

The Day of Judgment Is Necessary

The very term "judgment" implies that sin must be condemned, and righteousness extolled. If these two things were not essential, judgment would be a farce. Remember, early in this book we were told, *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"* (Rom 1:18).

I want to labor the point of this reality. **It is not possible for ungodliness and unrighteousness to escape the wrath of God!** It should not surprise you that this is not generally believed. If it was, sin would be quickly and energetically abandoned! If men doubt this is the case, let them consider the Son of God Himself. When the sins of the world were placed upon Him (Isa 53:6), He endured the wrath and cursing of the Almighty. The localization of all sin in the body of Christ (1 Pet 2:24), required that sin be *"condemned in the flesh"* of the One who bore them (Rom 8:3). Thus, the Son was *"made a curse for us"* (Gal 3:13).

The only way to advantage from His vicarious death is to be born again, have our sins remitted, and receive the righteousness of God. The Lord has revealed that He will ultimately confront the ungodly, holding them strictly accountable for their refusal of His righteousness. Men may excuse their sin in this world, but they will not be able to do so on the day of judgment. Be sure, your sins will find you out!

God will uncover the *"secrets of men,"* exposing their hearts. As it is written, *"God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel"* (Rom 2:16). The Lord *"will make manifest the counsels of the hearts"* for all to see (1 Cor 4:5). When standing before *"the judgment seat of Christ,"* before whom we *"must all appear,"* every single person will *"receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"* (2 Cor 5:10). For those who have done *"evil,"* He will show they deliberated rejected His righteousness in preference of their sin.

How often do professed gospels affirm that reality? In some circles, preaching has been so saturated with academia that

After declaring the appointed appearance of all men before Christ's judgment seat, the apostle said this. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor 5:11). He knew nothing of professed seeker-friendly services and palatable religious orations.

it is devoid of any power. Men are exposed to mere religious lectures, or the spouting of theological novelties. However, this is not how holy men preach! After declaring the appointed appearance of all men before Christ's judgment seat, the apostle said this. *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men"* (2 Cor 5:11). He knew nothing of professed seeker-friendly services and palatable religious orations. He knew the day of judgment was coming closer, and that not one whit of tolerance toward sin would occur at that time. If sin is not hated and renounced in this world, it will be the cause of condemnation on the day of judgment.

The Lord Will Help Us

Hearing this, some may despair, thinking themselves unequal to the

challenge of being godly. However, praise God, our liabilities are covered in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. How glorious are the words of promise. *"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen"* (Jude 24-25). Faith not only produces a fervent desire to continue in the Lord, it also lays hold of the Power that can keep us from falling. God is able to do this, even though you are not able of yourself.

Sin is falling morally. It is stumbling because we are walking in darkness. It is never considered a light matter, or something that is easily resolved. When we possess the righteousness of God, however, He *"keeps us from falling."* Just as surely as the disciples arrived on the other side of a temporarily stormy sea (Matt 14:22-34), so you will arrive safely in glory if you live by faith.

The condition of the trusting one goes beyond being kept from falling. That is only the prelude to what is coming. God is fully capable of presenting us *"faultless"* in the blazing light of His glory. On that day, when His glory exposes everything fully, and nothing is hidden, God is able to present His people as *"faultless,"* unflawed, perfect, and unblemished. The weakest part of them, their flesh-and-blood-bodies, will be forever gone, and they will be clothed with immortality. If that seems too aggressive, God is still *"able"* to do it.

As if that were not enough, the Lord is also *"able"* to present us before His presence *"with exceeding joy."* No fear, no trepidation or trembling, only a swelling and grateful joy! Such rejoicing will bring great glory to the God, whose workmanship we are (Eph 2:10).

BEING SAVED BY HOPE

Before concluding this section, a word should be said about the powerful effects of hope. While flesh tries to justify its involvement in sin, hope forbids such an attempt. This is why it is written, *"For we are saved by hope."* Hope, which is faith

in its forward posture, never attempts an explanation for sin. Rather, it makes sin repulsive, and drives the believer to prepare for the day of judgment. Scripture says it this way. *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.*

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

Hope knows that God is righteous in judging the world. It knows that sin is unreasonable, and cannot be excused. It is convinced that the wrath of God will come against sin in all of its forms. For this reason, purity of heart, mind, and body, are sought with zeal. Such purity, praise the Lord, is attainable because of the death and exaltation of the Lord Jesus

Christ. We can be cleansed daily (1 John 1:7,9; 2:1).

We acknowledge we are *“not yet perfect,”* and that we still stand in need of a Savior and Intercessor. We joyfully confess that we need the grace of God. With great delight and thankfulness, we admit our need of the Holy Spirit, and constant access to the throne of grace. But we will not excuse our sin, minimize it, explain it, or attempt to cling to it. We long to be where it cannot enter.

TRUTH INCREASED THROUGH A LIE

“For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?” Here is another argument presented by the flesh. This is not the statement of sound theological thought, as some imagine, but an expression of the foolishness of the flesh. It is an attempt to justify sin and avoid the inevitability of Divine judgment.

Other versions read, *“For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto His glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?”*^{KJV} *“But if through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds to His glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?”*^{RSV} *“But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?”*^{NASB} *“Someone might argue, ‘If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases His glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?’”*^{NIV} *“But, some might still argue, ‘how can God judge and condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights His truthfulness and brings him more glory?’”*^{NLT}

Let it be clear, this is not an intellectual form of reasoning, as though these very words coursed through the mind of the sinner. This is more an intuitive way of reasoning than a cognitive one. The Holy Spirit is putting in words an imagination that is entertained by the carnal mind. It is a form of spiritual interpretation, or unveiling the secrets of the heart,.

The foundation of this pseudo-reasoning is the affirmation that God will overcome when He is judged. *“Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: ‘That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged’”*^{NKJV} (3:4). The righteous man

Thus the penitent sinner makes no attempt to explain his sin, or excuse his transgression. Rather, by God’s grace, he brings his thinking into accord with the Lord. Cleansing and recovery are earnestly sought.

will reason like David did, confessing and forsaking his sin. He will plead with the sweet psalmist, ***“Have mercy upon me, O God . . . Blot out my transgressions. . . Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin . . . Purge me with hyssop . . . Make me hear joy and gladness . . . 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”*** (Psa 51:1-12).

Thus the penitent sinner makes no attempt to explain his sin, or excuse his

transgression. Rather, by God’s grace, he brings his thinking into accord with the Lord. Cleansing and recovery are earnestly sought.

The mind of the flesh, however, does not think in this fashion. It seeks to justify itself so aggressively that it does not hesitate to impute unrighteousness to God. Here is the corrupted reasoning of the mind of the flesh. ***If, when I sin, the truth of God becomes more prominent by way of contrast, and if God is glorified the more by that contrast, how can it be just for me to be punished? If my sin has only served to prove that God is righteous, how I can disciplined or condemned for contributing to His glory?*** The seriousness of such a notion cannot be overstated!

TWO NOTABLE EXAMPLES

There is a fundamental flaw in this reasoning. The underlying thought is that God receiving glory automatically accrues to the benefit of those through whom the glory came. But this is not true! Take, for example, the case of Pharaoh. He was raised up in order that God might receive glory through him. As it is written, *“For the Scripture says to 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’”*^{NKJV} (Rom 9:17). The declaration of the name of the Lord throughout the whole earth, however, brought no

advantage whatsoever to Pharaoh! He was not rewarded for contributing to God's glory. The reason for this condition is quite simple. He himself had no desire to glorify God. In fact, his will had to be crushed, and his purpose overthrown for God to receive glory. No such person will be rewarded by the Living God!

A similar observation could be made concerning Judas Iscariot. Through him, God was also glorified. His betrayal, energized by Satan himself, was impotent to overturn the purpose of God. Rather, it actually became the means through which salvation was wrought out for us. But Judas received no credit for this, for that was not his aim. He willingly made place for Satan, and sought to obtain gain through his diabolical deed.

"MY LIE"

Here the Spirit refers to man's sin and transgression as a "lie"—a corruption of the truth, diametrically opposed to it, and devoid of any reality. A lie is the antithesis of the truth—directly opposite to it. In its essence, sin is a lie—a delusion from the wicked one. Presenting itself as an advantage, it brings a curse instead upon those who choose to indulge in it.

The First Sin of Humanity

How pointedly this is illustrated in the first sin of humanity. Although strictly charged by God NOT to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Eve indulged in a conversation with the devil about the matter. Following her indulgence of Satan's reasoning, she drew some conclusions. *"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat"* (Gen 3:6).

Her perceptions were not true. What she concluded was a lie! The tree was not good for food! God had already defined what was pleasant to the eye and good for food. *"And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food."* In

addition to these, were the "tree of life" and "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:9). After being deceived by the devil, however, Eve concluded that the forbidden tree was also pleasant to the eye and good for food. In addition, she imagined it was *"to be desired to make one wise."* None of those things were true. Therefore, when the fruit was eaten, both Adam and Eve lived out a lie.

Human nature was polluted immediately. Degeneracy was not a slow and lengthy process, but yielded remarkable results right away. As soon as the guilty pair were confronted with God,

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the corruption of their spirit surfaced. When God called out to Adam, he did answer. However, he did not acknowledge his transgression at the first. Instead he answered, *"I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."* The Lord then pointedly asked Adam, *"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"*

Adam did not fall on his knees in deep contrition of heart, but immediately sought to excuse the matter. *"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."* Facing the woman, the Lord asked, *"What is this you have done?"* Instantly, Eve presented what appeared to be a plausible answer for her reprehensible conduct. *"The serpent deceived me, and I ate"* (Gen 3:10-13). Technically, both of them told the truth. Eve did give Adam of the tree, and

Satan did deceive the woman. Notwithstanding, this did not excuse their conduct. Thus they were judged, and sin and death entered the world.

To this very day, men have retained this propensity to excuse their sin. But sin is a lie, and thus cannot be excused. Justification does not come to us by fanciful explanations, but through *"faith in His blood"* (Rom 3:25).

The psychiatrists, regardless of their self-professed value, are wrong in seeking an explanation for deviate conduct. People sin because they have believed a lie. In so doing, they have judged God, considering the testimony of His creation, their own conscience, and His Law to be worthless. No person will be rewarded by God for having to be overruled. When God is glorified by the subduing of a person, that individual will not be honored for providing such an occasion.

ERRONEOUS REASONING

There is a form of erroneous reasoning that is prevalent in some circles. It views God receiving glory through a person as the ultimate goal and benefit. There is an element of truth to the perception. Namely, that God will be glorified in everyone, whether they are saved or lost. No reproach will be brought upon the Lord when people are cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). There will be no word spoken against the Lord and His Christ when the words are spoken, *"I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (Matt 7:23). Thus it is written, *"For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, AND in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"* (2 Cor 2:15-16). All men will, in the end, be cause for God to receive glory and honor.

Is the chief end of man to glorify God, as some affirm? There is a tone of truth in the statement, but it comes short of God's revelation of the purpose for man. God has spoken more specifically on this subject, leaving not doubt about it.

Made for Dominion

In the beginning, the Lord stated the reason for creating mankind. *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth”* (Gen 1:26). Later, the Psalmist elaborated on this intent, expanding our understanding of it. *“Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet”* (Psa 8:6). After the exaltation of Christ, the Holy spirit took the matter even further. *“For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.* (Heb 2:5-8a).

In elaborating on this, the Spirit says this objective has not yet been realized. *“But now we see not yet all things put under him”* (Heb 2:8b). However, as a pledge of the coming dominion, He declared, *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Heb 2:9). All things were made for Him (2:10), and those who are in Him will be *“joint heirs”* with Him (Rom 8:17). The time will come when the saints will *“possess the kingdom,”* receiving the dominion for which man was made (Dan 7:18,22,27). The chief purpose for man, from this perspective, is to have eventual dominion. In Christ, he is being cultured for that marvelous and extensive reign.

Seeking the Lord

From another view, man’s chief purpose is to seek the Lord, endeavoring to find Him and come into fellowship with

Him. This objective is clearly stated by Paul in his exposition of God’s purpose for humanity. *“From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us”^{NIV}* (Acts 17:26-27).

James confirmed this to be the purpose for man when he said, *“After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things”^{NKJV}* (Acts 15:16-17).

From still another view, the appointed purpose for man is to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. With unusual power, this is affirmed in Romans 8:29-30.

Conformity to the Image of Christ

From still another view, the appointed purpose for man is to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. With unusual power, this is affirmed in Romans 8:29-30. *“For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them he also glorified.”^{KJV}*

The formation of Christ in us (Gal

4:19) is the appointed objective for man. Where this does not happen, God will still be glorified, but no benefit will be given to the individual lacking that conformity to Christ’s image. Here, in this world, the aim is for Christ to *“dwell in our hearts by faith.”* In strict accord with this objective, we are *“strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man,”* in order that this might be fulfilled (Eph 3:16-17). If this does not happen, God will still be glorified through those not conformed to Christ’s image. However, they themselves will be thrust from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

WHY SAY SUCH THINGS?

It is necessary to say these things because of the great apostasy in which we are living. Men have been deluded into thinking they can be wed to the cursed order, living out a lie, and still be saved in the end. They imagine that God is somehow glorified BY them in this situation. They view salvation as a sort of safety net that protects us from hitting the bottom, so to speak.

I have frequently heard men say, *“The only difference between the saved and the lost is that the saved are forgiven sinners.”* They imagine that *“accepting Christ”* is an end of itself. But that is not the case. The Spirit says, *“But as many as received him, to them gave He power TO BECOME THE SONS OF GOD, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:12-13). Becoming the sons

of God involves being cultured for appointed dominion. It moves one into the realm where conformity to the image of Christ, and partaking of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) can become realities. It includes a continual seeking for the Lord, to know Him and fellowship with Him in His sufferings, as well as His glory (Phil 3:7-14).

Losing Salvation??

Still others affirm that once in Christ, it is impossible to miss heaven. Once sins are forgiven, it is thought, the person can never again be overcome by sin. Again,

there is a flavor of truth in the view, but very slight.

First, the doctrine assumes that we have received the whole of salvation, which is not the case at all. If our salvation is *“ready to be revealed in the*

conformed to the image of His Son. It includes running, fighting, wrestling, looking, and standing.

What would compel a person, any person, to conclude that it would be unjust for God to reject a person who

people think in this manner, and why such doctrines have been contrived. It is because that is the way flesh thinks! It is because men imagine that God is glorified by saving people who do not want to be saved. Somehow the natural man reasons that if everything turns out for God’s glory, everyone should really be saved.

Were not Adam and Eve expelled from the very garden into which God placed them? Did not many who were safely delivered from Egypt fail to arrive in Canaan? Even though Lot’s wife got out of Sodom, did she arrive in a place of safety? Did the man who received a real talent from a real master, and was given a real stewardship, have it taken from him? And was he not cast into outer darkness? The answer to all of these questions is too obvious to say more.

last time” (1 Pet 1:5), the whole of it is not yet possessed. If Jesus is going to *“appear the second time”* *“for salvation,”* then more is yet to be possessed than we presently have (Heb 9:28). Even our adoption is not yet complete. We have, it is true, received *“the Spirit of adoption”* (Rom 8:15), but there is more to be experienced. As it is written, *“we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”* (Rom 8:23).

Jesus is *“bringing many sons to glory,”* but they are not yet there (Heb 2:10). Israel did not come into Canaan as soon as they left Egypt, and neither do we enter into heaven as soon as we are forgiven our sins. There is a wilderness journey from here to glory, and we are not to assume it will be completed FOR us. God will complete the work by working IN US *“both to will and to do of His own good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). That involves being

chose to live in sin? If such a person once made a profession of faith, would God be unjust in condemning them for their unbelief? What is the rationale behind this contemptible teaching? What would lead a person to the conclusion that the glory and honor of God would be advanced, and the disobedient saved, in spite of the fact they walked in darkness?

Were not Adam and Eve expelled from the very garden into which God placed them? Did not many who were safely delivered from Egypt fail to arrive in Canaan? Even though Lot’s wife got out of Sodom, did she arrive in a place of safety? Did the man who received a real talent from a real master, and was given a real stewardship, have it taken from him? And was he not cast into outer darkness? The answer to all of these questions is too obvious to say more, and our conclusions are equally apparent.

But I will wax bold and tell you WHY

And if God will save a person who continues to live a lie, even though he professes to know Christ, what rule of thought would prohibit us from thinking all sinners would not be saved?

SINNERS WILL BE JUDGED AS SINNERS

The flesh reasons, *“Why am I also still judged as a sinner?”* The question is a fundamentally dishonest one. If Jesus came into the world *“to save sinners”* (1 Tim 1:15), precisely what distinguishes a saved person from an unsaved one? Ultimately, it is faith. But faith is *“the victory that overcomes the world”* (1 John 5:4-5). Those who live in sin are not living by faith. Were it possible to live by faith and still remain in sin, faith would be proved to be impotent.

Men will be judged as sinners when that is, in fact, what they are. They will not be able to justify their sin, for a Propitiation has been provided for it. They cannot claim a right to salvation because God received glory upon them, for they have *“crucified the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame”* (Heb 6:6).

In the end, a righteousness from God must be possessed, and it can only be obtained by faith. God will allow no excuse for involvement in sin. He has made righteousness available.

A FALSE CHARGE

“And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come’?; as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.”

Again, I want to emphasize that this is not a literal statement made by the

mouths of all sinners. It is a corrupt manner of reasoning, and is being exposed by the Spirit because it is not evident.

Here the Apostle deals with the response of wicked men to his teaching of God’s grace. With great power, the Spirit spoke through Him of the grace of God,

affirming that salvation is unequivocally *“by grace through faith”* (Eph 2:8). Confirming the superiority of grace, it is affirmed, *“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”* (Rom 5:20). Sin, in this case, became an occasion for the reception of God’s grace.

Though sin had ravished us, taking us down to the depths, the grace of God retrieved us, raising us into “heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). Even though “we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”^{2NKJV} (Tit 3:3-7).

Grace outweighed sin. The more sin there was, the more grace was received. That is a marvelous circumstance. One would think it impossible to corrupt such wonderful teaching. But flesh manages to corrupt it anyway, as is characteristic of it.

The charge brought against Paul was leveled by the Jews, not the Gentiles. They thought that because Paul repudiated the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), he actually was encouraging sin in his doctrine. This line of thinking is still held by many people in the Christian community. Paul addresses this matter later, in the sixth chapter. There he shows how foolish the notion is. “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*” (Rom 6:1-2). Again he says, “*What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid*” (Rom 6:15). Something overlooked by the legalist is that grace makes sin unreasonable and detestable. In the experience of “*the true grace of God*” (1 Pet 5:12), men are effectively taught to “*deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,*” not indulge them (Tit 2:12).

Jude spoke of “*ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness,*

and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). They used grace to cover up their own preference for sin, and justify their transgressions.

WHY THE VIEW IS WRONG

While sin necessitates the grace of God, it does not produce or create it. Grace does not come to men because of sin, but because of Divine love and interest in men. Thus, grace is not automatically received when men sin. Sinners must first hear the good news of the Gospel and embrace it by faith, else grace cannot be

Grace outweighed sin. The more sin there was, the more grace was received. That is a marvelous circumstance. One would think it impossible to corrupt such wonderful teaching. But flesh manages to corrupt it anyway, as is characteristic of it.

received. God is not disposed to lavish His grace upon men simply because they have sinned. Were that the case, He would be obliged to pour it upon everyone.

Sin is an evil tree than cannot produce good fruit. As Jesus said, “*Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a 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*” (Matt 7:17-19). It is not possible for good, of itself, to spring out of evil—for grace to be given simply because it is needed.

The sophist will object, pointing to Joseph, for example, who was blessed of God in grievous circumstances. Following the revelation of himself to his brothers, he said, “*But as for you, ye thought evil*

against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20). In this case, God overturned the wicked counsel of Joseph’s brothers in order to bring Joseph good. He was not blessed **because** they did evil. Were it not for the intervention of God, nothing good would have come from Joseph’s hateful treatment by his brothers. Their intent was an evil tree from which no good fruit could come.

Similarly, God overturned the apparently superior counsel of Ahithophel, co-conspirator with wicked Absalom (2 Sam 25:31-34).

Slanderosly Reported

Good doctrine can be distorted by the enemies of God. Thus men took the glorious message of the grace of God, and said Paul was encouraging people to sin, so they could receive even more grace. One might wonder precisely why this charge was made against the Apostle. That wonderment is largely owing to the general absence of such teaching in our time. Allow me to briefly mention some of the pivotal teachings of the Apostle who labored more abundantly than they all. These are taken from the book of Romans, and are only representative.

- ☞ That a message is God’s power to salvation, not human achievement (1:16).
- ☞ None are righteous of themselves (3:10).
- ☞ The righteousness of God has been revealed without the Law (3:21).
- ☞ That there are some people to whom the Lord will not impute sin (4:6-8).
- ☞ That justification comes before the evidence of it, and righteousness is realized before the assurance of it (4:9-11).
- ☞ Righteousness is imputed upon the basis of faith in Christ (4:22-24).
- ☞ The gift of grace abounds to the many by Jesus Christ (5:15).
- ☞ The obedience of One is the basis for many being made righteous (5:19).
- ☞ Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (5:20).

- ☞ We have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ (7:4).
- ☞ There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).
- ☞ God's predestined purpose is based upon His foreknowledge (8:29a).
- ☞ God has predetermined that those predestinated will be conformed to the image of His Son (8:29b).
- ☞ Nothing is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (8:38-39).
- ☞ That grace and works cannot be mingled as a basis for salvation (11:6).

It should be evident to you that these are not common teachings in our day. Yet, they are at the very heart of the Gospel and sound doctrine. They admittedly are abrasive to the flesh, provoking it to speak against them, as though they granted a license for men to sin. All such affirmations are slanderous. There is no truth to them.

Those who preach these truths are often charged with being antinomians – without Law. The person laboring under a system of Law cannot believe that the grace of God is as effective as His commandments. Thus they refrain from teaching grace, viewing it as inferior to the demands of Law.

The power of the new creation

Those who minimize grace, or make no mention of it at all, fail to see the power and nature of the new creature. They continue to cling to the notion that men, provided with the right information and incentives, can extricate themselves from sin. They are really not convinced men need a righteousness from God.

When a person is born again, he is rendered capable of willingly fulfilling the righteousness outlined by the Law. He has been freed “from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). While the remnants of the old nature remain in him (Rom 7:14-25), that is not the preeminent part of his person. He is primarily a “new creation.” Old things have passed away, and all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17). The essential person has been changed.

Rather than the grace of God

introducing a lenient attitude toward sin, it actually is a more powerful and demanding principle than Law. The person receiving the grace of God works harder, goes further, and is more fervent for God than any person under the Law. You have only to compare the rigorous life of Paul AFTER he tasted the grace of God in truth, with his life under the Law.

Thus Paul is not hesitant to speak against those who twisted the Gospel he preached. They were guilty of slander, as well as unbelief.

The End Does not Justify the Means

There is a secondary application of this text. Doing evil that good may abound may also apply to using ungodly means to

If any one is prone to think we are dealing with inconsequential matters, or mere theological technicalities, the Spirit says of the slanderers, “*Their condemnation is just.*” The KJV reads, “*whose damnation is just.*” The NIV reads, “*Their condemnation is deserved.*”

This is obviously a harsh denunciation, and richly deserving. To take the means appointed by God to deliver men from sin, and make it the occasion for continuing in sin, is a most grievous transgression. Any justification of sin is wrong, but to present God as approving or overlooking it will cause condemnation to come upon the person.

One additional thought on this: we are

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achieve, what is conceived to be, godly purposes. The modern church often employs questionable means to accomplish what it thinks is a good purpose. It is not uncommon for larger churches to use professional fund raisers, for example, to garner sufficient funds for a new building.

Others will go to the professions of the world to correct the moral behavior of their members. It is quite common to have profession counselors on the church staff whose only credentials are their degree in psychology. Additionally, some religious groups hire secular motivators to provoke zeal in their leaders.

Only godly means should be used to achieve godly purposes. If we are going to run the race to glory, it must be run “*lawfully,*” or in strict harmony with the Lord of glory (2 Tim 2:5). As simplistic as that may sound, it is still not clear to many people.

THEIR CONDEMNATION IS JUST

never put at a disadvantage by saying it the way God says it. In fact, the disadvantage comes when we do not use “*words which the Holy Spirit teaches*” (1 Cor 2:13). If the Scriptures say “*God imputes righteousness apart from works*” (Rom 4:6), that is the way we will say it. We have no regard whatsoever concerning those who imagine this gives a license to sin. It is their responsibility to conform their thoughts to God’s Word. It is never in order for us to avoid speaking in Scriptural words to avoid offending the unlearned, or even the wicked. If men will be condemned for refusing to receive the truth of God, we had better not seek to modify that truth, or to make it more palatable for them. If God’s judgment of them is just, we sin grievously if we seek to please them, or reduce the Gospel in order to appeal to them. It is not uncommon to hear people buttress their theological affirmations with statistics, language studies, non-Biblical historical occurrences, and even psychological principles. Such approaches betray the presence of the “*mind of the flesh.*”

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to some very powerful reasoning in the Spirit. You sense that Paul had no fear of opposing ideas, or those who refused to accept the Gospel he preached. His confidence was in the Lord, and his heart and mind were dominated with the truth of the Gospel. One of the great travesties of our time is the exaltation of the world's wisdom, and earthly disciplines of learning. Academia has been exalted to the throne of human thought. Men representing themselves as ministers of the Gospel, or laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, often rely on these things in their ministries.

It is not uncommon to hear people buttress their theological affirmations with statistics, language studies, non-Biblical historical occurrences, and even psychological principles. For example, I have often heard people base their teaching of responsibilities upon the

alleged differences between the male and female brain, or emotional makeup. These are not innocent departures. They reveal an affinity with the world that will lead people away from God.

Lest you think this has nothing to do with this passage, allow me to draw some things to your attention. Did you notice the total absence of such reasoning in our text? The only appeal is made to the truth of God. Those who are not in agreement with it are soundly denounced. There is no appeal to human logic, or any form of human science. Everything is based upon the Gospel of Christ, and the Divine assessment of humanity. When false reasoning is thrown down, the appeal is made to what God has revealed.

Let us also learn from this never to seek to justify or explain sin. God has already told us why men sin. It is because

they are sinful—because they have fallen, and are ruled by the wicked one. The answer to sin is a Savior, not a method, not a discipline, not a law. If men are going to be righteous before God, they must “*be made the righteousness of God*” in Christ (2 Cor 5:21).

This passage of Scripture has successfully answered every argument against receiving the righteousness of God. If men introduce other arguments, they are simply facets of the ones dealt with in this text. Every objection to imputed righteousness has been answered. Every one who imagines they have no need for righteousness has been put to silence. The notional strength and wisdom of the natural man has been violently thrown down. There is no recourse open to man other than believing the Gospel and receiving the righteousness of God.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 9



THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN

^{3:9} What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. ¹² They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; ¹⁴ "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways; ¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes." ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:9-20^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. DOES ADVANTAGE MAKE BETTER? (3:9)
- II. THERE IS NONE (3:10-12)
- III. INCAPABLE OF GOOD EXPRESSION (3:13-14)
- IV. SELF-SEEKING (3:15-17)
- V. NO FEAR (3:18)
- VI. THE MINISTRY OF THE LAW (3:19)
- VII. KNOWLEDGE OF SIN, NOT JUSTIFICATION (3:20)

that the provision of all external advantages does not enable man to become righteous. Time will not produce a righteous man, not will information from heaven itself.

If men are prone to philosophize on this matter, the Spirit will now show us that there is not a single righteous man upon earth—not a one that

sought the Lord, or achieved goodness. This is a Divine assessment of our race. It deals with the root of our problem, which is sin. It confirms that sin has defiled the entirety of the natural man, and the totality of humanity.

Men have chosen to so systematize theology that truth has been robbed of its power. Thus, human expressions like "total depravity" and "free will" are debated among men, and sharp divisions formed between those who have embraced the name of the Lord.

The Spirit does not approach the subject of sinfulness and the need for righteousness in that manner. Rather, He shows us the universal result of sin. He does not speak of man's capability, but of his lack of achievement. The fact of universal *guilt* is proclaimed, not general ability. **The Scripture will show that universal guilt confirms spiritual impotence.** Men may affirm that the will is free, and that man is capable of recovering himself. However, such

Because of the great difficulty involved in convincing men of their need of the righteousness of God, the Spirit argues the point extensively. He has proved that man left to himself cannot become righteous. He has also confirmed

affirmations are not made by the Lord. He will show that Divine intervention is an absolute requirement. The need of a Savior, grace, and deliverance is declared. A righteousness from God is also set before us as a necessity. There has never been an age or a people that was above these requirements.

From the very moment sin entered into the world, the need for a Redeemer and a righteousness from God also entered. Adam and Eve, having committed a single transgression, needed a Savior just as much as those in our century. **It is the nature of sin that demands a Savior and a righteousness from God, not the amount of it.**

A NEW GENERATION

The text before us will confirm that everything traced back to Adam is defiled. In fact, the order of Adam has been rejected, totally and without exception. If a Savior is given, He cannot come from Adam's lineage. If an individual is accepted by God, it cannot be in Adam, it must be in another. Because humanity is contaminated at its source (Adam), it is necessary that a "Second Man" man appear, from whom a new "generation" can be developed.

Jesus is that "Second Man," and the "Last Adam" as well (1 Cor 15:45,47). In Him, and as regarding acceptance, Adam's lineage is brought to a conclusion. From Adam to Jesus, the lineage was through the flesh (Lk 3:23-38). But Jesus "was taken away. And who can speak of His descendants? For He was cut off from the

land of the living"^{NIV} (Isa 53:8). Abraham had fleshly offspring, but Jesus did not! This was the very Scripture that intrigued the Ethiopian eunuch. "In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth"(Acts 8:33). The idea is that His life was "taken" before He could have any offspring.

Still, one of the designated names of

From the very moment sin entered into the world, the need for a Redeemer and a righteousness from God also entered. Adam and Eve, having committed a single transgression, needed a Savior just as much as those in our century.

Jesus is "Everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6). Through Him, God is begetting another race, pure and righteous. From the fleshly point of view, He appears barren—without progeny. But this is not the case at all. He is the One of whom Isaiah prophesied. "Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child! **For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman,**" says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, And let

them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And **your descendants will inherit the nations,** And make the desolate cities inhabited" (Isa 54:1-3). These shouts of praise immediately follow the Messianic prophecy of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

This is fundamental doctrine, and will be developed at length in the fifth chapter. It is why the new birth is essential to seeing and entering the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-7). It is the foundation that supports the necessity of becoming a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). It is why God has "begotten us again" to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3).

THE REASON FOR THIS SECTION

This section of Romans is one of the strongest denunciations of humanity that is found in Scripture. Taken from Psalm 14:1-3, and other prophetic expressions, the universal guilt of humanity is firmly corroborated.

The establishment of this truth is necessary to confirm that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God—the righteousness that is announced in the Gospel of Christ (1:16-17). Technically, the passage is not merely to convince men of sin, but of the condition into which sin has thrust them. Through it, the Spirit will show that God is just in rejecting the totality of Adam's race—"all flesh." It will also accentuate His marvelous grace in providing a new Progenitor in Jesus.

DOES ADVANTAGE MAKE BETTER?

8:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. The Spirit returns to looking at things from a Jewish point of view. He now shows that even though distinct advantages were given to the Jews, yet they actually did no better than the Gentiles. The "we" of this text are the

Jews, and the "they" are the Gentiles. He has stated the Jews have received "much" unquestionable advantage "every way" (3:1-2). Their primary benefit was the "oracles of God," placed as a stewardship into their hands. They were furnished with a precise delineation of sin, and rich promises that should have provided adequate incentive for becoming righteous, were that remotely possible.

But their advantages did not cause truth and righteousness to spring up in them. To the contrary, they were found with the same nature and sinful expressions as the Gentiles, who did not receive the "oracles of God."

ADVANTAGES DO NOT MAKE BETTER

There is a fundamental truth to be

learned here. Advantages do not, of themselves, make men better—even when they are received from God Almighty. **In nature, or in Adam, there are only varying degrees of corruption, not righteousness.** Men cannot be changed from the outside. They cannot be renewed by Law, Divine advantages, environment, or self discipline. Being at Sinai and hearing the voice of the Lord does not make sinners better. Receiving the Law at the disposition of angels does not make a person better. If one is provided the details of when and how to approach God, those details do not make the person better. This is, indeed, a most difficult thing for “*flesh*” to face.

If the Jews were not better for advantages given to them by God Himself, who is the person who will imagine that men are made better today by a religious heritage dating back to the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries? If I have the writings of all of the church fathers, will it give me the advantage? Indeed, if I am not born again, any advantages I may have will yield no fruit. If I am not in Christ Jesus, there is no advantage that can make me better in the eyes of the Lord.

The strength of this argument must not elude us! Remember the remarkable benefits given to the Jews. To them “*belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen*” (Rom 9:4-5). God took them unto Himself, devoted His love toward them, and separated them from the rest of the world. He revealed Himself to them alone. His holy Law was given exclusively to them, as well as a revealed procedure by which they could approach Him. His rich and glorious promises were given to them, and the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, belonged to them. Even the Lord Jesus Christ came from them, according to the flesh.

How is it possible to receive any more external advantage? What is a mere religious movement compared to that? How does an ancient manuscript, or some

archaeological discovery compare with those advantages? What of a studied discipline or rule of logic? Such things are not worthy of the smallest comparison to the benefits extended to the Jews.

Yet, there are still professed Christians among us to boast of having advantages in their creed, or the movement with which they are identified. Some imagine their expertise in language gives them the real edge, or that their mind is their chief asset. But all of these things are but puffs of smoke in the arena of life. The question is whether or not

If the Jews were not better for advantages given to them by God Himself, who is the person who will imagine that men are made better today by a religious heritage dating back to the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries?

these things have made them better!

A Brief Digression

While much good has come from various religious movements, they have not managed to change sinners into righteous people. I am affiliated with a movement that possesses many noble advantages. They point to the Scriptures, declaring they are thoroughly adequate. With tenacity, they refuse to bear the names of men, saying the name of Jesus is enough. They declare there is no need for a creed if we have Jesus, and that we should restore things as they were in the “New Testament church.” They say they are seeking the unity of all believers in Jesus alone. All of these things are good. Those who adopt such views are surely at an advantage.

But their advantage has not made them any better. They have as many divisions among themselves as others, and even many more. Immorality has not been purged from their ranks, and they are not

noted for being any more godly than others. Their youth go astray like others. They are plagued with a “*form of godliness that denies the power thereof.*” As a group, their position has not transformed them. It has not liberated them from the dominion of sin, nor has it brought to their generally ranks a hunger and a thirst for righteousness.

This movement holds no uniqueness in this regard. The same may be said of any religious movement, however hallowed it may be. Whatever advantages are found in such things, they have not wrought a transformation in the people. They still need a righteousness from God like everyone else.

Do not view me too harshly for saying these things, for this is precisely the point being made in this passage! God looks at results, not positions. It makes no difference what position is held, or what advantage is given, if the person is not made righteous, it is of no avail at all.

ARE WE BETTER THAN THEY?

Let the Jews speak for everyone who has an advantage. Did their advantage make them better? “*No, in no wise,*” or “*Not at all!*” If you were to judge the matter externally, you might come to a different conclusion. At certain times, idolatry was not in the ranks of Jewry. They did have the Temple, God-ordained sacrifices, and a revealed approach to God. They appeared to live on a more acceptable level than many of the heathen. But that was only appearance, and we are not to judge according to appearance (John 7:24).

In their hearts, or at the core of their being, they were no better! Law did not make them better. Worship did not make them better. Sacrifice did not make them better. Observing the feasts did not make them better. Circumcision did not make them better!

Beyond all question, this is one of the most difficult lessons to be learned by humanity. Men continue to think they are made “*better*” by external experiences and privileges. However, it is only when the “*stony heart*” is removed, and we

receive a *"heart of flesh,"* that we become *"better"* (Ezek 11:19; 36:26).

This is not to deny the validity or reality of external experiences and privileges. It is to affirm that they do not change the character of man, or bring the righteousness of God to him.

THEY ARE ALL UNDER SIN

" . . . for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." The expression *"under sin"* means under the power and guilt of sin-dominated by sin. No part of man is excluded from this domination. The sentence of condemnation has been passed upon all men. As it is written, *"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation"* (Rom 5:18).

The proof of reference is found in the first chapters of Romans. There we are summoned into the Divine courtroom. The charge leveled against all humanity is that all are guilty of sin, and stand in need of a righteousness from God. With powerful proofs, the Spirit has convinced us that no person is excluded from the charge. **Not only is humanity under sin, they are "held" there until the Lord releases them.** It is the Law that held us in that state. As it is written, *"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were HELD BY"* (Rom 7:4a).

It will be helpful to briefly rehearse the strong arguments that have been given to prove men are all under sin.

- ⊗ God has shown His eternal power and Deity to men in the creation. In that creation, these things are *"clearly seen."* Yet men did not glorify Him as God, neither were thankful (1:19-21).
- ⊗ In the very midst of the creation, clearly made by an all powerful God, men began to degenerate, becoming vain in their imaginations (1:22-23).
- ⊗ Men became idolaters, changing the glory of God into images made like men, birds, beasts, and creeping things (1:23).
- ⊗ When delivered over to their own hearts, men rapidly degenerated into corruption, dishonoring their own

bodies (1:24).

- ⊗ Men changed the truth of God into a lie, worshiping what was made rather than the One who made it (1:25).
- ⊗ When God gave them over to their own desires, both men and women resorted to unnatural conduct, becoming sodomites (1:26-27).

was universal. It was not isolated to a section of the world or to a certain people.

There is resounding proof that men need a righteousness from God! No one is acceptable in Adam, or in nature. Nature, or flesh, is a totally *"evil"* or corrupt tree. It is not capable of bringing forth good fruit to God. How appropriate are the words of Jesus. *"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit"* (Matt 12:33). He further elaborated, *"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a 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"* (Matt 7:16-19).

The Spirit has shown us an unbecoming display of *"evil fruit."* The list is impressive and unquestionable wicked (1:19-2:24).

01. Unthankful.
02. Vain imaginations.
03. Changed the glory of God.
04. Dishonored their own bodies.
05. Changed the truth of God into a lie.
06. Sodomy.
07. Reprobate mind.
08. Fornication.
09. Wickedness.
10. Covetousness.
11. Maliciousness.
12. Full of envy.
13. Murder.
14. Debate.
15. Deceit.
16. Malignity.
17. Whisperers.
18. Backbiters
19. Haters of God.
20. Despitiful.
21. Proud.
22. Boasters.
23. Inventors of evil things.
24. Disobedient to parents
25. Without understanding.
26. Covenant breakers.
27. Without natural affection.
28. Implacable.

The expression *"under sin"* means under the power and guilt of sin-dominated by sin. No part of man is excluded from this domination. The sentence of condemnation has been passed upon all men.

- ⊗ Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God delivered them to their own appetites. As a result, men were *"filled with all unrighteousness"* (1:29-31).
- ⊗ Even though they experienced the judgment of God, men continued to prefer sin, and the company of those who also sinned (1:32).
- ⊗ The Jews, having received the holy Law of God, did *"the same"* things as the Gentiles which received not the Law (2:1-5).
- ⊗ The Gentiles unanimously violated their own conscience, excusing their sin (2:14-15).
- ⊗ The Jews knew the will of God, and approved of the Law, acknowledging it was right, yet continued to sin, just as the Gentiles (2:17-25).
- ⊗ The Gentiles received every possible advantage apart from direct revelation. (1) The testimony of nature, and (2) The testimony of their conscience. Yet they continued to sin.
- ⊗ The Jews received all the advantages the Gentiles had, plus the Law and circumcision. They too continued to sin.

The Divine assessment: *"they are ALL under sin!"* The human will was not able to correct the situation. No amount of intelligence, creativity, or productivity could turn the heart away from sin, or cause it to hate iniquity. The situation

- 29. Unmerciful.
- 30. Finding pleasure in sinners.
- 31. Glorifying in being called a "Jew."
- 32. Trusting in the Law.
- 33. Causing blasphemy of God's name.

How is it that the presence of such things was universal, with no place or

person excluded? **Because the tree was corrupt!** Human nature was defiled! Men may argue about whether or not the corruption was total, but Jesus will shout at our hearts that a good tree cannot produce such results. Only a bad tree can do that. The tree **MUST** be made good, or **ONLY** bad fruit will be produced.

What is more, only God can "make the tree good." The Lord has already revealed that "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"^{NKJV} (Matt 7:19). **Men do need a righteousness from God!** None are excluded from this need, for "all have sinned and come short" of God's glory.

THERE IS NONE!

"⁴⁰ As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one;'¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.¹² They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.'"

Because of the importance of this matter, the Spirit now appeals to the Scripture to support everything that has been said. He does this to confirm that we are not dealing with a unique circumstance. The universality of sin is not something that has occurred in recent centuries. It has existed from the very moment Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. Observation and reasoning are valid in determining the truth of sins dominion over mankind. However, understanding must ultimately be anchored in the Word of God by which we live (Matt 4:4; Lk 4:4). God has spoken concerning the centrality of His Word. "For You have magnified Your word above all Your name"^{NKJV} (Psa 138:2). It is fitting, therefore, that the reality of man's sinfulness be confirmed by Scripture.

NONE RIGHTEOUS

"There is none righteous, no, not one." The Spirit gives the sense of the Scripture rather than a direct quotation. This is a summation of what will follow. The state of unrighteousness is pronounced upon humanity in the fourteenth Psalm. "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all

gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psa 14:2-3). Solomon also said, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl 7:20).

In the following verses, the lack of righteousness will be expounded. The traits that are enumerated are fruits or effects of unrighteousness. There are no exceptions to the declaration, "no, not

The lack of understanding, or knowing God, is a condition from which men must be saved. The nations that are without God are said to not know Him (1 Thess 4:5). What is more, when the Lord Jesus comes again, He will come "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God"

one." The Lord "looked from heaven," and did not find a single person who had not been defiled, or who was not sinning.

"Righteousness" is a condition enabling the individual to stand before God faultless and uncondemned. It is a state of "no condemnation," where the person is approved by God. After searching the entirety of Adam's race, the Lord could find no such person—"no not one."**Men need a righteousness from God!**

NONE WHO UNDERSTAND

"There is none who understands." The understanding that is lacking is "spiritual understanding," or the knowledge of God. The fourteenth Psalm declares that God looked "to see if there were any that did understand," concluding that there was none (14:2). The fifty-third Psalm gives the same conclusion (53:2). Of the most privileged people in the world, the Lord said, "For My people are foolish, They have not known Me. They are silly children, And they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, But to do good they have no knowledge" (Jer 4:22). This lack of knowledge is what brings destruction upon the people (Hos 4:6). There can be no spirituality apart from this knowledge.

From another viewpoint, those who lack "understanding" are characterized by a fundamental ignorance of God. Although this is not generally considered to be a serious condition, the lack of the knowledge of God constitutes a state of lostness and alienation. This it is written, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:17-18). Alienation from God is, then, caused by an ignorance of Him—or by having "no understanding." The gravity of such a condition can scarcely be overstated. Describing the situation in another way, Colossians 1:21 reads, "And you, who once were

alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled."

In this text, "wicked works" are seen as the result of not knowing God—not understanding Him.

The lack of understanding, or knowing God, is a condition from which men must be saved. The nations that are without God are said to not know Him (1 Thess 4:5). What is more, when the Lord Jesus comes again, He will come "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that **know not God**" (2 Thess 1:8).

Men need a righteousness from God!

God Wants to be Understood

Behind this declaration is the truth that God WANTS to be known and understood. He has structured the entire universe to make portions of His Person known (Rom 1:19-20). He has determined when and where all peoples are placed in order that they might seek and find Him (Acts 17:26-27).

This aspect of God was revealed through Jeremiah in a most wonderful way. "Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, THAT HE UNDERSTANDS AND KNOWS ME, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the LORD"^{NKJV} (Jer 9:23-24). Not only in irreligious men, but in religious ones, there is an undeniable tendency to glory in human wisdom, might, and riches. All of this is vanity. Only those who understand and know the Lord have grounds for boasting—and then, it is not of themselves (Eph 2:8).

Knowing God IS Eternal Life

The importance of knowing and understanding the Lord is confirmed by its association with eternal life. Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And **this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only**

true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"^{NKJV} (John 17:2-3).

Through John the beloved, the Spirit declares this to be one of the primary ministries of the Lord Jesus: i.e., coming to know and understand God. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an **understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life**" (1

There would be no need to give us such an understanding if there was any way for us to possess it on our own. But we did NOT have such understanding, as our text states. In fact, it took the ministry of the Lord from heaven for us to obtain it.

John 5:20).

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I want to emphasize that a universal Savior postulates a universal need. If there was a solitary individual in the world who knew God through natural abilities, Christ would not have come. Apart from His coming into the world, offering a satisfactory atonement, and ascending to the right hand of God to be the Author and Finisher of our faith, there was simply no possible way of coming to know or understand God. Sin created a gulf between God and man that man himself could not span.

If Adam, with only a signal transgression, could not remain in the presence of God, what of his progeny, whose imaginations are ONLY evil from

their youth? God is greatly to be praised for not leaving us in this situation. It is His desire for us to know Him that has driven the completion of a great salvation.

NONE WHO SEEKS GOD

"**There is none who seeks after God.**" Although I have already stated this, it bears repetition. God has ordered the affairs of men in a most precise way, in order that they might "seek the Lord." "From one single principle [man] He not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but He decreed the times and limits of their habitation. And He did this so that they might seek the Deity and, by feeling their way towards Him, succeed in finding Him; and indeed He is not far from any of us" ^{New Jerusalem Bible} (Acts 17:26-27).

In addition to strategically placing all peoples in both time and area, He placed them in His own creation, which declared His glory in every corner of the earth (Psa 19:1-4; Rom 1:19-20). If any vestige of moral ability remained in man, these advantages should have compelled him to seek the Lord UNTIL he found Him. After all, He "is not far from every one of us." However, even given all of these advantages, "none" could be found that sought after God.

Such notables as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David were all visited by the Lord PRIOR to an effective quest for Him. Our text is precise in every sense of the word, and perfectly describes the entire race of Adam apart from Christ. **Men need a righteousness from God!**

ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE

"**They have all turned aside.**" With absolute consistency, apart from Divine intervention, "ALL" men turned aside from the revelation that was given to them, whether from nature, conscience, or Law. Every aspect of man's nature was defiled by sin. He became ungodlike—"none righteous." His mind was corrupted—"none that understands." The will was polluted—"none who seeks after God." Now we see the contamination of his works—"all turned aside." Man has become thoroughly corrupted.

Just as Adam and Eve turned from the commandment given to them, so all men, by nature, have turned from every common appeal. The KJV reads, *“They have all gone out of the way,”* emphasizing that the departure has ALREADY taken place. By nature, they have elected the *“broad road”* that leads to destruction. They have heard the harmonious voice of nature, and have *“turned aside.”* They have felt the stinging goad of the conscience, and have *“gone out of the way.”* They have heard the thundering words of the Law and *“have turned every one to his own way”* (Isa 53:6). This is not a mere liability, but is a cosmopolitan condition!

The Psalmist said of this situation, *“Every one of them is gone back”* (Psa 53:3). Other versions read *“fallen away”* RSV, NRSV. This involves more than leaving an appointed path. It includes the idea of retrogression, or going backward. Apart from Jesus Christ, the entire human race is in a state of regression, plummeting downward, further and further from God. That is the meaning of the phrase, *“all have sinned and COME SHORT of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

By nature, men have *“turned away”* from God’s appointment for them, which is to *“seek the Lord.”* Even in their religion, they have *“come short,”* gravitating to idolatry or other forms of lifeless religion. Settle it in your heart that this is not a description of the worst of our race, but of the whole of it.

Nowhere is the corruption of men more clearly seen than in their will! Turning aside was a choice—a deliberate choice. Men **willed** to NOT seek the Lord. They **willed** to choose their own way. While I do not wish to make a big issue out of this here, it is interesting that men have chosen to vaunt the human will. This is done in spite of the fact that it is the very thing that has placed man at a distance from God. It was so in the Garden, and it is so today. **Men need a righteousness from God!**

ALL HAVE BECOME UNPROFITABLE
“They have together become unprofitable.” The NASB reads, *“They have become USELESS.”* The NIV and

NRSV read, *“They have become WORTHLESS.”* For whatever it is worth, the Greek word used here is *ἡρειώθησαν*, which means *totally wrong, depraved, and morally worthless.* Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary Strong’s Dictionary defines it as *unprofitable, useless, and unserviceable.* The Basic Bible English version reads, *“there is no profit in any of them.”* John Gill, an insightful preacher who lived in the 1700’s, said this of the passage before us: *“ . . . for so men being corrupted by sin, are of no use, service, and advantage to God, to men, or to themselves, but on the contrary, nauseous to God . . . and hurtful to themselves and others.”* Gill’s Commentary on Romans In his commentary, Barnes says of this verse, *“This word in Hebrew means to become ‘putrid’ and ‘offensive,’ like fruit that is spoiled. In Arabic, it is applied to ‘milk’ that becomes sour. Applied to moral subjects, it means to become corrupt and useless. They are of no value in regard to works of righteousness.”*

This involves more than leaving an appointed path. It includes the idea of retrogression, or going backward. Apart from Jesus Christ, the entire human race is in a state of regression, plummeting downward, further and further from God.

While I do not ordinarily share the writings of others on these texts, I did want to show that students of Scripture have been consistent in their perception of this passage. I am not espousing something that is strange, or newly developed. While my own view was not formed by these men, I have found general agreement among those of honest heart on this matter.

Sin has rendered humanity useless to God. The whole of the Adamic order has been rejected by Him, thereby necessitating the new birth. That is something that can ONLY be effected by God. He begets us through the Gospel

because of Christ’s sufficient death, *“once for all.”* In our new birth, we become qualified to receive God’s righteousness. Then, and only then, can we be profitably used by God and live in anticipation of the glory to come.

If sin has made *“all unprofitable,”* then all need a righteousness from God!

NONE WHO DOES GOOD
“There is none who does good, no, not one.” The blistering assessment of humanity continues, gaining strength. The Spirit is considering men apart from Christ, unforgiven and unregenerated. In that state, there is no one that *“does good, no, not one.”* By *“good,”* the Spirit means *“good”* in the eyes of the Lord, which is the only real *“good.”* Because the natural man is not good, nothing that he does is good. All of his works are tainted with his defiled nature, rendering them unacceptable to God. Rather than doing good, the Lord says of fallen man, *“They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good”* †NKJV (Psa 53:1). By nature, all of man’s *“righteousnesses are as filthy rags,”* to be discarded because they are defiled (Isa 64:6). As it is written, *“ . . . but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled”* (Tit 1:15).

To *“do good”* is to conduct ourselves in harmony with God, who alone is good. As Jesus said to the rich young ruler, *“Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God”* (Matt 19:17). In this statement, Jesus was not saying He Himself was not good. He is altogether good. However, the young man who asked concerning eternal life did not see Jesus as the Son of God, but only as a *“teacher.”*

NONE RIGHTEOUS! NOT ONE!
Thus, the Divine assessment of humanity is being confirmed. There really is *“none righteous, no not one.”* Apart from identity with Jesus, no one, to a person, understands God or is seeking after Him. Everyone is in a state of regression, having chosen to turn away from the Lord. Of themselves, no one is useful to God, as they all have become worthless. As God counts things, no one is

doing good—no not one. At some point, our hearts must be brought into agreement with this Divine assessment.

If that seems too strong, it is only because of spiritual blindness and hardness of heart. This is a matter of revelation, and it is to be received. It confirms that God was right in providing a righteousness for man, for man had none of his own. It also substantiates the

absolute need for that righteousness, and the worthiness of condemnation to all who reject it.

One of the appalling effects of cold theology is that it robs the heart of these things, leading people to imagine there is some vestige of good in man, even though God says there is not. Man does not do good because he is NOT good. He does not seek God because he does not want God.

He does not understand, because he is alienated in his mind. He is unprofitable because sin has utterly defiled him.

As though this were not enough, the Spirit will take the matter even further. He will confirm to us that our defilement is not a surface matter, but reaches into every heart of our persons. Regardless what aspect of man who consider, he is corrupt from beginning to end.

INCAPABLE OF GOOD EXPRESSION

⁴³ ‘Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit’; ‘The poison of asps is under their lips’; ¹⁴ ‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.’” Again, an appeal is made to the Scriptures. Sin has not made men lazy, it has made them corrupt. Their expressions reflect their condition. While there are varying degrees of wicked expressions, they all possess the same characteristics. Apart from regeneration, there is an obnoxiousness about all human expression. Although it may not appear to be the case to mortals, that is the way is really is. Remember, this is God’s assessment of men who do not have His righteousness—all of them.

THEIR THROATS IS AN OPEN TOMB

The quotation is taken from Psalm 5:9. What a vivid picture! An open tomb is one in which a rotting corpse lies. It emits a noxious odor that repels all who are near to it. Knowing this is the case, tombs and graves are always covered well in order to hide the corruption within them. But men do not do the same with their corrupt natures. Their throats become a passage for the expression of spiritual death—dead views. The odor of alienation is upon them, and they are tainted with aloofness from God.

A sensitive heart detects this condition and is offended by it. Some of these defiling expressions come in the name of scholarship, social interests, and

psychological profiles. But they all have this in common. They are emitting from the tomb of nature, defiling everything they touch. When men attempt to dignify them by assigning sincerity to the speakers, they are trying to throw a new suit of clothes upon a dead corpse.

THEIR TONGUES PRACTICE DECEIT

The tongue of the unregenerate conflicts with the Word of the Lord, and thus is said to *“practice deceit.”* When it comes to actual utterance, anything and everything spoken in contradiction of the truth of God is a lie. The Word of the Lord is, *“let God be true, but every man a liar”* (Rom 3:4).

saith the LORD. Take ye heed every one of his neighbor, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jer 9:3-4).

Sin has made man basically self-centered. Therefore, he speaks with his own interests being primary. When that occurs—and it always does in the natural man—the tongue practices deceit, clouding the truth, and turning attention to human opinion. There are differing measures of this tendency, but they all come under the canopy of *“deceit.”* Deceit seeks to substantiate human views and justify men in their conduct. It is the opposite of having speech *“alway with grace, seasoned with salt,”* that it might edify and minister grace to the hearer (Col 4:6; Eph 4:29).

Let it be clear, if men do not receive a righteous from God, this is the kind of speaking that will come from them. It may be socially cultured and politically correct, but it will be deceitful!

obnoxiousness about all human expression. Although it may not appear to be the case to mortals, that is the way is really is. Remember, this is God’s assessment of men who do not have His righteousness—all of them.

POISON UNDER THEIR LIPS

The reference is to an expression found in Psalm 140:3. *“They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders’ poison is under their lips.”* The idea is that their lips are harmful and infectious, spewing forth poison and

Through Jeremiah, the Lord indicted His people for speaking corruptly. *“And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me,*

contamination among the sons of men. Such were the words of Hymenaeus and Philetus, which “spread like cancer.”^{NKJV} (2 Tim 2:17). These were also the kind of words the unbelieving spies spoke to Israel, convincing them they could not possess the promised land as God commanded them. It is said of their words, “We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night” (Num 13:31-14:1). The poison of asps was under their lips, infecting the minds of the people.

Very little time will pass until the truth of this text is confirmed to your heart. You will be subjected to poisonous words that must be expelled from your mind, lest your own thoughts become corrupt. Men sorely stand in need of a righteousness from God.

MOUTHS FILLED WITH CURSING AND BITTERNESS

Again, an appeal is made to the Word of the Lord. “His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity” (Psa 10:7). Again, it is written, “For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak” (Psa 59:12). James said of believers who were following the “old man” instead of the “new man,” “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing” (James 3:10).

The cursing of reference is the cursing of God: blaspheming His holy name, and speaking against His judgments. In the mind of the speaker, such diatribes may not be considered to be

against God, but they are. It is much like Israel murmuring against Moses. “And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” (Ex 15:24). “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Ex 16:2). “And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (Ex 17:3).

A religion that allows for the expression of the flesh kills the soul. If human nature is fallen, it must not be given respect or ascendancy among the people of God. Fleshly credentials are not to be honored as though they came from God. Natural abilities are not to be viewed as though they were the superior ones. Our acquaintance with one another is not to be “after the flesh”

None of this was innocent. That is why the people were judged for speaking as they did. Their mouths were “filled with cursing and bitterness” because they did not perceive their condition as being advantageous. In our day, such speaking is dignified by people saying they are angry with God, and God is able to deal with such anger. But this is a foolish imagination. There is not so much as a speck of truth in it. Solemnly we are told, “Neither murmur ye, as some of them

also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Cor 10:10). Outbursts of cursing and bitterness are signs of depravity, not mere misunderstanding.

EXPRESSIONS OF THE FLESH

Because of the elevation of human knowledge and rights, even religious men have come to believe they have a right to express their opinion about the truth of God. In recent months, I have heard serious misrepresentations of the truth of God dignified by saying every one has a right to their opinion. Let it be clear to all of us. When God has spoken, the only right man has to believe and heartily embrace that truth.

What we are reading about is the nature of “the flesh,” or “the natural man.” There is nothing good or salvageable about the flesh. In it, there is “no good thing” (Rom 7:18). Jesus said, “the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63). If those in Christ give heed to their flesh, rather than crucifying it, it will react precisely as our text has indicated. You should be sufficiently acquainted with your own nature to know this is the case. The part of us that is traced back to Adam is called our “members that are upon the earth.” They are to be “mortified,” or put to death, not given expression (Col 3:5). In fact, “those who are Christ’s **HAVE** crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”^{NKJV} (Gal 5:24).

Fleshly Religion

A religion that allows for the expression of the flesh kills the soul. If human nature is fallen, it must not be given respect or ascendancy among the people of God. Fleshly credentials are not to be honored as though they came from God. Natural abilities are not to be viewed as though they were the superior ones. Our acquaintance with one another is not to be “after the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16). Worldly views, fads, and preferences, are to have no place among the people of God.

In Christ, we die to the fleshly order, and are therefore urged to separate from it. The Colossians were exhorted on

this very matter. *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh”* (Col 2:20-23). The absolute corruption of the flesh forbids the formation of religion around it. The truest form of religion is not found in external disciplines and the regimentation of the body. Rather, it is found in *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14:17). These are spiritual expressions, not fleshly ones.

THE ULTIMATE FLESHLY EXPRESSIONS

Flesh becomes more prominent as it is exposed to the glory of God. This is seen in the reaction of the world to Jesus. In particular, in the reaction of the Jews. If we doubt the depravity of the flesh, let us behold how it conducts itself toward God

“manifest in the flesh.”

The passage we have just reviewed speaks of speech, words, or verbal expressions. Ponder how those in the flesh spoke to Jesus. *“Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him”* ^{NKJV} (Lk 16:14). *“Then the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’”* (John 8:48). *“And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemes!’”* (Matt 9:3). *“And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.’ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, ‘If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself’”* (Lk 23:35-37). *“They answered and said to him (Pilate), ‘If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you’”* (John 18:30).

What constrained these people to speak so derisively of the Lord of glory?

Their throats were certainly an open tomb, and the poison of asps was under their lips. They spoke in the energy of the flesh. That is the manner in which flesh speaks. In the presence of the Lord, their flesh erupted because it could not abide the Savior. It spoke heartlessly, and with defamation, insult, and injury.

Not Merely A Law

The incentive for avoiding the dominancy of the flesh is not mere Law. It is rather a matter of survival. It is clearly stated, and is to be heartily embraced, *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (Rom 8:13). Take that word seriously, for your soul is in the balance. If we follow the dictates of the flesh, we will find it erupting in our manners, just as described in our text. Such conduct is evidence of spiritual death, and is to be resolved with swift dispatch. The *“great salvation”* God has provided precisely addresses this situation. Through it, men are extricated from a hopeless situation, and granted a righteousness that God approves.

SELF SEEKING

“¹⁵ Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways; ¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known.” Once again, I want to emphasize that the Spirit is describing the nature of the flesh.

While its expressions may take various forms, and be characterized by differing levels of wickedness, yet they all proceed from the same defiled well. Because people imagine these things are not in them by nature, is no proof they are absent. They are resident in the flesh, and will remain so. Scripture says it this way, *“Mortify therefore YOUR MEMBERS which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye*

lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds”

Once again, I want to emphasize that the Spirit is describing the nature of the flesh. While its expressions may take various forms, and be characterized by differing levels of wickedness, yet they all proceed from the same defiled well.

(Col 3:5-9).

It is not possible to *“put off”* something you do not possess. The things that are mentioned are said to be in our *“members”*. The NIV reads, *“whatever belongs to your earthly nature.”* The NASB reads, *“members of your earthly body.”* All of these things are resident in the part of us that is traced back to Adam. The potential to express them is resident in every person remaining in the body. The fact that we are in Christ has not removed them from our earthly nature. They were not washed away when we were baptized into Christ. Even when we are *“risen with Christ,”* they seek for expression. Therefore, they are to be *“put off,” “mortified,”* and *“denied.”*

When this truth registers upon the conscience, a major thrust forward has taken place.

In the first part of this passage, the sins of the heart are emphasized: *“None that understand,” “none that seeks God,”* going *“out of the way,”* and becoming *“unprofitable.”* The second part deals with sins of the mouth. The throat is an *“open tomb,”* tongues *“use deceit,”* *“poison”* is *“under the lips,”* and the mouth is *“full of cursing and bitterness.”*

Now we come to sins of action, when men will go to any means to justify themselves and gratify their own desires. Again, this is the unchangeable nature of the flesh.

FEET SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD

The reference is to Proverbs 1:16. *“For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.”* The sixth chapter of Proverbs lists seven things that God hates, which are an abomination to Him. Among them is *“An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief”* (v 18). Isaiah speaks even more directly to the matter. *“Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood”* (Isa 59:7). Again, this is the manner of the flesh. It will go to any length to justify itself—even to the shedding of blood.

Here the taking of innocent life is done creatively and with dispatch. Their *“feet run to evil”* swiftly, and *“make haste to shed blood.”* Given enough liberty, this IS what the flesh will do! Isaiah’s reference to this trait was given during the reign of Manasseh, during which so much innocent blood was shed.

How frequently this tendency has surfaced in our race. Cain’s feet were swift to shed blood when his brother’s sacrifice was accepted by God, and his own was not (Gen 4:8). Lamech lamented that he had killed a man because he was wounded by him (Gen 4:23). In an outbreak of rage, Simeon and Levi killed men who had defiled their sister (Gen 34:25). Heartlessly, Pharaoh ordered the death of newborn Jewish males because he thought they were becoming too numerous (Ex 1:16). Ahab and Jezebel had Naboth killed because they wanted his vineyard (1 Kgs 21:7-10). Athaliah,

mother of Ahaziah, had all the royal heirs killed (2 Kgs 11:1). Herod commanded that *“all the children”* under two years of age be killed, because he was threatened by the birth of Jesus (Matt 2:16).

There is no extent to which flesh will go to seek its own gain. The ultimate murder, of course, was that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well did Stephen say of the corrupt religious leaders of his day, *“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers”* (Acts 7:52). Their feet were *“swift to shed blood.”*

When believers are among the unregenerate, there is a certain destruction and misery that are experienced. The spirit is eroded and often torn down as the flesh sets itself against the redeemed soul.

And what can be said of our own time, when more than a million abortions occur annually in our own country? And for what reason? For self interests! See, this is the nature of flesh. Those who choose to live in the flesh are descending into a moral arena that is a bottomless pit! The senseless mass killings that have exploded in the last few years are nothing more than fleshly eruptions. Those who committed these dastardly crimes refused the truth and salvation of God. Because of this, their flesh soon gained dominancy over them.

DESTRUCTION AND MISERY IN THEIR WAYS

This is also taken from Isaiah 59:7. This describes a dreadful tendency in the flesh that leaves a path of destruction. Given expression, the flesh tears down what is good, and leaves misery in its wake. Whether it is holocaust of Pharaoh, Herod, or Hitler, those dominated by

nature think nothing of making others miserable, whether by insults, plundering, or physical harm.

It is a glad day when a person comes into Christ and experiences the circumcision of the body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11-12). The words of the prophet Isaiah are then fulfilled. *“Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.”* (Isa 60:18). While flesh tears down, the renewed spirit builds up and edifies.

When believers are among the unregenerate, there is a certain destruction and misery that are experienced. The spirit is eroded and often torn down as the flesh sets itself against the redeemed soul. It is no marvel that Jesus *“ofttimes resorted”* to Gethsemane with His disciples for spiritual renewal (John 18:2).

THE WAY OF PEACE NOT KNOWN

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, but is completely unknown by the flesh. As the Lord has said, *“There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked”* (Isa 57:21). Specifically, the reference is to Isaiah 59:8. *“The way of peace they know not.”*

If men are to find peace, it must come in and through Jesus Christ. It cannot come through the flesh, or from Adam’s resources. When the *“Dayspring from on high”* visited us, it was in order to *“To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”* (Lk 1:79).

Notice, the text says *“THE WAY of peace they have not known.”* By nature, men do not know HOW to obtain or come into peace. This is particularly true of *“peace with God,”* which is realized in Christ Jesus (Rom 5:1). This *“way of peace”* is beyond the reach of flesh. It cannot be discovered through mental disciplines or much study.

Those outside of Christ—all of them—have no peace of mind, and do not

know how to obtain it. Their conscience is not at peace, and no amount of religious activity can procure it for them. Sin has robbed all men! Although peace is aggressively sought by men, outside of

Christ they always come short of it. They do not know *“the way of peace,”* and thus stumble in moral and spiritual darkness.

There should be no doubt of the

need for a righteousness from God. All of the things that have been mentioned are the direct result of LACKING the righteousness of God. They are the consequence of transgression.

NO FEAR

⁴⁸ *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* On one occasion, sensitive Abraham observed of the realm of Abimelech, *“Surely the fear of God is not in this place”* (Gen 20:11). Indeed, there are places where such an absence is very apparent. However, our text says that in a state of nature, this condition is ALWAYS present. The quotation is taken from Psalm 36:1, where David observed of the wicked, *“There is no fear of God*

Lord, here is the answer. *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* It is not that they DO NOT think of their ways in association with God. Rather, it is because they do not WILL to think in this manner. It is not in them to do so.

By saying the fear of God is *“not before their eyes,”* the Spirit means it is not evident to them, and is not perceived as necessary. Like Balaam, they stumble

cannot do so. Because fear is not *“before their eyes,”* we must place it before them with strong spiritual arguments and solid Scriptural statements. In so doing, we call for the Holy Spirit to come in convicting power. Working through the *“sword of the Spirit,”* He has been commissioned to *“convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* (John 16:8-11). If it were not true that *“there is no fear of God before their eyes,”* the ministry of conviction would not be necessary.

Some have taken upon themselves to teach men to fear God through various forms of thought. The Word of God points out the futility of such an effort. Of wayward Israel He said, *“Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men”* (Isa 29:13). The utter uselessness of such an approach is found in the incapacity of the fallen, or fleshly, nature. It has no ability to fear God. That is why it does not do so. By nature, men do NOT think of God, or consider His ways. That is why His fear is not before their eyes, or the focus of their attention. That is why they do not seek Him, and why they continue to sin. They are in the grip of nature.

By saying the fear of God is *“not before their eyes,”* the Spirit means it is not evident to them, and is not perceived as necessary. Like Balaam, they stumble on in their own ways, oblivious to the destruction that looms before them.

before his eyes.” This is the kind of fear that is wholesome, provoking men to *“to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth”* (Prov 8:13). Such fear compels those possessing it to *“depart from evil”* (Prov 16:6).

on in their own ways, oblivious to the destruction that looms before them.

One might ponder, “How, then, can we *‘save with fear’* those who are out of the way (Jude 23)? First, we do not do so by appealing to earthly reasoning. We already know their minds do not think in this manner. Telling them of the natural consequences of sin, like disease and sorrow, will have no lasting effect. Flesh not only does not think in that way, it

But such fear is not in men by nature, confirming they do need a righteousness from God. If you are ever prone to wonder why men continue in their sin and rebellion, not turning to the

THE MINISTRY OF THE LAW

⁴⁹ *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”*

Having proved that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God, the

Spirit now turns to the Divinely appointed means of persuading men of that truth. He particularly addresses this to the Jews, although not exclusively to them, because they made their boast in possessing the Law. However, there is a strong tendency in the flesh to trust in Law. It has no objection to following a rigorous routine,

just as long as death to the desires of the flesh is not required.

The truth of the matter is that all men are far worse by nature than they think. The extent of the fall of humanity is far greater than flesh thinks, or wants to think. A disposition remains in man

that leads him to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. The Lord has made provision to convince him of the depth of his sin.

We will now address things that cannot be learned from nature. While the things that are made testify to the "eternal power and Deity" of God, they cannot convince the soul of sin. That is a work reserved for a more proficient minister.

WHAT IS "THE LAW"?

The word "Law" does not refer to any law of nature, or of civil authorities. This is "the Law" that was "given by Moses" (John 1:17). It is summarized in the Ten Commandments, which were "the words of the covenant" given to Israel (Ex 34:28). "The Law" also included the elaborations of the Ten Commandments, together with its blessings and curses.

Although the Law was given to Israel as a covenant (Rom 9:4), its ministry was not limited to them, as this text will affirm. It served a higher purpose than that of a covenant to Israel.

There is a strain of theology that affirms the Law has been totally abrogated—much like being erased. This particular persuasion presents God as repromulgating certain of the ten commandments, which are perceived as relevant to life in Christ. Our text will show this is not the case. The Law has been terminated as a means to righteousness, as taught in Romans 10:4. It has not, however, been obliterated.

THE LAW DOES SPEAK

Here the Law is pictured as though it were a person, speaking to humanity. There is a message that it is delivering—an essential message. There is a certain *tone* to the Law that can be discerned by the sensitive heart. It speaks, and to certain people.

If the Law had been abrogated, or annulled, it would speak no longer. There are, however, certain people who still need to hear the testimony of the Law.

THOSE UNDER THE LAW

Whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under its dominion, and are responsible to it. While this was primarily the Jews, it was not only the Jews. One particular reason for this dissertation was the tendency of the Jews to apply the Law to everyone but themselves.

What follows is common knowledge—something that is evident: "we know." The law is not speculative, nor

However, the law begins that ministry now, in this world. With powerful arguments, it convinces men they have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It removes their excuses and explanations from their minds, proving they have willingly and repeatedly broken God's Law.

does it deal with vain philosophies. It brings an essential message.

The Galatian brethren were Gentiles, and yet the Law is said to be their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ (Gal 3:24-25). Before they were in Christ, they were responsible to the Law, even though it was not given as a covenant to them.

Notice, the text does not say "whatever the Law SAID," but "whatever the Law SAYS." Its ministry is still going on. In the strictest sense of the Word, those "under the Law" are those whose conduct is wayward—who must be held in check because of the dominance of sin. From this vantage point the Spirit says, "Knowing this: that the law is **not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any**

other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust" (1 Tim 1:9-11). Unless lawless people only existed among the Jews, therefore, the work of the Law was not confined to them.

Notice that this perspective of the Law is "according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." More precisely, the passage reads, "and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me."^{NIV} The idea is that the Law speaks to those whose lives contradict the truth of the Gospel, which came 1,500 years after the Law was given. The Law, therefore, is still at work.

EVERY MOUTH STOPPED

The assignment given to the Law is to silence the boastful and alibiing mouths of all men. It is to convince them that they are guilty before God and without excuse. When this occurs, men will emulate Job, who said, "Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4). The Law speaks with strong tones to all men, "Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth" (Judges 18:19).

God has decreed that "no flesh will glory in His presence" (1 Cor 1:29). That will ultimately be the case when we 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; Rom 14:10). At that time, every mouth will be silenced before the Lord of glory. Like the man with no wedding garment, transgressors will be "speechless" (Matt 22:12).

However, the law begins that ministry now, in this world. With powerful arguments, it convinces men they have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It removes their excuses and explanations from their minds, proving they have willingly and repeatedly broken God's Law.

Paul provides a vivid portrayal of the Law's ministry. In the seven chapter of Romans, he recounts his former persuasion that he was righteous of himself. Before being in Christ, the "motions of sin," or "sinful passions" were at work "in our members, to bring forth death" (Rom 7:5). That was the fact of the case, yet Paul confesses this knowledge had escaped him. Outwardly, Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was impeccably righteous. According to his own testimony, "concerning the righteousness which is in the law," he was "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Even when he was persecuting the church, he thought he was doing what was right. Living in all good conscience, he said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 23:1; 26:9).

Now the Law enters. It comes to "stop" Paul's mouth. Here is his testimony. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came,

sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me" (Rom 7:7-11). Once it came home to Paul's heart that sin was an inward matter, "sin,

Let it be clear that the "guilt" of reference did not begin when the Law came home in power. The Law convinces the sinner that he is already guilty, and that his guilt was a matter of corrupted choice.

seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead."^{NIV} The sinful nature was there all along, but was hidden under the facade of religious flesh. But when the commandment broke through to his conscience, his flesh rose up in rebellion, filling his mind with "coveting of every kind."^{NASB}

The Law was not wicked in doing

this, but brought out that wickedness was in Saul of Tarsus. Effectively, it stopped his mouth, and brought him to Jesus for cleansing, renewal, and commissioning. That is the ministry of the Law.

ALL THE WORLD BECOMES GUILTY

Here the Spirit devastates the notion that the Law was ONLY for the Jew. The text reads, "and all the world may become guilty before God." The NASB, NIV, NRSV, and RSV read "become," or "held accountable to God." In my judgment, this is a very weak rendering of the text. The word translated "guilty" comes from ὑπόδικος, which means liable to punishment. In this case "accountable" carries the idea of "condemned already," and not that of a trial set forth to establish guilt.

The guilt is "before God," not merely in the conscience. Such a sentence requires the need of a Savior, and of a just acquittal upon the basis of another.

Thus, the soul is prepared for a Redeemer, having been convinced of its need for One. What a marvelous work has been assigned to the Law, and how faithfully it does its work.

KNOWLEDGE OF SIN, NOT JUSTIFICATION

²⁰ **Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.** With spiritual skill, and under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle has shown the absolute need of a righteousness from God. He has left no stone unturned, devastating every argument against the need for righteousness. His words are like those mentioned by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:11. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." Indeed they are! Who has not felt the weight of these powerful arguments. Have they not confirmed our need of a Savior and the

righteousness of God? Now, the Spirit will draw some further conclusions, showing us that we cannot seek justification by the Law. It was given to make all the world "guilty before God," not to enable them to become righteous by keeping a set of commandments. In fact, men had no propensity or ability to keep God's commandments, until they were reconciled by the death of God's Son.

THE DEEDS OF THE LAW

Precisely what are "the deeds of the Law?" The "deeds of the law" and the "works of the Law" are the same thing. They are the "deeds prescribed by the law."^{NRSV} The NIV reads, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight

by observing the law." And why is this so? Is not the Law good, and holy, and just? Is it not right to do the law? To fulfill the demands of the Law? Did not the Law promise life to those who kept it? As it is written, "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom 10:5; Lev 18:5; Gal 3:12)? How is it, then, that man cannot be justified, or made righteous, by fulfilling the deeds of the Law?

The key here is the word "Therefore." The previous verses (1:19-3:18) have declared and proved that all are guilty of sin. Human nature has been so corrupted, that it cannot do what God

requires in the Law. Therefore, rather than applauding men for their good deeds, the Law condemns them for their sin. The demands of the law upon a sinner are much like the demands of a marathon race upon a person in the intensive care unit of a hospital. They extend beyond the ability of fallen man. Blessed day when that truth comes home to the heart.

Jesus revealed another aspect of this to His disciples. He posed a hypothetical situation, confirming how far men had fallen from the glory of God. *“But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink’? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done’”* (Lk 17:7-20).

The Lord knows that no mortal has ever done everything God commanded to be done. Yet, He poses this situation to make a point. There is no merit before God for simply doing what you have been told to do. That is an obligation for which no reward is due—particularly eternal life. Thus, should we imagine that we have actually done *“ALL the things which were commanded”* us, we would still be required to say. *“We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.”* By the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified. The Law deals ONLY with obligations. It does not address men as those who have been freed to move into the presence of the Lord, but as those who are enslaved to sin, requiring sacrifices and offerings for sin.

NOT JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT

While men may tend to overstate their own accomplishments in this world, they will not be able to stand before God and boast. No person will be *“justified in the sight of God”* because of what they have done! If the Lord Jesus were

removed from the scenario, there would not be a solitary soul inducted into the tabernacle of the Most High.

Later in Romans, the Spirit takes up this argument again, pointing to Abraham, who is the *“father of us all”* (Rom 4:16). *“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; **BUT NOT BEFORE GOD.** For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”* (Rom 4:1-3).

There is a solid reason for this situation. Men have been universally convicted of sin. There is no one who is righteous, understands, seeks God, or does good. That is the Divine assessment, and is beyond all controversy. In that context, the very notion of being justified by the deeds of the Law becomes absurd. These two things—To be justified by the works of the Law, and to be guilty of sin—cannot be blended together. They are an admixture. If man is guilty, as our text affirms, then he CANNOT be justified by his own doing. **It is his doing that condemns him, and therefore it cannot justify him.** That is the argument of our text.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

One might suppose that, given this situation, the Law is useless. God forbid! Rather than being impractical and without value, it brings *“the knowledge of sin.”* Those who view the Scriptures as a manual of conduct do well to consider this verse. This passage has taught us that human conduct is not the issue. That is because every man is convicted of unacceptable conduct—*“all have sinned.”* The issue is being righteous before God, and the Spirit has shown us that, by nature, every mortal is without that righteousness. *“There is none righteous, no not one.”*

The Law puts a handle, so to speak, upon sin. It identifies it for us, so we can perceive it and be persuaded of its dominance over us by nature. **Its primary work is not to show us what sin is so that we can avoid it, but to convince us we have committed it!** It identifies deviate demeanor.

In identifying sin, the Law strips man of any hope of saving himself. It powerfully convinces the individual that the heart is *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jer 17:9). Thanks be unto God for deliverance from the condemning Law! It offered us no strength and no newness of life. It only

While men may tend to overstate their own accomplishments in this world, they will not be able to stand before God and boast. No person will be *“justified in the sight of God”* because of what they have done! If the Lord Jesus were removed from the scenario, there would not be a solitary soul inducted into the tabernacle of the Most High.

pointed at is and said, **“GUILTY!”** O, the bitter goad of a conscience that experiences the bludgeon of the Law! It is a precious deliverance when confidence floods the heart instead of condemnation.

The Law stopped our mouths, not allowing us to boast before God. But the Savior of mankind has stopped the mouth of the Law, not allowing it to condemn those who have died and been raised with Him. Blessed, indeed, is the soul who knows these things! *“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.”* (Psa 107:2). After you have let the Law do its work, then let the comforting Spirit do His work in you as well!

CONCLUSION

There are few areas of thought that are as productive as the one with which we are dealing. As a rule, the people of God have been deprived of the type of reasoning that has been presented in these chapters. The universal need for righteousness, when seen, is a great equalizer among the sons of men. It removes boasting, and uncovers a well of thanksgiving for the Lord Jesus Christ.

For some time, I have sensed the general dulness of professed Christians concerning these things. There appears to be a preoccupation with religious organization, career building, and other things related to these twin monsters.

Associated with these conditions is an unacceptable level of spiritual understanding and a deplorable lack of confidence toward God. The Lord Jesus is somewhere in the background of religious thought, and the power of godliness is denied more than any of us wish to admit. There is also an alarming level of immorality and spiritual ignorance in the professed church. Scriptural illiteracy is also at a totally unacceptable level.

What is the cause of these things? I am going to lay the responsibility for these conditions at the feet of church leaders. The very things that are so strongly espoused in the book of Romans

are hardly known by the masses. They are not being declared, but have been supplanted by other matters deemed more practical. The results have been devastating. Far too many believers are admittedly not ready to meet the Lord.

The answer to this situation is a return to the powerful proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. In it the righteousness of God is revealed *“from faith to faith,”* which is why it is *“the power of God unto salvation.”* Let there also be a return to the strong presentation of the universal need for the righteousness of God. Such preaching will move men away from reliance in the flesh.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 10



RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

^{3:21} But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. RIGHTEOUSNESS APART FROM THE LAW (3:21)
- II. RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH (3:22a)
- III. THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE (3:22b)
- IV. A PROPITIATION SET FORTH (3:25)
- V. R I G H T E O U S N E S S DEMONSTRATED (3:26)

With great power, the Spirit has established the universal guilt of sin. Without the Law, yet with the powerful testimony of both creation and conscience, the Gentile world lived in sin. They failed to seek the Lord as they were appointed

and positioned to do, creating idols, and refusing to be thankful. The Jews also were subjected to the unwavering and consistent testimony of creation. Additionally, they also received the more extensive testimony of the Law. Nature did not identify sin: the Law did. Nature pronounced neither blessing nor cursing: the Law did. Nature presented no intelligent shadows or types that declared a coming Redeemer: the Law did. Yet, the Jews also were dominated by sin, often falling into precisely the same sins as the Gentiles, who had neither Law nor promise. All have sinned!

As if this were not enough, the testimony of God Himself is brought before us. Assessing the totality of humanity with an omniscient eye He concludes, *"There is none righteous, no,*

not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (3:10-12).

All of this is intended to remove all hope in the flesh. Every person will eventually confront the Creator. Nothing that was resident in Adam can prepare us for that inevitability. Time has confirmed this to be the case. The outlining of moral responsibilities has also proved inadequate for the required preparation. Whatever may be said of the human intellect, it is not equal to this task. However precious the human will may be, it is not capable of making a decision on its own that will enable one to pass Divine scrutiny. Human emotion, upon which so

The means through which God's righteousness is received is a central doctrine of Scripture, by Given O. Blakely

much human activity is built, cannot equip us to stand before the Lord of glory. Intellect, will, and emotion are impotent to change our condition. They cannot remove a single transgression, make us clean, or induce a vivifying hope within us. However unpalatable this may be to men, it is nevertheless true. The totality of the Gentile world confirms the condition, as well as the total history of the Jews. **We need a righteousness from God.** We cannot do without it, for we cannot develop one of our own.

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

This entire section of Scripture is an exposition of Jesus' poignant words, "*You MUST be born again*" (John 3:7). The delineation of the dominance of sin over both Gentile and Jew confirms, "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh*" (John 3:6). The fact that "*there is none righteous, no not one*" substantiates "*the flesh profits nothing*" (John 6:63).

The entirety of the Adamic order has been repudiated by God. Even the totality of the natural order has been "*made subject to vanity,*" or subjected to mortality (Rom 8:20). Whatever gains its effectiveness from natural resources is powerless to bring a person one inch closer to God. Such things, regardless of their acclaimed superiority, have no effect whatsoever in altering the will, removing sin, or making the conscience pure.

Having said this, I am compelled to observe that a considerable amount of religious expertise relies completely upon natural resources—"*the natural man*" (1 Cor 2:14). Organization has no power to purge the conscience from dead works. Scholarship cannot enhance fellowship with God. Language expertise cannot liberate the soul from the dominion of sin. The accreditation of the most prestigious university in the world cannot write one's name in heaven. As simplistic as that may appear, the religious structure of our Western culture has managed to obscure the reality of these things.

Organization has no power to purge the conscience from dead works. Scholarship cannot enhance fellowship with God. Language expertise cannot liberate the soul from the dominion of sin. The accreditation of the most prestigious university in the world cannot write one's name in heaven.

It is not necessary for difficult and oppressive circumstances to be the means of recognizing the poverty of the flesh.

The Word of God can convince us that in our flesh "*dwells no good thing*" (Rom 7:18).

WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO SAY THIS?

At some point, the heart must be brought to trust in the Word of the Lord—particularly its assessment of the human race. The reason for this is straightforward. **MEN WILL NOT RECEIVE A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD UNTIL THEY ARE CONVINCED THEY HAVE NONE OF THEIR OWN.**

One of the grievous transgressions of sectarianism is the attempt to codify morality and systematize salvation. Without going into the particulars of this circumstance, it is enough to observe WHY men engage in such efforts. It is because they either do not possess the righteousness of God, or lack the confidence that they do. **An ignorance of the righteousness of God (Rom 10:3) compels the unlearned to seek a righteousness of their own.** This is the mother of legalism, and is a blight upon the body of Christ.

If a fundamental ignorance of the righteousness of God for men did not exist, the passage we are considering would not be necessary. It has been given to us to clarify what the devil has obscured, and to lift us into the realm of blessing.

RIGHTEOUSNESS APART FROM THE LAW

3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. Having seen the fruitlessness of all human endeavors to become righteous, the Spirit will now reveal to us the Divine initiative. He will show us what the Lord has done about our situation. Its absolute effectiveness and availability will be proclaimed with great spiritual power. Here is something every soul needs to comprehend.

BUT NOW

Here is a joyful transition from the condemnation of the Law to the good news of the Gospel. The provision of a righteousness from God is not an afterthought, or a Divine reaction to an unexpected turn of events. **Since what is now revealed transcends what was experienced at the first by Adam, it should be evident it was purposed before him.** Things did not begin with Adam, but with Divine purpose.

In His redemptive capacity, Jesus "*was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*" (1 Pet 1:20). He is truly "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Rev 13:8). That being the case, **Adam was not the ultimate man,** but only "*the first man*" (1 Cor 15:45,47). Through him, God's "*eternal purpose*" was initiated upon the earth. That purpose included the predetermination that those foreknown by God would be

The means through which God's righteousness is received is a central doctrine of Scripture, by Given O. Blakely

“conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). This conformation involved the subject of our text: the “righteousness of God.”

A Purpose for History

From an earthly perspective, it looked as though history was virtually ungoverned, with no real purpose being served. But this was not the case at all. In the digression of man, there was an increasing confirmation of his fundamental sinfulness. Both time and covenant proved this was true.

Avoiding Pointless Philosophy

We must zealously avoid developing crystallized philosophies about this matter, or posing questions that are not posed in Scripture. Some, for example, spend endless hours contemplating whether or not God knew man would sin. Based upon speculation, these contemplators then question why God did not stop man from sinning, or if there was a race before man . . . etc., etc. These are all profitless cogitations.

There Is A Purpose to History

This section of Romans is teaching us how to reason about the origin and history of man. God made man to seek and find Him, and positioned him in both time and place to encourage that quest. Both time and circumstance have confirmed this quest could not be done independently of God. **There is not a segment of His creation, whether personal or impersonal, that can correctly function without Him.** Blessed is the person who sees and embraces this truth. Such an one is well on the way to experiencing the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

“But”

The word “**BUT**” introduces a contrasting thought—in particular one that declares a Divine working as compared to a human one. The words “*but God*” occur forty-three times in Scripture (Gen 20:3; 31:7; 45:8; 48:21; 50:20; Ex 13:18; 21:13; Judges 15:19; 1 Sam 23:14; 1 Chron 28:3; Psa 49:15; 64:7; 68:21; 73:26; 75:7; Prov 21:12; Isa 17:13; Jonah 4:7; Mark 12:7; Luke 5:21; 12:20; 16:15; Acts 7:9; 10:28; 13:30; Rom 5:8; 6:17; 1 Cor 1:27; 2:10; 3:6,7; 6:13; 7:15;

10:13; 12:24; 15:38; Gal 3:18,20; 6:14; Eph 2:4; Phil 2:27). In all of these cases, the intervention of God turned the tide. The phrase “*but the Lord*” occurs fifty times in Scripture, and consistently conveys the same truth (Gen 39:21; Ex 10:20,27; Deut 1:45; 2:21; 3:26; 4:20; 7:23; 9:19; 23:5; 28:65; 1 Sam 1:5; 7:10; 16:7; 2 Sam 22:19; 1 Kings 19:11,12; 17:36,39; 1 Chron 16:26; 2 Chron 6:8; Psa 9:7; 18:18; 34:19; 37:17; 94:22; 96:5; 118:13; Prov 16:2,9; 17:3; 21:2; Isa 5:16; 60:2,19; Jer 1:7; 10:10; 16:15; 20:11; 23:8; 36:26; Hos 8:13; Joel 3:16; Jonah 1:4; Hab 2:20; Acts 9:15; 1 Cor 7:10; 2 Thess 3:3).

“BUT NOW” = After 2,500 years of moral and spiritual futility among the Gentiles, and after 1,500 years of moral and spiritual futility among the Jews under the Law. The testimony of nature, the witness of the conscience, and the attestation of the Law left man unchanged.

I have taken the time to list these references for a purpose. It is not a mere academic exercise, or a word study. Rather, it is intended to confirm there is a certain accent throughout Scripture. **Needed change is always introduced by God, and never by man.** When, therefore, we read “*but now,*” we are not reading of the progression of man, or the result of some mythical evolutionary process. Man continued to digress until God did something about it. He continued to be basically unrighteous until God intervened. Man was incapable of fulfilling his appointed purpose until the God of heaven undertook on the behalf of humanity with wisdom and power.

From another perspective “**BUT NOW**” means since Jesus has died, raised again, and is seated at the right hand of God. “**NOW**” is the time when the world has been reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18), sin has been expiated (Heb 9:26), and the devil destroyed (Heb 2:14). As it is written, “*For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation*” (2 Cor 6:2). This is a new day, a new time, the period for which men

have longed since first they heard of a Savior and His great deliverance. “**NOW**” we have received the atonement (Rom 5:11). “**NOW**” we are made free from sin (Rom 6:22). “**NOW**” we are delivered from the condemning law (Rom 7:6). “**NOW**” there is no condemnation (Rom 8:1). “**NOW**” in Christ Jesus we who were afar have been made near (Eph 2:13). “**NOW**” we are no more foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God (Eph 2:19). “**NOW**” God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (Eph 3:20).

Our need was assessed according to the past. Our benefit is declared in accord with the present time: the time when Christ “*is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:25).

After allotting 4,000 years for humanity to correct itself, not a single righteous person was found. In fact, men made no real effort to correct their condition, for there was not one who sought the Lord, or did good independently of Divine influence. No champion arose from “*the sons of Adam*” (Deut 32:8) to rescue mankind. “**BUT NOW**” that Jesus has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and is seated on the right hand of the majesty in the heavens, a wonderful announcement is made.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Having established that all persons are unrighteous by nature, and impotent to change their state, the Spirit now returns to the subject introduced in the first chapter. “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’*”^{RSV} (Rom 1:16-17).

Connecting the Thought

The extensive reasoning to which we have just been exposed (1:18 through 3:20) is a parenthetical thought. It confirmed the need for a righteousness from God. Whatever men may think of the

capacity of the human will, or the strength of human resolve, **four thousand years of accumulated history confirmed no one obeyed the testimony of nature, the law of the conscience, or the Law of God, as given through Moses.** Righteousness, therefore, must be made known by God. It will not come by further exposure to nature, for that has already proved inadequate. It will not come by elevating the conscience of men, for it has already been shown that men, by nature, pay no heed to their conscience. The revelation will not come by means of the Law, for its administration produced no righteous person. Now we return to a consideration of the righteousness itself.

Revealed In the Gospel

This is the *"righteousness"* that is revealed, or declared, in the Gospel (Rom 1:16-17). **Where this righteousness is not announced, the Gospel has not been preached,** for it is revealed in, or by means of, the Gospel of Christ. Wherever men have attempted to preach the Gospel with *"wisdom of words"* or *"enticing words of man's wisdom,"* this righteousness has been obscured (1 Cor 1:17; 2:4). Such preaching empties the cross of its power. As it is written, *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power"*^{NIV} (1 Cor 1:17). In every case, and with no exception, *"another Gospel"* (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6) successfully obscures the revelation of *"the righteousness of God."*

This is *"the righteousness which is from God by faith"*^{NKJV} (Phil 3:9). It is not developed, it is *"revealed."* It is not the result of our works, but comes *"through faith."* It does not contribute to human boasting, but leads *"to faith"*--deeper and increasing faith (Rom 1:17).

God's Own Righteousness

This is God's own righteousness--His own character, or Divine nature. It is a *"gift"* that is given to us because of Christ,

through Christ, and by faith (Rom 5:17). The realization, or participation in, this righteousness is the work of God. Thus it is written, *"For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him [Jesus Christ]"* (2 Cor 5:21). This is a staggering consideration! Other versions read, *"that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"*^{NASB} . . . *"that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*^{NIV}

Note, the proclamation is not that we will start doing what is righteous, but that we will become *"the righteousness of God."* The doing of true righteousness now becomes the evidence of a righteousness already possessed. As it is written, *"he that doeth righteousness IS*

This is the "righteousness" that is revealed, or declared, in the Gospel (Rom 1:16-17). Where this righteousness is not announced, the Gospel has not been preached, for it is revealed in, or by means of, the Gospel of Christ. Wherever men have attempted to preach the Gospel with "wisdom of words" or "enticing words of man's wisdom," this righteousness has been obscured

righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7). And, to dispel all doubt, those who *"become the righteousness of God"* will, as they live by faith, *"do"* righteousness.

Becoming *"the righteousness of God"* is what makes us God's *"workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works"* (Eph 2:10). It is what makes the new birth a NEW birth, separating us from the fleshly order. While the presence of the Holy Spirit

confirms we are *"the sons of God"* (Gal 4:6), being *"made the righteousness of God"* is what changes our nature. In that experience, and through the promises of the Gospel, we become *"partakers of the Divine nature"* (2 Pet 1:4).

Elaborating on the Righteousness

It should not surprise us that the Christian community is sharply divided on the precise nature of this righteousness. I will list a few of these views because of the pivotal nature of this passage. Also, very little is said these days about this passage on *"the righteousness of God."*

- ▶ Origen (185-254 B.C.) understood this to be God's attribute of justice.
- ▶ Chrysostom (347-407 B.C.) Felt it referred to Divine clemency, or His mercifulness to forgive.
- ▶ John Campbell (1800-1872 B.C.) said it consisted in man's conformity to the declared will of God.
- ▶ Macknight taught the righteousness of God signified the righteousness belonging to faith itself.
- ▶ Bishop Newcomb translated the phrase "the righteousness of God" as "God's method of justification."
- ▶ Tholuck said of this verse, "The Gospel makes known a way to the perfect fulfillment of the law which is required by God."
- ▶ Stuart explains "the righteousness of God" is "the justification God bestows."^{Taken from Haldane's Commentary on Romans}

Righteousness and Justification

It is necessary to understand that *"righteousness"* and *"justification"* are not synonymous. While they come from the same root word, they do not mean the same thing. ***"Righteousness" is a state of unblemished character. "Justification" is the means by which this character is imparted to men.***

In my judgment, we must avoid the notion that God makes men righteous by giving them the ability to keep His Law.

While the righteousness of the Law IS fulfilled in those who are righteous, it is fulfilled by their walk in the Spirit. As it is written, *“That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom 8:4). In this case, character is not the result of the fulfillment of the Law, but the fulfillment is a result of character. While this may appear to be a fine distinction, it is a necessary one. Prior to this, the book of Romans has affirmed that **man’s doing has been his undoing**. Salvation does not rest upon man’s doing, but upon God’s doing. That is why HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS is given to us, rather than a law demanding that we develop our own.

Righteousness is the result of Divine creation, not human doing. Isaiah prophesied of this day of salvation, *“You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the LORD, have created it”*^{NIV} (Isa 45:8). In confirmation of this, our state in Christ is described by the Spirit in these words. *“Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth”*^{NASB} (Eph 4:24).

The *“new man”* is nothing less than the result of God’s *“gift of righteousness.”* That nature, is described in this manner: *“the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him”* (Col 3:10). Believers are admonished to *“put on”* the new man.

We are apprized that this new nature, or the part of us that is *“born of God,”* is not capable of sin. Nor, indeed, can Satan touch this part of us. *“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God”* (1 John 3:8). And again, *“We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him”* (1 John 5:18). That nature is *“the righteousness of God”*—the Divine nature, given to us because of Christ and through

our faith.

To *“put on the new man”* is to live by faith and walk in the Spirit. It is to provide a spiritual climate in which the Lord can work and Satan cannot. Putting on the *“new man”* involves living in agreement with the Divine nature of which we are made *“partakers.”* We will do what is right if this is done.

if men are to learn of and experience “the righteousness of God,” they must be delivered from the notion that they can become righteous by doing. The emphasis must be placed upon believing, otherwise righteousness is beyond our reach. This does not eliminate doing, but rather makes doing possible, for without the righteousness of God, it is not possible to do the will of God.

APART FROM THE LAW

This righteousness is made known *“apart from,”* or separate from, the Law. While the Law of Moses, given as a covenant to Israel, is the particular focus, this word applies to **any law**. The only righteousness God will receive is NOT made known through, or facilitated by, the principle of law. How poignantly the Spirit says it. *“I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly”*^{NASB} (Gal 2:21). Those, therefore, who seek to produce righteousness by adherence to a moral code or by means of a routine or procedure, have nullified God’s grace for themselves. They have embraced a religion that has no need for Jesus, and thrust the righteousness of God from themselves.

This does not mean the Law itself is unrighteous. Rather, it confirms the Law holds up a standard that natural man cannot attain. It is IMPOSSIBLE for man to become righteous because of what he does, or by means of law—any law. Thus it is written, *“Is the law then against the*

promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law” (Gal 3:21). The way out of sin is not through law, commandment, or procedure of any kind. If a God-given law could not retrieve men from the fall and enable them to be righteous, there is **no** law that can do so.

Thus *“the righteousness of God”* is revealed to us **“without the law,”**^{KJV} or **“apart from the law.”** There is a good reason for this. Righteousness is appropriated by faith, and the Law has nothing whatsoever to do with faith. As it is written, *“The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them’”*^{NIV} (Gal 3:12). **Nowhere does the Law require faith, or give a promise to those who will believe.** Law operates on a different principle. It is based upon DOING, not believing. *“The man who does these things will live by them”* (Rom 10:5).

Thus, if men are to learn of and experience *“the righteousness of God,”* they must be delivered from the notion that they can become righteous by doing. The **emphasis** must be placed upon believing, otherwise righteousness is beyond our reach. This does not eliminate doing, but rather makes doing possible, for without the righteousness of God, it is not possible to do the will of God.

IS REVEALED

Because this righteousness comes from God, it is said to be *“revealed,”* or *“manifested.”*^{KJV} The word used here (manifested or revealed) means something that already exists is made known, or becomes apparent. This does not speak of something that develops, and then appears by virtue of its growth. Rather, it is something already developed that is opened up to the understanding of men. Further, until it is revealed, it is not possible to know of it. By its very nature, the thing to be revealed is hidden from human understanding. No amount of mental discipline or diligent search will discover it. It a thing cannot be known by human effort, revelation is not necessary.

For example, men of extraordinarily disciplined minds may study the complexities of nature, yet they will NEVER come upon *“the righteousness of God.”* Nature does not testify of God’s righteousness, but of His *“eternal power and Godhead.”* Those possessing astute powers of reason may probe the moral requirements of God, yet they will not discover a righteousness that can be given to men. This is a provision that must be revealed. The good news is that it has been made known through the Gospel of Christ. It is not made known through something that is seen, like creation. It is not revealed through requirements, like the Law. Rather, it is manifested through a message of Divine accomplishment and provision.

Law discovers sin, defining it and convicting of it. But it cannot produce a righteousness that finds the sinner free from sin and able to stand confidently before the Lord. When it comes to the revelation of the righteousness of God, we must come higher than Law can bring us.

WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND PROPHETS

Other versions read, *“to which the Law and the Prophets testify,”*^{NIV} *“attested by the law and the prophets,”*^{NRSV} and *“although the law and the prophets bear witness to it.”*^{RSV} The matter to which both the Law and the Prophets witnessed was a righteousness from God. Neither of them declared that it was present, but that it was coming.

The witness of the Law and the Prophets was twofold. **First**, they confirmed that men needed a righteousness from God. **Second**, they foretold by types and prophecies that such a righteousness would be provided by God.

The Law: Righteousness Needed

The Law held before men the requirements of God. The Ten Commandments were precisely that: *“commandments.”* They were neither suggestions nor goals. The Law placed before men a means to life: *“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My*

judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD”^{NKJV} (Lev 18:5). To *“live”* before God equates to being accepted by, and united to, Him. Those who took the Law seriously became acutely aware of their own unrighteousness, and of the absolute essentiality of righteousness before God. It whetted the appetite of sensitive hearts for that righteousness.

In **the sacrificial system**, outlined in the book of Leviticus, a witness to the righteousness of God was also seen. The need for the shedding of blood, cleansing, and atonement set before men the need for a means to approach God. A sense of the necessity of cleansing was developed, as well as the need for God being approached with the utmost sobriety (Heb 5:1; 8:3; 9:9,23; 10:1-11; 10:11).

Law discovers sin, defining it and convicting of it. But it cannot produce a righteousness that finds the sinner free from sin and able to stand confidently before the Lord. When it comes to the revelation of the righteousness of God, we must come higher than Law can bring us.

The ministry of the High Priest declared the need for the ongoing provision of Divine satisfaction. A righteousness from God, while once conferred, would require the presence of an active representative before the Living God. That representative must be selected by God, and accomplish the work of God. All of this is fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-16; 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1-3; 9:7-25; 10:21; 13:11).

The Prophets: Righteousness Foretold

The righteousness announced in the Gospel was witnessed to by the holy

prophets. They spoke of a time of acceptability, and of a change in character.

As a prophet, **Moses** spoke of a time when men would be changed. *“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live”* (Deut 30:6). This circumcision is experienced in Christ Jesus, and is a view of being granted *“the righteousness of God”* (Col 2:11-12).

Ezekiel witnessed to this righteousness as the removal of the heart of stone, and the granting of a heart of flesh. *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”* (Ezek 36:26).

Isaiah proclaimed this righteousness as the experience of liberty and change. *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert”* (Isa 35:5-6).

Jeremiah said it was experienced by the Lord Himself becoming our righteousness. *“In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”* (Jer 23:6; 33:16).

Malachi declared the righteousness from the standpoint of its Origin, declaring it would result in renewal and release. *“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall”* (Mal 4:2).

Because none were righteous, *“no not one,”* exceeding great and precious promises were held out to men, giving them hope of a better day. Under the

administration of the Lord Jesus, and because of His accomplishments, these promises are now realized by faith. This is why Paul said, *“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those*

which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23). He devoted himself to the proclamation of the Gospel, in which all

that Moses and the Prophets promised was revealed. There were not theological novelties in his preaching, and there ought not be in ours. The summation of that revelation is the conferment of the righteousness of God upon men. What a marvelous announcement!

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

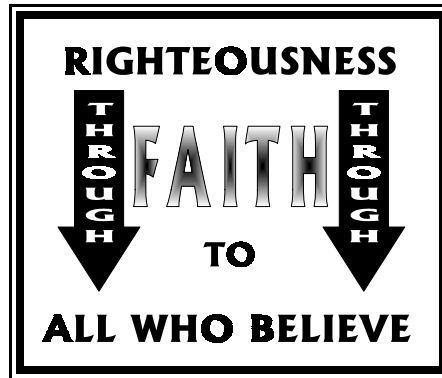
“22a Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” The Spirit now elaborates on the righteousness that is revealed through the Gospel, and was witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets. This is the chief benefit flowing from the Gospel, and was the primary light displayed through both the Law and the Prophets. Without this righteousness, there would have been no purpose for the Law. The Prophets would also have served no lasting purpose were they not to have pointed forward to this singular experience.

EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Notice what care is taken by the Holy Spirit. He leaves no room for any man-developed righteousness. There is no place for a righteousness proceeding from the Law. There is only one acceptable righteousness, and that is the righteousness BELONGING TO God Himself. While the righteousness comes FROM God, that is not the point of this expression. The ownership of the righteousness is the point. It is God’s righteousness.

Having confirmed that God has found none that were righteous, He now turns from the vanity of men to the effectiveness of God. There are two sides to the coin of salvation. (1) The removal of transgression, and (2) The receiving of righteousness from God. The emphasis is placed upon the latter. The remission of sins is in order to the reception of the righteousness of God, for that righteousness cannot be imparted where sin remains dominant.

There are times when salvation is viewed from the lower side of the coin—the



remission of sin. *“In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins”* (Col 1:14). *“And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses”* (Acts 13:39). *“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43). This is, indeed, a marvelous accomplishment, and well ought the children of the Lord live in continual praise for it.

The remission of sin, however, would serve no lasting purpose if we were not given the righteousness of God. If only our sins were forgiven, and no righteousness received, we would be like the swept and garnished house of which Jesus spoke. *“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first”*^{NKJV} (Matt 12:43-45). Many a professed believer is like that house. They

have been cleansed, and everything has been rearranged. Yet, there is nothing of substance in them. They are not growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). Nor, indeed, are they drawing near to the Lord with a true heart, having their conscience purged from dead works, and their bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:22).

This condition is largely owing to the lack of preaching concerning the righteousness of God. Neither its necessity nor availability is known by many believers. When they read the Scriptures, they read them like a manual of conduct, or a road map giving directions. They do not see the announcements or proclamations of the Scriptures. They are blinded to the types and shadows set forth in the Law, and the marvelous prophecies of the day of salvation in the Prophets. To them, righteousness is nothing more than a standard of conduct, dealing mostly with external matters, and human disciplines. It is a tragic circumstance!

Let none imagine that the word of God has nothing to say about our conduct, or about subduing sinful inclinations resident in the *“flesh,”* or sinful nature. But that is not the EMPHASIS of the *“Apostles’ doctrine.”*

A Superior Gift

When it comes to what we receive from God, there is a gift that stands out above all others. It is greater than food, clothing, and shelter. It transcends financial provisions, health of body, and domestic blessing. It is *“the gift of righteousness”* (Rom 5:17). The remission of sin is the necessary preparation for receiving this righteousness. The gift of the Spirit is essential to its maintenance.

But the righteousness itself is the point. Those who possess it are accepted by God.

A Brief Elaboration

I must labor this point. God is righteous in saving us, but that is not the point of phrase *“the righteousness of God.”* It is not that He is simply having mercy upon us. To dwell with the Lord forever, men must be like Him. A transformation must take place in them that makes them harmonious with the God who *“made”* them. Those at variance with the Lord will not be received by Him.

Although little is said of this in our day, this is a fundamental thread of reasoning throughout the Scriptures. From one perspective, the reason for condemnation is dissonance, or conflict, between God and man. That conflict exists in both thoughts and ways (Isa 55:8-9). It is confirmed in the ignorance of God that characterizes all who are not in Christ (Eph 4:18). It is declared in the universal indictment of humanity, *“and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). Unless a reconciliation is effected, and men are brought into accord with God, there is no hope of salvation.

This is why *“the righteousness of God”* must be more than a mere doctrinal point, or a commentary on the Person of God. It is something that **MUST** be experienced, possessed, and resident in us.

THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

Having established the need for having *“the righteousness of God,”* the Spirit now addresses the means through which it is received. How is it that the righteousness of God can be received? At this point, men have often chose to argue about the matter rather than declare the Gospel. The Spirit will not present alternative views of the subject, but will simply affirm the means.

The reception of this righteousness is unequivocally *“through faith in Jesus Christ.”* The KJV reads, *“which is by faith of Jesus Christ.”* By this, the faith Jesus had is not intended, but the faith He authors (Heb 12:2). Again, there is no point to arguing about this, it is *“given”*

unto us *“to believe”* (Phil 1:29).

The reception of faith is not a one time experience. For example, Paul told the Ephesian saints he had heard of their *“faith in the Lord Jesus”* (Eph 1:15). Yet, in his benediction to them he said, *“Peace to the brethren, and love WITH FAITH, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph 6:23). In my judgment, there is a great need for such a blessing in the church of our time.

“Faith” is the possession, and *“believe”* is the expression of that faith. From another aspect, faith is the ability to believe—to be convinced and assured of the truth of Jesus Christ.

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The preeminent focus of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, the summation of God’s Word is represented as *“the record that God gave of his Son,”*^{KJV} or *“the witness that God has borne concerning His Son”*^{NASB} (1 John 5:10). The primary testimony of God does not concern the direction of human conduct, but the Person of His Son. No individual will spiritually advance until his attention is placed upon the Son of God, the very heart of Divine witness.

Faith in Christ is a persuasion that He is precisely Who God has declared Him to be. HE is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). HE is the One who is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18). HE has reconciled us to God (2 Cor 5:18). HE has destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14). HE has plundered principalities and powers (Col 2:15). HE is the head of all things for the church (Eph 1:22-23). HE is presently mediating the New Covenant (Heb 12:24). HE is interceding for us at this time (Heb 7:25). HE will come and receive us to Himself,

that where He is, there we be also (John 14:3). These are not mere points of doctrine, but realities to be embraced by the heart.

Faith involves persuasion and confidence. As it is written, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*^{NASB} (Heb 11:1). Faith is convinced that what God has *“promised, He was able also to perform”* (Rom 4:21). It embraces the declaration of the Gospel with both hands.

This perfectly accords with the rest of Scripture. The focus of real faith is Christ Himself. Thus Paul answered the question *“What must I do to be saved?”* with these words: *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”* (Acts 16:31). God is proclaimed as the Justifier of *“the one who has faith in Jesus”* (Rom 3:26). Justification is pointedly said NOT to be by the works of the Law but *“by faith in Jesus Christ”* (Gal 2:16). The promise of God is realized *“by faith in Jesus Christ”* (Gal 3:22). As we approach the Lord, boldness and access are realized *“through faith in Him”* (Eph 3:12). Paul articulated the appointed quest of all believers. It was to be *“found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith”* (Phil 3:9).

All of this may appear rather elementary, but it is not. Great stress is placed upon faith in Jesus Christ because men are easily diverted from this central matter. It is altogether too common for men to accent **WHAT** is believed rather than **WHO** is believed.

Called into Christ’s Fellowship

“Faith in Jesus Christ” earnestly seeks to appropriate what He has been appointed to give. It longs to be with Him, know Him, and fellowship with Him. God has not called us into the fellowship of a denomination or train of thought. Rather, He has *“called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”* (1 Cor 1:9).

Let it be clear, **no salvational**

benefits will be realized apart from companionship with Jesus! Those who are aloof from Jesus are, by that very circumstance, excluded from His blessings. Satan has deluded people into thinking they can push Jesus Christ to the background of their lives and still be approved of God. Men have even succumbed to demonic doctrines that justify such a conclusion. But these are all imaginations to be cast down with our mighty spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:5-6). Faith in Christ cannot be part-time, occasional, or seasonal. If it is not the dominating principle of life, it will soon be

“To all”

This phrase emphasizes the imputation, or conferment, of righteousness upon the believer. This will be developed at length in the fourth chapter. It accents that righteousness is a gift, and not an achievement.

“On all”

This expression coincides with the prophecy of Isaiah. *“For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness”* (Isa 61:10). The 132nd Psalm reads, *“Let Your priests be*

It would be interesting to hear that question answered by denominational devotees. The answer, of course, will confirm to us the substance of Philip’s preaching. The eunuch answered, *“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”* (Acts 8:36-37). That is the believing of reference in our text.

What About Obedience?

The disciple of Law is not content with the promise of righteousness upon the basis of faith in Christ, or believing. Such imagine that faith must have obedience added to it. But this is not the case at all. Obedience is inherent in faith. Where obedience is not found, faith is not present! It is by faith that we obey, for obedience is neither possible nor recognized apart from faith.

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Is it not written *“By faith Abraham . . . obeyed”* (Heb 11:8). Abel offered his sacrifice *“by faith”* (Heb 11:4). Noah prepared the ark *“by faith”* (Heb 11:7). Moses kept the Passover *“by faith”* (Heb 11:28). Israel passed through the Red Sea *“by faith”* (Heb 11:29). Faith is the engine of obedience, and the only guarantee that it will be heartfelt and effective.

dashed upon the rocks of carnality.

TO ALL AND ON ALL

²² *The righteousness of God . . . unto all and upon all them.*” Other versions read *“for all who believe,”*^{RSV} *“for all those who believe,”*^{NASB} and *“to all who believe.”*^{NIV} I prefer the KJV, NKJV, Webster, Douay-Rheims, Revised Webster, and Young’s Literal translations: *“to all and upon (on) all.”* Such notable commentators as Barnes, Calvin, Gill, Haldane, Hodge, Jamieson Fausset and Brown, John Wesley, and others also receive these words. Of itself, this does not authenticate the text. I only share it to confirm this is not a strange view, and those who accept it are not theological renegades.

The strongest argument for the words *“to and on,”* or *“to and upon”* are not the manuscripts from which they were translated. Nor, indeed, do we bow at the shrine of the scribes and textual experts as though their research was infallible. These words are in perfect harmony with the remainder of Scripture, and in no wise do violence to the truth. There is no need for them to be discarded. Neither faith nor scholarship demands their removal. Thus I choose to retain and believe them.

clothed with righteousness, And let Your saints shout for joy.” The idea is that, while in this world, we are covered with this righteousness.

WHO BELIEVE

The nominal church does not place much emphasis upon faith, or believing God. Generally, the issue is “what” men believe. Significant divisions exist among professed believers over the particular points of doctrine that are embraced. I do not deny that some of this can be justified. But this is NOT the focus of our text, nor of the Scriptures themselves.

Here believing is not mental assent, or even an activity of the mind. Believing is accomplished in the essential nature of man—his heart. Thus it is written, *“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness”* (Rom 10:10). More of the Divine image is in the heart than the mind. The heart can more powerfully motivate the individual than the mind.

When the Ethiopian eunuch interrupted Philip by asking, *“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”*, the answer was clear and in strict harmony with our text. *“If you believe with all your heart, you may.”*

Those who believe in Christ Jesus will do what He says. Our text, however, is not focusing on that aspect of spiritual life. It is going to the heart of the matter, showing what makes men acceptable with God. Faith moves us into the domain of acceptance. It opens the door of heaven to us, and becomes the enablement of obedience. In that, we are to rejoice.

Without faith, it is not possible to please God (Heb 11:6). All effort, in such a case, will be futile, and will yield no acceptable results. If, on the other hand, men will believe in Jesus, and live by faith, they will become pleasing to God and productive in His Kingdom. As elementary as that may appear, it is something that is constantly affirmed in Scripture.

Faith is never taken for granted by the Holy Spirit. We are urged to fight the good fight of faith, and examine ourselves to see whether we be in the faith. We are also to see to it that an evil heart of unbelief does not rise in us.

THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE

^{22b} **For there is no difference,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.** With spiritual mastery, the Apostle now shows the heavenly logic behind our justification. This is not thinking after the manner of men, nor will it be accepted by those who are dominated by the carnal mind. The reasoning here declared, makes sense only to faith. Only those who are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ will find this to be a joyful sound.

FOR . . .

The word “for” is a rhetorical one. It introduces a reason for the circumstance just described—namely the righteousness of God being conferred on all who believe. The RSV and NRSV versions read, “since.” We might use the word “because,” or the expression, “in view of this.” It will become clear in this text that the ONLY real distinction among men is the possession of the righteousness of God. Apart from that, real distinctions cannot be found.

THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE

^{22b} . . . *there is no difference.*” The Spirit reaffirms the reality stated in verse nine. “For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.” From the positive view, the text explains why the righteousness of God is “unto all and upon all them that believe.” This same truth is reaffirmed in the tenth chapter. “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek” (10:12).

By saying “there is no difference,” the Spirit is confirming there is no other way of obtaining the righteousness of God, other than through faith. There is no cause resident within men that can justify God imputing His righteousness to them.

Herein is found a great cause for confidence in the believer. The righteousness of God raises the most lowly sinner to acceptance with God. There is

no cause to lament because of a supposed lack of gifts, or to boast because of seeming successes.

By nature, no person can rise above Adam, through which sin entered into the world Rom 5:12). In fact, were Adam to appear in our generation in his fallen state, he would be vastly superior in every way to the whole world of humanity. There has been a marked degeneracy in men from every aspect, spiritual, moral, and physical.

There may be differences in the abilities men possess, or their dispositions. Their possessions, education, or attainments may appear to be different. But all of those distinctions are on a lower level, having nothing whatsoever to do with Divine acceptance. Nor, indeed, do they provide for the acquisition of righteousness by differing means. Fundamentally, and at the very heart of the human circumstance, “there is no difference,” either in the need for of the

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means of acquiring “the righteousness of God.”

SINNED AND FALL SHORT

²³ . . . *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” The text goes beyond a mere philosophical statement. Two incontrovertible facts are stated. They confirm there is “no difference” among men. They also corroborate the

intrinsic need men have for “the righteousness of God.”

“Have sinned”

The condition of humanity can be traced back to Adam, but all guilt is not resident in him. As it is written, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that **all have sinned**” (Rom 5:12). From one perspective, that sin was a matter of choice. From another, it was the expression of a fallen nature. If this were not the case, some would NOT have sinned. However, no such person can be found. In all ages, and in all places, “all have sinned.” Whether with Law or without Law, “all have sinned.” Whether within the framework of a covenant or apart from one, “all have sinned.” If there is a mortal anywhere who affirms I “have not sinned,” he makes God a liar and His word is not in him (1 John 1:10).

By “sinned” the Spirit means lived in contradiction of the nature of God. It is true that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). However, even before the Law “sin was in the world” (Rom 5:13). It is quite true that “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (5:13b), but it still exists, and is a reality that must be addressed. All men have conducted themselves unlike God. They have all rejected preliminary Divine overtures, whether in nature or in Law. Their corrupt nature has expressed itself, confirming that of themselves they are not righteous.

Care must be taken not to assume this means all sin is alike. That is not the case, as is emphatically stated in the first chapter (1:23-31). There is such a thing as a “greater sin” (John 19:11), and “exceedingly wicked” sin (Gen 13:13). However, even though there are differences in the degree of sin, there “is no difference” in the fact of sin, or the need for righteousness.

“Fall short”

The means through which God's righteousness is received is a central doctrine of Scripture, by Given O. Blakely

Not only is man guilty of sinning in the past (“*have sinned*”), he is in the processing of falling, or coming short, of the glory of God. When compared with God, “*all*” come short of His glory. Though bearing His image, man is flawed at the core. He needs God’s glory and righteousness. The words “*come short*” or “*fall short*” come from a single Greek word. It is *ὀστεροῦνται*, and means “be behind, fail, destitute of, and fail to be a partaker of, or fail to reach.” The idea is not that man has some Divine glory, but not the measure intended. Neither does it mean he has some righteousness, but not quite enough.

The lack of Divine glory in the natural man can be seen in Isaiah’s response to seeing the glory of God. In one grand moment, the prophet saw “*the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.*” In that moment a keen sense of his own lack registered upon his spirit. In desperation he cried out, “*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*” (Isa 6:1-5). No one had to tell Isaiah he “*come short of the glory of God.*” He sensed the vast chasm between himself and the Living God—and he was a mighty Prophet!

There is a serious need in our day for an awareness of the glory of God. It has been so shrouded by organized religion that men scarcely know there is such a thing. It is for this reason that men are not pressing into the Kingdom, seizing it, as it was, by violence (Matt 5 1:12; Luke 16:16).

Proof of Universal Guilt?

Generally, Romans 3:23 is used to establish the universal guilt of sin. Indeed, that is the postulate behind the text, but that is not its purpose. The Spirit has already “*proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin*” (3:9). The purpose of this text is to show WHY the righteousness of God is “*unto all and upon all them that believe.*” It confirms why there are not multiple ways to obtain the righteousness of God.

BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY

^{24a} . . . *being justified freely.*” The Spirit now declares what is involved in becoming “*the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21), or receiving the righteousness of God by faith.

“Being”

The condition to be described is not a goal, but a present possession. It is a state of “*being.*” The NIV reads “*ARE justified.*” The NRSV accents it even more: “*they are NOW justified.*” Our text, then, concerns the present state of believers. The value of knowing this cannot be overstated.

In order for God to dwell with man, sins must be remitted, or cancelled out. Too, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, a life pleasing to God is impossible. Again, both of these occur when men are justified.

“Justified”

To be “*justified*” is to be made righteous by Another. The words “*being justified,*” or “*are now justified*” come from a single Greek word, *δικαιούμενοι*. This single word contains more than any single English word. That is largely why the Spirit is expounding it. Linguistically, the word means “to be put into a right relationship with God, acquitted, declared or treated as righteous.”^{Barclay-Newman} This is not the work of men, but of God Himself. The reason compelling God to do so is not the submission of man, but the obedience of Christ. As it is written, “*by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous*” (Rom 5:19).

“*Being justified*” involves two requirements. (1) Deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, and (2) Procuring the righteousness of God. This perspective is developed several places in the Apostolic doctrine.

“*Who hath delivered us from the*

power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13). The “*power of darkness*” is the realm in which there is no difference. It maintains such a hold upon men, they must be “*delivered*” from it. “*The kingdom of God’s dear Son*” is the domain in which Divine acceptance and victory are realized. Men must be transferred by Another into this Kingdom. They are impotent to do it themselves. Justification involves both of these Divine works.

“*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord*” (Acts 3:19). It is not possible to experience Divine acceptance while our sins remain associated with us. They must be blotted out from before the Lord. The “*times of refreshing*” are the experience of Divine sustenance and blessing. When men are justified, both of these are gloriously accomplished.

“*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38). In order for God to dwell with man, sins must be remitted, or cancelled out. Too, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, a life pleasing to God is impossible. Again, both of these occur when men are justified.

“*To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me*” (Acts 26:18). A transition must take place from the realm of darkness and ignorance to that of light and illumination. Sins must be forgiven, and an inheritance among the people of God obtained. If these do not take place, there is no hope of salvation. Praise the Lord, both are accomplished when we are “*justified.*”

Being justified is like coming out of Egypt and entering Canaan. It is being raised from death in trespasses and sins to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Eph

2:6). What God cannot abide is removed, and what He wants to give is received.

“Freely”

The word “freely” is rich with meaning. It carries the idea of gratuitously, or without human cause. It also carries the idea of “without cost, as a free gift.” It also means undeservedly, or without [human] reason.

This is the ONLY way righteousness can be given to men, for “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” It is not a reward for doing good, for “there is none that doeth good, no not one” (3:12).

The prophet Isaiah foretold of the nature of justification. “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have **no money**, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk **without money and without price**”^{NKJV} (Isa 55:1). In justification, what will be our inheritance in glory is tasted in this world in a first fruits sense. Jesus has promised, “I will give of the fountain of the water of life **freely** to him who thirsts” (Rev 21:6). That begins now, in justification, when we are made righteous.

BY HIS GRACE

“^{24b} . . . by His grace.” Here “grace” is contrasted with “works.” As it is written elsewhere, “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work” (Rom 11:6). Either righteousness is a reward for doing what is good, or it is a gift from God. Our text confirms the latter: it is a gift from God, given apart from human merit or accomplishment.

While men do enter into the matter, their part is neither foundational nor causal. In our salvation, God is motivated by himself-by His own Nature. The impetus behind our salvation is not human need or a human quest, but the inclination of God Himself.

Favor

“Grace” is an exceedingly large word. It includes the idea of favor, regard,

or blessing. This is expressed in the words, “But Noah found *grace in the eyes of the Lord*” (Gen 6:8).

Divine Pleasure

“Grace” also includes the idea of pleasure; i.e., that God takes pleasure in justifying men. The whole plan of salvation is “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph 1:5). This is the “good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself” (Eph 1:9). There is a telling expression of this facet of grace in the Thessalonian Epistle. “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the **good pleasure of His goodness** and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus

“Redemption” is a key word in Scripture. It speaks of liberation procured by the payment of a ransom. Outside of Christ men are “sold under sin” (Rom 7:14). The bondage was so extensive that a large price was required to set us free.

Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, **according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ**” (2 Thess 1:11-12).

Abundance

“Grace” carries the thought of liberality, abundance, and copiousness. Thus those in Christ Jesus are said to receive “**abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness**” (Rom 5:17). One of the great expressions of this truth is found in First Timothy 1:14. “And the **grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.**”

Purpose

“Grace” also includes the thought of Divine purpose or objective. Grace carries the idea of producing something, or completing a Divine purpose. Thus we are

called “according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). A grand statement of this facet of grace is found in the book of Second Timothy. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (1:9).

Concluding Thoughts on Grace

Thus, when we are said to be “justified freely by His grace,” we are to understand the following.

1. To be justified is an evidence of God’s favor and blessing. It is the highest token of Divine regard in this world.
2. We are to understand that God takes pleasure in justifying us, or giving us His righteousness. When we seek first His righteousness we are not infringing on forbidden territory.
3. Because grace is abundant, righteousness is also abundant. We did not receive a mere token of righteousness, but the righteousness of God Himself.
4. Divine objectives are being fulfilled in our justification. When we are made righteous, it is not only for our own satisfaction, although that is surely realized. This is the purpose for which Jesus was commissioned to bring us to God for fellowship and participation.

THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS

“^{24c} . . . through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Salvation, in a sense, is very technical, addressing and including all Divine requirements. We are not simply pronounced righteous, but made righteous “through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”^{NIV}

“Redemption” is a key word in Scripture. It speaks of liberation procured by the payment of a ransom. Outside of Christ men are “sold under sin” (Rom 7:14). The bondage was so extensive that a large price was required to set us free. After four thousand consecutive years of human history, it was apparent a

Redeemer could not come from the lineage of Adam. As the forty-ninth Psalm so poignantly says it, *“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him-- the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough”*^{NIV} (v 7-8).

Developed Under the Law

The idea of redemption was not borrowed from heathen cultures, as some sophists suggest. It is a concept belonging to and developed by the God of heaven. The first glimpse of it is afforded in the making of coats, or garments, of skin for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21). So far as we know, however, that was not attended with an explanation. At the very best, the understanding of Adam and Eve would have been very sparse on the matter of redemption. It is clear that Abel also had some idea of redemption, as he *“brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions”*^{NASB} (Gen 4:4). The text indicates either a multiplicity of firstlings in a single sacrifice, or a firstling offered during multiple occasions. Yet, little was known of the extent of redemption. It remained for that concept to be developed under the Law.

The law contains twenty-nine references to *“redeem”* (Ex 6:6; 13:13,15; 34:20; Lev 25:25,26,29,32,48,49; 27:13,15; 19,20,27,31; Num 18:15,16,17), four to *“redemption”* (Lev 25:24,51,52; Num 3:49), and twenty-three to *“redeemed”* (Ex 15:13; 21:8; Lev 19:20; 25:30,31,48,54; 27:20; 27,28,29,33; Num 3:46,48,49,51; 18:16; Deut 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 21:8;24:18).

God redeemed Israel from Egypt (Ex 6:6). When the first born were offered to God, certain required redemption. *“But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem”* (Ex 13:13; 34:20). The redemption was to be made *“with lamb”*—the offering of an innocent life. With great care, the necessity of redeeming what was offered to the Lord was repeated (Lev 27:26-27; Num 18:15-16). Redemption was also offered for land

(Lev 25:24).

An elaborate procedure was also instituted for redeeming a person whose debt was too great to be paid by the debtor (Lev 25:47-55). Houses were redeemed (Lev 27:15). Fields were redeemed (Lev 27:19-20). Even provision for redeeming tithes were placed into effect (Lev 27:30-31). A woman sold into slavery could be redeemed (Ex 21:8).

An acute awareness was developed that anything given to God had to be redeemed. The redemption cost was not

This was a redemption from pointless religious life. Since Jesus has died, there is no excuse for remaining in lifeless religion. Nor, indeed, is it necessary to remain under the grip of any pointless or aimless living. As long as men do so, God cannot confer His righteousness upon them.

insignificant, and required the commitment of the one paying it.

All of this was a shadow of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In Him a price was paid—a ransom—for lost humanity. It was not paid simply to release those bound to sin, but to present them to God, for they had all been defiled and rendered unsuitable by sin.

The Proclamation

The proclamation of the Gospel is that a satisfactory redemption has been paid by Jesus. It has been presented to God Himself, to Whom the price was due. Some have imagined that the price was paid to the devil who held us captive, but that is absurd. Our release from enslavement did not depend upon Satan’s consent, but upon Divine power.

Redeemed from the Curse of the

Law

This redemption is glorious in its ramifications. Christ has *“redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”* (Gal 3:13-14). God could not receive us while His own Law condemned us. Therefore, the exacting penalty of the Law fell upon Christ. In this redemption, the Law could no longer condemn us, thereby enabling us to receive the promise of the Spirit.

Redeemed from Pointless Living

As long as men were enslaved to pointless living—particularly religious life—God could not confer His righteousness upon them. The redemption, therefore, had to address this dilemma. Praise God, Christ’s redemption was effective in this matter. *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet

1:18-19).

This was a redemption from pointless religious life. Since Jesus has died, there is no excuse for remaining in lifeless religion. Nor, indeed, is it necessary to remain under the grip of any pointless or aimless living. As long as men do so, God cannot confer His righteousness upon them.

Redeemed from the Hand of the Enemy

As long as men remain under the power of *“the enemy,”* the devil (Matt 13:39), God cannot grant them His righteousness. They must be redeemed from His power. Thank God, Jesus has accomplished this. *“And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy”* (Psa 106:10). And again, *“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he*

hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south” (Psa 107:2-3). Satan cannot hold those who receive this redemption.

The Forgiveness of Sins

This redemption includes the forgiveness of sins, thereby allowing us to come into the presence of the Lord for fellowship and blessing. “In whom we have redemption through his blood, **the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace**” (Eph 1:7). And again, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, **even the forgiveness of sins**” (Col 1:14).

Redemption Includes the Future

This redemption is so large that the future is also included in it. Our bodies, for example, are embraced in Christ’s

redemption. “Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the **redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory**” (Eph 1:14). This is also mentioned in the eighth chapter of Romans. “And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the **firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body**” (verse 23).

That coming day is called “the day of redemption,” and we are not to grieve the Spirit of God Who has sealed us unto that day (Eph 4:30). At that time, everything purchased by Jesus will be brought pure and holy into the presence of the Lord—including our bodies.

Eternal Redemption

We should know that a redemption

that justifies God conferring His righteousness upon us is exceeding large. That is why it is called an “eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). It is a redemption that has brought thorough satisfaction to God. It will also bring a rich satisfaction to those who receive it.

Summation

The righteousness which we so sorely required is now conferred upon us by God Himself. It is His own righteousness, and He desires to bestow it upon us. It will be an adequate and thorough covering that will compensate for the effects sin has had upon us. It will be granted to us liberally and without reservation upon the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ. Our Father vouchsafes it to us because of Jesus. He has satisfied the Father’s demands, and pleased Him by the manner and zeal in which they was accomplished. In every way, God is “well pleased” with Jesus.

A PROPITIATION SET FORTH

“²⁵ Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.”

You should be able to discern that Paul is preaching the Gospel to the Roman brethren, and to us as well. This is not a proclamation of what men should do, but of what God has done. It is an announcement of “the wonderful works of God,” as first declared on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). Men must never allow their theology to take them beyond the “joyful sound” of the Gospel (Psa 89:15). Our closeness to the Lord is measured by our sensitivity to the Gospel of His Son. Our spiritual status is determined by our belief of the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). That is why such an extensive argument is being presented.

God is not simply looking for people to do what He commands, but for those who

can see what He has done. Once the Lord is seen for what He is, and what He has done is comprehended, thankful obedience will flow like rivers of living water from the belly of the believer. However, when the Gospel of Christ becomes obscure, an inevitable retrogression will occur. It may

However, when the Gospel of Christ becomes obscure, an inevitable retrogression will occur. It may be a cultured retrogression, or one seeking strict adherence to the Law, but it will thrust the person from the presence of God.

be a cultured retrogression, or one seeking strict adherence to the Law, but it will thrust the person from the presence of God. In my persuasion, the knowledge of this situation is extremely rare.

WHOM GOD HAS SET FORTH

“^{25a} Whom God set forth . . . ”This is a strong statement. The NASB reads, “Whom God displayed publically.” Other versions read “God presented Him”^{NIV}. “Whom God put forward”^{NRSV}.

This involves the public appearance of Jesus “in the fulness of time” (Gal 4:4). He grew up among the very people He came to save. When He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk 2:52) it was before men. His ministry was public, as He went throughout cities and synagogues preaching the Kingdom of God.

But of particular emphasis is the death of Christ, wherein a covering for sin was provided. When standing before Felix, Paul made a point of the public nature of Christ’s suffering and death. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should

show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles . . . For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; **for this thing was not done in a corner**" (Acts 26:22-26).

God has "set forth," or "displayed publically" His Son in at least two ways. First, His death was public, with both Jews and Gentiles being privy to it. The leaders and common people among the Jews participated in Christ's death, together with "both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles" (Acts 4:27). In His death, GOD was displaying Him to the world, and a memorable sight it was!

Second, God has "set forth" or "presented" Him in the Gospel. The Good News is preeminently the presentation of Christ Jesus. It is God placing Him before the people, calling upon them to perceive His love in Christ (1 John 3:16), and avail themselves of the effects of His death.

The presentation of the blood of Christ was not public, being made in heaven, in the holiest place (Heb 9:1-12). But the sacrifice itself was public, beheld by the entire universe of personalities. Angelic hosts, as well as the hosts of darkness beheld the atoning death of Christ. Men beheld the spectacle, including Jesus' disciples, His enemies, and the indifferent as well. In all of this, God was setting Jesus before the eyes of the people, calling upon them to behold the effects of their own sin, as well as the Divine remedy.

AS A PROPITIATION BY HIS BLOOD

^{25b} . . . as a propitiation by His blood . . . " God has presented Jesus "as a propitiation." This is a term rooted in the types of the Law. The word highlights the serious of sin and the nature of God. The focus of the word is the MEANS by which sins are forgiven. They cannot simply be spoken away, nor can God turn His face from them and conduct Himself as though they did not exist. Those who imagine God can countenance sin, or is tolerant of it,

are simply mistaken. They speak what they desire, not what is the truth.

This word, in its varied forms, occurs four times in the Apostle's doctrine. Our text is its first mentioning. Two variations of the word are found in First John. "And He is **the propitiation** for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world . . . Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be **the propitiation** for our sins" (2:2; 4:10). The precise word of our text also occurs in Hebrews, where it is applied to an article of Tabernacle furniture. "And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat (atonement cover^{NIV}); of which we cannot

To propitiate means to cover the sinner from the wrath of God. The Spirit has already declared, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). That wrath will surely be unleashed in all of its fury in "that great and notable day of the Lord"

now speak particularly" (9:5).

Academically, the word "propitiation" means "relating to an appeasing or expiating, having placating or expiating force."^{Strong's} Strong's wisely says of the word, "Used of the cover of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, which was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim on the day of atonement (this rite signifying that the life of the people, the loss of which they had merited by their sins, was offered to God in the blood as the life of the victim, and that God by this ceremony was appeased and their sins expiated); hence the lid of expiation, the propitiatory."^{Strong's Definitions} The text in Hebrews unfolds for us the true meaning

of the word "propitiation."

The Mercy Seat

The construction of the "mercy seat" (Heb 9:5), is outlined in Exodus 25:17-22. It was an elaborate piece of furniture, being the lid covering the ark of the covenant. It was made of pure gold, showing unusual worth. Two cherubim of gold, hammered out of solid gold, were on the both ends of the mercy seat. Their wings were stretched out, covering the mercy seat. They were facing each other, and were looking down at the mercy seat. There, above the mercy seat, God met with the representative of the people. He spoke from between the cherubim "about everything which" that He gave "in commandment to the children of Israel."

On the "day of atonement," incense was to be placed on the alter before the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place. The intent was "that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die" (Lev 16:13). The blood of the sin offering of a bull was to be sprinkled "on the mercy seat on the east side," and "before the mercy seat." Also, the blood of "the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people" was to be sprinkled "on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat" (Lev 16:14-15). All of this typified the atoning death of Christ, which is being declared in our text.

To propitiate means to cover the sinner from the wrath of God. The Spirit has already declared, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). That wrath will surely be unleashed in all of its fury in "that great and notable day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20). Earlier, in the second chapter, it is identified as "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (2:5). There is a time when the shattering message will be sounded, "For the great day of His wrath is come" (Rev 6:17).

I realize it is not fashionable to speak

of God's wrath in these days. Indeed, some younger disciples have never heard the subject delineated. However, one of the primary aspects of Jesus is that He has *"delivered is from the wrath to come"* (2 Thess 1:10).

It is only through Christ that we *"shall be saved from wrath"* (Rom 5:9). Those who are not in Christ, who have not availed themselves of the *"propitiation,"* are *"by nature the children of wrath"* in every sense of the word (Eph 2:3). The *"wrath of God"* will come upon *"the children of disobedience"* (Col 3:6).

God has set forth Jesus as a *"propitiation,"* or covering, in the time when His wrath is going to be revealed from heaven. No other safety will be found in that day. Those who have shunned the One God has publically presented will cry in vain to the mountains and rocks, *"Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb"* (Rev 6:16). But shelter will only be afforded to those who are covered by Christ Jesus.

The Blood of Christ

Just as the blood of the sacrifices of old was placed upon the mercy seat, so the blood of Christ is the only valid appeal to the mercy of God. The KJV reads that Jesus is set forth as a propitiation *"through faith in his blood."* Although some rather learned arguments are presented for rejecting the phrase *"faith in His blood,"* I choose to retain the words as they stand. I have found I am not alone in this, for great scholars and men of faith have seen fit to do the same. Nothing in the text, context, or the Gospel itself demands a rejection of them.

I take it that the phrase *"faith in the blood"* expresses the same idea expressed in Hebrews 9:14. *"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* It is at the point where we are convinced of the effectiveness of Christ's blood that our conscience is cleansed from defilement,

and we are shielded from the wrath of God.

We are *"made nigh"* to God *"by the blood of Christ"* (Eph 2:13). We were *"redeemed"* from the ravages of sin by it (1 Pet 1:19). Through it we have bold confidence to enter into the holiest of all, heaven itself (Heb 10:19). His blood *"cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

And why is all of this so? Because the sacrifice of Christ's life has met every requirement for our acceptance by God. His wrath cannot fall on those who are availing themselves of the death of His Son. It is no wonder that God so carefully structured how men thought about blood under the Law. Thus it is written, *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul"* (Lev 17:11).

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HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMONSTRATED

^{25d} . . . to demonstrate His righteousness . . ." The details of our redemption are marvelous to consider. God has publically set forth Jesus as a remedy and covering for sin in order to *"demonstrate,"* or *"declare,"* His own righteousness. Although God owes us no explanation for what He does, yet He has condescended to confirm His uprightness in delivering up His Son for our offenses. Elihu was only partially right when he said to Job, *"for He giveth not account of any of his matters"* (Job 33:13). Since those spiritually primitive times, God has revealed more of Himself. We now know that God has explained a great deal about Himself and what He has done. The text before us is a case in point.

THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD

" . . . because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed." The Spirit opens to us precisely what Divine activity has been shown to be righteous. It is His forbearance with sins committed before the setting forth of Jesus.

To the sophist, or surface-thinker, this is not a great point, and little is made of it in our day. But it is a significant point with God, and we do well to look into it. Why was God so intolerant with the angels that sinned, yet so seemingly tolerant of men who continued to sin? *"God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment"* (2 Pet 2:4). Yet, God endured sinful man for 4,000 long years before placing His Propitiation before them.

Some might point to the flood as evidence of God's intolerance with sin. And that is, indeed, something to be pondered. However, even then, God's longsuffering waited while the ark was being prepared—a period lasting well over one century (1 Pet 3:20). There was also Sodom and Gomorrah, who were destroyed in an unparalleled pouring out of fire and brimstone from heaven (Gen 19:24; Lk 17:29). But these were the exceptions, not the norm.

Many students of Scripture have stumbled over the sins of the ancients, speaking of them as though they were rebellious, hard-hearted, and weak and vacillating as themselves. Legion is the name of those who speak of Abraham lying, Jacob being a deceiver, and David being an adulterer. But this is not how God spoke of those men, even though they committed sins that were an offense to God and a reproach to His love for them. For the patriarchs, however, sin was not the rule, and precious few transgressions are recorded against them. Actually, it is a source of amazement that they lived so notably with so little truth being revealed to them.

Our text unveils why more is not said

The means through which God's righteousness is received is a central doctrine of Scripture, by Given O. Blakely

of their sins—only enough to confirm they too stood in need of a Savior. God did “forbear” or “pass over” the sins “previously committed,” and He freely declares that He did. The NIV reads, “He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.” Of course, those who insist that the God of the old Testament differs from the God of the New Testament must deal with this reality. Such false teachers portray our Lord as a God of wrath during the time before Christ, and One of love after Christ. But they would have a difficult time convincing Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and others of their sophistry.

God “passed over” the sins committed before in prospect of the atoning death of Christ Jesus, His only begotten Son. That death was sufficient to reach backward as well as forward. As it is written, “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).

God was righteous in His forbearance, knowing that His Son would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). That sin, whether committed before Law, during the Law, or in “the end of the world,” was addressed by the propitiating death of Christ. However, lest we presume upon the nature of God, we are to understand it was His “forbearance” that “passed over” them, not indifference.

Now that Christ’s blood has been shed and presented in the heavenly realms, God is no longer forbearing of sin. This is precisely the point Paul made to the Athenian philosophers, and it needs to be made to the philosophers of our time. “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now **commands all men everywhere to repent**, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

Another practical view of this text confirms that God has been gentle with all of us, not allowing His wrath to break out

upon us until we availed ourselves of the atonement, or reconciliation. Truly, “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom 2:4). Again, it is written, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

Notwithstanding, and lest men become complacent in their sin, “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet 3:9). In view of that certainty, “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Pet 3:10).

God was proved to be righteous in passing over the sins of the ancients. He will also be proved righteous in condemning those who have rejected His Son, whom He has publically set forth as a propitiation for sin. God’s dealing with men is exacting in every way.

RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMONSTRATED

²⁶ **To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** Our salvation MUST be right! God cannot save men at the expense of His own integrity. That would bring no honor to Him, nor could it rescue us from our bondage. There is a shallowness in many views of redemption that is uncomely for those who embrace them, and reproachful to the God they claim has saved them. Many, swept up in the tide of delusion, present God as saving people who have no real thirst for righteousness, are not engaged in a quest for heaven, and are spotted by this world. Our text will confirm this to be a serious misrepresentation of God.

DEMONSTRATION AT THE PRESENT TIME

Not only has God been proved righteous in His forbearance of those who

sinned prior to Jesus, there is something to be known of Him “at the present time.” This phrase, “at the present time,” denotes this “day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). The demonstration, or declaration, has been going on since Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon His people on the day of Pentecost. The KJV version says He is “declaring,” while the RSV and NRSV say He is proving something.

The truth being communicated is that God is righteous. The Gospel reveals “the righteousness of God” for men. However, through it God’s own personal righteousness is also affirmed. **The point of this is not simply that God is upright, but that He is righteous in saving men.** The salvation of God is so precise, and so thoroughly addresses every aspect of God, that none can successfully protest it. That is the point of a challenge that will be hurled at the doubter in the

eighth chapter. “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:33-34).

God has not simply saved men by Divine decree, oblivious of His own character and word. He has taken care to save us in a righteous manner. How else could salvation be the cause of glory being brought to Him? Those who boast of salvation being according to God’s sovereignty have only told part of the story. It is consistently represented as being according to His mercy and grace, and that is what brings Christ Jesus into the picture. Christ’s death has allowed God to be righteous in extricating men from sin, rather than punishing them for it. How wonderful are the works of God!

JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER

“... that He might be just, and the Justifier...” Other versions read, “so as to be just and the One who justifies.”^{NIV} “That He Himself is righteous and that He justifies.”^{NRSV} “That He might Himself be upright, and give righteousness.”^{BBE} “He is entirely fair and just in this present time when He declares sinners to be right in His sight.”^{NLT}

As indicated, the idea is that **God is RIGHT in removing the sin of sinners, and making the unrighteous righteous!** All of the Divine attributes have joined together in our salvation. As it is written, “*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*” (Psa 85:10). Prior to Jesus, mercy and truth could not meet together. Mercy cried out for pardon, while truth demanded condemnation. Righteousness and peace could not kiss in holy embrace before the death of Jesus. Righteousness required that sin be punished. Peace longed for reconciliation. All of these traits were resident in God, yet could not work harmoniously for man’s salvation without an atoning death—a “*propitiation*.” Longsuffering stepped into the forefront, agreeing, as it were, to manage the dilemma until the Redeemer came. Mercy delighted in the arrangement, and truth was satisfied to wait. Peace found joy in the arrangement, and righteousness was content to wait until the “*Sun of righteousness*” arose with healing in His wings.

Thus, from beginning to end, God is declared to be righteous. He was righteous in passing over sin in anticipation of the atonement. He is righteous in delivering

men from sin. And He will be righteous in the condemnation of those who refuse to be reconciled to Him.

This, then, is the full scope of righteousness revealed through the Gospel. God Himself is shown to be right in the conferment of righteousness upon men who are, of themselves, unworthy. O, how this message needs to be heralded!

OF THE ONE WHO HAS FAITH IN JESUS

God will not save everyone, even though He “*desires all men to be saved*

or (1 Tim 1:19), are not said to be justified. For such to be the case, God would have to deny Himself, for He has represented Himself as having no pleasure in such people (Heb 10:38-39).

While men debate whether it is possible to be lost once you are saved, the Scriptures declare that God is righteous in justifying the person who is believing in Jesus. Speculating about whether or not a person can fall out of favor with God is foolish. Adam and Eve experienced the favor of God, and also His disfavor. It is possible for “*an evil heart of unbelief*” to

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and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Men will not be saved by mandate, but by faith. They will not be saved in groups, but “*the one who has faith in Jesus*” will be justified, or pronounced righteous.

It is not the one who “*has believed*,” but the one who “*has faith*,” or IS believing, that is justified by God. God has nowhere committed Himself to justify those who “*believe for a while*” (Lk 8:13), “*cast off their first faith*” (1 Tim 5:12), or do not “*fight the good fight of faith*” (1 Tim 6:12). Those who “*deny the faith*” (1 Tim 5:8), make “*shipwreck*” of the faith,

enter into those who are appropriately called “*brethren*” (Heb 3:12).

But for those who will persist in believing in Jesus, availing themselves of His Person and ministry, God will surely “*keep them from falling*,” at last presenting them “*faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24). God is greatly to be praised for remaining righteous in our salvation. God be praised that it is RIGHT for Him to confer righteousness upon those believing in Jesus! Now, make it your business to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

This text has opened the very heart of the Gospel of Christ. It has revealed what God has done about our sinful condition, and how He has done it righteously, and with the utmost regard for His own integrity. It is not only that men be made righteous, but that God remain righteous in the doing of it. I do not believe this is generally known in the Christian community—at least not much is being

said about it. Many people who profess to have heard the Gospel have never heard these things.

MAN IS IMPOTENT TO CHANGE

We have also seen the utter impotence of man to change his moral and spiritual condition before God. God must change him, or he will not be changed. God must make him righteous, or he will never be righteous.

JESUS IS NECESSARY

The necessity of the Lord Jesus has also been declared with power. Not only did we need a Savior, God the Father needed One upon Whom He could lay the sins of the world. He needed to punish sin. He could not ignore it. His nature would not allow Him to do so.

BEYOND IMAGINATION

I do not believe there is a created

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intelligence capable of imagining how God would save sinners. Had He not revealed this to us, even though its truth was couched in types and shadows under the Law, no man is capable of imagining it. Even after it has been revealed, multitudes of professed believers find it difficult to believe. That is how great the salvation is that is in Christ Jesus. It is appropriate that we are warned, "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation*" (Heb 2:3). The answer to that question should be obvious to you.

APART FROM THE LAW

Those with a penchant for law must be brought to see this righteousness is made known and conferred independently of Law. The Law and the Prophets witnessed to it, but could not bring it to pass. Sin has so blighted our race that we are incapable of pleasing God apart from faith in Christ Jesus. Were this not the case, there would be no need for Jesus, or for God to confer His righteousness upon us. It is imperative that men see this, and cease to depend upon Law for approval.

BE ENCOURAGED

I encourage to you to believe in Jesus—to trust in His atoning death, and the effectiveness of His blood. Do not take for granted that you have advanced sufficiently in this area. Jesus has accomplished more than we presently comprehend. He has brought salvation within your reach. His work has satisfied God, and there is no reason why it cannot satisfy you. God will honor you with righteousness if you will honor His Son. He is faithful to do this!

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 11



BOASTING IS EXCLUDED

^{3:27} Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹ Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law. (Romans 3:27-31^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE EXCLUSION OF BOASTING (3:27a)
- II. THE BASIS FOR ITS EXCLUSION (3:27b)
- III. THE CONCLUSION OF FAITH (3:28)
- IV. THE GOD OF ALL WHO BELIEVE (3:29)
- V. ONE BASIS FOR JUSTIFICATION (3:30)
- VI. DO WE MAKE VOID THE LAW? (3:31a)
- VII. WE ESTABLISH THE LAW (3:31b)

The Spirit has presented penetrating proof of man's need for a righteousness from God. Not only does he utterly lack one of his own, he is absolutely incapable of developing one. Sin, having entered the

world through Adam, has so infected mankind, that outside of the Lord's intervention, there is no hope of surviving the day of judgment.

Because Christ's death has touched the heart of God, a grand message of deliverance is now brought to all the world. It is the Gospel of Christ, characterized as "*the power of God unto salvation.*" Regardless of the objections of religious sophists, this Gospel is essential for the completion of the work God has begun in us. At no point does the believer move beyond his need to hear the good news of Christ Jesus. Those who imagine that personal, domestic, and social concerns are of more importance to the believer than the Gospel have only confirmed their ignorance.

Spiritual life cannot be initiated or maintained independently of the Gospel. The reason for this should be apparent. We still must contend with the carnal

nature, even though it has been circumcised from us by Jesus (Col 2:11-12). As long as that condition exists, the Gospel must be declared and expounded. Commensurate with the neglect of the Gospel, the flesh begins to gain strength, and will soon draw men away from the very God they once embraced through Christ Jesus.

Early in the history of the church, men were drawn aside into vain jangling over the law and the meaning of words. As soon as that circumstance arose, the church began to lose its power, experience division, and hold back the truth of God. Humanly developed theologies took the place of the Gospel, as men were vaunted above the Most High God.

Throughout this book, we will find the most precisely defined theology in the world is the Gospel of Christ. In that Gospel God Himself is revealed, as well as the nature of man. What man needs is

defined, and the provision of it by God is announced. Apart from the Gospel, neither man nor God can be fully comprehended. Furthermore, it is only to the degree that the Gospel is believed and embraced that understanding becomes valid. If the Gospel is not comprehended, God cannot be known. If it is not believed, a distorted view of man will also result.

I am aware that these are bold assertions, yet they need to be made. When men treat the church as though it were central, majoring on its form, patterns, and organization, a serious departure from the Gospel has occurred. Those who choose to emphasize other matters related to man have been swept up in the same departure.

Men are not at liberty to choose an emphasis differing from God's stress. Throughout the Scriptures, from beginning to end, the Lord has placed the accent upon Jesus. The destiny of all men hinges upon the Son of God. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him, and He alone is charged with bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). All of this is resident in the Gospel of Christ, and must not be withheld from men.

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD

From early times, men have been prone to systematize the things of God. Thinking this enables men to more readily take hold of them, all sorts of regimented thought is being purveyed in the name of Christ. Each denomination has its line of reasoning that enables them to remain distinct from other believers. These systems of thought are often equated with the Word of God itself.

Teachers of the Word are solemnly told to "*rightly divide the word of truth,*" handling it properly (2 Tim 2:15). They are to apportion it with an interest in convicting sinners and edifying saints. They are not to give meat to babies or milk to men. They are not purveyors of information, but ambassadors of Jesus. Their message is not that of a church or denominational line of reasoning, but of Jesus Himself.

In the dispensing of the Word, the Gospel is the melody—the prominent part. It is portrayed in the tabernacle service and sacrificial system of the Law. It was prophesied by the Prophets, announced by Jesus, and expounded by the Apostles. The Gospel of Christ is prominent in every Epistle. It is the foundation for spiritual reasoning and the basis for godly appeals. It makes sin unreasonable and

that Gospel. This is what made Paul such an effective laborer in the Kingdom. He ministered with a lively sense of the truth of the Gospel upon his spirit.

All of the Epistles are actually a preaching and exposition of the Gospel of Christ. No Gospel or Epistle is written in memory of a mere man. Nor, indeed, are any of them addressed exclusively to alien

Apart from the Gospel, neither man nor God can be fully comprehended. Furthermore, it is only to the degree that the Gospel is believed and embraced that understanding becomes valid. If the Gospel is not comprehended, God cannot be known.

righteousness sensible.

In this world, the proclamation of the Gospel is sandwiched between two great events. (1) The entrance of sin into the world. (2) Man's ultimate confrontation of God and Jesus themselves. As soon as sin entered, the Gospel was announced in embryo (Gen 3:15). And, only the Gospel of Christ prepares men to stand before God. No amount of human discipline or learning can accomplish that preparation independently of the Gospel. A sparse Gospel results in a feeble hope. Spiritual advance requires hearing the Gospel.

REASONING ON THE FACTS

In the first chapter of this marvelous Epistle, Paul referred to himself as one who served God "*with my spirit in the gospel of his Son*" (1:9). **The Gospel is a framework in which acceptable service, or worship, is rendered to God.** While it is true that Paul majored on preaching this Gospel, He also enveloped his own conscience with a lively sense of the reality and implications of

sinners. That singular circumstance is arresting to ponder. It confirms that men must hear the Gospel throughout their lives in order to proper advance in the kingdom of God.

The Gospel produces a lively sense of our need of a righteousness from God. It also keeps us apprized that such a righteousness can be had through faith. Nothing is as effective in these matters as hearing the Gospel of God's Son. That is precisely why it is the theme of inspired writing. The testimony of Jesus is, as it is written, "*the spirit of prophecy*" (Rev 19:10).

Our text will now proclaim the inferences of the doctrine of man's sinfulness and need of a righteousness from God. An inference, in this case, is an inspired conclusion. It is a spiritual deduction. It is not a human opinion, but a Divine revelation. Once, however, the Gospel is heartily embraced, these inferences become apparent, and are accepted by the believer. They become a motive for acceptable behavior.

THE EXCLUSION OF BOASTING

^{3:27a} **Where is boasting then? It is excluded.** There is an undeniable tendency in flesh to rob God of His glory. From assuming too much of self (Gal 6:3) to trusting in horses and chariots (Psa 20:7), the proneness to live as though there were no God is found throughout humanity. With great power, the first three chapters of Romans have thrown down such reasoning. The universal dominance of sin has confirmed the fall of man and his need of a righteousness from God. This is not, however, apparent to all.

Divine sensitivity to the boasting of humanity is plainly declared in Scripture. Although there is a marked tendency in men to boast in their achievements, God will not allow it! One of the marks of fallen humanity is that they became *“boastful”* (Rom 1:30). It is the tongue, noted for its wickedness, that *“makes great boasts”*^{NIV} (James 3:5). As James would say, *“All such boasting is evil”* (James 4:16). The only valid boasting is boasting *“in the Lord”* (2 Cor 10:17).

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast”*^{NIV} (Eph 2:9-10). Salvation is designed so that it excludes boasting--glorying in human achievement. Wherever this practice exists, at the best, salvation has been neglected, and at the worst, it is not present! It makes little difference what claims are made.

Boasting in something other than the Lord is altogether too common in the professed church. The Gospel, however, does not allow for such boasting. The Gospel announces that *“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”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 1:27-29). That is another way of saying boasting *“is excluded.”*

Where Is Boasting?

Other versions read, *“Then what becomes of our boasting?”*^{NASB} *“So what*

Glorying in such things as wisdom, might, and riches involves trusting in them, as well as taking credit for the development of them. Life is lived relying upon these things instead of upon the Lord. Though popular, this is a condition that grieves the Lord.

becomes of our boasts?”^{NJB} *“Can we boast, then?”*^{NLT}

What is *“boasting?”* And why is it *“excluded,”* or not allowed. The word *“boast”* means to glory or rejoice in something. In our text, such boasting is in human achievement or accomplishment. Boasting springs from a frame of mind that supposes Divine requirements have been fulfilled by mere human effort. It presupposes the dominance of self, and takes no account of Divine working.

The Rich Young Ruler

An example of such boasting is found in the rich young ruler’s response to Christ’s word to *“keep the commandments”* (Matt 19:17). The young man replied, *“All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”* That was boasting, and it is not allowed. He had not been as complete in his obedience as he supposed, for *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* Although Jesus was attracted to this young man, loving him, yet He faced him with a requirement flesh could not keep. *“One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the*

poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mk 10:21).

The Pharisee Who Prayed with Himself

Jesus once spoke a parable *“to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”* It provides an excellent example of boasting. *“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess”* (Luke 18:9-12).

All such boasting is *“excluded.”* There is no place for it in the Kingdom of God. If men have actually done the will of God, *“it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). It is His power that is at work in us (Eph 3:20). Jesus once said, *“The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works”* (John 14:10). If this was true of Him, how much more is it true of those who are in Him. Boasting is excluded!

A Divine Mandate

The matter of boasting in anything other than God is strictly forbidden. The Spirit declared this through Jeremiah in very clear words. *“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD”* (Jer 9:23-24). Glorying in such things as wisdom, might, and riches involves trusting in them, as well as taking credit for the development of them. Life is lived relying upon these things instead of upon

the Lord. Though popular, this is a condition that grieves the Lord.

Glory Not In Man

Another form of boasting is glorying in man. This is altogether too common in our day. The Word of the Lord speaks with remarkable clarity to this subject. *“Therefore let no man glory [same word as “boast”] in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s”*(1 Cor 3:21-23). If God gives us “all

things,” how foolish to boast in them instead of the God who gave them! Such boasting betrays spiritual blindness, and must be repented of with dispatch.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is ironic that *“true religion”* should make people humble, compelling them to keep unspotted from the world, and visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27). Yet, it has become the ground for fleshly boasting throughout the world. Men glory in their religious achievements, creeds, and heritage, isolating themselves from other

believers, and claiming uniqueness upon the basis of these things.

But when it comes to the matter of acceptance with God, and the appropriation of his righteousness, boasting is excluded. It is NOT allowed. There is no place for it, no quadrant of the Kingdom where it is in order.

The blessing is to the *“poor in spirit,”* who are in possession of the Kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3). That stands in stark contrast with boasting, which is *“excluded.”*

THE BASIS FOR ITS EXCLUSION

“^{27b} By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.” The Spirit is not content to merely state the reality. He will expound it to us, in order that we may grasp it with our hearts and minds. It is never enough to simply learn to repeat the truth, although that is imperative. It is also essential to love and perceive it. It is the perception of the truth that enables us to love and obey it.

What law, or principle, dictates the exclusion of boasting? The words of our text are easy enough to grasp with the intellect. *“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith”* (Rom 3:27). That is not a difficult sentence to diagram, nor are the words hard to research.

EVERY REALM HAS LAWS

Every realm has inviolable laws; principles that cannot be contradicted. The domain of our earth has general laws. There are varying laws in the firmament, and in the depths of the sea. These are all laws that have nothing whatsoever to do with the human will. They stand firm, and cannot be shaken. These are not moral laws, to be kept or broken, but laws that cannot be broken. They, like the Word of God, stand in tact, and cannot be altered or changed (John 10:35). Neither can they be ignored with impunity.

The laws we will now address are in

the spiritual domain. They too cannot be altered by men.

DIFFERENT REALMS, DIFFERENT LAWS

In the natural realm, for example, we have the law of gravity. When you deal with matter, or substance, this law dominates. It will not serve you unless you honor it. It will harm you if you ignore it. When anything of weight is thrown into the air, it will eventually come down!

It is never enough to simply learn to repeat the truth, although that is imperative. It is also essential to love and perceive it. It is the perception of the truth that enables us to love and obey it.

When you spin something at a high rate of speed, unattached things will be forced to the outside. That is the law of centrifugal force. Water, wind, fire--they all function according to inviolable laws, or principles. If you expect these forces to serve you, those laws must be respected. Certain laws must be honored in all valid sciences, i.e., chemistry, physics, biology, etc.

A SUPERIOR LAW

Boasting has been excluded on the

basis of a law--a superior law! Hear the text again. *“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.”* Notice that two contrary laws are mentioned, *“works”* and *“faith.”* It is significant that these are contrasted. There are whole bodies of theology that have attempted to put them together in a way not intended by God.

There is a sense in which *“faith”* and *“works”* are brought together. There is the *“work of faith”* (1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11). In that case, however, faith itself is the *“work.”* James also spoke of *“works”* being the indispensable evidence of faith (James 2:14-26).

However, when it comes to being extricated from bondage to sin and receiving God’s righteousness, *“faith”* and *“works”* are opposing laws. They are contrasted with one another in our text. Additionally, Romans 9:31-32 puts them in opposition to each other. *“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 stumblingstone.”* Galatians 2:16 presents the same contrast. *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we*

The imputation of the righteousness of God by faith excludes all boasting in the flesh, by Given O. Blakely

might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Galatians 3:2,5 also contrasts faith and works. "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? . . . He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

Our text brings us into a higher realm. We cannot shun the reality of the contrast determined by the Holy Spirit.

THE CAUSE OF JUSTIFICATION

This text addresses the cause of our justification--why God gives us His righteousness. He does not give it to us upon the basis of our works, but because of faith. NOT works, but faith.

THE LAW OF WORKS

What is the law "of works?" In the words of Scripture, it is this: "The man who does these things will live by them" (Rom 10:5, NASB). In the words of Levitical law, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD" (Lev 18:5). This is the law, or principle, upon which the majority of professed Christendom appears to operate. Discipline, achievement, accountability, responsibility--these are all bywords under "the law of works."

The Law commanded works, not faith (Gal 3:12)! It offered life for doing, not believing.

Even if the individual could achieve a good degree of success under this "law," he still could not stand faultless before the Lord. Paul cites Abraham as an example of this truth. "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God" (Rom 4:2). God will not be beholden to men for their deeds! It is not that He refuses to recognize flawless obedience, it is that there is no such thing! And even if this condition did exist, it is not enough to constitute one "righteous" in the sense of our text. In the words of Jesus, "So you

that he had kept the commandments "from his youth up" (Matt 19:20). This was only an imagination, but he thought it was right. The Pharisee bragged about his achievements in a supposed prayer to God. "God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (Luke 18:11-12).

See, the law of works did not exclude boasting, it encouraged it! It is human nature [another word for fallen nature] to

Works open the door for boasting, they do not close it! The rich young ruler boasted that he had kept the commandments "from his youth up" (Matt 19:20). This was only an imagination, but he thought it was right. The Pharisee bragged about his achievements in a supposed prayer to God.

also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'" (Luke 17:10, NIV). The fact that men had to be told, or commanded, to do it proves they are unrighteous!

But our text says boasting is "excluded." It is not excluded by the law of works. If, in fact, a person did all he was commanded to do, he would boast. Works open the door for boasting, they do not close it! The rich young ruler boasted

boast in supposed achievement.

That is the "pride of life" that belongs to the worldly order, and is not of God (1 John 2:15-17). Boasting has more to do with "confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3) than merely bragging externally. It is a condition of soul that finds the individual resting in, and depending upon, the "natural man." Such a condition does not require faith, the Lord Jesus, or the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is so sinful.

THE LAW OF FAITH

THE LAW OF FAITH IS DIFFERENT

The "law of faith" differs significantly from the "law of works." It will not allow such boasting. It is as though faith had its own law, which refuses to place meritorious value on any works wrought by men. Hear Paul express this law. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all:

yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor 15:10). Although he was a prodigious laborer, Paul refused to give credit to himself. He traced his accomplishments back to the grace of God, not self-effort.

Here was a man of remarkable discipline and spiritual achievement. There is not a believer in history that does not acknowledge Paul excelled the rest of

our race. Yet when he spoke of his life, he spoke of "the law of faith," not the "law of works." "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Faith achieves in men what God desires. It acknowledges sin, trusts in Christ Jesus, and receives God's

righteousness. It is superior to every other expression or response of men! Believing God (not merely believing there is a God) **always** produces a "good report" (Heb 11:2). No one is ever put at a disadvantage for believing God. Nor, indeed, is it possible to gain any true advantage while not believing God.

FAITH IS GREATER THAN REASON

Reason is a marvelous faculty possessed by mankind. It sets humanity apart from the rest of creation. Made in the image of God, man can think, ponder, plan, and choose. He has a capacity to understand or comprehend.

However, reason cannot find God, or discern Him as He wants to be discerned. Zophar was correct in his observation, even though he applied it wrongly to Job: "Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). Solomon confirmed the observation. "Man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (Eccl 3:11). And again "Man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, **he will not discover**; and though the wise man should say, 'I know,' **he cannot discover**"^{NASB} (Eccl' 8:17). **And that was God's work "under the sun," to say nothing of His infinitely greater redemptive work in His Son!**

Time would fail us to elaborate on the inferiority of reason. Apart from Christ, and at its natural apex, it is "foolishness with God" (1 Cor 3:19). With all of man's purported wisdom and learning, it is still true-- "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). But this is not the case with faith!

The Example of Abraham

When there is no earthly reason for believing, faith can still lay hold of the promises of God. **The law of faith is transcendent to the limited law of reason.** That is why it is said of our father Abraham, "Against all hope [with no natural reason for hope], Abraham in

hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God" (Rom 4:18-20, NIV).

Mere human reason would have pointed to the age of Abraham and concluded the promise was not possible. It would have pondered the womb of Sarah and determined that what was promised could not come to pass.

Abraham did not resort to reason, but to faith! The law of faith does not require evidence, but a promise! It can rise higher than reason, see more

The truth of the matter is that most of us must carry difficult burdens--burdens we had rather not experience. But this is no handicap to faith, and thus is no real impairment to you!

than the naked eye, and reach further than logic! It rests in God, not in the attestation of the senses, or the confirmation of human logic.

Faith is willing to risk everything on the Word of the Lord! It sees the superiority of God to apparently impossible circumstances. It may not look possible for a nation to walk through the Red Sea, but if God tells them to do it, they can (Ex 14:15-16)! It may not look reasonable for rivers of water to come out of a wilderness rock, but if God says they will, the people can prepare to drink (Ex 17:6)! It may violate the rules of astronomy and reason to think the sun can stand still, but if God tells Joshua to command it to happen, he will proceed (Josh 10:12-13). Faith sees the word and will of God as supreme.

Faith is superior to reason! In its presence logic shrinks and swivels! This is because faith rests in God and His unquestionable power! Those who shine the light upon the human capacity to reason do us no service! It was human reason that brought our race down (Gen 3:6)! It was reason that led Israel to fear taking the promised land (Num 13:31-33). From the human point of view, it was reason that provoked the high priest and Jewish leaders to demand Christ's crucifixion (John 11:49-50).

This does not mean faith is unreasonable--God forbid! It does mean that **faith lifts us to a higher plain of reason**--one that is related more to Deity than humanity. The "law of faith" is superior to reason, however, in every way. It brings great advantage and blessing.

FAITH IS SUPERIOR TO EMOTION

Human emotion is not to be trusted. It is something that can be a blessing or a curse. It can move David to leap and dance in praise to God (2 Sam 6:14). It can also constrain Esau to sell his birthright for a single meal (Heb 12:16). Emotion is more soulish than spiritual. It is a slave that must be governed by a higher principle.

Faith towers over emotion, or human feelings. When Abraham obediently goes to offer Isaac, his emotion is tempted by a probing question from Isaac. "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Gen 22:7). How the question must have wrenched the soul of the patriarch. It was a temptation to draw back from obeying the word of the Lord. He had been told to offer Isaac, and the command had not been modified by an allusion to a lamb God would provide. Abraham does not crumble under the oppression of emotion. Faith, superior to emotion, rose to the occasion. "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Gen 22:8).

The truth of the matter is that most of us must carry difficult burdens--burdens we had rather not experience. But this is no handicap to faith, and thus is no real impairment to

you! You are always better for believing.

Faith is superior to emotion! Think of the three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whose Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were commanded to serve the gods of Nebuchadnezzar, and bow before a golden image he had made (Dan 3:14). When they refused, the earthly sovereign spoke clearly to them. *“If ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”* (Dan 3:15). Here was a test emotion could not pass! Fear stood like a ravaging lion to devour these young men. But faith rose like a mighty champion, superior to emotion. Hear these young men as faith constrained them to respond. *“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up”* (Dan 3:16b-18, NIV).

Faith is superior to emotion! It can motivate in a way not possible to emotion. It is important to underscore the danger of a religion that is anchored in emotion. That is the type of religion that thrusts people into spiritual jeopardy. Beware of any religious emphasis that leaves you feeling good, but unable to trust the Lord!

FAITH TRANSCENDS EXPERIENCE

Experience is wonderful when it comes from faith in God. It is good when David slays Goliath, Elijah slays the prophets of Baal, and Elisha raises a boy from the dead. By faith remarkable things were experienced by believers of old, who *“conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection”* (Heb 11:33-35, NASB).

Faith, however, is not confined to the arena of experience. It can function triumphantly when there are no favorable experiences. Do you doubt the truth of this? Hear the Word of the Lord. *“Others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in*

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goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:36-40, NASB).

And what of these noble souls who did not participate in the miraculous--who left this world as though they were defeated? They gained God’s approval through their faith! Today, they stand amidst the great cloud of witnesses that surround us, attesting to the superiority of faith (Heb 12:1). “Run,” they cry! “Run!” Do not give up the race because you are not experiencing deliverance! You can refuse deliverance, and still go to be with the Lord. You can be an outcast, with nothing apparently working in your favor, and still receive the crown of life!

We do not desire a life of hardship for anyone. We fervently desire that the faithful may *“prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers”* (3 John 2). But, if this does not happen, it does not mean you are not *“more than a conqueror!”* (Rom 8:37). By faith, you can *“boast about”* your *“weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in”* you (2 Cor 12:9, NASB). Faith cries out to languishing experience, *“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Cor 12:10).

If, dear child of God, you have been cast down because of your experience, come up higher! Faith is superior, and it will make you superior, to experience. Suffice it to say, a religion that unduly elevates experience is a most dangerous one. Such an approach obscures faith, so sorely needed to overcome the world.

FAITH IS EFFECTIVE

The *“law of faith”* leads to Kingdom effectiveness! It is not a law that fails us, but one that sustains and strengthens us. It is a law honored in heaven, and effective upon earth. We cannot leave this subject without drawing attention to the remarkable effectiveness of faith. If you are in Christ, you possess comforting evidence of that effectiveness. Ponder these realities, and be refreshed.

Hearts Cleansed by Faith

Knowledge of the acceptance of the Gentiles was an epoch in the history of the church. Once convinced of this display of Divine grace, Peter announced, *“and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith”* (Acts 15:9, NASB). And what is a cleansed heart? It is one that in which guilt has been removed. It occurs when the *“conscience”* is *“purged from dead works”* (Heb 9:14). A cleansed heart is one that realizes Divine acceptance, having been made pure.

Can this be accomplished by the law of works? Can the conscience be favorably effected by a faithless deed? Indeed not.

Judas could find no solace, even though he returned the bloody money he had received for betraying Jesus (Matt 27:4-5)! Esau could not placate his conscience by seeking the inheritance he had forfeited, with bitter tears (Heb 12:17). The Lord is not satisfied with “*thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil,*” or the presentation of “*my first-born for my rebellious acts,*” or “*the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul*” (Micah 6:7). Such works, as noble as they may appear, will not please God--and they can bring no cleansing to you! Only faith can cleanse the heart, making it pure before God, and confidently clean to you! The “*law of faith*” is the superior law!

Faith Sanctifies the Individual

There is not much said about sanctification in the churches today. Often, those who do speak of it corrupt its meaning in the minds of their hearers. Sanctification is one of the principle aspects of God’s great salvation. God has made Jesus to become our “*sanctification*” (1 Cor 1:30). Without “*sanctification,*” an absolute essentiality, “*no one will see the Lord*” (Heb 12:14).

The word “*sanctification*” speaks of holiness, acceptance, and purity. It is a word denoting consecration to God through Christ and by the Spirit. This is what gives Divine utility to the believer--what enables him to be used by God, and to work together with Him (1 Cor 3:9).

How is the individual sanctified? How do we become holy and pure, and thus usable to God. It is not by the law of works! It is not possible to work your way into a position where God can use you! As remarkable as human discipline may appear, it is not adequate for this assignment!

The Word of the Lord is clear on this subject. Christ’s commission to Saul of Tarsus revealed the truth on this matter. Jesus appointed him “*to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive*

forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18). See, your faith is what qualifies you for service in the vineyard of the Lord! That is the dominating credential God requires!

The Righteous Live By Faith

How is spiritual life sustained? Many believe it is by routine, discipline, and solid habits. Whole religious systems have been placed into effect that teach this. They are all wrong! Life with God is not

In the matter of justification, Scripture sets faith in juxtaposition to law. You are either justified because of what you do, or because of your faith. This is foundational to our understanding of salvation.

sustained by habit! It is not maintained by a disciplined routine. This does not mean we disdain routine. It does mean routine is not equal to the requirements of spiritual life.

And, what does it mean to “*live*”--for the righteous to “*live*.” It means more than to merely exist. This is being “*alive to God*” (Rom 6:11). It is being joyfully sensitive to Him, and desirous to be in His presence. It means we are hearing Him who is “*speaking from heaven*” (Heb 12:25). Such “*life*” enables us to be “*led by the Spirit*” (Rom 8:14). Those who are spiritually alive are more conscious of heaven than earth, and of God than men. They live “*by every Word of God*” (Matt 4:4), and are noted for drawing near to God (Heb 10:22).

How is this life sustained. Do we live by what we do? By the routines we follow? God has spoken on this matter, so there is no need for conjecture. “*For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH”* (Rom 1:17, NASB). How frequently this truth is

affirmed! “. . . *the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me*” (Gal 2:20). “*Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH”*” (Gal 3:11). “*BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM*” (Heb 10:38).

Faith is what keeps the child of God alive and sensitive to God! This is what puts heaven in our eye, and confidence in our heart! Faith substantizes the truth of the Gospel to our hearts. It convinces us that God is for us, and not against us. It persuades us that Christ died for us and lives for us. Faith assures us we are accepted by God through Christ Jesus, even though we have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

In spite of this obvious truth, faith is rarely the emphasis of the contemporary church. Much of what is done in the name of Christ does not require faith. You can do such things without trusting in the Lord with all of your heart. You really do not have to depend upon the Lord to fulfill sectarian requirements. But if you want to live toward God--to be nourished and strengthened by His Presence--faith, and faith alone, is required!

Faith Justifies the Individual

The legalist does not talk much about justification. Words like that are not found in his corrupted vocabulary. But this word is in the Divine nomenclature, and is central in patterns of heavenly thought. Because we have already touched upon this subject, a few observations will suffice.

In the matter of justification, Scripture sets faith in juxtaposition to law. You are either justified because of what you do, or because of your faith. This is foundational to our understanding of salvation. Your faith enables you to join in the affirmation of the Spirit. “*For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law*” (Rom 3:28).

This is not a mere creedal statement, to be embraced without discerning the case. Here is something you can know, and of which you can be fully persuaded. *“Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified”* (Gal 2:16). We offer no apologies for the strength of this confession. If it does not mesh with preconceived notions of salvation, then throw away the preconceived notions. Truth never opposes itself. It is, however, set in firm opposition to what is NOT true!

This is Something Evident

We are dealing with something that is *“evident,”* or obvious to the pure in heart. *“Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH”* (Gal 3:11). Once you have *“tasted of the Lord,”* it is clear that Law--any law--cannot clear your record before God. It is not possible for a sinner to remove his own sin, or for works to undo what we have done! Faith makes that evident to us! It is true that many professed teachers do not see this. It is not *“evident”* to them. Their failure to perceive this central matter disqualifies them from being a teacher of God’s people. Until this truth is seen, they occupy the *“room of the unlearned”* (1 Cor 14:16, KJV).

A Remarkable Commentary

Paul provides a remarkable commentary on the effectiveness of faith in justification. He shows us the Gentiles, who had no Law, and thus no works of the law. Gentiles who have been received by God experienced righteousness independently of the Law. Here is Paul’s reasoning. *“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by*

faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone” (Rom 9:30-32).

Israel, in covenant with God, zealously sought to appropriate righteousness, or a state of justification, by means of Law. They did NOT receive righteousness! They did NOT arrive at a righteousness that resulted from law-keeping, or measuring up! Their efforts caused them to *“stumble”* over Jesus, Who brought salvation. Attempts to appropriate justification by means of Law inevitably leads to a rejection of Christ!

Notice the power of Paul’s argument. The Gentiles found righteousness even though they were

appropriates justification. *“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:1).

AVOIDING ERRONEOUS CONCLUSIONS

Let none conclude that the Law is evil or sinful. It serves an appointed purpose, but that purpose is NOT justification! By convincing us of the unacceptability of our works, the Law brings us to Christ. That is simply another way of saying it convinces us we need a Savior. We are not wise enough nor strong enough to save ourselves! Even when we are told what to do, our incapacity to please God clings to us like a giant weight. Let the Scripture state the case for us. It does it so very well.

“But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith” (Gal 3:2-24, NASB).

Imprisoned in Sin

Do not miss it! Apart from Christ, we were *“shut up,”* or imprisoned in, sin! We cannot work our way out, with Law or without it! Before faith *“came”* to us, we were under the Law. Dominated by it, we actually could not believe! We were *“locked up until faith should be revealed”* (NIV). Through the Gospel of Christ--not the Law--God *“opened the door of faith”* to us (Acts 14:27). We were thus justified by believing news rather than fulfilling requirements! The Law, with all of its demands, offered us no help. There is not a particle of grace in Law.

There are no remedies in Law, or means to recovery. Once broken, the seal of *“condemnation”* is placed upon us. Only faith can remove that seal! And, when *“there is therefore now no condemnation,”* all fleshly boasting is excluded by *“the law of faith.”* It is

In the matter of justification, Scripture sets faith in juxtaposition to law. You are either justified because of what you do, or because of your faith. This is foundational to our understanding of salvation.

NOT pursuing it! The Jews did not find righteousness, even though they WERE pursuing it! The Gentiles were constrained by the message of a conferred righteousness--the Gospel (Rom 1:16-17). The Jews were constrained by a Law that demanded righteousness! You see, the Gospel has saving power, the Law does not! The Gospel offers something you can obtain, the Law does not! The Gospel offers salvation to those who will believe, the Law does not! It never did, nor was it ever intended to do so.

Our peace with God has come because we have believed the *“record God gave of His Son”* (1 John 5:10-11). The Law of faith, having excluded all boasting,

impossible to boast in the flesh and believe at the same time. Such boasting and faith are mutually exclusive. Where fleshly boasting is found, faith is not present, and where faith is present, boasting in the flesh is excluded.

THE CONCLUSION OF FAITH

²⁸ **Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.** The words “we conclude” not only introduce a deductive statement, they put forth an official tenet of apostolic doctrine. Other

presented with the facts in the case. The Gentiles have sinned without the Law, and the Jews have sinned with it. No one has managed to live flawlessly, and no one has met the Divinely appointed objective of seeking and finding God. All have

which believeth in Jesus” (3:24-26).

Settle it in your heart, if salvation is dependent upon the works of men, this is what they must do. They must get a Savior from heaven and bring Him down to die. Then, after he has died, they must raise Him from the dead. This reasoning assumes they realize their need of a Savior in the first place, which no man has ever concluded on his own.

Faith can and must take hold of those realities. The grace comes from **God**. The redemption price was paid by **Christ Jesus**. **God Himself** presented the covering for sin. **Christ’s blood** is what satisfied God and enabled Him to be both the Just and the Justifier of the one believing in Jesus. **God’s righteousness** is the driving force behind the remission of sins. All of those are independent of man. His works have nothing whatsoever to do with their accomplishment. Not a single mote of weight or a gram of power can be added to them by any mortal. They stand independently of men, yet must be appropriated by them.

versions accentuate this perspective: i.e., “We maintain that,”^{NASB} “we hold that.”^{RSV} This is a conclusion driven by faith and energized by the Holy Spirit. It is not an opinion, and is not subject to change or update. A spiritual conclusion is to reasoning what the pillars Jachin and Boaz were to Solomon’s temple (2 Chron 3:15-17). This “conclusion” is the result of comprehending what has been said before. It is an explanation of why a righteousness from God is announced in the Gospel, rather than demanded by the Law. This “conclusion” also affirms there is no other way to be justified.

sinned, and all come short of the glory of God.

The point being driven home by the Holy Spirit is this: Human guilt and powerlessness cannot be resolved by any form of discipline or law keeping. Men cannot be trained to be righteous. There is no routine that can rid them of their sin or bring God’s righteousness to them. Once sin is committed, no remedy can be found within the natural realm.

Only Faith is Capable

If men could not keep the Law of God, who is the fool that will imagine man is capable of attaining these things by his own power and ingenuity? If ten commandments were beyond the reach of man’s natural powers, does any one imagine redemption, propitiation, and justification are within their reach?

Verse twenty of this chapter also presented a conclusion. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” The “conclusion” we are now considering incorporates that truth. In God’s sight, no man can become right by doing what the Law of God demands. That has already been substantiated by the declaration of sin’s domination of the human race.

FAITH REQUIRES A COMPLETED WORK

While faith does “come by hearing,” it also requires a completed work. It must rest upon something that has already been accomplished. It cannot repose upon something that is yet to be developed: i.e., *I have faith I can do it.*

The Proclamation

The accomplished work has already been declared. It is the substance that faith must grasp. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him

Let us imagine for a moment that the redemption that is in Christ Jesus could be appropriated independently of faith. Man would be required to bring a Savior down from heaven, and bring Him back from the dead once He died. This is precisely the reasoning found in the tenth chapter of Romans. It is a manner of thought that is forbidden. “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)” (Rom 10:6-7). Settle it in your heart, if salvation is dependent upon the works of men, this is what they must do. They must get a Savior from heaven and bring Him down to die. Then, after he has died, they must raise Him from the dead. This reasoning assumes they realize their need of a Savior in the first place, which no man has ever concluded on his own.

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The conclusion, therefore, is incontestable. *“A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”* **God will not be pleased with anything short of faith in Christ!** The Prophet said it in these words, *“Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”* (Micah 6:7). Micah continued to show what God desired from men. *“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”* (v 8). Those three things, as confirmed by both Moses and the Prophets, required a change of nature.

Even though animal sacrifices were commanded by God and offered according to the Law, yet they brought Him no pleasure. As it is written, *“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure”* (Heb 10:6; Psa 40:6). They did not effect a change in men, but let them with a defiled and condemning conscience. Thus it is written, *“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”*^{NASB} (Heb 10:1-4).

Why Bring This Up?

It might appear all of this has little to do with our text. Permit me to elaborate on the necessity of this reasoning.

Under the Law, the greatest work took place on the day of atonement. In that prescribed routine was the loftiest involvement of the high priest. Precision and order marked every facet of that sacrifice. It was offered at a particular time and in a particular place. Appointed

priestly vestments were put on. Specific animals were used, and step-by-step procedures fulfilled (Lev 16). Yet, in that extensive procedure, sin was not removed and the conscience was not purged, *“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”*

How, then, could any person hope to remove his sin and realize a cleansed conscience by doing his best not to murder, steal, or lie? If the loftiest work of the Law did not one whit to justify men, what would lead anyone to believe any work of Law—any obedience rendered in the energy of the flesh—could accomplish justification? The basis for justification

If the loftiest work of the Law did not one whit to justify men, what would lead anyone to believe any work of Law—any obedience rendered in the energy of the flesh—could accomplish justification? The basis for justification cannot reside in the one being justified.

cannot reside in the one being justified.

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Other versions read as follows. *“We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”*^{ASV} *“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”*^{NIV} *“For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.”*^{NRSV}

Our text is speaking of the **GROUND** of our justification: the foundation upon which it rests. It is faith *“apart from the works of the Law.”* The professed church has divided over this issue. One segment of the church argues that faith is combined with works as the basis for justification. The other contends that faith itself is the ground for

justification, without works.

First, the Spirit has no regard for the contentions of men. He is placing before us the reason for our justification, and it is apart from the *“works of the Law.”* Further, *“works of the Law”* and *“obedience”* are, to my knowledge, nowhere said to be synonymous. Later, the Spirit will make this affirmation, *“But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness”*^{NRSV} (Rom 4:5).

A Type of Justification

A type, or picture, of justification is seen in the Lord’s directions for rearing up an altar of stone on which to make sacrifices. *“And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it”* (Ex 20:25). The fact that a person may have been a skilled craftsman had nothing whatsoever to do with the case. If man’s *“tool”* was put to the altar, it would become polluted, or defiled.

Man’s works, however disciplined and precise they may be, cannot become the basis for justification. Neither, indeed, can our faith be placed in them. God will not save us because of *“works of righteousness which we have done”* (Tit 3:5). Emphatically we are told salvation is *“Not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Eph 2:9). God has saved us and called us *“not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”* (2 Tim 1:9).

When affirming the existence of a *“remnant according to the election of grace,”* the Spirit makes a poignant statement that is of relevance to this discussion. *“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work”* (Rom 11:6).

When it comes to the **BASIS** of justification, faith and works cannot mix. We cannot trust in Christ and in our own

accomplishments. The **foundation** has already been laid, and it will not mingle with any other. *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor 3:11). Faith takes hold of the foundation!

James and Works

It is unfortunate that men have chosen to argue about Scripture rather than believe it. One of the chief sources of contention in Christendom surrounds James’ teaching on works and that of Paul. The teachers are different, but only because they are dealing with different matters. It will be to our advantage to briefly consider some of James’ remarks. They were given by the inspiration of God, and are not to be ignored.

While Paul declared the BASIS of salvation, James dealt with the EVIDENCE of it. Both affirmed that FAITH was the means of appropriating it. In providing an example of justification, Paul affirmed, *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”* (Rom 4:3). James makes precisely the same point. *“Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness”* (James 2:23).

James was dealing with those having an empty profession. He referred to them as *“adulterers and adulteresses,”* who, because of their friendship with the world, had become the enemies of God (James 4:4). The question with James was not HOW men become righteous before God, but how they PROVE to others that such has occurred. *“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works”* (2:18).

James, the brother of our Lord (Gal 1:19), sternly rebukes those who affirm faith, yet lack the evidence of it. He will not allow men to imagine they have faith

if they are lacking works. *“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone”* (James 2:17). *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”* (2:20).

When James says, *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”* (2:24), he is not declaring the doctrine of justification. Rather, he is uprooting the notion that justification can occur without a fundamental change taking place in the one who is justified. His view is one which reasons from effect back to cause. In that view, he makes no allowance for an unproductive faith.

When Paul dealt with the same subject as James, he also made no allowance for the absence of works. *“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God”* (1 Cor 7:19). *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10). *“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”* (Tit 2:14). But this is never set forth as the basis, or foundation, of our justification, or the ground of Divine acceptance.

Righteousness Imputed Without Works

The imputation of righteousness is expressly said to be *“without works.”* Because I will be dealing with this passage in a later lesson, I will only quote it here. *“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”* (Rom 4:6-8). **Works**

grow from the tree of justification, but are never its root.

Those who seek righteousness through the *“works of the Law”* will stumble over the Stumblingstone, rather than be founded upon it (Rom 9:32).

If a person chooses to seek justification through works, all the works of the Law must be fulfilled. *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith”* (Gal 3:10-11). In this case, *“life”* equates to being justified, or living in the favor of God. If justification depends upon your work, you must do it all!

WHY FAITH JUSTIFIES

Faith justifies because it receives *“the record that God gave of his Son”* (1 John 5:10-11). Sin had to be taken away before you could be freed from its dominion (Heb 9:26). The devil had to be destroyed before you could be released from his hold (Heb 2:14). God had to be satisfied before you could be received (Isa 53:11). Principalities and powers had to be plundered before you could be free from their oppression (Col 2:15). The handwriting of ordinances that was against us had to be fully satisfied before you could be loosed from the Law’s condemnation (Col 2:14).

No amount of work on your part could accomplish these things. Jesus, and Jesus alone, fulfilled them all. Faith receives what Jesus has done, and is ready to act upon it. That is why it justifies. Faith never balks at a word from God. It always depends on God being faithful, and it is always honored by God. Without it, it is impossible to please God.

THE GOD OF ALL WHO BELIEVE

“²⁹ Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also.” If men could be justified by *“the works of*

the Law,” then only the Jews would be justified. As a covenant, the Law pertained only to them, and to them alone (Rom 9:4). As a moral code, or Law, it was

given *“that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God”* (Rom 3:19). The Law, therefore, was never intended to be a

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means of justification, or becoming right before God. Yet, if justification is by works, this could not be the case.

A Legalistic View

While this may appear relatively apparent to us, it was revolutionary for the Jews—even those who believed. A strict legalist could support the notion that the Jews alone could expect salvation. Jesus Himself said, *“Salvation is of the Jews”* (John 4:22). When Jesus first sent out the twelve, He said to them, *“Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matt 10:5-6). To a Syrophenician woman He said, *“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matt 15:24).

The Household of Cornelius

Nearly ten years after the day of Pentecost, the Gentiles remained largely neglected by the church—even by the Apostles and elders. The acceptance of Cornelius upon the basis of his faith proved to be an epoch to Peter, chief spokesman for the Twelve. It was at that time that he said before the Gentile Cornelius, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”* (Acts 10:34-35). This was a hallmark event.

The Ministry of Paul and Barnabas

Later, when the conversion of Cornelius’ household was reported to the brethren in Jerusalem, they *“glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life”* (Acts 11:18). About seven years later, when Paul and Barnabas related how the Gentiles had been converted through their ministry, they *“rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles”* (Acts 14:27). This represented a major breakthrough in understanding as well as Divine accomplishment.

To this day, there remains considerable confusion among professed believers concerning the Jews and the

Gentiles. Some are convinced the Jews have been written off, with no Divine committal to their recovery. Others believe the Gentiles have a separate Gospel, preached by Paul, and that it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Jews. Still others look forward to a period of time after a rapture, when the Jews will be brought to the Lord by means of another Gospel.

All of these notions are dashed to the ground by the affirmation set before us. *“Is He the God of the Jews only? is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also.”* “Ah,” says the sophist, “but God is not the God of the Jews at all. That is something that occurred in the past.” However, that is not true. If He is *“not the God of the Jews only,”* then it remains that He is still the *“God of the Jews.”* Once again, in justification, Gentiles are perceived as partaking of something belonging first to the Jews. The Gospel is to *“the Jew first, and ALSO to the Greek,”* or Gentiles (Rom 1:16). Tribulation and anguish is promised to every soul that *“does evil, of the Jew first, and ALSO of the Gentile”* (Rom 2:9). Glory, honor, and peace are also promised

Throughout a considerable percentage of history, there was a Divinely imposed distinction among men—Jew and Gentile. This difference dominated God’s dealings with men for over 1,500 years.

to *“to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and ALSO to the Gentile”* (Rom 2:10). There are *“vessels of mercy”* whom God has prepared for His glory, *“not of the Jews only, but ALSO of the Gentiles?”* (Rom 9:24).

The glory of the acceptance of the Gentiles has been largely obscured by the institutional church. It is one of the great occurrences in history, and is not to be treated lightly. It is consistently viewed as an unusual token of Divine favor.

Righteousness, the Common Need of All

Throughout a considerable percentage of history, there was a Divinely imposed distinction among men—Jew and Gentile. This difference dominated God’s dealings with men for over 1,500 years. Because of this, those without faith tended to regard God as a *“respecter of persons,”* thinking that the Jews as superior to others.

However, our text has shown us that when it came to NEED, all men were considered the same. They ALL need a righteousness from God. When it comes to the matter of guilt, they are also all the same: *“ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*

There will not be a separate Gospel for the Jews or the Gentiles, because their need is no different. A single Savior died for them all. One Lord conquered their foe. One Propitiation is offered for a means to Divine mercy. One Man reconciled them to God. God will NOT accept the Jews on one basis, and the Gentiles on another. That would dishonor Jesus, and bring reproach to God.

The righteousness that is declared, therefore, belongs no more to the Jew than to the Gentiles. And, arrogant Gentiles must know they have no more right to it than the Jews.

SAME GOD?

When the Spirit uses the expressions *“God of the Jews”* and *“God of the Gentiles,”* He is referring to the Lord in His **redemptive capacity**, not the creative one. While it is true that both owe their origin to God, that is not the point of the text. It is their acceptance by God that is the point, not their origin.

The phraseology speaks of a mutual and intimate relationship between God and the people. Thus the prophet Jeremiah said, *“And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God”* (Jer 30:22). The Prophet further said this relationship would be the result of a new heart. *“And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they*

shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer 24:7).

One of the marks of the New Covenant is that God “will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10). Ezekiel spoke of the same association (Ezek 11:20; 36:28). This is the most profound of all relationships.

In the ninth chapter, the Spirit will again make a point of this. “Even us, whom he hath called, **not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?** As he saith also in Osee (Hosea), I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not

my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God” (9:24-26).

That speaks of a redemptive relationship in which sin has been expiated, and the individual made acceptable in Christ Jesus. Such receive a righteousness from God upon the basis of their faith.

ONE BASIS FOR JUSTIFICATION

“³⁰ . . . since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” Here again the means through which we are justified is declared. It should be apparent that this can easily escape us. Indeed, there is a great neglect found among preachers and teachers in affirming justification by faith. I know of people who have spent their life in “church,” and have never heard a solid proclamation of this truth. “Works,” in some form, are almost the universal emphasis of the professed church. Most religious specialists are professed experts of some kind of human “work.” God’s messengers, on the other hand are experts in the Gospel—in the announcement of a righteousness from God.

RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

Among men, there is really only one problem—sinning and coming short of the glory of God. There is also only one remedy—a righteousness from God. The perception of these circumstances is essential to a truly effective ministry for Christ Jesus.

The outbreak of religious specialists during the past two decades has cast a cloud of dust in the eyes of the people. Multitudes are being led to believe their primary difficulties and advantages are found in their age category. Thus we have specialists in children, youth, young adult, middle aged, old aged, etc. Men speak of the X-generation and the Boomer-generation just as though they were Divinely revealed categories. But they are not. To classify people according to

WHEN they were born is more related to heathenism than to Christ Jesus. To teach people that primary distinctions are traced to thinking with the left side of the brain or the right side of it, smacks of a godless analyst, not a godly one.

When it comes to groups of people in the flesh, God has only two classifications: “circumcised” and “uncircumcised,” or “Jew” and “Gentile.” By using these

some point, those who speak for the Lord have to get down to that situation, else the Gospel will really have no relevance.

NOT A NATIONAL GOD

God is not a national God, whereas idols often are. No group of fleshly people owns God, or can claim exclusive identity with Him. He is truly “the God of all flesh” (Jer 32:27). He is He who “from one man he made every nation of men” (Acts 17:26). The entire race can repeat in unison, “Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?” (Mal 2:10). The ONLY unique identity God holds among men is toward those who are in Christ Jesus. Only they have a unparalleled relationship with Him.

Notice this is traced to God’s oneness: “Seeing it is ONE God.” Some, stumbling over this language, assume there is only one Person involved. Thus, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are viewed as one Person doing three different things. However, this is a purely humanistic view of God, and is to be rejected as a total misrepresentation of the case. The whole of our salvation postulates three personalities in the Godhead. Each one is Divine, and each has a special work to do. The Father purposes, the Son executes, and the Spirit applies. The Son fulfilled the will of the Father, and the Spirit fulfills the will of the Son. There is no need to go further into this matter, as the whole of Apostolic doctrine is an elaboration of these things.

BY FAITH AND THROUGH FAITH

“Seeing it is one God, which shall

The whole of our salvation postulates three personalities in the Godhead. Each one is Divine, and each has a special work to do. The Father purposes, the Son executes, and the Spirit applies. The Son fulfilled the will of the Father, and the Spirit fulfills the will of the Son.

terms, the Spirit emphasizes that one was a covenanted people (“circumcised”), and the other an uncovenanted people (“uncircumcised”).

He declares there “is no difference” in the matter of their need—they “come short of the glory of God.” He also affirms there is “no difference” in the matter of their past—“all have sinned.” Neither group has yielded a righteous man, one that sought God, or one that was good. Those are just the facts in the case. At

justify the circumcision **by** faith, and uncircumcision **through** faith." All major translations use the words "by" and "through." The two words have slightly different meanings. "By," means "out of faith." "Through" means "by means of the faith." I understand there to be no essential difference in the words. The idea is that righteousness is **given** to us through the vehicle of faith—that is, God gives it to the believer. From the pragmatic viewpoint, righteousness is experienced through faith—that is, it is **received** because of faith.

The reasoning of the verse appears to be as follows. One God will justify the covenanted Jews by faith, and the uncovenanted Gentiles through the same faith. Peter would call it "like precious faith," or "a faith of the same kind as ours" NASB (2 Pet 1:1).

There is a common dilemma among men, and a common answer. It comes from a single God, and through a single means—faith.

Observing the unusual emphasis the Spirit is placing on the matter of being justified by faith, or receiving a

righteousness from God through faith, I am compelled to ask why this is not preached with greater frequency and urgency. In many circles with which I am familiar, the subject of righteousness by faith is rarely, if ever, mentioned.

This line of reasoning will continue through the first verse of the fifth chapter. It should be obvious to you that this is a pivotal teaching. It should be equally apparent that it can easily escape us—thus the extended teaching.

A BRIEF REVIEW

The words justify, justified, justifieth, justification, and righteousness are key words in Romans.

1. "Justify" (3:30). Mentioned with faith.
2. "Justified" (2:13; 3:4,20,24,28; 4:2; 5:1; 8:30). Mentioned twice with "faith," once with "grace," once with Christ's blood.
3. "Justification" (4:25; 5:16,18). Mentioned once with Christ's resurrection, and twice with God's "free gift."
4. "Justifier" (3:25). Mentioned with believing.
5. "Justifieth" (4:5; 8:33). Mentioned once with faith, and once with God's doing.

6. "Righteous" (2:5; 3:10; 5:7,19). Mentioned once with the obedience of Christ.

6. "Righteousness" (1:17; 2:26; 3:5,21,22,25,26; 4:3,5,6,9,11,13,22; 5:1,17,18,21; 6:13,16,18,19,20; 8:4,10; 9:28,30,31; 10:3,4,5,6,10; 14:17). Mentioned three times with God's revelation, seven times with faith, six times with believing, four times with imputation, twice with God's gift, once with grace, twice with the Holy Spirit.

Those holy associations should provoke us to a deeper inquiry into the matter of righteousness. This is particularly true when you consider the words of the Lord Jesus. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and **His righteousness** . . ." (Matt 6:33).

Our hearts should also be persuaded this righteousness comes to us by faith. When it comes to "works," it is Christ's achievement that is the foundation of our acceptance. God honors what Jesus has done, and has exalted Him to His right hand because of His work, giving Him all power in heaven and in earth. No discerning soul will deny this is the case, but find great pleasure in its truth.

DO WE MAKE VOID THE LAW?

^{31a} **Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not!**

The strength of this line of reasoning is confirmed in nearly every major translation. "Do we then make the law of **none effect** through faith" ASV "Do we then **nullify** the Law through faith?" NASB "Do we then **overthrow** the law by this faith?" NRSV "Law then do we **make useless** through the faith?" Young's Literal "Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can **forget about** the law?" NLT "Are we saying that the Law has been **made pointless** by faith?" NJB

When justification by faith is taught, do interfere with obedience to God's moral requirements? Do the commandments of God suddenly become useless and pointless? Is it true, as some affirm, that insisting we are justified by faith cause people to become antinomian, or without

law? Does it encourage loose living and the neglect of ones soul?

Flesh is anxious to get rid of the Law, because it detests the commands of God. Therefore, it seeks to treat grace as though it offered a license to sin, and removed any danger of falling from grace. Legion is the name of those who espouse such heresy. Further, countless numbers of people practice this heresy, even though they formally deny it. Who is able to number the people who willingly and constantly live in contradiction of the Law of God, claiming their preliminary obedience to the Gospel, or their identity with a religious institution as enough reason for God to receive them.

This was a constant charge brought against both Jesus and Paul—namely, that they had no regard for the Law. The

scribes and Pharisees and many of the people tried to pit the Law against Jesus (John 8:5; 12:34). As for Paul, he was slanderously reported to have taught, "Let us do good that evil may come" (Rom 3:8). Others charged him with persuading men to "worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13).

The tendency to view grace and faith as a license to sin continues to this day. Those who emphasize being justified by faith (what few there appear to be) are viewed as preaching a deficient Gospel, and not taking due regard of the book of James. But these are false charges, and are the result of spiritual blindness.

If the Gospel of Christ reveals a righteousness from God (1:17), what manner of reasoning would conclude that the declaration of that Gospel fomented

sin? That is an utter absurdity!

Has God erased the Law, as some affirm, only to repromulgate some of the commandments that are perceived as compulsory under the New Covenant? Is that what Jesus came to do?

CAME NOT TO DESTROY

Jesus forbade us to think of Him as nullifying or destroying the Law or the Prophets. **“Do not think that I came to abolish [destroy^{KJV}] the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill”^{NASB}** (Matt 5:17). If *“the knowledge of sin”* comes through the Law (Rom 3:20), it is absurd to think Jesus came to destroy it.

ENDED AS A MEANS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

The weakness of the Law was not

all law—for any approach to righteousness that depends upon man. This is precisely the point made in Galatians 3:21. *“Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.”^{NASB}*

But life cannot be imparted by means of law—even if the law is from God, and is *“holy, and just, and good”* (Rom 7:12). Apart from faith, all doing is nothing more than *“dead works,”* to be discarded in favor of faith, which alone can appropriate the righteousness of God.

With remarkable precision, the Spirit reminds us, *“And all our righteousnesses (not unrighteousnesses) are like filthy rags”* (Isa 64:6). No amount of doing can get rid of that condition.

avoiding such a conclusion. The NASB states the situation more clearly. *“Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us.”* The Law was removed in its condemning capacity; that is, it can no longer condemn those who are in Christ Jesus.

The *“ordinances,”* in this case, were not the commandments of God, but the ceremonies contained in the Law. These ceremonies were an acknowledgment of guilt, and were given to the ancient people because of guilt. But now, Christ Jesus has cancelled the debt, having removed our sins from us as far as the East is from the West (Psa 103:12).

THE LAW OF COMMANDMENTS CONTAINED IN ORDINANCES

The same truth—namely the cancellation of the debt sin incurred—is taught in the book of Ephesians. *“Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances”* (Eph 2:15). Again, the Spirit carefully states the case., He does not say the commandments themselves were abolished, but *“the commandments contained in ordinances.”*

But life cannot be imparted by means of law—even if the law is from God, and is “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). Apart from faith, all doing is nothing more than “dead works,” to be discarded in favor of faith, which alone can appropriate the righteousness of God.

due to any deficiency in it. Rather, it was weak *“through the flesh”* of men (Rom 8:3). It offered life to men, but its demands exceeding their ability: *“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* (Gal 3:10). The Law was not an appropriate means to obtain righteousness, and thus it was ended in that capacity—or in a covenantal capacity. Thus it is written, *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes”^{NKJV}* (Rom 10:4).

In this capacity, the Law stands for

BLOTTING OUT THE HANDWRITING OF ORDINANCES

The death of Christ is related to the cancellation of the indebtedness created by our infractions of the Law. Scripture states it this way. *“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross”* (Col 2:14).

Some have supposed this was a destruction of the Law itself. However, the Spirit carefully states the case,

This phrase refers to the same thing mentioned in the ninth chapter of Hebrews. There the Spirit refers to the Old Covenant as one *“Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation”* (9:10). These were the *“commandments contained in ordinances,”* imposed upon the people as an acknowledgment of guilt. This is not a reference to the abolishment of the Ten Commandments. Both the Ephesian and Colossian texts refer to the Law in its covenantal aspects, not its moral requirements.

WE ESTABLISH THE LAW

^{31b} **“On the contrary, we establish the law.”** Such a statement could not be made if Christ’s death had abrogated, or nullified, the Law of God. By establishing the Law, we acknowledge that its assessment of us was correct. We

had broken the Law, and thus stood guilty before the Lord. Our mouths were stopped by the Law, and we had to acknowledge our personal guilt.

If this were not the case, there would

be no need for Christ at all. Christ coming into the world and laying down His life confirms the truth of the Law. When we embrace His death by faith, we also acknowledge the truth of the Law’s condemnation. Because of the Law, we

The imputation of the righteousness of God by faith excludes all boasting in the flesh, by Given O. Blakely

fled to Christ for refuge, to hold on the hope set before us (Heb 6:18).

THE MORAL LAW

By moral law, I mean the commandments by which sin was defined, and through which the knowledge of sin was cultured. Faith establishes the Law by enabling us to fulfill its demands.

This is done in a twofold sense. First, our hearts are brought into accord with the Law. This is the result of God writing His Laws upon our hearts and putting them into our minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16). With our minds, we ourselves “*serve the Law of God*” (Rom 7:25).

There is another sense in which we “*establish the Law*.” With sin being removed, the Law written on our hearts, and a new nature given to us, we actually do from the heart what the Law demands—and we do it out of preference. Here is how the Scripture states this marvelous reality. “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*” (Rom 8:3-4).

THE CEREMONIAL LAW

By “ceremonial law,” I mean the routines established under the First Covenant, to address the matter of sin and uncleanness. By faith, we also establish the truth of those routines by embracing their antitype, Christ Jesus. By taking hold of the “*Lamb of God*,” we realize the fulfillment of all those types, establishing their truth and relevance.

What is more, by embracing the One they prefigured, we acknowledge they are no longer binding upon men. Just as John the Baptist concluded his introductory work when Jesus came, so the ceremonial ordinances under the Law concluded their work when the real Sacrifice, determined before the foundation of the world, was offered. There was no further need for them, yet they continue to speak to us.

THE SABBATH DAY COMMANDMENT

A word should be said about the Sabbath commandment. The presence of the fourth commandment is what gave rise to the development of a theology that affirmed the complete abrogation of the Law. This, men supposed, would refute those who affirm the Sabbath day is still binding on the people of God.

First, the matter of the Sabbath day is addressed directly in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. “*For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into*

By moral law, I mean the commandments by which sin was defined, and through which the knowledge of sin was cultured. Faith establishes the Law by enabling us to fulfill its demands.

my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief” (Heb 4:3-6).

Israel did not enter into the rest of God the true Sabbath. This contradicts the doctrine of the Sabbatarians who affirm the seventh day is the proper day of worship. (Many of them affirm that honoring the first day of the week is a Satanic innovation.) If this were the case, Israel would have entered into the sabbath-rest of God, though imperfectly, because they did honor the Sabbath day.

However, it is here declared they did

not enter the “rest” God associated with the seventh day! If the cessation of creative labor on the seventh day is the “rest” to which our text refers, we cast are upon the horns of a dilemma. The Lord said Israel did not enter His rest, yet they did keep the Sabbath day holy, as He commanded (though with much inconsistency). God declared, “*They (the unbelievers) shall never enter My rest!*”

The point is not merely that they did not enter, but that they “*could not*” enter! It was no longer offered to them! It was not accessible to them. However, the seventh day was offered to them—yea, it was commanded they keep it, and do so in a holy manner. The most diligent Sabbath keepers in Israel, however, did not enter into God’s real Sabbath rest! That is a matter of revelation.

The Lord is not speaking of a ritual, but of a condition. He is not referring to a procedure, but to a culmination. It is more than interesting that in Hebrews 3:11,18, and 4:1,3,5,10, and 11, the word “rest” is translated from the Greek word *κατάπαυσις*, which means ceasing from ones work or activity . . . rest. However, in the ninth verse, another word is used.

“*There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God*” (NASB, NIV, NRSV). The word used here is *σαββατισμός*, which means a spiritual rest, a rest. This is a use of the word from which the word “Sabbath” comes, and is the only place in the New Covenant writings where it is found. Notice, it is yet to be **inhabited**, not observed! It is something into which we “enter,” not something we keep.

Two Kinds of Rest

Here, there are at least two kinds of “rest” to be considered. First, a rest from toil and exertion. In this case, “rest” for the weary. This was foreshadowed by the seventh day Sabbath. In that day, there was to be a cessation of normal activity, and provision made for rest and contemplation. This cannot, of course, be applied to God Almighty. There is no need for God to “rest,” in this sense of the word. Creating the world did not fatigue

the Lord!

The other kind of rest is a conclusion--a "rest" because something is completed. This is the "rest" God is said to have had. Both rests pertain to man, but only the latter applies to the Lord. For God, the Sabbath-rest marked the conclusion of the creation of the heavens and the earth. For Israel, the Sabbath-rest marked the conclusion of a week, and the preparation for further toil.

For those in Christ, the Sabbath-rest marks the conclusion of their orientation for glory, when they shall be "conformed to the Image of God's Son" (Rom 8:29), glorified and ready to embark on an eternal reign with the Son of God. That rest "remains" to be enjoyed by the people of God. Now, they enjoy a "rest" from their own labors as a basis for entrance into glory. They now savor

The Fourth Commandment

The Ten Commandments are a reflection of the image of God. They are good, and holy, and just, as Romans 7 declares. But they are not the basis for determining whether a person is righteous or not. That is determined by personal faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:13; Phil 3:9). As for the Sabbath day, Israel, who received the commandment, never really entered into God's rest, or sabbath.

There is a greater rest that was typified by the Law's Sabbath day, but never fulfilled by it. That is the rest of faith, and is discussed at length in the fourth chapter of Hebrews, as I have shown.

A parallel is made between the fourth commandment Sabbath and the rest of faith. The Sabbath day was bound upon Israel because their hearts were hard. They would have forgotten God altogether if He did not demand they remember Him on that day, dedicating it exclusively to Him.

In Christ, however, our nature is changed, so that we actually know and delight in knowing the Lord. Now every day becomes a Sabbath so far as

sanctifying the Lord in our memory. This does not mean keeping the Sabbath is wrong. Nor, indeed, does it mean we are to demand that everyone keep it. Colossians 2:16 forbids us to judge one another on this matter. The recollection of God as the Creator of the universe is wonderful. Intimate fellowship with Him by faith is more wonderful. That is why Scripture affirms, "We which believe do enter into rest" (Heb 4:3). This is a higher and more extensive rest which overshadows, but does not obliterate, the former Sabbath.

Not Right to Demand Sabbath Keeping

It is never right to demand that everyone keep the Sabbath day—even

This is a foundational teaching. The Old Covenant put the entire responsibility in the hands of man. Believing or faith are not mentioned a single time in all of the Law—including all of the commandments, all of the directions, and all of the Levitical law. It was a system of doing.

though no individual is condemned for choosing to do so. Colossians 2:16 forbids us to judge one another on this matter. The recollection of God as the Creator of the universe is wonderful--but it is certainly not the highest or most glorifying view of our God. Intimate fellowship with Him by faith is more wonderful.

The Sabbath day commandment has not been obviated by a different commandment, but by a greater rest. It is something like the light of the sun removing the light of the moon. That "rest" is nothing less than satisfaction with the atoning death of Christ. When we enter into that "rest," we cease depending on our own accomplishments,

resting, as it were, from them.

The New Covenant Is Different

When comparing the New and Old covenants, our approach must be correct. The New Covenant is a different kind of covenant, not at all like the Old Covenant. God said it this way, "I will make a new covenant. . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt" (Heb 8:8-9, NIV). The latter part of that chapter confirms this is the covenant Jesus is presently mediating. It is not a covenant of DOING, like the Old Covenant was. In fact, the Spirit makes this parallel in commenting on the nature of the New Covenant. "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says: Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down) or Who will descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom 10:5-10).

This is a foundational teaching. The Old Covenant put the entire responsibility in the hands of man. Believing or faith are not mentioned a single time in all of the Law—including all of the commandments, all of the directions, and all of the Levitical law. It was a system of doing--the doing of men.

In the New Covenant, God does the foundational work, then calls upon us to believe it. He then accepts us upon the basis of our faith, and works with us to fulfill His will (Phil 2:12-13). The entire New Covenant is summarized in a few words. Jeremiah foretold it in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Spirit later gave it again in Hebrews 8:8-13. It is again summarized in

Hebrews 10:16-17. **In all of these references what the Lord does is the total emphasis.** There are no “Ifs,” and there are no commands.

If you will read those texts, you will find the following affirmations. (1) God will put His laws into the mind. (2) He will write his laws on the heart. (3) He will be God to the people. (4) The people will be His people. (5) Every one in the covenant will know Him, or be familiar and in love with Him. (6) He will not remember their sins any more.

All of those things are promises—promises to be believed. They can only be possessed in Christ. Further, our faith will compel us to do anything and everything He commands us. Other scriptures that affirm the nature of the New Covenant, and how radically it differs from the Old Covenant are as follows. Jeremiah 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:10.

The First Day of the Week

The “*First day of the week*” is frequently mentioned in Scripture, and always with a note of approval. This is specifically said to be the time when Jesus rose from the dead. “*Now when He rose early on the first day of the week . . .*” (Mark 16:9). This is also the day on which Jesus, following His resurrection, first appeared to His disciples. “*Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’*” (John 20:19). It is also the day on

which He appeared the second time to His disciples. John refers to it as eight days following the first appearance, which would put it on the first day of the week. “*And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’*” (John 20:26).

In addition, the day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week. This feast took place 50 days after the high Sabbath of the paschal week (Lev 23:15-16). The Sabbath from which the

on setting aside special monies for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul specified that it be done on “*the first day of the week*” (1 Cor 16:2). As the church progressed, from Ignatius (A.D. 30-107) onwards, we “have a complete chain of evidence that The Lord’s Day became the regular Christian name for the first day of the week.”

Suffice it to say, there is solid ground for perceiving as “*the Lord’s Day*” the first day of the week. This was the day on which natural light was created (Gen 1:3-5). It was the day on which Christ

This is not simply another day! The events that took place on the first day of the week are conducive to godly recollections that sanctify the soul. It outshines the Sabbath day, having been blessed with greater occurrences.

count was made occurred the day after Jesus was crucified, and was the reason why His body was taken down from the cross (John 19:31; Mark 15:42).

It was also the Sabbath honored by the women who came to anoint Jesus’ body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:54-56). Fifty days from that Sabbath day was the first day of the week--the Day of Pentecost, on which the Spirit was poured forth.

We are categorically told that the early disciples came together to break bread “*on the first day of the week*” (Acts 20:7). When instructing the Corinthians

Jesus arose from the dead (Mark 16:9). His two recorded appearances to His disciples occurred on this day (John 20:19,26). The day of Pentecost took place on this day (Lev 23:15-16), and the early church is said to have gathered together on the “first day of the week” (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2).

This is not simply another day! The events that took place on the first day of the week are conducive to godly recollections that sanctify the soul. It outshines the Sabbath day, having been blessed with greater occurrences. God did greater things on this day.

CONCLUSION

We have dealt with the very heart of sound doctrine: how the righteousness of God is appropriated. With great power, the Holy Spirit has persuaded us of the need of a righteousness from God. He has announced that “*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*” (1:18).

There is only one way to avoid being

consumed by that wrath, and that is to be clothed with the righteousness of God. This is not merely a technical point, but a requirement driven by God’s own nature.

Only the Son of God could fulfill the demands of the Law and the purpose of God. Only He could remove sin, destroy the devil, and reconcile us to God. For this reason, God has set Jesus before the world as a propitiation for sin—a means of obtaining His mercy.

When we believe the record God has given of His Son, Jesus takes hold of us, and our faith takes hold of Him. It is then that God imputes His very own righteousness to us, thereby lifting us above the condemnation of the Law. Because of our faith, God receives us.

The “*law of faith*,” by which God’s righteousness is appropriated will not allow men to boast, as though their salvation was the result of their own

doing. The Law of faith “excludes” boasting, moving us to glory in the Lord. We glory in God through Jesus Christ, having no confidence in the flesh.

The religious climate in which we find ourselves makes it exceedingly difficult to take hold of these things. Yet, we must exert ourselves to do so, asking

the Lord to help our unbelief. Christ has brought God’s righteousness within the reach of faith. Praise Him for that, and extend yourself to appropriate it.



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 12



ABRAHAM, JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' ⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. (Romans 4:1-4^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHAT SHALL WE SAY? (4:1a)
- II. ABRAHAM OUR FATHER (4:1b)
- III. THE CONCEPT OF FINDING (4:1c)
- IV. IF ABRAHAM WERE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS (4:2)
- V. WHAT DOES THE SCRIPTURE SAY? (4:3)
- VI. ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD (4:4a)
- VII. FAITH COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (4:4b)
- VIII. GRACE VERSUS DEBT (4:4c)

In Scripture, extensive reasoning is always associated with foundational

teaching. This is remarkably consistent throughout the Word of God, setting it apart from all other words. The Spirit never deals with trivia, and is never known to provide humorous anecdotes for life. Levity and light-heartedness cannot be found in Scripture. This does not mean such things are of themselves sinful, unless they are colored by baseness. Triviality, froth, levity, and jesting, however, are never presented as the means to edification. They appeal more to the flesh, and are soulish in nature. For this reason, they are never to be exalted, or given prominence in things pertaining to life and godliness.

Because men "*live by every word of God*" (Lk 4:4), matters **unrelated** to spiritual life are totally absent in Scripture. This is particularly true of the

Apostolic writings, when insightful proclamation is brought to its apex.

In the text before us, the Spirit begins to probe into the matter of men being given the righteousness of God. He is going to confirm to our hearts the reasonableness of righteousness coming to us as a gift, and not a reward. Because this is difficult for men to grasp, the Spirit will reason with us extensively about the matter. This confirms the importance of the theme.

THE DANGER OF A RELIGION BASED UPON EMOTION

It is in order to make a few comments about the danger of an emotional-based religion. This is required by the nature of the times in which we live, particularly in the Western world.

Throughout church history men have arisen who sought to build the souls of men upon the shifting foundation of emotion. Much of this has occurred because religion had become lifeless and sterile. Men developed an inordinate thirst for religious experiences rooted in the flesh, and thus sought them aggressively. It was not long until entire religious movements were based upon experience rather than faith. This is a great tragedy in the history of the church.

Legitimate Experience

Let it be clear, those who live by faith are brought into the realm of great and legitimate experience – but the experience is not an end of itself–i.e., it is not the real point. You can search the Scripture with great care, and you will never find the Lord calling upon men to seek an experience based in the flesh. The body is the weakest part of our constitution, and has not yet been redeemed (Rom 8:23). **The greatest evidences, and the most lasting experiences are beyond the perimeter of the body.**

A fleshly sensation, or a overpowering experience, however lofty, is never presented as worthy of a whole-hearted quest. I say these things with great care, not wanting to leave the impression that personal and exhilarating experiences are to be held in disdain, or repudiated as false. Anyone even casually acquainted with the word of God knows it is filled with the remarkable experiences of God’s people. But nowhere are we

admonished to emulate those Divinely orchestrated experiences.

For example, we are urged to appropriate faith like Abraham, not become a father in old age as he did. Although becoming a father of many nations is not beyond possibility with God, that is not the point of this reasoning. Further, the various exploits accomplished through faith are not the point in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, but faith itself. Fleshly experience is NOT the highest form of blessing. It is possible to receive unprecedented benefits in the

comes to the culturing of the soul, building up the renewed spirit, and orientating the individual for glory, we are raised to the realm of faith. In that domain—where men believe “*with the heart*” (Rom 10:10)—a kinship with Jesus is developed that cannot occur anywhere else. This is the realm of perception and understanding. It is were cognitive fellowship with God is realized, and the knowledge of God is developed.

This is precisely the point of our text. When the Spirit brings home to our hearts the indispensability of

However, when it comes to the culturing of the soul, building up the renewed spirit, and orientating the individual for glory, we are raised to the realm of faith. In that domain—where men believe “*with the heart*” (Rom 10:10)—a kinship with Jesus is developed that cannot occur anywhere else.

body and be unthankful (Lk 17:12-19) and unbelieving (Heb 3:19). God does not confirm the richness of the New Covenant in the flesh. To do such a thing contradicts the very nature of the New Covenant.

The Domain of Faith

This does not suggest that God does not work marvelous experiences in the bodies of His people. However, when it

righteousness, and the means through which it is appropriated, He leads us to consider the **faith**, not the works, of Abraham. He will not leave us adrift on the sea of imagination, but anchor us in the safe haven of spiritual understanding. That is where Divine fellowship is realized, and where it grows and flourishes. It is where the indispensable knowledge of God is ministered, and acquaintance with the most High realized.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY . . . ”

^{4:1a} **What then shall we say . . . ”**

The Spirit will now reason with us concerning the preceding statements. Allow me to refresh your mind concerning those powerful affirmations.

1. The righteousness of God has been revealed “*apart from the Law*”(3:21).
2. Justification is given freely by grace and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24).
3. God has publicly presented His Son as

- the Propitiation for sin (3:25a).
4. The Propitiation is appropriated through faith in His blood (3:25b).
5. The subject of proclamation is God’s own righteousness (3:26a).
6. God is declared to just, or righteous, in remitting sin and conferring His righteousness upon men (3:26b).
7. The remission of sins and the conferment of righteousness is to the person who has faith in Jesus (3:26c).
8. Faith makes no provision for boasting

- (3:27).
9. The individual is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law (3:28).
10. Faith does not make the Law void, but rather establishes it (3:31).

These are not mere points to be codified and memorized. They are pillars of sound spiritual thought and reasoning—pivotal utterances upon which sound conclusions are to be constructed. Thinking spiritually is much like building

a solid edifice. It requires good materials and their proper correlation. Disjointed thought is always out of order in the heavenly kingdom.

GOING FURTHER

Spiritual life has a nature that is not commonly known. It has a forward posture that always finds the individual moving toward the Lord. It is never enough to simply acquiesce with, or assent to, the truth. We must become adept at drawing conclusions from it.

This is what I call “going further.” It is allowing the truth to dictate the WAY,

from the Spirit into the flesh, and vice versa. But that is only an imagination.

If a person will martial their thoughts, casting down worldly considerations, the Spirit will cause the truth to be seen more clearly.

This is precisely what is taking place in our text. The Holy Spirit has elevated our thinking, bringing us into the heavenly realms. He has shown us the centrality of the Gospel, and glorious revelations it announces. He has established our need of a righteousness from God, and affirmed God is righteous

and minds.

GOD DEMANDS A CONCLUSION

God demands that we come to a conclusion concerning His truth. “*What shall we say?*” He does not want us to remain in a state of indecision, something that is altogether too common in the church world. “*What shall we say?*” Is asking, “What is our response to these things?” “How does this truth impact upon our understanding? Our views? Our approach to righteousness?”

This phrase is mentioned seven times in the book of Romans (3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30). It represents a Divine summons into the activity of meditation and contemplation. It is here that the real benefit of truth is realized. If truth only lies on the surface of our minds, never getting into our thoughts, it will not produce fruit within us. The blessings of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are wells springing up from within.

This rhetorical question—“*What shall we say then?*”—leaves the legalist behind. The person dominated by a law-mentality cannot probe into the truth, or draw water from the wells of salvation. Likewise, the person content to dwell on the surface of truth, satisfied with mere academic statements, is nonplused by the question. This is an interrogation that presumes interest—intense interest.

Here is a question that, to faith, has an obvious answer. Yet it must be expounded, for in it there are rich morsels to be had for the soul. Indeed, this is fertile soil for spiritual fruitage. As we are brought to ponder the appropriation of righteousness, we will be blessed.

True preaching does not leave bits and pieces of truth floating about in the mind. It does not simply add a few facts to an arsenal of information. The power of truth is unleashed in its affirmation. The realization of that power comes through contemplation and consequent understanding.

or manner, in which we think. Faith will move us to think in a godly way, bringing us to specific God-honoring conclusions. For some time, I have noted how swiftly men can forget the great declarations of Scripture. Some, after being exposed to the mind of God, can quickly degenerate into worldly thought. They leave the citadel of truth to slough about in the cesspool of things pertaining to life in the body. The truth does not seem to make much of an impression upon them. Such people imagine they can move quickly

in meeting that need by grace through faith. But it is not enough simply to make that point. It must be fixed firmly in our thinking. True preaching does not leave bits and pieces of truth floating about in the mind. It does not simply add a few facts to an arsenal of information. The power of truth is unleashed in its affirmation. The realization of that power comes through contemplation and consequent understanding. Like a skillful Builder, the Spirit will now fasten the truth of justification by faith to our hearts

ABRAHAM OUR FATHER

^{4b} . . . *that Abraham our father, pertaining to the flesh . . .*” In Romans, this is the first of nine references of Abraham (4:3,9,12,13,16; 9:7; 11:1). It opens a line of reasoning that is foundational, and must be grasped by the human spirit. A word concerning Abraham will be helpful. He is a pivotal person in Scripture.

INTRODUCTION TO ABRAHAM

Abraham was first known as Abram, who was of the generations of Seth, whom Adam begat “*in his own likeness, after his image*” (Gen 5:3). This was a godly generation, as indicated by Eve’s statement concerning Seth. “*For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed*” (Gen 4:25). Adam

was one hundred and thirty years old when Seth was born. With the birth of Seth’s first recorded son Enosh, “*Then men began to call on the name of the LORD*” (Gen 4:26). Within that generation, Terah lived seventy years and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, Ur of the Chaldees. Nahor begat Lot,

but Abram remained childless because Sarah was barren (Gen 11:26-29). The eleventh chapter of Genesis closes by saying, *“And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran”*^{NKJV} (Gen 11:30-31).

God Calls Abram

At this point, God called Abram. The call was unparalleled. *“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”*^{NKJV} (Gen 12:1-3).

Joshua later apprized the children of Israel that Terah had *“served other gods”* (Josh 24:2). We have no record of God revealing Himself to post-flood generations until Abram. Nevertheless, as soon as Abram was called, he *“departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him.”* He was seventy-five years old at the time (12:4). With dispatch he *“took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan”*^{NKJV} (12:5). Although it has become fashionable for ministers to criticize the patriarch for taking Lot and the people they had acquired, the Holy Spirit never does so.

God Appears to Abram

The first record of God “appearing” to anyone is found in Genesis 12:7. *“Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.”*^{NKJV} This was the first of at least four Divine

appearances to Abraham (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 18:1). In each of these, God made certain commitments to Abraham. They were all of an epochal nature.

1. In the first appearance God said, *“Unto thy seed will I give this land”* (12:7).
2. **The second appearance** came in the form of a vision. At this time, the Lord said to Abram, *“Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”* At that time the Lord revealed Abram’s seed would be as multitudinous as stars of the heavens. This is the occasion when Abram *“believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness.”* God also ratified His covenant with Abram over

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a sacrifice. He also unveiled the future to the patriarch. *“Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete”*^{NKJV} (Gen 15:1-16).

3. *“And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations”*^{NKJV} (17:2-4). During this **third appearance**, Abram’s name

was changed to *“Abraham.” “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”*^{NKJV} The covenant of circumcision was also established with

Abraham at this time. Sarai’s name also changed to Sarah. *“And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her”*^{NKJV} (17:1-16). This occurred twenty-five years after the Lord’s first appearance to Abraham. Then he was seventy-five, now he was one hundred years old (17:17).

4. **The fourth appearance** took place in the plains of Mamre. At this time it was confirmed that Sarah would bear a son. God also divulged to Abraham the appointed destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:1-33).

The Defeat of Chedorlaomer

On one occasion, when Chedorlaomer and a confederacy of kings soundly defeated the surrounding nations, he took *“all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.”* When word of this reached Abraham, *“he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people”* (Gen 14:14-16). When he returned from that battle, he was blessed

by Melchizedech, one of the great types of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gen 14:18-20; Heb 7:1-10).

Apart from this occasion, Abraham's association with God is his only distinction.

The First Man Called a Prophet

Abraham is the first person in Scripture who is called "a prophet" (Gen 20:7). We know from Scripture that Enoch, who lived considerably before Abraham, "prophesied" (Jude 14). However, the Word first refers to Abraham as a prophet. I gather this is because of his close association with the coming Messiah.

The First Said to Believe

The word "believe," from the Hebrew word **אמין/אמיא/h,w** (a-man) is **first** mentioned in relation to Abraham. "And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). In fact, in all of the book of Genesis, this word is used only three times. It is first used in Genesis 15:6 in reference to Abraham. It is also used in Genesis 42:20 in the account of Joseph dealing with his brother. There, the word is translated "verified." "But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die." This presents an aspect of believing, or having faith, that is also confirmed in Hebrews 11:1: namely that of persuasion or verification. The last use of this word in the book of Genesis refers to Jacob, when his sons gave him the report that Joseph was alive. "And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he **believed them not**" (Gen 45:26). Apart from these references "believing," in any of its varied forms, does not occur in the book of Genesis. This is true in every major translation of Scripture.

Genesis is the book of beginnings. While men of faith are said to have existed before Abraham (Abel–Heb 11:4, Enoch–Heb 11:5, and Noah–Heb 11:7), believing God is first related to Abraham.

So far as Scripture is concerned, Abraham is the very first person said to have "believed in the Lord."

WHY MENTION THESE THINGS?

Why take the time to introduce Abraham? There is a good reason for doing so. If you are familiar with the record of this patriarch, you are aware he is not known for exploits like David and Samson. He built no temple like Solomon, nor did he have an extensive kingdom like him. The things that distinguished Abraham are of no value when viewed according to the flesh.

This man is distinguished by Divine

hold of justification.

OUR FATHER

"Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh . . ." Other versions read "Abraham, our forefather,"^{RSV,NASB,NIV} and "Abraham our ancestor."^{NRSV} The phrase "pertaining to," or "according to" "the flesh" has two possible meanings. First, it can mean from his personal viewpoint. It would be like saying, "What was Abraham's personal experience?" Second, "pertaining to the flesh" can refer to the word "father." In my judgment, this is the preferred meaning, as brought out by the other translations: "our forefather according to the flesh," and "our ancestor according to the flesh."

Genesis is the book of beginnings. While men of faith are said to have existed before Abraham (Abel–Heb 11:4, Enoch–Heb 11:5, and Noah–Heb 11:7), believing God is first related to Abraham. So far as Scripture is concerned, Abraham is the very first person said to have "believed in the Lord."

Primarily, this accents Abraham being the father of the Jewish nation, which sprang from him. God promised, "And I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen 12:2). And again, "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" (Gen 13:16). Once the Lord said, "Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation" (Gen 18:18). Zachariah recognized Abraham as the father of the Jewish nation (Lk 1:73), as well as Stephen (Acts 7:2), and the Lord Jesus Himself (John 8:56).

Not Limited to Israel

The fatherhood of Abraham is not limited to Israel. He is also a father to those "who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham," as stated in Romans 4:12. Verse sixteen of this chapter sums up the matter by saying Abraham "is the father of us all" – i.e., those who believe in Jesus.

In Christ Jesus, we become Abraham's "seed," or offspring, and are thus qualified to receive the promises made to him. This is expressly stated in Galatians 3:29. "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." This is an especially pungent thought. Verse sixteen of the third chapter of Galatians sets the stage for this statement. "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as

appearances and believing God. Aside from his defeat of Chedorlaomer and the five kings with him, we are at a loss to show anything great in the eyes of men accomplished by Abraham. His record is carefully set before us in such a manner as to leave us thinking about his faith. His background is not notable like of Moses. His childhood is not distinguished like that of king Josiah.

That is, indeed, the point of this text! Before God, faith distinguishes men, not works! Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). This section of Romans will establish the superiority and indispensability of faith in the matter of salvation. There will be no justification without faith. It has a value of its own, and towers over all other benefits. Faith is the heart of spiritual life. It alone can take

of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ.^{ⁿᵏᵏᵛ} After establishing the singularity of Abraham's "Seed," affirming it to be Christ, the Spirit declares that those in Christ are "Abraham's seed." They are, in fact, joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17).

It was in this sense that Jesus was identified with humanity. Rising into heavenly places, the Holy Spirit speaks of the incarnation of Christ in this manner. "For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb 2:16). The NKJV, and other contemporary versions, read, "For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham." Here Christ's birth is viewed from the standpoint of its effects. The benefits of His life, death, and intercession, are passed on to all who believe. That is a pivotal point of Scripture. Those believers are "the seed of Abraham." Others times, Christ's entrance into the world is declared in view of its purpose: "to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15), or "to take away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

There Is A Higher Genealogy

There is a higher form of human genealogy—i.e., "pertaining to the flesh." There is a pedigree that can be traced back to Abraham, making him our father.

To put it another way, there is a faith experienced today that is precisely like that found in Abraham. Thus, it is said of Abraham, "that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also" (Rom 4:11). Whether Jew or Gentile, therefore, Abraham, is the father of those who believe on Christ Jesus. The type of faith that justifies is first seen in Abraham.

Faith is personal, but it is not unique to the individual. True faith is common among those possessing it, having the

When, therefore, we marvel at the faith of Abraham, let us not forget that this is the same faith we have in Christ Jesus. Abraham's faith was not extraordinary, leaving your faith to be ordinary. Faith itself is extraordinary, and all who possess it are extraordinarily blessed by God. In Scripture, believing is never considered ordinary. It is always blessed of God, and those who believe are declared to be accepted by God.

In declaring justification by faith, therefore, the Holy Spirit takes us back to Abraham. In Abraham, the kind of faith

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same essential qualities. Paul referred to it as a "common faith," or "the faith we share"^{ⁿᵏᵏᵛ} (Tit 1:4). Peter called it "like precious faith," or "a faith of equal standing with ours"^{ⁿᵏᵏᵛ} (2 Pet 1:1). It is, in a very real sense, "the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all" (Rom 4:16).

that saves is first seen. The Spirit will show us that faith has connected us with Abraham, and with the promises made to him. It has made you unique, just as surely as it did Abraham. Faith always elevates the one possessing it, bring the blessing and commendation of God.

THE CONCEPT OF FINDING

"^{1c} "What shall we say then that Abraham our father . . . **has found** . . ." Other versions read, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, **discovered** in this matter?"^{ⁿᵏᵏᵛ} "What then are we to say was **gained** by Abraham . . ." ^{ⁿᵏᵏᵛ} "What were his **experiences** concerning this question of being saved by faith?" ^{ⁿᵏᵏᵛ} The word "found" is translated from the Greek word εὑρηκέναι. The word means to find after a deliberate search. It also is used to denote coming upon something for which a search was not made. The meaning here is "to experience for oneself, or obtain."^{Robertson} It is not an intellectual word, but a heart-word, speaking of taking hold of something, as compared with simply coming to know about it. The

question can be stated this way. "What was Abraham's experience in this matter of justification?" Or, "What was realized by Abraham?" Or, "What did Abraham come to appropriate?" Stated yet another way, our text means "As a man, what advantage has Abraham obtained?" we will find it was not in any exploits he performed, or in any fleshly distinction. His advantage will be seen in what he found by believing.

REALITY THAT ALREADY EXISTS

Scriptural *finding* assumes the existence of the reality BEFORE it is actually found. This is particularly relevant in the consideration of appropriating the righteousness of God, or being justified. Righteousness, in this

case, is not a condition that is developed, but one that is found. "Finding," in this case, equates to receiving, or appropriating from God.

Jesus portrayed the Kingdom of God, which is necessarily wed to God's righteousness (Matt 6:33), as something to be "found." It is like a treasure hidden by God within in a field, waiting to be "found" (Matt 13:44). It is also like a superior pearl of great price, to be "found" by the earnest inquirer (Matt 15:45-46). Everything we need for justification is already in place. It only needs to be received by faith. Further, faith, or believing in the Lord, always moves the individual to obey. Faith is never disobedient! Faith itself never draws back

or withholds from God. Disobedience is always the offspring of unbelief.

A KEEN INTEREST

“Finding” also assumes a keen interest on the part of the finder. Once the heart is persuaded of the reality in question, it will engage in a fervent quest to obtain it. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to compel earnest seeking on the part of the one possessing it. For this reason, an unqualified promise is given to

all who seek. *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened”* (Matt 7:7-8). How the hungry soul needs that blessed promise!

It is axiomatic, or goes without saying, that once the heart is convinced of the promises of God, the individual will enter into a zealous effort to obtain them.

All reluctance to obey the Lord comes from a failure to believe Him.

This is precisely why Abraham “found” the blessing of the Lord. Once the Lord had revealed Himself to Abraham, the patriarch is noted for his involvement with and obedience to the Lord. Everything else about him is incidental to that fact. Remove the consideration of God and His righteousness and Abraham loses all distinction among men.

IF ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY WORKS

“2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.” At this point we enter into a most controversial text of Scripture. The controversy, however, is not driven by the text itself, but by the traditions of men with which it conflicts. It is never wrong to say things precisely as God says them. Equally true, it is never right to adopt a theological position that does not allow the individual to accept God’s word as it stands. Men may say there is a requirement to blend the various texts of Scripture on a given subject. And, indeed, there are some matters in which this is true, such as morality and human response. **But when it comes to the foundation upon which faith is built, there is no blending, or combining of thoughts.**

There is a vast difference between developing the implications of the foundation, as James did, and the laying of the foundation itself. In our text, the foundation is being placed before us—the BASIS upon which Divine acceptance is realized. The implications of being upon that foundation will be expounded in chapters six, seven, and eight.

If one imagines there is a conflict between James and Paul, that imagination will be dissipated in those chapters. Paul affirms the necessity of obedience with a power that makes James’ reasoning sound almost

elementary. This by no means denigrates James, who wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. But James’ purpose was different. He was correcting hypocrites, showing how pointless their profession was. Paul is confirming the saints, unveiling the role and power of their faith.

Lest we miss the point, there does appear to be a conflict between James and Paul, even though such does not really exist. James says, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had*

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offered Isaac his son upon the altar?” (James 2:21). Our text is going to dogmatically affirm that is NOT the case. James does not question that Abraham’s justification took place before the offering of Isaac. He refers to precisely the same passage as our text. *“Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness”* (James 2:23). His point is that faith compelled Abraham to obey, regardless of the largeness of the demand. The obedience of the patriarch confirmed

his faith. Where obedience is not rendered faith is not real, but is feigned. *“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone . . . But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:17,20,26). **Faith without works is no more “faith” than a dead body is a person.**

JUSTIFIED BY WORKS?

By saying *“If Abraham was justified by works,”* the Spirit is not suggesting the possibility of such a thing. In fact, He will overthrow such a notion by Divine affirmation and strong arguments.

“Works,” in this case, are not the response of faith. They are not the *“good works”* for which we have been created in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10). Strictly speaking, they are not the *“good works”* for which faith makes us *“zealous”* (Tit 2:14), but those that are independent of faith.

These are *“works”* that **precede** Divine acceptance, or experiencing the conferment of righteousness. They are *“works”* that are thought to be the means of becoming righteous.

These are *“works”* proceeding from *“the flesh,”* whether moral or ceremonial (like those commanded under the Law). They are *“works”* resulting from a fleshly pedigree, human discipline, or any result of purely human ingenuity. They are

“works” wrought without God, apart from Divine influence, and in the energy of the Adamic nature. They are the kind of “works” beheld in the remarkable achievements of Nebuchadnezzar. Remember his words? *“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”* (Dan 4:33).

But the “works” of reference are not limited to tangible projects like cities and buildings. They also include wisdom, scholarship, and keen philosophy and reasoning. As it is written, *“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe”*^{NIV} (1 Cor 1:20-21).

There is no room before the Lord for any work or achievement of men that was wrought independently of Him. Rather, as Jesus said, *“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God”*^{NIV} (John 3:21). Such works will never be the basis for human boasting. That is precisely why our Lord said those who do them *“come into the light,”* acknowledging it is God who *“works in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13).

A Reason for Self Confidence?

No man has reason for confidence in himself. However, let us suppose that Abraham was, in the sense of our text, *“justified by works.”* Which ones would be included? What is said of Abraham BEFORE God appeared unto him? What works had he accomplished, and what confidence could he have in such?

The Scriptural record is given in order to establish our faith and reveal to us the mind of the Lord. What does this record have to say about Abraham

BEFORE God confronted him?

1. Terah, who *“served other gods,”* was his father (Gen 11:26).
2. Nahor and Haran were his brothers, and Lot his nephew (Gen 11:27).
3. He took Sarai as his wife, who was barren (Gen 11:29-30).
4. He left Ur of the Chaldees with his father, his wife, and Lot, to go to the land of Canaan. God’s call to him came **after** this departure (Gen 12:1-4). Some have concluded it came before this, due to the wording of Genesis 12:1: i.e., *“Now the Lord HAD said . . .”* However, nothing in the text suggests this call came prior to him leaving Ur of the Chaldees with his father.

This is the sum total of our knowledge of Abraham prior to his call from God. It is evident there is nothing there in which Abraham could boast. God has revealed the life of this patriarch to make this abundantly evident to us.

The Lord will not allow us to think in this way—not even in a theoretical manner. “NOT before God!” If boasting is legitimate, it must be allowed before God. If it is not allowed before God, it cannot be lawful, for God always allows what is right before Him.

If Abraham was justified by works, he would have a basis for making a boast: *“he has something to boast about.”*^{NKJV} The truth of the matter, however, is that there is not a record of a single work done by Abraham before he was justified—not a single one! We know more about the life of obscure Cornelius before he was justified than we do of Abraham’s (Acts 10:1-2). Yet, Cornelius is not the father of us all, nor is his justification set before us as the supreme example. He is not our father, in any sense. Our father, according to the

faith, is Abraham, and he is the revealed pattern of justification.

BUT NOT BEFORE GOD

The Holy Spirit is dogmatic on this point. Though glorying in ones own achievement may appear legitimate from every earthly vantage point, it is not allowed before God. The Lord will not allow us to think in this way—not even in a theoretical manner. **“NOT before God!”** If boasting is legitimate, it must be allowed before God. If it is not allowed before God, it cannot be lawful, for God always allows what is right before Him.

The Divine nature will not allow fallen beings to boast in His presence. Salvation, or being justified, is so ordered by the Lord as to exclude boasting. As it is written, *“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”*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 1:27-30). It is not that such boasting is not advisable, but that it is impossible!

Legitimate boasting, or glorying, can only be *“in the Lord.”* We are saved in such a way as to shut us up to that alternative. *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Cor 1:30-31). God will not allow men to glory in anything or anyone but Himself.

A religion that permits men to glory in their own works, whether it be an individual or a movement, is not from God. Neither, indeed, is a purported gospel from God if it leaves those embracing in it glorying in men or having confidence in the flesh.

A SUMMATION OF THE VERSE

With the foregoing comments in

mind, this verse affirms that justification is NOT by works. The question posed does not suggest Abraham could have been justified by works—not even in the eyes of men. The answer, “*But not before God,*” applies to the whole of the sentence. Not just the part referring to glorying. The idea is that before God Abraham was NOT justified by works, and thus could

being able to trace their religion to patriarchs of the past. John the Baptist said to Pharisees and Sadducees, “*And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham*” (Matt 3:9). Hear the Jews say to Jesus, “*We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in*

If God will not allow men to boast in tracing themselves back to Abraham, who was His “*friend,*” what will He say to those who glory in a Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Campbell, or even some lesser luminary? If it was vain and contemptible to boast in being a Jew, how much more is it abhorrent to glory in being a Reformationist, Restorationist, Adventist, or some other movement? We do not deny that many good things were given to the sons of men through these men and movements. However, they are not ground for boasting. It is what “*the Lord hath wrought*” that is the only ground for glorying (Isa 26:12). That is not simply a tenet of the faith. It is a truth that must be received and confessed by the people of God.

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not glory before God in such.

If there is a single trait of corrupt religion that is particularly reprehensible, it is its lack of glorying in the Lord. The Jews of old were not the last ones to glory in their heritage, and make a boast in

bondage to any man” (John 8:33). Indeed, they were technically correct. As Jesus replied to them, “*I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you*” (John 8:37). They had external credentials, but no inward ones.

The apprehension of this reality is what causes praise to issue forth from the saints of God. As it is written, “*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*” (Heb 13:15). There is no theological position that can produce such a sacrifice of praise.

WHAT DOES THE SCRIPTURE SAY?

“*3 For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” In order to buttress his argument, the Apostle to the Gentiles appeals to the Scripture. He has reasoned with us, but will not leave us with reasoning alone. **Sound reasoning must begin and end with Divine affirmation.** Holy men of God through whom God gave us His Word (2 Pet 1:21) never fastened their thoughts with human illustrations, oratory, or other forms of human wisdom. They fastened their teaching with the nail of Scripture—a “*thus saith the Lord.*”

For many, the acid test of truth is whether or not it harmonizes with a preconceived theological position. For others, the touchstone is what they have been taught from their youth. For others, the measure is the fleshly ability of the speaker. However, there is no substitute for the Word of God.

When Israel was faced with the impressive words of spiritual mediums who claimed supernatural powers, they were told to resort to the Word. “*And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*” (Isa 8:19-20). This word is still true! If the message we hear, regardless of the speaker, is not “*according to this Word,*” it is because the speaker is in darkness.

You will find a remarkable consistency in this matter. David, the Prophets, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the Apostles, and other Scriptural writers, **ALWAYS** spoke in harmony with the Scriptures. They cared nothing for being at variance with the traditions of

men, but they consistently honored the Word of God. Thus our text asks, “*For what does the Scripture say?*”

SCRIPTURE SPEAKS

Because the Word of God is living and powerful, Scripture is said to “*speak.*” There are some who seek to distinguish between Scripture and the Word of God. Such positions reveal a level of ignorance that is altogether unacceptable.

The Word of God and Scripture

During the days of king Josiah, they discovered “*the book of the law in the house of the Lord.*” After due consideration of this wonderful discovery, the king commanded certain men to inquire of the Lord concerning the matter. In his decree he said, “*because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book*” (2 Chron 34:21). The Word and the book are thus equated.

Jesus also equated Scripture with the Word of God. *“If He called them gods, unto whom the **word of God** came, and **the scripture cannot be broken**”* (John 10:35).

It should not be necessary to further establish this fact. We are called to consider the Scripture—what is written. Scripture *“speaks”* to us because it is vitalized by the Holy Spirit. Thus we read, *“So the Scripture was fulfilled **which says . . . And again another Scripture says . . . For the Scripture says to Pharaoh . . . For the Scripture says . . . Or do you not know what the Scripture says . . . Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? . . . For the Scripture says . . . Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain**”* (Mk 15:28; John 19:24,37; Rom 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; Gal 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18; James 4:5).

The point in all of these, and similar, texts is that the authority was in the Scripture itself. What was written carried all of the power of an utterance from heaven. Sixty-seven times, the New Testament Scriptures say *“It is written”* (Matt 2:5; 4:4,7,10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24,31; Mk 1:2; 7:6; 9:13; 14:21,27; Lk 2:23; 3:4; 4:4,8; Lk 7:27; 10:26; 10:26; 19:46; 20:17; 22:37; 24:46; 6:31,45; 12:14; 15:25; Acts 1:20; 7:42; 15:15; 23:5; Rom 1:17; 2:24; 3:4,10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13,33; 10:15; 11:8,26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3,9,21; 1 Cor 1:19,31; 2:9; 3:19; 4:6; 9:9,10; 10:7; 14:21; 15:45,54; 2 Cor 4:13; ; 8:15; 9:9; Gal 3:10,13; 4:22; Heb 10:7; 1 Pet 1:16).

What is *“written”* is not open to question. It has sufficient power to repel the advances of Satan and thoroughly equip the saints. The *“Scriptures”* are the Divine repository by which the validation of every message purporting to be from God is to be tested. Those who test sayings by Scripture are acknowledged by heaven as being noble in that endeavor. As it is written of the Bereans, *“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether*

those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture Must Have Integrity

All of this assumes the absolute integrity of the Scriptures. If they are not reliable, we are cast upon the sea of human opinion with neither sail nor oar.

All of this may seem very apparent—at least to faith. Thus some might consider it useless to make such a point. We are, however, living in a time when the integrity of Scripture is being questioned by those who claim identity

portions, of Scripture, based upon human analysis. An inordinate value was placed upon original manuscripts, and men felt free to sit in judgment on what was written.

However innocent all of this may appear, it has resulted in a near disdain for the Word of God in many circles. With alarming confidence, any portion of Scripture that clashes with preconceived notions can be dismissed. Plausible explanations are offered, ranging from language considerations, to social customs

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with Christ Jesus.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, a movement began referred to as “the enlightenment,” or ‘the age of reason.’ It was a reaction against the powerful effects of the Reformation movement, which had exalted Divine reasoning above that of men. This movement was “committed to secular views based on reason or human understanding only, which they hoped would provide a basis for beneficial changes affecting every area of life and thought.”^{Grolliers Encyclopedia} It was not a godly movement, and “emphasized the right to self-expression and human fulfillment, the right to think freely and express one’s views publicly without censorship or fear of repression.”^{Grolliers}

The approach to Scripture was greatly impacted by this misnamed “age of reason.” Higher criticism was introduced during this time. This was an approach to Scripture that allowed men to accept or reject statements, and even

and variant manuscript readings.

However you choose to approach the Scripture, it must leave you free to accept its statements without question or modification. If this is not done, the words *“The Scripture says,”* or the question, *“what does the Scripture say?”* carry no weight. To me, it is inconceivable that the massive and complex universe in which we reside could be maintained by the Word of Christ’s power (Heb 1:3), yet His Word has become distorted and untrustworthy. It is utterly foolish to imagine we can acknowledge we live in a world that is strictly maintained by Christ, yet cannot rely unquestionably upon His Word, by which we live.

When, therefore, we read *“For what does the Scripture say?”* let us prepare to accept it without question. Refuse to allow doubt to enter your thinking. Let us determine to shape out thinking by its affirmations. If we will believe it, Scripture will confirm the truth to us. Then we will gain confidence before God.

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD

“³ For what does the Scripture say? | ‘Abraham believed God, and it was | accounted to him for righteousness.’”

Here is a most arresting statement. The *“Scripture”* says this in Genesis 15:6. This was the second time the Lord appeared to Abraham. On this occasion, *“the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision.”* This occurred approximately twenty-five years after the Lord’s initial appearance to the patriarch (Gen 12). In the vision extensive revelation was given to Abraham—revelation that far exceeded the things made known in the Lord’s first appearance. In the beginning the Lord said, *“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 12:2-3). Now, twenty-five years later, much more is made known.

1. Abraham was told not to fear (Gen 15:1a)
2. God was Abraham’s *“Shield”* (15:1a).
3. God was Abraham’s *“exceeding great Reward”*(15:1b).
4. Abraham’s heir would come from his own body (15:4).
5. God would make his descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens (15:5).
6. God revealed Abraham’s descendants would be in a strange land as servants for four hundred years (15:13).
7. God would judge the nation served by Abraham’s progeny (15:14a).
8. He revealed Abraham’s seed would come out of the foreign land *“with great possessions”*(15:14b).
9. Abraham would live long and be buried in a *“good old age”*(15:15).
10. In the fourth generation, Abraham’s descendants would return to Canaan (15:16a).
11. The Amorites, then in Canaan, would not yet be judged, because their *“iniquity”* was *“not yet complete”* (15:16b).
12. God made a covenant with Abraham, to give the land of Canaan to his descendants (15:18a).
13. The borders of the promised land were specified (15:18b).
14. Ten nations would be dispossessed of the promised land (15:19-21).

This was a remarkable revelation in both nature and extent. What would Abraham’s response be? At very beginning of the vision, Abraham confessed he remained childless, and had been given no heir. This appeared to contradict the promise. He had even asked God to let the steward of his household, Eliezer, be appointed as his heir (15:2-3).

God said this would not be the case. Abraham would have offspring—not one or a few, but a multitude that could not be numbered. The circumstance of the patriarch conflicted with this promise. Every facet of human wisdom rejected the

God said this would not be the case. Abraham would have offspring—not one or a few, but a multitude that could not be numbered. The circumstance of the patriarch conflicted with this promise. Every facet of human wisdom rejected the possibility of such a thing. The whole course of nature could allow no such fulfillment.

possibility of such a thing. The whole course of nature could allow no such fulfillment.

What will Abraham do? Will he ask further questions? Will he shrink back in unbelief? Will he appeal to statistics and the laws of probability? Will he continue to bring up his childless condition, the barrenness of his wife, and even his older age? Will he think like the churchmen of our day?

Ponder for a moment the age in which Abraham lived. He did not have a Bible. He possessed no Scripture replete with faith-building examples, or Divine promises to nourish the soul. There were no kindred prophets who could substantiate the Word of the Lord. There were not a multiplicity of counselors on

whom, he could rely. There is not a shred of human knowledge, wisdom, or example that can strengthen the promise of the Lord. The commitment of God went beyond the perimeter of human understanding, and higher than the range of man’s powers of reason.

Now comes the edifying proclamation. *“And he believed in the LORD!”* Faith was equal to the occasion. It could take hold of a word wholly unsupported by anything in this world or the natural man. The promise was too big for reason, but not for faith. It would have crushed emotion, yet caused faith to rise in a man to whom little had been revealed before.

Abraham did not require an orientation course. He did not have to learn to believe, or be tutored in trusting. *“He believed in the Lord.”* He reckoned on the Lord’s ability, not his own.

The Circumstances

A promise of this magnitude had never been given before. There were no prior works of God that could confirm the probability of nations coming from an old man with a barren wife. Prior to this, a righteous man had been murdered by a child of the devil. An entire world had been cursed, with only eight souls surviving. A global effort to build a tower that reached into heaven had been dashed to the ground in Divine judgment. A holy nation did not exist. An inspired book had not been written. There was no record of signs and wonders. Idolatry was prevalent—even in his own family.

In spite of all of this, Abraham *“Believed in the Lord!”* His faith reached up, and anchored itself in the God of heaven. God said it, Abraham believed it.

THE RELATION OF PROMISE TO FAITH

There is no record of anyone believing God until a promise was given. Our text refers to the very first record of such believing. Abraham did not decide what he wanted to do, then believe God for the fulfillment of it. There is altogether too

much of this kind of thinking today. While it is true, *“All things are possible him that believeth”* (Mark 9:23), believing is never more possible than when God delivers a promise.

of lions” (Heb 11:33).

It is by means of God’s *“exceeding great and precious promises”* that we become *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). That very text is preceded by

The people of God need to hear the promises of God. It is essential that faith be nourished by Divine commitments! It is not enough to command people to believe, they must be given a promise to believe—a word from the Lord of glory! It is no wonder that faith is so sparse in our day. It is a time when the people of God are being served intellectual trivia, current events, and religious novelties.

Is it not written, *“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (Heb 6:12). And again, *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son”* (Heb 11:17). And again, *“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths*

a reminder that we have *“obtained like precious faith”* (2 Pet 1:1). That faith feeds upon the promises of God, just as surely as Abraham did.

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wonder that faith is so sparse in our day. It is a time when the people of God are being served intellectual trivia, current events, and religious novelties. Faith shrivels in an environment like that! Trust cannot be nourished by demands, and *“unfeigned faith”* cannot rise under the sound of law.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

It is one thing to read about Abraham, it is quite another to become identified with him—to be his *“seed.”* Do you *“believe God,”* or *“believe in God?”* God has made certain commitments that pertain to you. You can respond to them in a way that fulfills the word of Jesus. *“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham”* (John 8:39).

If you sense a beginning of faith in your soul, yet lack confidence, thinking you are unequal to the demands of faith, be encouraged to present your case to the Lord. *“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”* (Mark 9:24). Take Abraham as your example. He believed God and was blessed. You will be also. God always honors faith.

FAITH COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“³ For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’” Other versions read, *“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,”*^{NIV} *“AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,”*^{NASB} *“And Abraham had faith in God, and it was put to his account as righteousness,”*^{BBE} *“Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous.”*^{NLT}

The word *“accounted,”* or credited, is a word of exchange. Literally, it means “to take an inventory, and give an estimate,” to “conclude,” “esteem,” or “impute.”^{Strong’s} It has the idea of sharing or crediting someone’s account, and to give an official evaluation of the thing reviewed. To “account to” or “credit” someone, is to take something belonging to another, and give it to one who has none of that

commodity himself.

THE WEIGHT OF THE CONSIDERATION

This Text must not be viewed as a mere historical event, or as the statement of an official theological position. We have already been told that the Gospel announces a righteousness from God that is realized by faith (Rom 1:16-17). What is more, this righteousness is needed. In fact, no person can be received by God without possessing it.

To accentuate the human dilemma, the Gospel affirms *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”* (Rom 1:18). This cannot be averted. It will happen! The only hope is to be moved out of the category of *“unrighteous,”* for it is not possible for the unrighteous to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). These are circumstances that are cast in stone, so to

speak, and cannot be changed. They involve the very character of God, who *“cannot deny Himself”* (2 Tim 2:13).

To further complicate the matter, lest any person imagine they have managed to achieve righteousness, it is written, *“There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom 3:10-12). This is man in his natural state, with nothing more than resources obtained from Adam. It is man in the unregenerated state—under the *“power of darkness”* from which he must be *“delivered.”* This is the person who has not been *“translated”* into the kingdom of God’s *“dear Son”* (Col 1:13). It is the one who has not been *“washed,” “sanctified,”* or *“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”* (1

Cor 6:10).

Within this category of people there is not one righteous person! All such people are “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12).

Given this context, the sensitive of heart become keenly interested when they hear about Abraham being reckoned righteous! Such a person knows righteousness is imperative, and that they are not capable of producing a righteousness of their own. To hear about a righteousness that is given is, therefore, a glad sound. Further, to hear that it is the very righteousness of God causes the heart to leap with joy.

NOT A MERE FORMALITY

The righteousness of reference is not ceremonial, or a mere formality. God did not simply CALL Abraham righteous, while he remained in an unrighteous condition. Although there are people who view righteousness in this manner, it is the height of absurdity to do so. God does not accept people by pretending they are righteous. His character will not allow such a thing. The righteousness reckoned to Abraham was real, and stood the test of Divine scrutiny. Even when the most exacting commands were given to Abraham, he obeyed without hesitation. His obedience was the result of having righteousness credited him.

WHAT IS THE “IT”?

What is the “it” that is mentioned? “Abraham believed God, and **IT** was counted unto him for righteousness.” The next verse will clarify that “it” is the faith Abraham possessed—the fact that he “believed God.” Thus we read, “his faith is accounted for righteousness” (4:5).

Herein is a marvelous thing! God regards faith as righteousness itself. Believing God outweighs all of our sins,

and removes all of our guilt and uncleanness. That is why it is written, “and by Him everyone who believes is **justified from all things** from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). That is another way of saying “accounted righteous,” for being justified is the same as being made righteous.

Because this truth is expounded extensively in the next few verses, it will suffice to just touch upon it here. Reliance upon, or trust in, the Lord compensates

to Abraham as righteousness.

God took inventory, so to speak, of Abraham. He evaluated him, scrutinizing his person with His omniscient eye. When He saw faith in Abraham, and took note that the patriarch believed Him, he wrote “**righteous**” upon Abraham’s person. That is what our text says, and that is what it means.

The dominating thing that Abraham did was believe God. That is what changed his status, and made him acceptable to God. The fact that he did not

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for the alienating consequences of sin. This is because faith is actually a greater accomplishment than all of the exploits of men. To believe God is not natural! To trust Him requires resources men do not have by nature. While men can intellectually assent to the fact of God, and conclude from His creation that He exists and is powerful, that is not sufficient to save the soul. If it is “*the work of God that you believe in Him whom he sent*” (John 6:29), believing cannot be a mere exercise of the intellect.

The Scriptures declare the grace of our Lord is “*exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 1:14). While believing God involves the human will, it involves more than the human will. Those who believe are said to have “*believed through grace*” (Acts 18:27). Faith is “*obtained*” (2 Pet 1:1), and it is “*given*” to us to believe (Phil 1:29). To be sure, whatever God gives must be received and acted upon. But it was faith itself—believing God—that was accounted

stagger at God’s promise, and obeyed God’s commands, confirmed that he was, in fact, righteous. His faith had made him so, and his works proved that was true.

A FINAL WORD

One final word on this passage. The text of reference (Gen 15:6) is also mentioned in Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23. The fourth chapter of Romans reasons extensively on this passage, confirming its centrality in understanding the salvation of God. This is not a tangential doctrine, but a foundational one. It must move us to place a high value on believing God. If God regards believing Him so highly, what can be said of the person who regards believing as elementary, or a mere initial step in appropriating the salvation of God? Let it be clear that **men cannot be blessed by God while placing a low priority on a response He honors above all other reactions to His word.** That response is believing God—taking Him at his word, and moving out upon it.

GRACE VERSUS DEBT

“⁴ **Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.**” Other versions read, “Now to

him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt,”^{KJV} “Now to the one who works, his wage is not

reckoned as a favor, but as what is due,”^{NASB} “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift,

but as an obligation,^{ANIV} “When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive,^{ANLT} and “Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due.”^{ANRSV} It should be apparent that this is a central consideration.

A FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATION

There is a fundamental consideration to be seen here. It is the background to this text. **God will NOT be placed in debt to fallen men!** This is affirmed in the eleventh chapter of Romans. “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen”^{NIV} (11:35-36). The same truth was expressed by young Elihu, whose counsel God upheld: “If you are righteous, what do you give to Him, or what does He receive from your hand?”^{NIV} (Job 35:7). God Himself supported that word by saying to Job, “Who has a claim against Me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to Me”^{NIV} (Job 41:11).

God does not honor what He does not initiate! If man renders back to God something he has not received from God, it simply is not acceptable. This is a major tenet of Scripture, and is at the root of the reasoning to which we are being exposed (Rom 4:1-4).

This is why man “*must be born again*” (John 3:3-7). It is ever true, “*The flesh profiteth nothing*” (John 6:63). If this were not the case, God would be obliged to recognize the goodness of the flesh. **Those requiring deliverance cannot boast before the One delivering them.**

Man, who comes “*short of the glory of God,*” cannot cause God to be indebted to him. If there is any legitimate difference among men, it is because of what the Lord has done. Thus it is written, “*For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*” (1 Cor 4:7). That is why Paul, after

acknowledging he had labored “*more abundantly than they all,*” said, “*yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*” (1 Cor 15:10). He was glorying in the Lord. **Salvation is arranged so as to allow only that kind of boasting.**

HIM WHO WORKS

It is again vital to understand what the Spirit means by “*him that worketh,*” or “*him who works.*”^{NKJV} Work is here compared with faith. As a basis for becoming righteous, “*work*” is the antithesis of faith. In this sense, it is not the complement of faith, but its competitor.

“*Work*” is not to be equated with obedience, for obedience is integral to faith. In fact, Jesus is said to be “*the Author of eternal salvation unto all them*

It is again vital to understand what the Spirit means by “*him that worketh,*” or “*him who works.*”^{NKJV} Work is here compared with faith. As a basis for becoming righteous, “*work*” is the antithesis of faith. In this sense, it is not the complement of faith, but its competitor.

that obey Him” (Heb 5:9). In our text, the person who “*works*” has not yet entered into God’s rest. Such imagines that entrance into Divine favor depends upon human accomplishment. Scripture speaks on this wise. “*For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*” (Heb 4:10-11). Entering into rest is here equated with salvation.

The idea of ceasing from our own works means refraining from **reliance** upon our own works. Once faith “*comes*” (Gal 3:25), however, the believer becomes a prodigious worker. That is because faith opens the channel, so to speak, for God to

work in the individual. As it is written, “*Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen*” (Heb 13:20-21). Thus, the person who is justified does not cease to work any more than God ceased to work after creating the world and the fulness thereof. What ceases is an attempt to gain Divine favor by ones own work.

By devoting ourselves to believing, we are brought to rely upon Christ’s achievements for our acceptance.

The one “*who works*” does so in the energy of the flesh, and is quite satisfied with his work. Like the vain Pharisee, he thinks himself worthy of the commendation of God. “*God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess*” (Luke 18:11-12). Such a person imagines he deserves to be called righteous. However, as long as our works are imperfect (and all of them are), they cannot be the basis for the conferment of righteousness. **You cannot receive a perfect righteousness upon the basis of imperfect works.**

Here, “*works*” have to do with appropriating salvation, not walking in the will of the Lord, or laboring in His vineyard.

THE WAGES

If, in fact, we earn justification, then God cannot give it to us freely by His grace. God would then be obliged to give us wages. However, Scripture has already affirmed that God CANNOT be put into the position of a debtor to man. When it comes to “*wages,*” such do exist. “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*”^{NKJV} (Rom 6:23). **Eternal life can only be received as a gift!**

It is to be understood that we are not deserving of the great salvation we have

received. Every believer can confess with **Jacob**, *“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant”* (Gen 32:10). If that is true of “the least of all” God’s mercies, what about the superior *“gift of righteousness”* (Rom 5:17)?

Abraham, the friend of God, once approached God in this manner. *“Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes”* (Gen 18:27). If the *“friend of God”* spoke in this manner, how ought we to speak?

Recognizing the blessing of the Lord, **David** said, *“Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?”* (2 Sam 7:18). If this could be said of the man after God owns heart, the sweet psalmist of Israel for whom, God built a house, what should we say?

Righteous **Job** stood before the Lord and said, *“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”* (Job 42:5-6). If a man described as *“perfect and upright”*

said this of himself, what can we say of ourselves?

Whatever you have received from the Lord, beginning with your justification, it has been given to you **because you have**

Grace, like faith, is contrasted with works. As it is written, *“And if by grace, then it is **no longer** of works; otherwise grace is **no longer** grace. But if it is of works, it is **no longer** grace; otherwise work is **no longer** work”* (Rom 11:6).

Whatever you have received from the Lord, beginning with your justification, it has been given to you because you have believed, not because you worked. It was a gift, not a payment! Good works proceed from faith, and are never the cause of it.

believed, not because you worked. It was a gift, not a payment! Good works proceed from faith, and are never the cause of it.

THE MARVEL OF GRACE

“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” When it comes to the imputation of righteousness, grace is not an option, but a necessity. In the Divine economy, it is impossible to receive eternal benefits upon the basis of human accomplishment. Salvation in all of its aspects is *“By grace through faith”* (Eph 2:8).

In the text just quoted, as well as the one on which I am commenting, a reward for working removes the possibility of a gift for believing. Both cannot exist simultaneously. They are mutually exclusive.

Thus, the Spirit has reasoned with us concerning our father Abraham. He has made clear to us how he was made righteous, declaring that is precisely how we are made righteous. Now salvation is within our reach.

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit has opened a thread of reasoning to us that is not common in many church circles. It is not a mere novelty, but is the very foundation of spiritual understanding. The imputation of righteousness upon the basis of faith, and *“without works,”* is a reality settled in heaven. Although the book of Romans spends considerable time expounding this truth, its power is in its affirmation. Those who communicate in the name of the Lord must have these things at the center of their proclamations. Receiving the righteousness of God through faith is a foundation upon which obedience is realized. Confidence and assurance are also attained when this truth is perceived.

Where the proclamation of this text is not known and embraced, there can be no satisfactory advancement in the faith. At some point, the heart must be able to say, *“I know whom I have believed and am*

persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim 1:12). As long, however, as a person believes Divine acceptance is the result of our works, such a frame of mind will not be realized. The very nature of the heavenly kingdom forbids *“the full assurance of understanding,”* the *“full assurance of hope,”* and *“the full assurance of faith”* until the cause of our righteousness is known (Col 2:2; Heb 6:11; 10:22).

I am going to wax bold and say the absence of spiritual confidence is directly owing to a basic ignorance of the cause and nature of salvation. Further, that unfamiliarity is the result of failing to comprehend the Gospel of Christ. *Where the Gospel is not the major thrust of preaching and teaching, faith cannot flourish.* Faith, as it is written, *“comes from what is heard, and what is heard*

comes by the preaching of Christ”^{RSV} (Rom 10:17). Nothing in the text suggests this is limited to an initial hearing of the Gospel, or the inceptive believing of the Gospel. That is precisely why Paul said to the Corinthians, *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:2). Their faith had waned, and only the hearing of the Gospel can correct that condition.

The Epistles are actually expositions of the Gospel of Christ. In them, the implications of the Gospel are declared, and the Gospel itself is reaffirmed. All of this is designed to enable the saints of God to obtain boldness to come into the presence of God, knowing they are accepted in Christ Jesus. Mercy and grace to help in the time of need cannot be appropriated if we are afraid to come to the throne of grace. What is more, we

cannot confidently approach God if we are not sure we are accepted by Him, and reckoned to be righteous.

Throughout this discourse, strong statements are made that cannot be controverted. The Spirit accents what IS, not what can be! A few of them will serve to confirm their unusual power.

1. The Gospel is God's power in order to salvation (Rom 1:16).
2. A righteousness from God is made known through the Gospel (1:17).
3. God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (1:18).
4. Eternal life will be given to everyone who, by patiently continuing in well doing, seeks for glory, honor, and immortality (2:7).
5. Those who are contentious and do not obey the truth will experience Divine indignation and wrath (2:8).
6. No one is righteous of themselves (3:10).
7. No one understands God of

themselves (3:11).

8. No one does good of themselves (3:12).
9. By the deeds of the Law, no flesh will be justified in God's sight (3:20).
10. The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus to all who believe (3:22).
11. We are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24).
12. God has set forth Jesus as a covering, or propitiation, for sin (3:25).
13. God not only justifies sinners, but is proved righteous in doing so (3:26).
14. Boasting is excluded by the law, or principle, of faith (3:27).
15. The only valid conclusion is that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the Law (3:28).
16. In this way, believers establish, rather than make void, the Law of God (3:31).
17. Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness (4:3).

All of these affirmations can be grasped by faith. None of them are mere possibilities. All of them are realities.

They bear no similarity to the approach of the Law. The Law identified what was wrong, and specified what was right. Men were then commanded to fulfill both without any deviation whatsoever. Perfect and consistent obedience would cause the doer to live. All others were cursed: "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them*" (Gal 3:10).

Thus men are faced with two alternatives. (1) Fulfill all requirements of the Law in the energy of the flesh. (2). Believe God. Which course will you take? I exhort you to throw yourself into believing God. Ponder His exceeding great and precious promises, determining to believe them "*without wavering.*" In so doing, you will be made righteous.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 13



DAVID DECLARES IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

4:5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ⁷Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." Romans 4:5-8, NKJV

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WORK (4:5a)
- II. BELIEVING ON HIM WHO JUSTIFIES (4:5b)
- III. WHEN FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (4:5c)
- IV. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN (4:6)
- V. DEEDS FORGIVEN AND SINS COVERED (4:7)
- VI. WHEN GOD REFUSES TO IMPUTE SIN (4:8)

If men are going to have confidence before God, they must know He has accepted them. It is not possible to boldly approach the Lord, or stand confidently

before His throne when doubtful about our relationship to Him. It only takes one real confrontation of the Almighty to cause vain religion to dissipate. Saul of Tarsus could not continue his mission of persecution after he encountered the living Christ! When God unveils the Lord Jesus, and He comes in all of His glory, those who fought against His people will not fight against Him. Instead they will *"hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand"* (Rev 6:15-17).

Knowing the sureness of the Lord's return in glory, and knowing that no character-change will be possible at that

time, the Spirit strives now to convince men of sin, righteousness and judgment. By illuminating the preached Gospel, He persuades the tender of heart of their sin of unbelief. He brings them to see that Jesus is the only truly righteous One, for He has ascended to the Father. He brings them to see that Satan has already been judged, and is no longer worthy of the smallest measure of obedience (John 16:8-11). Men must cease to listen to him.

CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD

Although institutional-centered religion places little emphasis upon confidence before God, this is the great thrust of Scripture. God is **not** glorified by timorous disciples who lack confidence. He has declared He will have no pleasure in the person who draws back from Him (Heb 10:39). If the salvation of God has

made provision for the “full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), what possible reason can be adduced for failing to appropriate it? How is it that men would claim to have faith, yet lack the assurance it brings?

Right here an important observation is in order. Almost without exception, those with a propensity toward legalism are sadly lacking in confidence toward God. With all of their emphasis on precision and exactness, they have failed to appropriate something without which men are placed at a decided disadvantage. With spiritual candor and great power the Holy Spirit associates us with the Son **only** if we have confidence and hope. “*But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*” (Heb 3:6).

It is certainly not my aim to sit in judgment upon people’s profession. That is an area in which we are not licensed to operate. However, it is imperative that we take hold of this word of the Spirit!

Those in Christ are “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), and “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17). They are “baptized into Christ,” and “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). God Himself has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13). We have been made “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and, like Jesus, raised by “the glory of the Father” to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Everyone in Christ is a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), has received the “earnest,” or pledge, of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). All who are in Christ are not condemned (Rom 8:1), have “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), and have been made “free from the law of sins and death” (Rom 8:2). They are in a state from which no external power can separate them, whether “death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature” (Rom 8:38-39). God is working “all things together for their good” (Rom 8:28),

continuing to “perform” the work begun in them “until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). The Father has not only put them into Christ, but has made Christ to be unto them “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). All believers have access to the Father through the Spirit (Eph 2:18), and free access to needed grace (Eph 3:12).

Not Mere Technicalities

These things are not mere technicalities to be debated in schools of theology. Nor, indeed, are they intended to be a means of dividing the body of

Almost without exception, those with a propensity toward legalism are sadly lacking in confidence toward God. With all of their emphasis on precision and exactness, they have failed to appropriate something without which men are placed at a decided disadvantage.

Christ into various systems of regimented thought. All of them are experiences—spiritual experiences. They are deeper and more profound than any bodily experiences. They have an impact upon the human spirit, and produce all manner of spiritual fruitage within.

It is inconceivable that such things could occur without those receiving them knowing it. If a woman healed of an issue of blood could know “what was done in her” (Mk 5:33), ought not deeper experiences of the soul and spirit also be known to the individual?

The truth of the matter is that all people brought into Christ had a profound knowledge that something great has occurred to them. Thus those who were converted on Pentecost continued “daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and

having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46-47). When the city of Samaria had given heed to the word preached by Philip, it is written, “*And there was great joy in that city*” (Acts 8:8). Following his baptism, the Ethiopian eunuch “went on his way rejoicing,” without Philip or any fellow believer (Acts 8:39). After responding to the Gospel, the Philippian jailor brought Paul and Silas “into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:34).

This is a consistent pattern throughout Scripture. The conversion of the Ephesians is described in this manner. “*Christ, in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise*” (Eph 1:13). It is said of the Thessalonians, “*For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance*” (1 Thess 1:5).

Why Say This?

There is a real need to say these things. **No child of God begins with doubt and fear.** That is simply not how the new birth is accomplished. Were that the case, joy would not attend conversion—but it does, and consistently so! The new convert may not be able perceive or explain the magnitude of salvation, but there is no question about its reality. That is why partaking of Christ is associated with “*the BEGINNING of our confidence*” (Heb 3:14), as well as “*confidence and rejoicing*” (Heb 6:11).

Lifeless religion has robbed people of this confidence. Without exception, as soon as the heart and mind are diverted to theological wrangling, ones status with God becomes unsure. Systematized theology too often robs the soul, taking joy and confidence from it, and replacing them with doubt and stern judgmentalism.

This Makes the Teaching Imperative

These unfortunate conditions are not unique to our time. Early in the history of the church, subverting teachers arose, injecting legalism and variant teachings. As a result, the souls of men became emaciated, confidence waned, and a distance began to form between the people and the Savior who had delivered them.

deliverance through Jesus. That is one of the resounding arguments for regular participation at the Lord's table.

WHAT THE SPIRIT IS DOING

In our text, the Holy Spirit is fortifying assurance and confidence. He is doing this because the rigors of the faith-life require the strong presence of assurance. The person who runs

They have missed the purpose of the words, and their miserable theology confirms this to be the case.

Our text is showing the BASIS of our acceptance by God, and the REASON for Jesus receiving us to the glory of God (Rom 15:7). This passage is not defining the various aspects of obedience, nor is it intended to outline every facet of our acceptance of Christ Jesus. The wording of the text should confirm to your heart that this is not the presentation of a facet of our salvation, but its foundation. We are dealing with the root of redemption, not its branches or fruit.

In this matter, the Spirit will separate believing from working. It is folly to attempt to unite the two when dealing with the BASIS of our acceptance. While it is true that faith and works go together, it is not at the primary level, where we build upon the foundation. It is essential that we understand this critical distinction. Your confidence can never rest in what you have done, even when it is absolutely correct and has been driven by faith. Confidence, like faith, must reside in the Lord of glory Himself. The teaching of this passage is designed to produce that kind of confidence.

It is to be understood that God cannot be confidently approached where assurance is lacking. Nor, indeed, can Satan be effectively and consistently resisted where confidence lies wounded in the legal vestibule. The soul MUST be refurbished and strengthened with the knowledge of its acceptance in Christ Jesus!

It is to be understood that God cannot be confidently approached where assurance is lacking. Nor, indeed, can Satan be effectively and consistently resisted where confidence lies wounded in the legal vestibule. The soul MUST be refurbished and strengthened with the knowledge of its acceptance in Christ Jesus! The redeemed must not allow themselves to get beyond the sound of the Gospel, or the recollection of their

"*uncertainly*" is not likely to finish the race (1 Cor 9:26).

We will read some strong statements in our text. They are affirmations that have spawned debates among men—but that is not their purpose. Those who read these statements, then dash through the Word of God, combining them with other texts in order to build a convenient theological system, are in serious error.

THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WORK

^{4:5a} **But to him who does not work...** "The text means precisely what it says, and is consistently translated in every version. *Worketh not*, ^{KJV} "without works", ^{NRSV} "without working", ^{BBE} "is not working", ^{NLT} "not because of their work." ^{NLT} A literal translation would read "but not to him that works."

A FOUNDATIONAL AFFIRMATION

This is a statement of **depth**, not of breadth. If the breadth of salvation was the consideration, the Spirit may very well have reminded us that Jesus is the "Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb 5:9). Our text is affirming the **basis** of salvation, not its scope. If this was a view of the scope of salvation, mention might well have been

made of how we have been "*ordained*" to walk in "*good works*" (Eph 2:10). Here is an expression of **cause**, not effect. The necessary effects of salvation include the holy life (Heb 12:14), crucifixion of the flesh (Gal 5:24), and fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12).

Where "Works" Have No Place

There is an aspect of salvation in which "*works*" have no place. This is not true of the whole of salvation, but of its foundation, which is the point of this passage. We must refrain from any attempt to neutralize this text by showing the importance of obedience and righteous deeds. Those matters will be addressed with great power in chapters six through eight. In that section, the Spirit will make

no provision whatsoever for the mind or works of the flesh.

If one fails to grasp the significance of the passage before us, the following teaching on sanctification will be too strong, and will cause the heart to faint. On the other hand, receiving the truth of this passage will fortify the soul with spiritual strength. It will put a solid rock under human effort, and provide an anchor for the soul.

Not Simply An Effort to be Good

The "*works*" of reference are not simply efforts to be good, as ordinarily conceived. This reference has strict regard to efforts to appropriate righteousness. God does not permit men to develop their

own definitions of righteousness. In summation, the Law defined uprightness in this way. *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”* (Matt 22:37-40).

As used in our text, *“works”* are the perfect fulfillment of a primary love for God, and a consequent love for our fellow man. *“Works”* include all of the ramifications of that *“love.”* That is why *“love is the fulfilling of the law”* (Rom 13:10).

Often, such works are called *“the works of the law.”* With remarkable consistency the Spirit informs us men cannot be justified by adhering to a code of Law—primarily God’s Law. *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified”* (Gal 2:16). The expression *“works of the Law”* refers to the moral code of the Law, not its ceremonies. It covers **all of the consequences** of loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. What is even more, all such works are accomplished in the energy of man, not through Divine working. As used in this text, *“works,”* refer to human activity apart from faith and independently of Divine influence.

The Spirit Elaborates

It is the nature of men to receive partial works as though they were sufficient. *“Trying hard,”* so to speak, is imagined to make the effort acceptable. But that is not the view of the Lord at all. The Law, which is the foundation for the *“works”* of our text, makes no allowance for failure. It does not impute

conscientious effort to the individual as the fulfilling of the Law. This is a pivotal point in the passage before us. Here is what the Spirit says. *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* (Gal 3:10). The Law, therefore, will not exonerate the individual who fails in a single point of its requirements. Thus James says, *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10). Man cannot choose the works he thinks are necessary, and discard the ones thought to be unnecessary. If man is justified by works, he must do ALL of the work, not just a part of it.

“Works” By Any Definition

If righteousness cannot be attained by keeping God’s Law, how much less by fulfilling ones own definition. Technically, God’s Law stands for ALL law. As it is

No understanding person will affirm he deserves to be justified. When asked for a reason for the hope that is within him (1 Pet 3:15), the believer will always point heavenward. He will trace his salvation to God the Justifier. He will cite the death and resurrection of Christ as the basis and life-giving hope of salvation.

written, *“For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law”*^{NASB} (Gal 3:21). If it was possible for righteousness to be realized on the basis of Law, then that is precisely how it would have been granted. **In such a case, there would have been no**

need for Christ, not need for faith, and no need for forgiveness!

This is precisely the argument of the Spirit. He is showing us the utter absurdity of a Savior if man can save himself. It is preposterous to postulate the need of remitting the sins of a person who has achieved righteousness on his own. That should be apparent, and yet this truth eludes the person who insists on justification by law.

THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WORK

Who is the person *“who does not work?”* It is the person who refuses to **rely** upon his own work. This is the one who needs forgiveness, and knows that he does. Such an one does not hold his achievements before God, but calls on the name of the Lord, seeking mercy. Rather than boasting of what he has done, he acknowledges he has sinned and comes short of the glory of God, just as God has said (Rom 3:23).

The phrase *“does not work”* is not the same as *“does not do anything.”* It is not synonymous with being slothful or indolent. It does not mean faith is inactive. It **DOES** mean the individual does not present his works as a reason for justification. He does not rely on his own activity, but on the effective accomplishments of Christ Jesus. The truth of the matter is that no work of man can fulfill what is required to make God just in justifying the sinner. Who is the person who would dare to boast of such a thing?

No understanding person will affirm he deserves to be justified. When asked for a reason for the hope that is within him (1 Pet 3:15), the believer will always point heavenward. He will trace his salvation to God the Justifier. He will cite the death and resurrection of Christ as the basis and life-giving hope of salvation. The person who cannot confess such things is under the darkening shroud of spiritual ignorance and alienation from God. The Gospel must be powerfully presented to such individuals.

“Does not work” means we have not worked to come into Christ, but because we have been placed in Him (1 Cor 1:30). It means God has not been motivated to justify us because of what we have done, but because of what His only begotten Son has accomplished. Yes, faith has made us active, but that is not the foundation upon which a spiritual life is built. The “work” of reference is foundational work, not godly activity. It is the work declared in First Corinthians 3:11. *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* You cannot build upon what you have done. That is not an acceptable foundation. You can only build upon the foundation put into place by God Himself—Jesus Christ. All of that is involved in “does not work.”

We Need This declaration

What is more, faith needs declarations of this sort. Those who only put us in mind of our duty have taken the heart out of religion. Those who only set before us the danger of falling away enclose us with hopelessness. Faith must hear *“what the Lord hath done”* (Psa 126:2-3; Isa 41:20).

The great events of the day of Pentecost were set in motion by the powerful proclamation of *“the wonderful works of God”* (Acts 2:11). There is not apt to be much faith or obedience where this is not done. When we are emboldened to depend upon the Lord, our works will become more abundant, and will yield more fruit. When our trust in the Lord diminishes, our faith wanes, and our works become less numerous. A considerable amount of fruitlessness in the churches is directly owing to a lack of wholehearted trust in the Lord.

THE SPIRIT IS BOLSTERING OUR CONFIDENCE

Remember, the Spirit is bolstering the confidence of believers. He is giving them a reason to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12), resist the devil (James 4:7), and go on their way rejoicing (Phil 4:4). This IS a word addressed to believers, not unbelievers, about WHY God has accepted them.

Some Examples

There are examples in Scripture of being justified *“without works.”* They will assist us in taking hold of this word without thinking we will contradict other words of the Spirit regarding works.

Peter Saved from the Deep

On one occasion, when the disciples were in the midst of a threatening storm, Jesus came to them *“walking on the water.”* When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were *“troubled,”* saying *“It is a spirit.”* Although they were experienced boatmen, they *“cried out for fear.”* Immediately Jesus called out to them saying, *“Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”* Knowing the implications of that utterance, Peter replied, *“Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.”* The answer came back

back into the boat, *“the wind ceased”* (Matt 14:24-32).

Who would imagine that Peter was saved because of his work? Did Peter depend upon his own activity, whether walking on or swimming in the water? Indeed not, he was saved *“without works”* in a very real and effective way.

Before Jesus lifted Peter out of the raging sea, Peter did something. He asked the Lord to bid him to come. He came down out of the boat. He walked on the water to go to Jesus. When he sank, he called out to the Lord. But who would dare to call them *“works”* by which Peter was saved from the stormy sea? In every way, Peter knew it was the Lord who saved him.

It is in this way that we are justified. We have been active in asking, seeking, and coming to the Lord. We were active in calling upon His name. But our faith was in none of those things. We did not rely on our activity, but on the Lord’s. Thus, in the sense of our text, we were justified *“without works.”*

The Woman with the Issue of Blood

En route to the house of Jairus, Jesus passed within the hearing of a woman who had been suffering from a bloody issue for twelve long years. A crowd of people thronged around Jesus, seeming to make Him inaccessible to the needy. Yet, this suffering woman started making her way toward Jesus, going through the crowd. She reasoned within herself, *“If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.”* The Scriptures tell us she made it to the Master, and touched *“the border of His garment.”* Instantly *“the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.”* When the Savior confronted her, He informed her *“Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague”* (Mk 5:25-34).

Who will dare to imagine this woman would point to her own works to account for her healing? She did do something.

The great events of the day of Pentecost were set in motion by the powerful proclamation of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). There is not apt to be much faith or obedience where this is not done. When we are emboldened to depend upon the Lord, our works will become more abundant, and will yield more fruit.

immediately, *“Come.”* Without delay, Peter came *“down out of the ship,”* and *“he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.”*

You remember the incident. In making his way to Jesus, the attention of Peter was diverted from the Master. When he *“saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.”* Immediately, *“Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”* Peter then accompanied Jesus on the water back to the ship. When they stepped

She heard Jesus was in her vicinity and determined to reach Him. He reasoned about His effectiveness, and inconvenienced herself to touch His clothes, convinced she would be healed as a result. All of that took intense effort, particularly for a woman weakened from such a disease.

But when Jesus accounted for her healing, He did not point to her effort, but to her faith. He did not commend her for expending energy to come through the crowd, but for her faith. According to our text, she was delivered from her plague *“without works.”* She knew everyone who touched Jesus’ clothes were not healed. It was not that touching the hem of Christ’s garment fulfilled a Divine demand, and thus was honored of God. It was her faith that was honored. That is precisely the sense of our text: *“who does not work.”*

The Healing of the Blind Man

On yet another occasion, Jesus confronted a man who was *“blind from his birth.”* His disciples took the occasion to ask about WHY such things happened. They could only think of sin producing such conditions, but Jesus announced this occasion was in order *“that the works of God should be made manifest”* in the blind man. Then Jesus *“spat on the*

ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.”

We are simply told the blind man *“went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.”* When asked by professional religion men to account for his healing, he could only say, *“A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.”* Later, when Jesus again confronted him, we find the blind man did not even know Jesus was *“the Son of God.”* When Jesus told Him who He was, the blind man said, *“Lord, I believe. And he worshiped Him”* (John 9:1-38).

Here is an example of someone whom Jesus found. The man was not seeking Jesus, but found Him whom he sought not (Rom10:20). Do you suppose he would account for his marvelous healing upon the basis of his works? He DID do something. In obedience, he made his way to the pool of Siloam and washed the clay from his eyes. But that is not what healed him. He could have put clay on his own eyes, or had another put it there for him, and wash it off in Siloam. But he would not have come away seeing.

In the sense of our text, he was healed *“without works.”* He was not saved by a procedure, but by the interposition of the Son of God. Take Jesus out of the equation, and this man would have remained blind until the day he died!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I find it deplorable that the religious climate is such as requires such lengthy explanations. Those who imagine that *“he who does not work”* excludes all activity on the part of men are simply foolish, and inexcusably so. Such a circumstance would be like Peter being lifted out of the stormy sea without calling. It would be like the woman with an issue of blood being healed without extending herself to come to Jesus. It would be like the blind man being healed while ignoring the word to go wash at the pool of Siloam.

However, if you were to ask Peter, the woman with the issue of blood, and the blind man why they were delivered, they would not point to what they did, but to what the Savior did! That, of course, is precisely the point made by the Spirit in each of the cases cited. The phrase *“him who does not work”* takes us down to the root of the matter. It is not a surface view, but one faith grasps. It will sustain the soul, buoying it up in tumult.

BELIEVING ON HIM WHO JUSTIFIES

^{4:5b} *... but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly . . .* Here, believing is contrasted with working. The words are clear, and cannot be controverted: *“But to him who does not work but believes on Him . . .”*^{NIV} Whatever may be said of *“works”* (and the Spirit does have considerable to say about them), they are not the subject of this text. That means we are being given to see the foundation, or basis, upon which men are justified. Unlike James’ discourse on justification (James 2:17-26), Paul’s purpose is not to rebuke hypocrisy. Rather, **He is expounding the righteousness that is announced by the Gospel** (1:17).

THE PREMINENCE OF BELIEVING

It should be apparent from this verse

that believing is a preminent activity, in a class by itself. It is the fountain from which all valid work springs forth. Remember, he has already cited Abraham as the premier example of justification by faith. The quality that set him apart was that he believed God.

What Is Believing?

It should be apparent from this verse that believing is a preminent activity, in a class by itself. It is the fountain from which all valid work springs forth.

Believing is not something that can be done perfunctorily, mechanically, or mindlessly. By its very nature, believing

engages the essential nature of man, calling up more of his resources, and reaching deeper into his person. It will be profitable to briefly explore this pivotal word: *“believe.”*

From the viewpoint of language, believing involves the following.

- ▶ To be convinced, or persuaded, of the reality of something.
- ▶ To have confidence in someone or

something that has been said.

- ▶ To commit, entrust, or trust, oneself to something or someone.

Believing is the active sense of faith. Thus our text refers to the person who “believes” as the one who has “faith.” When, therefore, we read “*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Heb 11:1), we are brought to understand what is involved in “believing.” Believing is being so convinced of the reality of what is hoped for, that no effort is spared to obtain it. It is being dominated by the persuasion of unseen realities, beginning with the Living God and Jesus Christ, and extending to the hope that is held forth in the Gospel of Christ. **Believing is faith in motion.**

“Believing” is not a casual word. It involves infinitely more than intellectual assent, or admitting something is true. The person who believes steps out on what is believed, thereby appropriating the promise of God.

The believing person is always honored by God. This is evident from the promises that are made to the one who believes.

- ▶ “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to **him that believeth**” (Mark 9:23).
- ▶ “**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned**” (Mark 16:16).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God**” (John 3:18).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him**” (John 3:36).
- ▶ “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and **he that believeth on me shall never thirst**” (John 6:35).
- ▶ “Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that believeth on me hath everlasting life**” (John 6:47).

- ▶ “**He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water**” (John 7:38).
- ▶ “**I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?**” (John 11:25-26).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me**” (John 12:44).
- ▶ “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father**” (John 14:12).
- ▶ “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: 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).
- ▶ “**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that**

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- believeth**” (Rom 10:4).
- ▶ “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and **he that believeth on him shall not be confounded**” (1 Pet 2:6).
- ▶ “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son**” (1 John 5:10).

We must not allow ourselves to think of believing in a shallow sense. If we have “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27), it cannot be a shallow thing.

WHAT ABOUT THE DEMONS?

One might object to this line of reasoning, saying that the demons believe. Indeed, the Scriptures do say this. “*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!*” (James 2:19). However, as is evident, this is not the believing that saves the soul. Demons are never said to believe on Christ, or to have faith. They believe “*there is one God,*” because they have dealings with Him. They have been personally confronted and cursed by God. **Their believing is not driven by testimony, but by experience.**

Those who believe only because they see, do **not** receive the blessing. This is confirmed by at least two notable texts. The first refers to the occasion when Thomas confronted the risen Christ. He had refused to believe until he saw. “*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe*” (John 20:25). He had to have tangible evidence. The next time the disciples met together, Jesus appeared to them. He personally challenged Thomas, “*Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*” Thomas simply answered, “*My Lord and my God.*” The response of Jesus is most significant. “*Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*” (John 20:25-29). Notice, He did not bless Thomas, but pronounced the blessing on those who believed without seeing.

The second event that confirms believing on the basis of seeing is not blessed, is the day of judgment itself. Just as the demons have confronted God, so all men will eventually encounter the Living God. There will be no question about His reality. There will be no resistance of His

power. No charges will be leveled against Him by His creation. At that time *“saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God”* (Rom 14:11). In that day sinners will believe there is one God in the same sense that demons do, and it will do them no more good than it has the demons!

Men will also confront the reigning Son. At that time, there also will be no question about His reality or power. God will unveil the Son to all, showing Him to be *“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”* (1 Tim 6:15). When He does, the word will be fulfilled, *“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil 2:10-11). When Jesus was upon earth, the demons knew who He was, and bowed before Him, confessing Him to be *“the Son of God”* (Matt 8:29) and the *“Holy One of God”* (Mk 1:24). They saw and believed, but it did not save them. Sinners will see and believe on the day of judgment, but it will NOT save them!

All things will not continue as they are now. Eventually, everyone will be convinced that God is precisely Who He declared Himself to be. All men will be fully persuaded that Jesus Christ is exactly who the Gospel affirmed Him to be. No one will doubt the existence of God in that day. No one will question the authority of Christ Jesus in that day. But that kind of persuasion will not save the soul! It is not the believing that is *“to the saving of the soul”* (Heb 10:39).

Thus, the demons, who do believe, are not an example of the believing that saves the soul. They have been faced with incontrovertible evidence, and tremble in the wake of it.

PERSUASION WITHOUT TANGIBLE EVIDENCE

The believing mentioned in our text (*“but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly”*) is founded upon the testimony

of the Gospel, not tangible evidence. While this is unusually simplistic, it eludes the flesh. God has, in fact, withdrawn the primary evidence, which is Jesus Christ the Lord. He has moved Him beyond the reach of natural senses, and outside the realm of fleshly experience. Unless a person believes what God has said about Jesus, there is nothing else that will confirm the truth of the Gospel.

Allow me to elaborate again on this pivotal point. It is essential that we take hold of this with our hearts as well as our

Further, if God had not revealed these things, it is utterly impossible that any man could have concluded them. There is no form of human reasoning that could have looked at the physical evidence of Christ’s life and death and concluded these things happened.

minds. Think of what God has affirmed concerning Jesus Christ.

- ▶ He is God’s *“only begotten Son”* (John 1:18).
- ▶ He was *“in the form of God,”* and on *“equality”* with God before coming into the world (Phil 2:6-8).
- ▶ The sins of the world were laid upon Him (Isa 53:6).
- ▶ He put away the sins of the world (Heb 9:26).
- ▶ He reconciled the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).
- ▶ He was made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- ▶ He was made a curse for us (Gal 3:13).
- ▶ Through His death, He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
- ▶ He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- ▶ He blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col 2:14).
- ▶ He spoiled, or plundered, principalities and powers that once dominated the world (Col 2:15).

- ▶ The Son volunteered to come into the world and accomplish what God desired (Heb 10:5-9).
- ▶ God has exalted Jesus to His right hand, making angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him (1 Pet 3:22).
- ▶ Jesus is now bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).
- ▶ He is now interceding for us (Heb 7:25).
- ▶ He is the Mediator of the New Covenant, administering its promised benefits to believers (Heb 12:24).

These are the matters with which the Gospel deals. **None of them can be confirmed by tangible evidence.** None of them can be demonstrated on a flesh-and-blood level. There are no archeological finds that can confirm their truth. There is no relic that can prove they are true. The ONLY evidence of their truth is the Word of God.

Further, if God had not revealed these things, it is utterly impossible that any man could have concluded them. There is no form of human reasoning that could have looked at the physical evidence of Christ’s life and death and concluded these things happened.

Believing, in the sense of our text, is a persuasion that does not require tangible evidence.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

This line of reasoning is germane to our text. God does not justify those who believe *“there is one God,”* but the one *“who believes on Him.”* This is NOT believing that Christ exists, but that He is precisely who God has represented Him to be. The Gospel is, in fact, a delineation of Christ Jesus. It is the *“the record that God gave of His Son”* (1 John 5:10). Other versions read, *“the testimony that God has given of His Son,”*^{NKJV} *“the witness that God has borne concerning His Son,”*^{NASB} and *“the testimony God has given about his Son.”*^{NIV}

Believing on HIM

To believe *“on HIM”* is to trust and depend upon the Christ of the Gospel. It involves focusing all of our dependence upon Him, making Him the focal person

of our lives. Where this is not being done, men are not believing “on HIM.” Consider the dominance of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures—“HIM.” Jesus Himself affirmed the Scriptures “*testified of*” Him (John 5:39). He is the “*spirit*” or heart “*of prophecy*” (Rev 19:10). Let there be no mistake about this, where Jesus is not the most prominent Person, men have not believed on “HIM.”

Believing ON Him

Believing “ON Him” is quite different than believing there is a God, or even believing there is one God. In the sense of our text, believing “ON Him” is trusting in, or relying on, the Christ of the Gospel. By that, I mean the person depends upon Jesus being the ONLY one in whom God is “*well pleased*.” He shapes His life by the persuasion that only Jesus has dealt effectively with sin. He approaches life with a dominating conviction that everything is subject to Jesus, and that there is no promised blessing that cannot be received through Him.

Again, I want to emphasize that believing is embracing Jesus as God has represented Him. There is a marked tendency in men to fabricate a Savior of their own. One who will save their home, their marriage, their finances, their country, etc. While care must be taken not to discourage people from bringing their requests to the Lord, care must also be taken not to equate this with the Gospel. Such approaches are areas of possibility. The Gospel deals with guarantees.

Being More Specific

It may appear this has all missed the mark, for our text is speaking of believing on God—the One who justifies. Why, then, bring up believing on Christ Jesus?

Jesus has spoken to this issue. In summary, I will show that men cannot believe on God—the One who justifies the ungodly—apart from His Son. Here is something Jesus “*cried out*.” “*He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on Him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth Him that sent me*” (John

12:44-45). Again, Jesus said, “*He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me*” (Matt 10:40; John 13:20).

In a very poignant statement, Jesus confirmed that God cannot be accessed apart from Himself. “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6). The God who justifies in inaccessible apart from His only begotten Son!

When the Gospel of Christ is replaced with a gospel of the church, or even a gospel of the Spirit, a great disservice has occurred. Jesus, and Jesus alone, has accomplished what God required to justify you.

Through Peter, the Holy Spirit affirms that we believe in God through Jesus Christ. “*Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God*” (1 Pet 1:21). Confirming the effective ministry of Jesus in this regard, Peter also wrote, “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*” (1 Pet 1:18).

Looking at this matter from yet another perspective, John writes, “*Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also*”^{NASB} (1 John 2:23). You must not allow the strength of this declaration to pass by you. Denying the Son is refusing Him in the capacity in which God presents Him. It involves more than denying He is the Son of God. It is a refusal to receive Him in that capacity. The very thought of NOT having the Father is startling to the sensitive soul. Let us not be deceived on this matter. No one will be saved who does not have the Father. Further, no one can have the Father independently of the confession of, and reliance on, the Son.

The Bottom Line

Believing on the God who justifies is realized by receiving Christ in the capacity presented in the Gospel. It simply is not possible to believe ON God apart from the Christ of the Gospel.

A TRAGEDY OF OUR TIME

When Jesus is not preached, salvation is pushed beyond the reach of the people. Dependency upon God, which is imperative to the maintenance of spiritual life, is not possible apart from believing on the Son. Further, believing on the Son is not possible unless the sound of the Gospel remains in our ears. Do not imagine that you can continue to believe on the Son without hearing the proclamation and exposition of the Gospel. Such a thought is a delusion, and leads to condemnation.

When the Gospel of Christ is replaced with a gospel of the church, or even a gospel of the Spirit, a great disservice has occurred. Jesus, and Jesus alone, has accomplished what God required to justify you. Your faith in God is directly proportionate to your acceptance of and reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many believers are regularly subjected to a Christ-less gospel. The issues presented to them focus more on country and family than on God and Christ. It should not surprise us to find a lack of faith in such assemblies.

WHO JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY

The Spirit carefully presents the means of appropriating righteousness. Believing that justifies is delineated with precision. We are to believe on “*Him who justifies the ungodly!*” Believing on God who created all things does not bring righteousness to men. The believing that saves is driven by an acute awareness of personal defilement and guilt—“*the ungodly*.” **Where there is no sense of sin, there will be no belief in Christ or quest for God’s favor.**

Who Are the “Ungodly”

What do you think of when you hear the word “*ungodly*”? Frequently,

Scripture speaks of *“ungodly men”* (2 Sam 22:5; Psa 18:4; 2 Pet 3:7; Jude 4). Such men are never commended, never acceptable, and always under the curse of God.

King Jehosaphat was rebuked for helping *“the ungodly”* (2 Chron 19:2). The blessed person *“walks not in the counsel of the ungodly”* (Psa 1:1). *“The ungodly”* are like *“chaff”* that is driven from the presence of the Lord (Psa 1:4). They will not be able to stand in the judgment (Psa 1:5), and their way will *“perish”* (Psa 1:6). Those who were destroyed in the flood are referred to as *“the world of the ungodly”* (2 Pet 2:5). The challenge is hurled out to us, *“And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”* (1 Pet 4:18).

Some may conclude from these texts that *“the ungodly”* are obviously base and reprehensible people. Others may see them as the morally depraved and indulgent—the dregs, so to speak, of society.

Etymologically, the word *“ungodly”* means *destitute of a reverential awe of God, condemning God, impious, irreverent, or wicked.* ^{Strongs} That definition, however, contributes to the notion that *“ungodly”* refers to a sort of lower segment of humanity—that it is a term that compares men with other men. But that is not the case at all.

“The ungodly,” in this case, is everyone *“without Christ”* (Eph 2:12). It is everyone whose origin can **only** be traced back to Adam. *“The ungodly,”* are those mentioned previously in this Epistle. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

Fundamentally, *“ungodly”* means not like God. It assesses men by comparing them with God Himself, not with one another. That condition—being unlike God—moves the sinner to think and act differently than God, which is the essence of impiety. Wherever this condition is found, the Gospel and salvation is needed.

This condition—being unlike God—is a most serious one. It required Divine intervention in order for God to even deal with it. Thus it is written, *“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”* (Rom 5:6). If Christ had not done this, God could not have corrected our condition.

We will find that at its root, salvation has to do with making us like God. This is accomplished by conforming us to the image of His Son, who is God’s “express image” (Rom 8:30; Heb 1:3). Justification involves taking people who are unlike God, and making them like Him through a process called “from glory unto glory”

We will find that at its root, **salvation has to do with making us like God.** This is accomplished by conforming us to the image of His Son, who is God’s *“express image”* (Rom 8:30; Heb 1:3). Justification involves taking people who are unlike God, and making them like Him through a process called *“from glory unto glory”* (2 Cor 3:18).

Being justified, or *“saved,”* is not a matter of simply living differently, or incorporating some new habits into our lives. It is not a change of routine, but a change of character. It is becoming like God, where our thoughts and ways are no longer at variance with Him (Isa 55:8-9). This is a transformation that results in a love of and preference for the truth. Everything becomes *“new”* for such a person, and *“old things pass away”* (2 Cor 5:17). In justification, there is a harmony between God and the justified one that is depicted as *“peace”* and *“reconciliation”* (Rom 5:1; Col 1:21).

Misrepresentations

I have been subjected to a remarkable amount of preaching and teaching that represented Christians as being at variance with God. The will of

God is often presented as not really desired by the saints. Too often the statement of Divine requirements is followed with something like, *“But that is not what we do,”* or *“We tend to go the other way,”* or *“Like the Israelites we want to do our own thing.”*

You will find no such representations in Scripture. Retreating from God, preferring our own way, and being drawn to the world are consistently represented as *“the flesh.”* These are NOT a depiction of the new creation, but of the *“old man”* which is to be *“put off”* (Eph 4:22-24). Those who are in Christ are consistently addressed as those who are reconciled to God and capable of denying ungodliness. Where the matter of living correctly is addressed, believers are told, *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God . . . For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light . . . As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,”* etc. (Col 3:12; Eph 5:8; 1 Pet 2:2). All of this assumes that those in Christ DO have the capacity to think like God and prefer what He says.

THE MATTER OF WORKS

When it comes to the *“ungodly”* being justified by God, who is the person willing to affirm men can work themselves into that blessing? Who will say they can become like God by working? How can men, through works, prevail upon God to justify them. It should be abundantly clear to our hearts that the *“ungodly”* cannot be justified, in the sense of our text, by works. It is our *“works”* that revealed our need for justification. They confirmed we were fundamentally unlike God in our ways and thoughts.

God is greatly to be praised for justifying *“the ungodly.”* Only He can fully exonerate them, clearing them of all guilt. Let us be thankful that such a blessing is obtained through *“believing on Him that justifies the ungodly.”* That is a good message with a joyful sound, bringing deliverance and Divine strength to the soul.

WHEN FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

^{4:5c} . . . **his faith is accounted for righteousness.**” What a marvelous statement. Ponder the condition of the man as he stands before God. Through the Law, God acquainted men with a requirement scarcely known to men. *“none shall appear before Me empty”* (Ex 23:15). Again it is stated, *“And none shall appear before me empty”* (Ex 34:20). And again, *“and they shall not appear before the LORD empty”* (Deut 16:16). This principle is also declared in two of Christ’s parables: the talents and the pounds. In both, there was one man who had nothing to offer the master Both were called *“wicked”* servants, and were thrust from the presence of their Lord (Matt 25:26; Lk 19:22).

God has also defined the very best we do apart from Him – the very best, not the worst. *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”* (Isa 64:6). Just as it was true of Israel, so it is with every man: *“I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee”* (Isa 57:12). When Joshua the high priest stood before God, his priestly vestments were nothing more than *“filthy garments”* (Zech 3:3). It is no wonder that Paul determined to be *“found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law”* (Phil 3:9).

It is in our interest to ponder how we will appear, and what we will possess, when we stand before the Lord of glory. It is true, *“we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”* (Rom 14:10-12). God will look for righteousness—a righteousness that He can receive.

Right here our text obtains a beauty that is excelled only by that of the Lord

Himself. Admittedly, we will have no works of our own to present to God. We know this is the case, for *“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom 3:12). Without Jesus in the equation of life, there is no such thing as good. Even with Him in the equation, good is defined by His presence, not by our independent effort. His influence makes works *“good.”*

Imagine standing before the Lord NOW – for how He views us in this world will determine **how He views us in the world to come.** Everything is *“naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”* (Heb 4:13). Not only does He see what we possess, He also sees what we do NOT possess – and both are critical factors. To stand before Him having sin is not acceptable. To stand

That is the preeminent possession for which the Lord looks – FAITH. Where it is found, God always acknowledges and honors it. It is unquestionable evidence of the reception of His grace, which is packed full of both faith and love

before Him without righteousness is also unacceptable.

We have an index to what the Lord is looking for in one of our Lord’s sayings. In His parable of the importunate widow, Jesus revealed the necessity of persistence in prayer. At the conclusion of that parable He said, *“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really FIND FAITH on the earth?”* ^{NKJV} (Lk 18:8). That is the preeminent possession for which the Lord looks – FAITH. Where it is found, God always acknowledges and honors it. It is unquestionable evidence of the reception of His grace, which is packed full of both faith and love (1 Tim 1:14).

The great men and women of this world, as confirmed by the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, were always distinguished by the faith.

FAITH ACCOUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

When God finds faith in a person, how does He react? What is His response? O, here is a message that must be seen. Here is a word that every poor sinner must hear: **“his faith is counted for righteousness!”** Other versions also confirm the strength of this statement. *“His faith is reckoned as righteousness,”* ^{NASB} *“his faith is credited as righteousness,”* ^{NIV} *“his faith is put to his account as righteousness,”* ^{BBE} *“But people are declared righteous because of their faith.”* ^{NLT} The Amplified Bible reads, *“his faith is credited to him as righteousness—the standing acceptable to God.”*

The person who believes is not thoroughly righteous. He still struggles with the *“old man,”* and experiences the downward pull of the flesh. He remains in an earthen vessel that cannot transport into the world to come. Yet, God receives the one who *“believes in Him”* just as though there were no flaw at all. How is this possible?

First, the declared objective of Jesus is to present to Himself *“a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:27). Second, God is fully able to *“present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24).

But what of the interim? What about here and now? Must we live in doubt of our acceptance? Indeed not! Until the *“redemption of the purchased possession”* (Eph 1:14), our faith **IS** our righteousness. Our text is very specific on this point: *“His faith is counted for (as) righteousness.”* That is, God accepts *“faith”* as the fulfilling of the Law, and the meeting of His requirements. To put

in another way, “*faith*” is the channel through which His own righteousness is imparted to us. It is like a covering “*robe*” that makes us beautiful in His sight (Isa 61:10).

The legalist, one who imagines righteousness comes through works, cannot receive this saying. It is too lofty for him, extending far beyond the reach of his finely tuned, yet stilted, mind. But for

the person who knows what they are by nature, this is a glad sound! It moves such an one to capitalize on believing, knowing that thoughts, words, and deeds, are gloriously transformed by faith.

Believing is not a mere “step” in a salvation procedure. It is not something you do once, then move along to better and higher things. Believing is the heart of spiritual life. It is the breath of the

church, which is the body of Christ.

The acceptance of this proclamation has done more to increase my personal confidence and assurance than any other thing. It has enhanced the beauty and worth of the Gospel. It has brought the greatness of salvation more within my reach. It has confirmed the inferiority of this world, and the superiority of the one to come. Thank God for this affirmation!

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN

^{4:6} ***Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.***” One of the undesirable traits of a law-approach to God is its de-emphasis of the Lord’s blessing. Those enslaved to law rarely speak of being blessed by God. By nature they are more interested in precision and form than in obtaining something from God. The thrust of their message is what is offered to God, not what is received from Him. Having once been snared by this emphasis myself, I know all too well of its effects upon the human spirit.

When a person begins to depend on his own works for Divine acceptance, a cloud of despair rises on the horizon of life. The soul seems to sense the inadequacy of independent human effort. By independent human effort, I mean working without a knowledge of grace and Divine acceptance. Before any real progress can be made in the light, an awareness of God’s blessing must register upon our spirits. Our text confirms this is the case.

To accentuate that God has ALWAYS taken faith as the preeminent thing, the Spirit takes us back to a saying of David, who was a man particularly close to God. Scripture refers to David as “*a man after His own heart,*” and “*the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel*” (1 Sam 13:14; 2 Sam 23:1). It should at once be apparent to us that David will be able to more perfectly articulate the purpose of God.

God does not refer us to some saying of Balaam, “*who loved the wages of unrighteousness*” (2 Pet 2:15). The Spirit does not cite a proverb of Solomon, or a saying of some worldly dignitary. Rather, He will refer us to someone who knew something of this truth, and through whom He could speak with precision.

Those enslaved to law rarely speak of being blessed by God. By nature they are more interested in precision and form than in obtaining something from God. The thrust of their message is what is offered to God, not what is received from Him.

BLESSED IS THE MAN!

The importance of being blessed cannot be overstated. Jacob, you will remember, refused to let the heavenly messenger go until he was “*blessed*” by him (Gen 32:26). Jabez, unknown but powerful man of God, once prayed, “*Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!*” It is written, “*And God granted him that which he requested*” (1 Chron 4:10).

God specializes in blessing. The

creation was marked by blessing. “Of mankind it is said, “*And God blessed them*” (Gen 1:22,28; 5:2). God also “*blessed the seventh day*” (Gen 2:3). After the fall of man, we hear nothing about blessing until after the flood—around 1,600 years later. “*And God blessed Noah and his sons*” (Gen 9:1).

It was over two hundred years before the blessing of God was mentioned again. That occurred when the Lord called Abraham. “*And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will **ble**ss thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a **ble**ssing; and I will **ble**ss them that **ble**ss thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be **ble**ssed*” (Gen 12:2-3). From that time, references to the blessing of God were more frequent.

The culmination of blessing is associated with the Son of God. Of Him, it is written, “*God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities*” (Acts 3:26). Under the administration of Jesus, Divine blessing has become the standard, and is common in the household of faith.

The Man

The Spirit will now place a single individual before us. It will not be a specific person, like Abraham, Peter, or Paul. **You can be this person!** Further, the reference will not be to a single blessing, but to a state, or condition, of

“blessedness.” It is a situation that continues, a bright and refreshing ray of glory in which the person can bask.

What Does It Mean to be Blessed?

“Blessing” speaks of advantage and joyful benefit. It speaks of a happy frame of mind that results from favorable circumstances. Blessing not only makes the person better, it also produces a joyful in the one being blessed. Solomon once said, “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Prov 10:22). That condition is brought to its apex in Christ Jesus.

Lest we be tempted to degenerate into fleshly assessments, the Spirit is very specific about the blessed person. It is identified as “the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.” To conditions are declared. (1) First, righteousness is “imputed,” reckoned to, or credited to. (2) Second, it is credited to the individual “apart from,” or independent of, the “works” of man.

Some people equate the ultimate blessing with health. When asked concerning their state, they will say, “At least I have my health.” During his trial, Job was not able to say that (Job 2:7). Neither, indeed, could Paul say this at the height of his prodigious ministry (2 Cor 12:7-10) Timothy was not able to make such a confession (1 Tim 5:23). Trophimus and Epaphroditus could make no such boast (2 Tim 4:20; Phil 2:25-27), nor could the mighty prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 13:14). We must be careful not to adopt sayings that are in conflict with the Word of God.

Others see the ultimate blessing as having a good and godly family. Thus, they say, “Well, at least I have my family, and that is the important thing.” Aaron could not make such a confession (Lev 10:1-2). Eli, who faithfully raised mighty

Samuel, had sons described as “the sons of Belial” (1 Sam 2:12). Make no mistake about this, a family that is united in the Lord is a blessing – but it is not the ultimate blessing.

The consummate blessing is to be received by God even though we nothing can be found in us that merits such a benefit. To receive the impeccable righteousness of God “apart from works,”

obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:9-10).

No form of religion is safe that allows a person to forget “the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isa 51:1). As soon as the heart becomes insensitive to justification, or the imparting of righteousness apart from works, a gigantic door is opened for the wicked one.

The consummate blessing is to be received by God even though we nothing can be found in us that merits such a benefit. To receive the impeccable righteousness of God “apart from works,” equips one for life, and prepares one for judgment. It is a blessed state indeed!

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This is the blessedness of which David spoke when he confessed, “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings” (Psa 40:2). It is what drove Paul to acknowledge, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:12-13). The knowledge of this blessedness is expressed by the Spirit in these words, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not

Under such a circumstance, the heart is easily diverted, and commandments become burdensome, and heaven seems far away.

I am concerned about the growing absence of songs of thanksgiving about being accepted by God. I have longed been discontent with the lack of personal testimonies in gatherings of believers. It is not that the absence of such things are to be viewed as sin. No person should attempt to correct such a situation by some form of legislation, or weighing down the people with heavy burdens. The lack of heartfelt expressions betrays a condition for which God has provided a remedy. When once the “blessedness” of receiving the righteousness registers upon the human spirit, it at once stimulates the heart. The stammering tongue is enabled to speak, and the lame can then leap as a versatile deer (Isa 32:4; 35:6). The one who is so blessed, himself becomes a blessing.

DEEDS FORGIVEN AND SINS COVERED

“^{4:7} Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered . . .” And what does kingly David say concerning the

blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works? The Spirit calls us to consider Psalm 32:1-2. “Blessed is he whose transgression is

forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” This is the same man who once

cried out under the oppression of guilt, *“Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”* (Psa 51:8-10).

There is something about knowing God sees our sin that strikes fear into the heart. Thus David acknowledged, *“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities (kept a record of sins-NIV), O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”* (Psa 130:3-4). That sins can be identified in our personal history cannot be denied: *“All have sinned.”* Equally true, none of us can say we have committed no sin since coming into Christ, for *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in . . . we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us”* (1 John 1:1,9).

The question is not whether or not we have sinned. We all have! The question is whether or not we *“are forgiven!”* It is whether or not our sins are *“covered.”*

Now, God’s forgiveness must be undergirded by a righteous cause. He cannot forgive us while forfeiting His own righteousness. That is the glory of the Gospel of Christ! It announces that in the Son, God has made full provision for Him to be righteous in justifying the ungodly. Hallelujah for that!

Our text declares a most marvelous reality. Remember, the Spirit is telling us what David has said about the blessedness of a man to whom God imputes righteousness *“without works.”* He then cites David’s statement concerning the remission of sins. He refers to such remission in two ways. First, it is *“forgiveness,”* and second, it is a *“covering.”*

FORGIVENESS

Because sin has credited indebtedness to God, those who are

justified are said to be *“forgiven.”* Their debt has been paid in full by the Lord Jesus. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”* (Matt 6:12). He also accentuated this marvelous benefit when He spoke of God’s forgiveness as dissolving a great debt. *“The lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him **the debt**”* (Matt 18:27).

Faith can teach a person to reason in such a manner as to produce joy and gladness. It says to the believer, “If my sins are gone, God has given me His righteousness.” With joy it enables the saved to shout, “If God cannot see my sin, then He has accepted me in the Son.”

COVERING

Sins that are *“covered”* are sins that cannot be seen by God. He does not consider them or associate them with the individual. This is the significance of the word *“propitiation,”* a word denoting a covering for sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). A vivid picture of this is seen in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. There, the noblest of our race are placed before us. Included are Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses’ parents, Moses, the Israelites, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

There is not a solitary sin or deviation of any sort registered against these saints. Were you to trace their record through the Scriptures, you would find some of their sins recorded.

However, if you were granted a hearing with each one of them, not one of them would say they were without sin, or that they had no need of a Savior.

Why were not their sins mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews? Because they had lived in faith of the coming Redeemer. That Redeemer had come and removed their sins. He paid the debt they owed, and their record was cleared. Their iniquities were forgiven, and their sins were covered.

This is true of all who believe on Him who justifies the ungodly!

TRUTH THAT GLADDENS THE HEART

Now, here is a truth that brings great gladness to the heart. The individual whose iniquities are forgiven is the same person to whom God has imputed righteousness! The person whose sins are covered is the very one who has been made righteous *“without works.”*

It is not possible to be *“forgiven”* and remain unrighteous. Neither, indeed, is it possible to have your sins *“covered”* and not be righteous before God. Thus, the person who really knows they are forgiven, can also know they are righteous. The one who is convinced his sins are covered, can also be convinced God has received him.

Faith can teach a person to reason in such a manner as to produce joy and gladness. It says to the believer, *“If my sins are gone, God has given me His righteousness.”* With joy it enables the saved to shout, *“If God cannot see my sin, then He has accepted me in the Son.”*

When the heart acknowledges these things, and the mouth confesses them, a certain spiritual exhilaration is experienced. It enables the person to draw near to God *“with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Heb 10:22). It is then that you can *“know you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:13), and that God is working *“all things together”* for your good (Rom 8:28).

WHEN GOD REFUSES TO IMPUTE SIN

“^{4:8} Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.” The importance of the truth before us is seen in its firm undergirding by the Holy Spirit. He does not merely make passing statements about this matter, but fastens it firmly in our conscience, thereby accentuating its significance.

The informed and sensitive person wants to know that God will not condemn him. He reasons, “How does God regard me now?” “Will God hear my prayers?” “How will He regard me in the day of judgment?” Such questions cannot be brushed aside as inconsequential by any serious-minded person.

Our text addresses this very matter. The Spirit uses what is called a Hebraism—another way of saying the same thing just declared. He will restate this affirmation: *“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered”* (v 7). He will further define who this person is, and do so with great power.

The forgiven person, whose sins are covered, is not only the person to whom God has imputed righteousness without works, **it is also the one whom God refuses to charge with sin!** God *“WILL NOT”* credit sin to the account of that person! Hear the truth stated from several different versions. *“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”*^{ASV} **“BLESSSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”**^{NASB} *“Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”*^{NIV} *“Blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin.”*^{NRSV} *“Happy is the man against whom no sin is recorded by the Lord.”*^{BBE} *“Yes, what joy for those whose sin is no longer counted against them by the Lord.”*^{NLT} *“How blessed are those to whom the Lord imputes no guilt.”*^{NJB}

DOES SUCH A PERSON EXIST?

Doubt and fear both ask whether such a person even exists. But faith sees the truth that is declared. When Jesus

tabernacled among men, He made sure He made this aspect of His person known. Even before He died, He had power to forgive sins—to cover them, removing them from association with the very ones who committed them.

On one occasion, four believing men brought a palsied man to Jesus for healing. Because they could not access Jesus the ordinary way, they broke up the roof of the house in which He was ministering, letting the man down into the midst of the people, before Jesus. When Jesus saw *“their faith,”* He immediately addressed the afflicted man. *“Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.”* When facing unbelieving critics, He affirmed, *“the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins”* (Lk 5:18-24). How much more does He have that power now!

On another occasion, Jesus declared an abundance of sins could be remitted by Him. You will remember that woman who anointed Jesus feet with precious ointment, washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. When He was confronted with hypocritical men He said, *“Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she*

The forgiven person, whose sins are covered, is not only the person to whom God has imputed righteousness without works, it is also the one whom God refuses to charge with sin! God “WILL NOT” credit sin to the account of that person!

loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven” (Lk 7:47-48). How much more can He forgive now that He is enthroned in glory!

Jesus also declared there were some people He would NOT condemn, even

though they were worthy, from one perspective, of condemnation. Once Jesus’ critics brought Him a woman who had been taken in the very act of adultery. After challenging the condemning multitude, *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,”* the accusers departed, leaving the woman alone with Jesus. When He asked her where her accusers were, and who it was that condemned her, the woman replied, *“No man, LORD!”* With voice of compassion and omnipotence, the Lord replied, *“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”* (John 8:3-11). How much more will He refuse to condemn those who have *“received the atonement”* (Rom 5:11).

NO CONDEMNATION

The person God refuses to credit with sin is the one who is not condemned. As it is written, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom 8:1). *“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”* (John 3:36). The person against whom God will not charge sin is *“not condemned.”* Again, the person who is *“not condemned”* is the one to whom God WILL NOT impute sin.

This is a most blessed consideration! The devil seeks to condemn delivers, God will not. Often fellow men condemn us, but God will not. In a powerful way, the Lord reasons with us on this matter. *“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us”* (Rom 8:33-34). No person can effectively charge a person with sin whom God has justified! No one can condemn the one who is trusting in Christ Jesus, who died, is risen, and is at the right hand of God interceding for us! To such people, God *“WILL NOT impute sin.”*

I cannot close this section without reminding you that in Christ your sins ARE forgiven. This is powerfully declared to us. “*And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, **having forgiven you all trespasses***” (Col 2:13). Again, it is written, “*I write unto you, little children, because **your sins***”

are forgiven you for his name’s sake” (1 John 2:12). Wonderful statements for the one who believes!

If you can receive this (and your faith will bring that enablement), if your sins are forgiven, God has given you His righteousness. It will effectively equip you

to live for the glory of God without offending Him. It will make all of His commandments pleasant to consider and sweet to obey. You can know you are forgiven, and that God Himself WILL NOT charge you with sin! In that confidence you can approach God, resist the devil, and perfect holiness.

CONCLUSION

The passage we have considered is one of most weighty of all Scripture. There is sufficient truth compressed into it to feed the soul for many days to come. The apprehension of this text will shed light on all of Scripture. It will also illuminate life itself. The power of Satan

will be neutralized when you believe this text. It will bring heaven closer to you, and put this present evil world further from you.

I challenge you to zealously avoid any trend of theological thought that

makes no place for this passage, or relegates it into the background of your thinking.

Considerations that clarify this text, bringing it into the thought processes are good, and should be nurtured.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 14



ABRAHAM, JUSTIFIED BEFORE CIRCUMCISION

^{4:9} 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. ¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. Romans 4:9-12, NKJV

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THIS BLESSEDNESS (4:9a)
- II. WHAT WE SAY (4:9b)
- III. HOW WAS IT RECKONED (4:10)
- IV. A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS (4:11a)
- V. THE FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE (4:11b)
- VI. RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO (4:11c)
- VII. WALKING IN THE STEPS OF THE FAITH (4:12)

In Scripture, the REASON for God's justification of "the ungodly" is no small point. From beginning to end, the whole

matter of salvation hinges upon the grace and graciousness of the Living God. The various terms that are central in the proclamation of salvation emphasize this reality.

THE LANGUAGE

- ▶ **The message** that must be embraced by faith is called "Gospel," or "glad tidings" (Rom 1:16; Acts 13:32; Rom 10:15). It is not the proclamation of a Law, or the specification of requirements. It is the announcement of the "wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11), the proclamation of what the Lord has done. What a joyous sound it has, and it is good to the tender of heart. "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).
- ▶ **The means** of accessing this great

salvation also accentuate its nature. Faith is the appointed means of taking hold of the grace of God. Salvation is "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8). This does not relegate obedience to an unimportant place. Rather, it makes obedience acceptable and effectual.

- ▶ **Objectively, salvation is effected by a Savior**, sent into the world by God Himself. This confirms the human condition was beyond any self-help procedure. The initiative that brought the Savior into the world belonged totally to God. He did not come by request, but because "God so loved the world" (John 3:16).

MAN'S SINFULNESS

With great power, the Spirit has shown the sinfulness of mankind. Whether with law or without it, sin dominated man. No righteous person

could be found by the all-seeing God. He declared there was no one who sought God or did good (3:10-12). While men have chosen to debate over the condition of the “*natural man*,” there is no question in Scripture about that condition. By nature, all men are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph 2:1). They are under the dominion of Satan, and are “*by nature the children of wrath*” (Eph 2:2-3). With no equivocation whatsoever those outside of Christ are described as “*having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). Every one who is in Christ Jesus can identify their past as a time when they were “*foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another*” (Tit 3:3).

THE DESCRIPTION OF SINNERS

Sinners are described as “*servants of sin*” (Rom 6:17,20), “*subject to bondage*” (Heb 2:15), “*ungodly*” (Rom 5:6), “*darkness*” (Eph 5:8), “*alienated and enemies*” (Col 1:21), “*children of disobedience*” (Col 3:6), and “*sheep going astray*” (1 Pet 2:25). Out of Christ men are “*lost*” (Lk 19:10; 2 Cor 4:3), “*condemned already*” (John 3:18), and the wrath of God “*abides*” on them (John 3:36). They are so dominated by the devil that is it said of them, “*the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them . . . lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*” (2 Cor 4:4). They had to be sought before they could be saved (Lk 19:10). They had to hear a message from another world before they could be saved (Rom 10:14-17). They had to be “*delivered,*” “*raised,*” “*translated,*” and “*reconciled*” (Col 1:13,20; Eph 2:6).

THERE SHOULD BE NO QUESTION

There should be no question among those in Christ Jesus about their natural condition or innate abilities. It should be abundantly evident to them that they were as paralyzed in the spirit as the impotent man was in the flesh (John 5:7). They were as blind in their spirit as Bartimaeus was in the flesh (Mark 10:46).

But, alas, these “*evident*” things have been obscured by the doctors of the Law, so that men think they are able to save themselves, or to be justified by their own works.

The Lord, because of His “*great love, wherewith He loved us*” (Eph 2:4), is not willing to leave men bantering back and forth about such critical matters. He sent His Holy Spirit to unveil the truth of the matter, and to empower holy men to

This type of strong affirmation sharply conflicts with the academic approach to Scripture. It pounds flesh down where it belongs, and provides no option for another view of salvation. The Spirit gives heaven’s perspective, and does not even allow the flesh to speak on the matter.

proclaim it to the sons of men. That is what this section of Romans is all about.

Here, the Spirit is not showing us various views of salvation, then urging us to select the one that best suits our preconceived conceptions. That is what men do, but it is not what God does. One of the reasons this passage is so hotly contested among professed believers is the manner in which it is written. It leaves no room for opinion, no place for a variant view, and no hope to the one who objects to the message of the Gospel. This type of strong affirmation sharply conflicts with the academic approach to Scripture. It pounds flesh down where it belongs, and provides no option for another view of salvation. The Spirit gives heaven’s perspective, and does not even allow the flesh to speak on the matter.

THE POWER OF AFFIRMATION

Once again, I want to draw attention to the affirmations that are made in this book—particularly in the first four chapters. Remember, the power of the truth is in its affirmation. The passage we are presently reviewing is built upon the solid foundation of these firm and unwavering statements. Notice how each one of them is uncompromising, with no possibility of contradiction or negation.

- ▶ “The gospel of Christ: for it **IS** the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (1:16).
- ▶ “For therein **IS** the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it **IS** written, The just shall live by faith” (1:17).
- ▶ “For the wrath of God **IS** revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (1:18).
- ▶ Because that which may be known of God **IS** manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them” (1:19).
- ▶ But we are sure that the judgment of God **IS** according to truth against them which commit such things” (2:2).
- ▶ “For there **IS** no respect of persons with God” (2:11).
- ▶ “There **IS** none righteous, no, not one” (3:10).
- ▶ “There **IS** none that understandeth, there **IS** none that seeketh after God” (3:11).
- ▶ “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there **IS** none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat **IS** an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps **IS** under their lips: whose mouth **IS** full of cursing and bitterness” (3:12-14).
- ▶ “There **IS** no fear of God before their eyes” (3:18).
- ▶ “But now the righteousness of God without the law **IS** manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which **IS** by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there **IS** no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the

redemption that **IS** in Christ Jesus” (3:21-24).

- ▶ “Where **IS** boasting then? It **IS** excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (3:27).
- ▶ “Therefore we conclude that a man **IS** justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (3:28).
- ▶ “Now to him that worketh **IS** the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith **IS** counted for righteousness” (4:4-5).
- ▶ “Blessed **IS** the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (4:8).

realities upon which we “reckon,” or pillars upon which sound reasoning is based.

When we think upon the things of God, we must have a proper focus. With zeal, men must avoid reading the Scripture through a preconceived theological template. The Bible cannot be read through a Baptist mindset, a Christian Church perception, or a charismatic persuasion. It is not to be viewed through a Calvinistic or Armenian filter. Nor, indeed, are we to pass the Word of God through a liberal or conservative sieve. God does not give men the luxury of reading His Word as a

reformationist or restorationist, a trinitarian or a Jesus-only, or a sabbatarian or a first-day-of-the-week advocate. The heart is to be subjected to the raw Word of God without an attempt to make it fit into a theological box.

There are some who do not believe such a thing is possible. They are persuaded men cannot approach the Word of God without human bias. However, there is one thing of which they are willingly ignorant. It is the nature of faith.

FAITH IS ABLE

Faith can rise to the need to believe God. It does not need a precedent, visible confirmation, or historic attestation! Abraham can believe God without any of those things. He can embrace the Word of God without comparing it with the heathen background of his father or the customs and expertise of the Chaldeans.

Because faith is “obtained” from God (2 Pet 1:1), and comes to us by means of “the grace of God” (1 Tim 1:14; Acts

18:27), it has unique qualities of its own. Faith “comes” to men (Rom 10:17; Gal 3:23), and is given to “every man” in Christ by “measure” (Rom 12:3). However, that faith is neither supported nor facilitated by natural abilities. It has a logic of its own, reasoning after a heavenly manner. It is in no way deficient, and never puts the child of God at a disadvantage, as does the world’s wisdom.

NOT A BY-PATH

All of this has not been an intellectual by-path, or an excursion into the wilderness-realm of philosophy. It is necessary to say these things because of the cancerous growth of human reasoning within the professed church. It is a condition with which the Spirit Himself contends in the passage before us.

The reason for this lengthy treatise is not the inability of faith. Neither, indeed, is it because the things proclaimed are inherently *hard to believe*. They are no more difficult to believe than the promises God made to Abraham! The reason for this extended comment on righteousness is that corruption had penetrated the thinking of professed believers. They had begun to imagine they were saved because of their own effort – or because they had been singled out by God – or because they had an ordained mark upon them.

With great power, the Spirit will reason with us in the heavenly places. He will set before us matters the flesh will not be able to accept. However, that should not concern us, for God cannot receive the “flesh.” Justification will not be explained from a scholarly point of view. It will not be viewed as a mere possibility, to be discussed and debated as though it were merely “some new thing” (Acts 17:21). Rather, the Spirit is speaking to our faith, putting the matter of salvation where it can be “believed.”

. The Bible cannot be read through a Baptist mindset, a Christian Church perception, or a charismatic persuasion. It is not to be viewed through a Calvinistic or Armenian filter.

The grammarian will at once argue that there is no original word for “**IS**”–that it reflects the grammatical construction of the sentence, not a specific word. And, indeed, that **IS** the case. However, we must not allow that technicality to rob us of the truth. The point is that the statements made are foundational, firm, and unwavering. They reflect a circumstance that exists, not a possible condition. They are the affirmation of unwavering realities to be grasped by faith.

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR REASON

All of these statements are like building blocks, and are to be strategically placed into our reasoning. These are

THIS BLESSEDNESS

“4:9a **Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also?**” And

what is “*this blessedness*” or “*this blessing?*” First, this is a state or condition of benefit that is conferred,

imputed, or reckoned--not achieved. This is particularly true of the imputation of righteousness. This very point is being

made with unusual power. This precious facet of salvation has been viewed from different perspectives. Paul's salutation recognized the conferment of righteousness upon believers in Rome. Thus they are *"beloved of God, called to be saints"* (1:7). This comes under the broad canopy of *"salvation,"* which is accomplished through the Gospel in which this very righteousness is revealed (1:16-17). It is becoming *"a Jew inwardly"* and experiencing *"circumcision"* in the *"heart"* and *"spirit"* (2:29). It is *"being justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (3:22). It is the forgiveness of sin and the covering of iniquities (4:7). Thus believers are brought to the point where God *"will not impute sin"* to them. This is the state of blessedness to which our text refers.

In 1700, Isaac Watts wrote a song that declared *"the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."*

THE GOSPEL STATED

"Vain are the hopes the sons of men

On their own works have built;
Their hearts by nature are unclean,
And all their actions guilt."

"Let Jew and Gentile stop their mouths
Without a murmuring word;
And the whole world of Adam stand
Guilty before the Lord."

"In vain we ask God's righteous law
To justify us now:
Since to convince and to condemn,
Is all the law can do."

"Jesus, how glorious is Thy grace!
When in Thy name we trust.
Our faith receives a righteousness
That makes the sinner just."

Institutional religion robs men of the ability and compelling desire to express such things. It takes the joy out of salvation and surrounds the person with duty and lifeless regimentation. But when the soul is enthralled with the Gospel, and the blessedness of being a person to whom

the Lord *"will not impute sin,"* it can sing with Augustus L. Hillhouse.

"Bright heralds of the eternal Will,
Abroad His errands ye fulfill;
Or throned in floods of beamy day,
Symphonious in His presence play."

"Loud is the song, the heavenly plain
Is shaken with the choral strain;
And dying echoes floating far,
Draw music from each shining star."

"But I amid your choirs shall shine,
And all your knowledge shall be mine;
Ye on your harps must learn to hear,
A secret chord that mine will bear."

Methodist Episcopal Hymnal, 1878

There is a strain of religion in our country that leaves the individual without a solitary thought of God Almighty imputing righteousness without works, or refusing to impute sin to those in Christ Jesus.

I lament that the awareness of *"blessedness"* is not as common among believers as salvation provides. There is a strain of religion in our country that leaves the individual without a solitary thought of God Almighty imputing righteousness without works, or refusing to impute sin to those in Christ Jesus. The absence of these perspectives causes life to become a burden for those who are conscious of their own weaknesses and shortcomings.

True religion is one of *"blessedness"*—a personal awareness of what the Lord has done. This is *"the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel"*—the joyous benefit that is realized when that Gospel is believed (15:29). This is *"the blessing of Abraham"* that comes upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ (Gal 3:14). This is the blessing that qualifies us to receive the Holy Spirit. As it is written,

"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit"^{NIV} (Gal 3:14).

FOR THE CIRCUMCISION ONLY?

This is a particularly precious section for Gentiles—those who formerly 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"* (Eph 2:12). Does the blessedness of receiving a righteousness from God belong to the Jews alone? Or, is it for the Gentiles also?

Here, the Jews are called *"circumcision,"* for that was the external sign of their identity with God. Their works certainly were not a sign of that fact, even though they had been given benefits exclusive to them (Rom 9:4-5). The Gentiles are called *"uncircumcision,"* because they had nothing to commend them to God—not even an external sign in the flesh.

The Jews Received the Promise

The promise of being made righteous was given to the Jews. They alone received the promise, *"In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"* (Jer 23:6). And again, *"In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness"* (Jer 33:16). They alone were told, *"The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God"* (Jer 51:10).

The Jews alone had the proper form, the proper message, and the glorious promises. Is *"this blessedness"* only for them? Can those who are under the curse of the Almighty be blessed by Him? You might be surprised how many

souls imagine this is not possible. Indeed, there are people who believe they can be a member of a church—even THE church—yet they are not persuaded God will NOT impute sin to them. There are others who have a fairly good idea about what they should be doing, yet they utterly lack any confidence that God will NOT hold their sin against them. For that very reason, sin tends to dominate them.

This IS a blessed condition that is not commonly realized. There is a great deficiency within the professed church on this very point: knowing *“the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”* Is it for the circumcision ONLY, *“to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ*

came, who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:4-5).

Let me put it another way. Is this blessedness for those who have met all of the external criteria—or, at least, are so perceived? In our parlance, is it only for the ones who have the correct pattern in their congregational structure? Is it for those alone who have mastered the step-by-step procedure for coming to Christ? Is that the basis for receiving *“this blessedness?”*

Do not take this to mean that God has no interest in the structure of His people, or how they behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church, the *“pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15). Do not think that any required obedience can be ignored or treated as inconsequential when coming to Christ. But that is not the matter being

expounded in this text. Circumcision was required also, and that without exception. Yet, as we will find, it was not the basis for the conferment of righteousness.

Our text will show us that faith procures the *“blessedness”* of reference. He has already proved it cannot be appropriated by *“works,”* for natural men are incapable of producing such works.

The spirit will now confirm to our hearts that *“the righteousness of God”* is conferred upon men independently of their background or their works. The Jew must abandon his trust in works, and come to Christ believing. The Gentiles must admit their helplessness, and also come to Christ believing. Both will receive righteousness upon the basis of their faith. Neither will receive it upon the basis of their works. This righteousness comes *“by faith!”*

WHAT WE SAY

^{4.9b} ***For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.*** The words *“we say”* are equivalent to *“we teach,”* or *“we preach,”* or *“this is in our message.”* Whatever others may have said about Abraham’s realization of righteousness, here is what the Holy Spirit moved men to say. *“For we say that faith was reckoned to*

have heard much about Abraham. I have personally heard very little about his faith being reckoned, or credited, to him as righteousness. This simply not what was generally said about Abraham. Those who esteemed him made mention of him going to Canaan, having Isaac, and offering Isaac. But little was said about his faith. Some spoke more of Abraham *“lying*

nothing of which he could boast—no works that he could hold before God as a basis for receiving the righteousness of God. He had to be *“justified”* like all of us. He was not a super man, but a believing man. His faith is what MADE the difference. His works are what REVEALED that difference.

FAITH AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Although Abraham did not have a righteousness of his own, his faith was credited to him AS righteousness. **That is, his faith was accounted, or considered, as his righteousness.**

In this saying we see the greatness of faith. There is no adequate likeness of faith in nature. It transcends the ability of the flesh, taking hold of the Word of God without the imagined benefit of evidence. The *“faith of Abraham”* (4:16) confirms this is the case. Ponder the Divine utterances that Abraham believed, and around which he shaped his life.

- ▶ God would make of him a great nation and bless him (Gen 12:2a).
- ▶ God would make his name great, and

From the standpoint of nature, Abraham was no different than any other man. He too had *“sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (3:23). He had nothing of which he could boast—no works that he could hold before God as a basis for receiving the righteousness of God. He had to be *“justified”* like all of us. He was not a super man, but a believing man.

Abraham **for** righteousness.”^{KJV} *“For we say, ‘FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’”^{NASB}* *“We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him **as** righteousness.”^{NIV}*

During over fifty-five years of exposure to preaching and teaching, I

about Sarah being his sister” than about Abraham believing God. However, when Paul said something about Abraham, he spoke in concert with the Lord of glory!

From the standpoint of nature, Abraham was no different than any other man. He too had *“sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (3:23). He had

- make him a blessing (12:2b).
- ▶ God would bless those who blessed Abraham (12:3a).
- ▶ God would curse those who cursed Abraham (12:3b).
- ▶ God would bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (12:3c).
- ▶ God promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan (12:7; 15:7).
- ▶ In his old age, when he was “as good as dead,” God promised Abraham he would beget seed (Gen 15:4).
- ▶ Abraham’s progeny would spend four hundred years in a land that was not theirs, suffering affliction (Gen 15:13).
- ▶ God would judge the nation afflicting Abraham’s yet unborn “seed” (15:14).
- ▶ In the fourth generation, Abraham’s seed would come out of bondage to possess the land promised to him (15:16).
- ▶ Abraham would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:1).
- ▶ Kings would come from the loins of Abraham (17:6).
- ▶ Abraham would have a child through his barren wife, Sarai (17:16a).
- ▶ Barren Sarai would become the mother of nations (17:16b).
- ▶ Kings of people would come forth from barren Sarai (17:16c).
- ▶ God commanded Abraham to offer his son, his only son, as a burnt offering—the one through whom all the promises would come (22:2-16).

Believing Contradicts Human Reasoning

In all of these matters, there was not one shred of visible evidence that could justify believing God. There were no historical events to confirm such things were possible. The Scriptures tell us how Abraham reasoned on these promises. It was a higher form of reasoning than known to the advanced civilization of the Chaldeans.

- ▶ **Concerning begetting seed when he was incapable of doing so, and had a barren wife.** “*And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he*

staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom 4:19-21).

- ▶ **Concerning offering up Isaac through whom all of God’s promises to Abraham were would be fulfilled.** “*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he*

Not only did Abraham believe God, he did so in contradiction of human wisdom. There is nothing in human reasoning that could justify believing the marvelous promises given to Abraham.

that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Not only did Abraham believe God, he did so in contradiction of human wisdom. There is nothing in human reasoning that could justify believing the marvelous promises given to Abraham. It is essential to see this, for we are living in a time when too much value has been placed upon human logic.

Believing not only rises above the wisdom of this world, it is in stark contradiction of that wisdom. That is why is it said of Abraham, “*(as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed; God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be’*” (Rom 4:17-18).

The expression “*in hope believed*” means Abraham believed and expected, or anticipated, the fulfillment of the promise. Even though the promises were great, extending beyond human possibility, the patriarch did not “*stagger*” at them. He made no attempt to substantiate them by reconsidering his own body, or the inability of Sarah to have children.

Scripture tells us Abraham was “*strong in faith, giving glory to God*” (Rom 4:20). He did not “*waver in unbelief,*”^{NASB} but took hold of the Divine promises without hesitation. He did not test or examine the promise of God, but believed it. That was most remarkable from a human point of view. From heaven’s perspective, however, this is the nature of faith—to believe God! It needs nothing more than a Word from God.

The Gospel announces things more difficult to conceive than those promised to Abraham. They are even more contradictive of the wisdom of this world and the reasoning of men than the Lord’s commitments to Abraham. The remission of sins, new birth, and reigning with Christ are too great for man’s wisdom. Only faith can take hold of these things, not “*staggering at the promise of God.*”

It should be evident to us that believing God involves more than your own personal effort—although it surely does include that. Faith “*comes*” to you from God, for it is “*given unto you to believe*” (Phil 1:29). It is “*obtained,*” and is therefore “*precious*” (2 Pet 1:1). It comes “*by hearing*” (Rom 10:17), and is carried to us in the “*grace of our Lord*” (1 Tim 1:14). The more you are exposed to the Word of the Lord, the more apt you are to believe. The more prominent the Gospel of Christ is in your thinking, the more disposed you will be to believe. Abraham did not “*believe God*” because he heard others philosophizing about Him, but because he heard God Himself. He believed what God said, NOT what men interpreted God to have said.

If God places such a high value upon

faith, how is it that men would not do the same? What would move anyone to minimize it, or imagine it to occupy a place on the periphery of life? Believing God actually results in Divine acceptance. Our righteousness flows from our believing, not from our works. To put it another way, **it is righteous to believe and unrighteous not to believe.**

THE SERIOUSNESS OF UNBELIEF

For this reason, UNBELIEF is the most prominent sin. It is the transgression from which all other sins proceed. Our blessed Lord spoke of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this regard. His appointed role is to persuade men of the truth of the Gospel, and ready them for salvation. Here is how Jesus stated the case. *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged”* (John 16:7-11). The Spirit will reprove, or convict, the world of three realities. The NRSV reads, *“He will **prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.**”* Notice these three cardinal points, and their relationship to the Gospel of Christ.

1. **SIN:** “. . . concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.”^{NASB} The dominate (and, in a sense, **only**) sin is NOT believing in Jesus. That is, it is not believing the “record” or testimony “*God has given of His Son*” (1 John 5:10-11). To fail to believe

what God has said about Jesus is tantamount to Abraham not believing God’s promises to him. Further, just as Abraham had absolutely no hope of an offspring or inheriting the land of Canaan apart from God, so those without Christ have been shut up to sin and vanity. The persuasion of this involves the intellect, but goes much deeper. That is why it requires the work of the Holy Spirit to bring it to pass. He does this through the Gospel.

2. **RIGHTEOUSNESS:** “. . . concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me.”^{NASB} The meaning here is twofold. First, the Spirit convinces men of the **reality of righteousness**, for men will not seek it if they are not persuaded of its actuality. Second, that righteousness is administered to men **through the exalted Christ**. That is one of the primary reasons He returned “to the Father” –to ensure others could follow. Again, this powerful work of the Spirit is accomplished through the Gospel.

3. **JUDGMENT:** “. . . concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”^{NASB} The judgment of reference is not the day of judgment, but the casting down of Satan, who no longer dwells where he can accuse the saints before God (Rev 12:10). This is another way of saying the ground for a charge against the

people of God has been removed. Thus light has risen upon a cursed world, offering righteousness and hope. This conviction is also accomplished by the Spirit through the Gospel.

Among other things, this confirms the seriousness of unbelief. Abraham’s condition before God was CHANGED when he believed God. Until then, his condition was no different than the rest of the race. Believing God has never been dominant in the world. Those who have dared to take God at His word have always been in the minority. But they have never been without blessing.

WHAT SHOULD WE SAY?

When it comes to the **conferment**

Abraham’s condition before God was CHANGED when he believed God. Until then, his condition was no different than the rest of the race.

of righteousness, what should we say? It should be obvious that we should say what the Spirit says. *“Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.”* Let us take care not to adopt a view of Scripture that does not allow these words to come out of our mouths. Too, let us make no attempt to dilute them by trying to make them fit into some theological pattern of thought.

When it comes to the REASON Abraham was considered righteous by God, it was because **he believed God**. It is no different with you.

HOW WAS IT RECKONED?

^{4:10} **How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.** We now come to a most precise teaching. This is like new wine that cannot be poured into old wine

skins of legalism. It is a fresh new cloth that cannot be sewn on to the old garment of Law. This is a foundational statement, and is therefore of the utmost importance. The Spirit is not providing us with the **evidence** of Abraham’s justification, as James did, but with the **cause** of it. He

will confirm to our hearts that faith did what no work could do.

The question *“How was it then accounted?”* is a critical one. Other versions read, *“How was it then reckoned?”*^{KJV} *“Under what circumstances*

was it credited?^{NIV} “Now how did this come about?”^{NJB} The NIV does capture the sense of the text. The question concerns the condition of Abraham **at the time** God accounted his faith to him as righteousness. The Spirit has already spoken of the blessedness of the man “unto whom God imputeth righteousness **without works**” (verse 6). He is now going to fully support that statement by citing the principal example of justification—our father Abraham.

THE COMMANDMENT OF CIRCUMCISION

When it comes to “works,” there is an premier activity God commanded of Abraham. It was circumcision.

The very first mention of circumcision in the Scriptures is related to Abraham. It involved an extensive commandment, and is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. “*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant*” (17:10-14). Notice the many facets of this command.

- ▶ It was God’s own covenant.
- ▶ It was to be kept by Abraham and his offspring after him.
- ▶ Every male child was to be circumcised.
- ▶ Circumcision was a token of the covenant God made with Abraham.
- ▶ It was to occur when the child was eight days old.
- ▶ All generations were included in the commandment.
- ▶ Those born in Abraham’s household, as

well as all slaves, were also included.

- ▶ The uncircumcised male child was cut off from Abraham’s people.
- ▶ The one who was uncircumcised was guilty of breaking God’s covenant.

Circumcision, then, was not an optional matter. Remaining among the promised people was conditioned on the circumcision of the male children.

Remaining among the promised people was conditioned on the circumcision of the male children. Without fulfilling this Divine requirement, neither individuals nor their sacrifices were accepted.

Without fulfilling this Divine requirement, neither individuals nor their sacrifices were accepted. You simply could not be associated with Abraham, and specifically with the promises made to Abraham, without being circumcised.

Abraham himself was circumcised when he was ninety-nine years old. At the same time, Ishmael, who was thirteen years old, was also circumcised, together with “*all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner*” (Gen 17:24-27). Later, when Israel was delivered from Egypt, they were reminded of this requirement (Ex 12:44-48). Part of the Levitical law referred to the circumcision of a male child on the eighth day (Lev 12:3). Before Israel invaded Jericho, the fulfillment of this requirement was necessary (Josh 5:2-7). John the Baptist was circumcised on the eighth day (Lk 1:59). The infant Jesus was circumcised the eighth day, in fulfillment of this commandment (Lk 2:21). Stephen referred to this command in his last sermon. “*And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day*” (Acts 7:8).

I have taken the time to comment on circumcision because of the power of

the argument we are considering. Circumcision was no small thing. It was not an inconsequential commandment, or something that was optional to the seed of Abraham. In fact, this single ordinance distinguished the Jews from all other people. After Abraham and prior to Christ’s enthronement, all men were separated into these two categories: **circumcised and uncircumcised** (Gen 17:14; Ex 12:48; Jer 9:25). A large commandment, indeed!

NOT IN CIRCUMCISION, BUT IN UNCIRCUMCISION!

Here the Spirit “*speaks expressly.*” The condition in which Abraham was found **AT THE TIME** he was pronounced righteous was “*NOT in circumcision.*” **His justification, or being made righteous, occurred at least fourteen years before he or any member of his household was circumcised.**

He was “*accounted righteous*” in Genesis 15:6, **BEFORE** God told Abraham Sarah would have the promised offspring, **BEFORE** Ishmael was born, and **BEFORE** he himself was circumcised. Ishmael, as you recall, was thirteen years old when Abraham was circumcised. Abraham was counted righteous before he was circumcised, and remained so for at least fourteen years! Circumcision, therefore, **CANNOT** be the cause of justification, or being made righteous.

The Jews considered themselves superior to others because they were circumcised in accordance with God’s covenant with Abraham. Thus, Gentiles were “*called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands*” (Eph 2:11).

There was an advantage to being circumcised! That advantage is stated in this way: “*What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God*” (Rom 3:1-2). **That advantage, however, did not cause the circumcised to be righteous.** Advantages are of no value unless they

yield fruit! Adam and Eve had the advantage in the garden. Israel had the advantage in Canaan. The Jews had the advantage in Jerusalem. In every case, their advantage was not a guarantee.

As a “*master of assemblies*” (Eccl 12:11), Paul is fastening the truth of

justification by faith in our understanding. He is showing there is no way for righteousness to come through the flesh, whether by sign or by work. From Abraham, and until Jesus, the ultimate “*sign*” was circumcision in the flesh. That was the ultimate work, and act of obedience. Yet, our text affirms

Abraham was righteous when he was yet UNcircumcised. This did not take place the day before he was circumcised, but a full fourteen years before that commanded event. This is the Spirit’s powerful confirmation that the man is blessed “*to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.*”

A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS

“^{4:11a} ***And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.***” Circumcision is not ignored, as though it had no significance at all. It became the confirmation of the righteousness he already possessed. It is essential to hear how the Lord spoke of circumcision to Abraham. “*This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you*” ^{NKJV}(Gen 17:10). Notice, God’s covenant was ratified by the circumcision of the “*male child.*” Further, this was not done when the men had matured, but when the child was “*eight days old,*” before they could do any “*work*” (Gen 17:11).

GOD’S USE OF SIGNS

God used tokens and signs in His dealings with Israel. It is His manner to do so. The token, or sign, was primarily for the benefit of the one receiving it. It became the personal evidence of Divine acceptance. A few examples of this form of Divine provision will suffice.

Deliverance from Egypt

When Israel was delivered from Egypt, a visible sign was required to be on their houses. It was not an option, and anyone failing to meet this requirement would experience the “*plague*” and the “*destruction*” with which God would smite Egypt. A lamb of “*the first year,*” “*without blemish*” was to be taken from the flock of each family. The lamb was to be reserved until the fourteenth day of the

month, then killed “*in the evening.*” With care, each family was to “*take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the upper door post of the houses where they eat it.*” They were then to eat the Passover meal “*with haste, with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands.*” That very night, the Lord passed through Egypt, smiting the firstborn in the land, both of man and beast. Of the blood placed upon the doorposts of the house it is written,

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“*Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt*” ^{NKJV}(Ex 12:1-13).

The Sabbath Days

The Lord’s Sabbaths were also a sign to the children of Israel. “*Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you*” ^{NKJV}(Ex 31:13). Ezekiel refers to the same sign. “*Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them*

and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them” ^{NKJV}(Ezek 20:12,20).

A Fearful Sign

All signs were not the same. On one occasion, when Korah and his rebels fomented an insurrection against Moses, the Lord assembled the people, giving them something to remember. It is written, “*And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign*” (Num 26:10). Like a flagstaff, that occasion was fixed in the minds of Israel to discourage any further rebellion.

When Israel Came Into Canaan

When Israel at last crossed Jordan to enter Canaan, they were instructed to follow a very meticulous procedure. The ark of the covenant was to be taken over first. When the feet of the priests bearing the ark touched “*the edge of the water,*” the waters which came downstream stood still, and “*rose up in a heap very far away*” at the city of Adam. With the waters “*cut off*” the priests carrying the ark entered the river bed and “*stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.*” After the people had safely crossed over, Joshua commanded twelve chosen men, one from each tribe, “*Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you*

and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.” Later Joshua “set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood.”

We are told why this procedure was followed: “that this may **be a sign among you** when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you? Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever” (Josh 3:13-4:9).

SIGNS COULD NOT BE IGNORED

In all of these cases, the “sign” was essential. To ignore the procedures associated with that sign would incur the curse of the Almighty. None of them were optional, and none could be ignored.

The Abrahamic sign of circumcision was the same. It was not optional. With great solemnity the Lord told Abraham, “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul **shall be cut off from his people**; he hath broken my covenant” (Gen 17:11). As we proceed in this text, it is necessary to say these things because of the tendency men have to view Divine stipulations as inconsequential. They are not! The fact that Abraham was justified by faith does not reduce God’s requirements for him to an unimportant or nonessential status. The very manner in which God spoke to Abraham confirms this to be the case.

Our text, however, is not establishing the necessity of obedience, but “the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works” (4:6). The Spirit is going deeper, to the bedrock foundation of salvation. The matter of obedience will be addressed later, and with great power.

The point to be seen is that faith must not rest in the “sign” of

the covenant, but in the God of the covenant! That it is wrong for the Jew to trust in circumcision is confirmed by the words, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh” (Rom 2:28). Circumcision did not make Abraham righteous. It ratified a righteousness that he already possessed. That circumstance, however, did not allow Abraham to ignore circumcision. It DID mean he could not place his trust in it. Divinely appointed signs are evidence, but not the basis for faith.

THE MATTER OF BAPTISM

Endless debates have been spawned over the matter of baptism. It is important to note that no such arguments were ever posed in God’s Word. Our baptism is clearly related to spiritual circumcision, as confirmed by Colossians 2:11-12. “In Him [Christ] you were also

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circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

The essentiality and effectiveness of baptism is never questioned in the Word of God. The Spirit consistently speaks of it as a pivotal point in spiritual life. Associations are made with baptism that confirm its essentiality. Here are a few of them.

- ▶ Repentance (Acts 2:38).
- ▶ The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- ▶ The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- ▶ Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).

- ▶ Salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
- ▶ Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- ▶ Being raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- ▶ Being identified with Christ’s death (Rom 6:3).
- ▶ Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
- ▶ Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
- ▶ The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
- ▶ Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
- ▶ Coming into Christ (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27).
- ▶ Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).
- ▶ A commandment (Acts 10:48).
- ▶ The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
- ▶ Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
- ▶ Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).
- ▶ Calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).
- ▶ Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- ▶ Obtaining a good conscience (1 Pet 3:21).
- ▶ The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).
- ▶ Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:36-37).

Just as circumcision, and other ordained signs, there is no question about the necessity of baptism. One who argues that baptism is not necessary might as well attempt to tell Abraham that circumcision was not necessary, or that Israel did not really have to put the blood on the posts of the door. It makes just as much sense to tell Israel they did not have to honor the Sabbath days. To affirm that baptism has no bearing on our relationship to God is as absurd as saying circumcision was inconsequential to Abraham and his offspring. Such statements are unworthy of a child of God, and reflect an uncomely spirit.

However, when men begin to trust in their baptism, they have committed precisely the same sin as the Jews who trusted in circumcision. Faith must **not** be placed in the sign, but in the God of the sign. I come from a heritage that emphasizes baptism. Their insistence on its necessity is noteworthy, and not to be

despised. However, they are not noted for their spirituality or holiness. Many of their people trust in their baptism, and are not noted for faith in God. This does not demean baptism, anymore than the Jew's reliance on circumcision demeaned that ordinance.

The Spirit affirms that Jews who trusted in circumcision were obliged to keep the whole Law, and that without flaw. *"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision"*^{NKJV} (Rom 2:25). This is addressed to those who had confidence in the flesh, being *"called a Jew, and restand in the law, and makest thy boast of God"* (Rom 2:17). Since their confidence resided in what they had done—including circumcision—they were obliged to be perfect doers, not partial ones.

While this may appear to be a rather technical point, it is precisely the one being made by the Spirit of God. God reckons people righteous because they believe. That is how it was with Abraham, and that is how it is with you! Although commanded to be circumcised, Abraham's faith was the basis of him being declared righteous.

In my judgment, this is precisely the point made by the Spirit in the third chapter of Galatians. *"For ye are all the children of God **by faith** in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* 3:26-27). It is not necessary to develop some theological formula allowing us to dissect this statement. It is enough to believe it. This is the same truth reflected in the great apologetic of Paul to the Jews. *"And*

by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

A SEAL

Abraham's circumcision was also a "seal," or Divine signet, *"of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."*^{NIV} Abraham's circumcision was a pledge, or personal assurance, that he was righteous before God—not because he was circumcised, but because he believed *"in the Lord."* His circumcision pointed to what he had, and was intended to assure his heart of that possession.

It is important to remember this is Divine reasoning. This is not intended to be a line item in a finely tuned theological system, and must not be approached in that manner. Men often think there is a need to handle the Word of God in this fashion, but it is not always to their advantage to do so. Here a commanded activity is said to be a "seal," or stamp, of something possessed before the "seal" itself was received. The ensuing argument will confirm the necessity of viewing it in this manner.

Sealed with the Holy Spirit

Those in Christ are said to be "sealed" with the Holy Spirit. This is thrice declared. *"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts"* (2 Cor 1:22). *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of*

truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:13-14). *"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"* (Eph 4:30).

Concerning this matter, the Holy Spirit is said to have been sent into our

Abraham's circumcision was a pledge, or personal assurance, that he was righteous before God—not because he was circumcised, but because he believed "in the Lord."

hearts BECAUSE we are sons. In the fullness of the time, Jesus came into the world *"to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father"* (Gal 4:5-6). While this is not the only approach to our sonship, it is a vital one, and must not be ignored. Those who receive the power, or right, to *"become the sons of God"* are those who *"believe on His (Christ's) name"* (John 1:12). That is a foundational view of our relation to God, just as our text is a foundational view of Abraham's relation to God.

THE FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE

^{4:11b} . . . *that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised.*" The Spirit reasons further with us on this matter. He says that Abraham was pronounced righteous **before** he was circumcised, in order that *"he might be the father of all them that believe, though*

they be not circumcised." There cannot be one basis for justification for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Their dilemma is the same, therefore the remedy must be the same. For that reason, the *"father of all those who believe"* must receive righteousness on a basis that is common to both Jew and

Gentile. That basis is faith. If Abraham had been justified AFTER his circumcision, he could not have been the father of Gentile believers. He was justified, so to speak, in his "gentilehood."

We must be careful not to take this statement beyond its intended meaning.

The point being made is that national and fleshly distinctions—even those imposed by God Himself—do not make men better. They CANNOT be the basis for the conferment of righteousness. Abraham’s faith was counted to him for righteousness while he was yet uncircumcised IN ORDER THAT *“he might be the father of all those who believe.”*

GLORIOUS COMPLEXITY

Here we are able to perceive something of the depth to which men sank when sin entered into then world. To retrieve men was not a simplistic task, and ought never to be presented as it was.

First, there had to be a progenitor of those who live by faith. Our text is declaring that person to be Abraham. The faith that saves had to have a genesis in a person who would become both an example and a father of following believers.

Second, a law had to be given through which the knowledge of sin could be imparted. That Law would effectively stop every mouth, rendering the whole world guilty before God. The various ceremonies of the Law were vivid pictures of the coming means of salvation. They had no justifying or sanctifying power in themselves, but were only faint outlines of the coming Savior.

Third, there had to be a man, born of woman, who lived an impeccably holy life—without any moral taint. That man must, of His own volition, lay down His life for sinners. He must bear in His body the sins of the world upon the tree. He must defeat the devil, spoil principalities and powers, and triumph over death. He must then ascend into heaven, present His blood as an atonement for sin. Then, from a throne of absolute power and authority, He must bring many sons to glory through His righteous government and effective intercession.

Fourth, to facilitate this great salvation, a message must be declared that announces the expiation and makes known a righteousness from God.

Fifth, the Holy Spirit of God must convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, unveiling the necessity and availability of a conquering Savior. Once sinners are convinced, they are born again *“of the Spirit,”* who remains with them to complete the work.

Salvation is not possible without any of these elements. What we have in our present text is the affirmation of the first requirement: a progenitor of the faithful. While he is very literally the father of “many nations,” including Jews (from Isaac) and Arabian nomads (from Ishmael), no nation is as significant as the spiritual nation of believers. In his great prophecy following the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah referred to *“our father Abraham”* (Lk 1:73). In his great message to the recalcitrant Jews, Stephen referred to *“our Father Abraham”* (Acts 7:2). The Jews of Jesus’ day frequently referred to Abraham as *“our father”*

(Rom 3:10). If, therefore, men are to be righteous, they must be **MADE** righteous by another. Further, there must be a just basis for the conferment of that righteousness.

That basis is established as faith—believing God! In particular, it is believing the record, or testimony, God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11).

There is a consistent property in faith, whether it is in Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, or you. Faith does not stagger at the promises of God. It always does what God demands. It always moves the believer to conform his life to the expectations faith produces. That is one of the reasons God can count it to us for, or in the stead of, righteousness. Where these characteristics are not found, faith is not present. This, of course, is the whole point powerfully proclaimed by James (chap 2).

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FAITH DOES NOT DEPEND ON RITES AND PRIVILEGES

One of the strong affirmations of our text is that faith does not require or depend upon rites and privileges. Abraham believed God and was counted righteous BEFORE the rite of circumcision of the privilege of national status. Faith did not require those things. That did not mean they were useless. It does mean faith can exist independently of them. If this was not the case, the Gentiles could not have faith, for they had neither rite nor privileges according to the flesh.

FAITH HAS MORAL POWER

Faith has moral power that Law cannot impart. It can move a person to obey when nothing else can—not even fear. Noah, for example, *“moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.”* But it was only AFTER he had faith (Heb 11:7).

Think of our father Abraham, and of the effective constraining power of his faith. When he was called to a place he would afterward receive, he *“obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whether he went”* (Heb 11:8). By faith he *“sojourned*

(John 8:39,53). But our text moves beyond the Jewish nation to the multitude of believers in Jesus Christ.

To Gentile Romans Paul refers to *“Abraham our father”* (4:1). Our text affirms he is the father of Gentiles, or the uncircumcision, who believe (4:12). Later it is declared he is *“the father of us all”* (4:16). Those who believe on Jesus are part of a spiritual lineage that goes back to Abraham, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST BE CONFERRED

Let it be clear that righteousness MUST be conferred, imputed, or credited. It cannot be the result of doing, or working. The Spirit has already confirmed *“there is none righteous, no not one”*

in the land of promise,” without ever possessing a bit of it (Heb 11:9). Faith moved him to look “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). Although he was “as good as dead,” faith gave Abraham the ability to beget progeny “so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable” (Heb 11:12).

Place a high priority upon faith, and do not despise it, or relegate it to a place of inferiority. God regards it so highly that those possessing it are counted righteous in His sight.

RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES FROM FAITH

Where there is no faith, righteousness cannot be possessed, and where righteousness is not possessed, there can be no salvation. In the imputation of righteousness, the inward man is so impacted that righteous expressions also come from the believer. The character of the individual is changed when righteousness is imputed to him.

It is essential that this be seen, for some have imagined that the presence of faith obviates the need for righteousness. This is not so. If, when righteousness is imputed to the person, he remains essentially unrighteous, God is not glorified. To put it another way, when God imputes “righteousness without works,” it is done in order that truly upright works may be realized. By moving the engine of religion from outward activity to an inward disposition, the standard of conduct is raised. It is not possible to be unholy or disobedient while in fellowship with God.

This is seen in our father Abraham. After Abraham had believed God, and it

was imputed to him for righteousness, he was brought into union with the Lord. Of that union, God said, “For I have known him, **in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him**”^{2NKJV} (Gen 18:19). **Apart from acceptance by and affiliation with the Living God, doing righteousness and justice is not possible.** Therefore, God focused his attention upon Abraham in order that he might be righteous in his doing. He could not, however, do this unless Abraham was righteous in character. Further, only faith could cause that to occur.

Abraham’s righteousness prompted him to intercede for Sodom (Gen 18:24-32). It provoked him to circumcise Isaac on the eighth day, as God had commanded him earlier (Gen 21:4). It moved him to rise early in the morning to sacrifice Isaac, as God commanded him (Gen 22:3). His faith constrained him to seek a proper wife for Isaac (Gen 24:6-9). It moved him to sojourn “in the land of promise, as in a strange country,” living in tents while looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). He was a godly man!

Faith, then, closes the gap between men and God in order that He might confer righteousness upon them. Because that blessedness involves the remission of sin, God may now dwell with the individual. In doing this, He is “just,” as

well as the “justifier” of him that believes in Jesus (Rom 3:26).

A godly life is the result of Divine intimacy—of being called into the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 1:9). This is involved in the statement of Ephesians 2:10. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

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beforehand that we should walk in them.”^{2NKJV}

The grace of God effectively teaches us “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:11-13). **However, this teaching could NOT take place if you were not accepted and righteous in God’s eyes.** Further, you could not be righteous if you did not have faith! Your practical righteousness was preceded by the imputation of God’s righteousness “without works.” It sprang from the righteousness credited to you. When your character changed, your life changed also.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO THEM ALSO

“^{4:11c} . . . that righteousness might be imputed to them also.” This is a most powerful argument, devastating any notion that national heritage, family lineage, or religious tradition can be the basis for Divine acceptance. Mind you, the

Jews boasted in their heritage, thinking that of itself it lifted them above all peoples. The Jews once said to Jesus, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man” and “Abraham is our father” (John 8:33,39). They imagined

being able to trace their fleshly origin back to Abraham was sufficient.

ABRAHAM’S FAITH

However, Abraham was not received by God because of his flesh, but because of

he *“believed God.”* His faith is what pushed him beyond his peers, bringing him into the realm of blessing. Apart from faith, he was like others.

He Looked Ahead

In a telling remark of the nature of Abraham’s faith, Jesus said of him, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”* (John 8:56). The NIV reads, *“Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”* That is, Abraham lived in the prospect of the Seed through whom the whole world would be blessed. This is a rare insight into *“our father Abraham.”* Although he was given relatively few particulars, this patriarch knew a day of great blessing and benefit was coming—the time, so to speak, of the Seed. He had no greater delight than this glorious prospect. Even while in Canaan, noted for its cultural superiority, his faith moved him to anticipate a greater time and a more perfect residence.

He Saw Christ’s Day

Now, Jesus says that Abraham *“saw”* His day *“and was glad.”* What does this mean, for elsewhere Jesus said, *“For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them”* (Lk 10:24).

First, Abraham did not see Christ’s day in all of its fulness, as those blessed to sit at his feet and hear His words. While in the flesh, he saw Christ’s day from a great distance, which accentuates the power of faith. But it seems to me there is more to this than that. The last record we have of Abraham pertains to his post-death existence. Enough is said to show us many things. The reference is found in the well known sixteenth chapter of Luke, in Christ’s account of a certain rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Both men died in due time. The rich man, Jesus said, awoke in hell, and in much torment. Lazarus *“was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom,”* as though lovingly embraced by him (Lk 16:22-23).

Lazarus was being *“comforted”* by Abraham (Lk 16:25). And, how could a man who also died around two thousand years before bring solace to Lazarus? I suggest that it was because he had seen something. His understanding had been

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enlarged. Indulge me for a moment as I show the evidence of this.

Abraham made several observations to the condemned rich man that are of note.

- ▶ He knew the rich man had his good things in the world.
- ▶ He knew that man was now in torment.
- ▶ He knew Lazarus had experienced evil things in the world.
- ▶ He knew a great fixed gulf was between the departed blessed and cursed, which could not be crossed.
- ▶ He knew the people on earth had Moses and the Prophets, which came hundreds of years after he left the world.
- ▶ He knew if men did not receive God’s Word, they could not be convinced of its truth by one returning from the dead.

If these lesser things were known to Abraham on the other side, how much more should he have been aware of the *“Seed”* which he so fervently anticipated?

THE POINT OF THE DIVERSION

The point of this brief diversion is to confirm that Abraham’s faith made him unique, not his earthly status or religious achievement. He himself was changed by faith and the consequent imputation of

righteousness. The anticipation of the blessing of the world eclipsed his own possession of the promised land. Is that not a marvelous consideration?

RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO THEM ALSO

Abraham became the father of the faithful in order that righteousness might also be imputed to *“them,”* that is, those who believe. While Abraham is *“the father of us all,”* our righteousness cannot come from him. It must be personally imputed to us because of our personal faith. It is simply not enough to be associated with Abraham, who was among the greatest of our race.

One of the dreadful effects of sectarianism is the idea that being identified with a particular group brings the approval of God. Thus men banter back and forth about what makes the group unique, thereby guaranteeing it of the blessing of the Lord.

- ▶ For some, the whole matter is form or ritual. To go through the proper procedures is the fundamental thing. If the particular church has managed to preserve the more holy routines, participation in that church makes one acceptable to God.
- ▶ For others, the pattern of the church itself is the real issue. Does it have the proper offices, and does it observe the proper ordinances. Are its servants called by the proper names, and are the proper people holding its respective offices?
- ▶ Some conceive the creed, or official statement of beliefs, to be the primary thing. A precise statement of what is officially believed is perceived as outweighing everything else.
- ▶ Still others feel the outstanding matter is the day on which believers gather together. Some insist it is the Sabbath, or seventh day, while others contend it is the first day of the week. The Sabbatharians place a greater stress on this matter.
- ▶ Certain groups accent human experience—visible and audible experience. They state what they

perceive to be the fundamental blessing, binding it upon all others. It generally has to do with people being overpowered by God. Such people seem to give no thought to the dreadful condition of a person who must be knocked down by God to be blessed.

▶ There are also those who make the attire and occupations of the believer the primary marks of distinction. They rally around their perception, and are actually known more for how they look than their affiliation with God.

This is only a sampling of the types of distinctions that presently exist among believers. There are varying degrees of dogmatism and tolerance in all of them, but they are all held to be critical issues.

Not to be Misunderstood

These observations are not to be construed as meaning these matters have no relevance at all, or that how we feel about them is of no consequence. It is not intended to be a sort of scoffing at something perceived to be ignorant and unlearned.

What I am endeavoring to show is the sharp conflict between these approaches and that of our text. Remember, we are at the foundation level, showing what brings men into true accord with the Living God, through Christ, and by the Spirit.

The argument is that being righteous in God's eyes IS the point! Nothing else makes any difference whatsoever if the individual is not righteous. Furthermore, no one can be righteous unless he is MADE righteous. As it is written, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be **made righteous**" (Rom 5:19). That can ONLY come through faith, for it is faith that is "counted as righteousness." The premier example of this has been given, and is being expounded. Abraham "believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3,9,22; Gal 3:6; James 2:23).

PERSONALLY APPROPRIATED

The righteousness of God must be **personally** appropriated. It cannot be realized by proxy! Abraham had to attain it personally, and so do his children. That is precisely the point of this text: "that righteousness might be **imputed unto them also**." And how is it that it will be imputed, or credited, to them? Is it because they are in the fleshly lineage of Abraham? Indeed not! When it comes to the progeny that receive righteousness, Abraham is "father of **all them that believe**."

Where faith is lacking, righteousness will not, and cannot, be found. There is no Divine acceptance where men do **not** believe God! "But without faith it is impossible to please

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him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). Jesus has declared, "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

MAKING THE MATTER PRACTICAL

I have a profound concern for the unacceptable level of faith that exists in the average church. In many congregations and Christian institutions there is a remarkable level of unbelief. One can hardly attend a class or an assembly where this it not made known. It is not at all strange for statements of Scripture to be challenged or questioned. People will often express alarm that God reacted in the manner described in Scripture. Such people are confounded that God "loved Jacob" and "hated Esau". Others marvel that David was a man after His own heart, or that Peter was so highly favored by Jesus. They cannot see that

when a person believes God, he pleases God.

God promised Abraham something that was impossible from any human point of view. Abraham believed Him anyway! That is why God imputed righteousness to him. What can be said of the person unable to accept a seven-day creation, or a universal flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? What of the one who says the Scriptures are not flawless, or that God cannot send anyone to hell?

What about the sinner who cannot believe his sins can be remitted? Or the pious hypocrite who does not think he has any sin? Ponder the person who is not devoted to the Lord, yet feels qualified to have a leading position among the saints. Consider the individual who sees no need to regularly ingest the Word of God, or fight the good fight of faith, or put on the whole armor of God, or resist the devil!

Do you imagine these are unusual circumstances? Churches throughout our country, and this very city, are filled with people holding these unbelieving persuasions. How can they hope to be accepted by God? Will their association with what is perceived to be the "right church" cover up their unbelief? Indeed, it will not!

GOD WANTS TO BLESS!

God wants to bless humanity! He has a desire to grant His righteousness to those created in His own image. Early in human history He divulged a gracious purpose that would bring this to pass. He showed it to Abraham, and Abraham believed him. In our father Abraham, God revealed what He would do for every soul who believed on Him. He made Abraham a distinguished man among men. In him the Lord revealed what happens when a person will believe Him, and what will occur when He imputes righteousness to that man.

To those who will "have faith in God," He will give righteousness. It is

made known in the Gospel and confirmed in Abraham. It is for the Jew and the Gentile as seen in Abraham's righteousness. It was received while he was yet uncircumcised.

Abraham did not have a fine religious heritage. He had no works to present to God that would qualify him for acceptance. He did not have a good understanding of God. But when God

spoke to Him, unveiling a blessing that transcended any earthly possibilities, Abraham *"believed God."* He did it BEFORE he was circumcised! He did it BEFORE he got to Canaan! He did it BEFORE Sarah could conceive or Isaac was born.

What possible reason can be presented for you not believing God? You have every reason to be convinced you

CAN believe God. God has gone on record on this matter, and He will not withdraw His word. Abraham's faith brought righteousness to him before he had the sign of acceptance. God did it this way to convince us righteousness will also be imputed to all who believe, whether they are Jew or Gentile. This is a word worthy of much proclamation. It brings a joy and peace to the soul that cannot be otherwise known.

WALKING IN THE STEPS OF THE FAITH

^{4:12} . . . **and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.** The precision with which the Holy Spirit speaks is a source of great edification. Notice how He approaches the fatherhood of Abraham. He will teach us the ramifications of being righteous before God. First, He points to our entrance into God's favor. *"That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also"* (v 11b). But He does not stop there. He now shows us that God's children continue to walk by faith. In fact, that is the secret to their strength. Abraham's children are not only described as those who believe, but also those ***"who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."***^{NIV}

There is a certain progress to faith that must be seen. While faith does have its genesis in our hearts, it must be retained. By that, I mean faith must impact the way we live. The faith must be *"kept"* in order for the intended benefit to be realized.

It may appear as though the Spirit is referring to two separate classes of people: i.e., *"them that believe,"* and those *"who walk in the footsteps of the faith."* But this is not the case. These are two

stages of spiritual life, not two categories of believers. One is the beginning of that

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life, the other its progression and culmination. Neither stage is taken for granted, and neither occurs automatically. Abraham had to exert effort to believe God initially. He also had to exert himself to continue to believe God. He was put to the test by both time and circumstance, both of which have proved more than some could bear. Again, this is seen in our father Abraham.

We have an inspired record of one hundred years of Abraham's life. God first appeared to him when he was seventy five years of age (Gen 12:1-4). One hundred years later, he died *"in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people"* (Gen 25:7-8). During that one hundred years Abraham's faith left footsteps to be followed. From the time God first

appeared to him until the day he died, he was noted for his faith. His life was shaped around the promises of God, and his heart was riveted to God's revealed purpose. He lived in the blazing glory of Divine commitment.

- ▶ He left Ur by faith (Gen 12:4).
- ▶ He dwelt in Canaan by faith (Gen 12:6; Acts 7:4)
- ▶ During a famine, he sojourned in Egypt by faith (Gen 12:10-20)
- ▶ By faith he chose to dwell in Canaan following a dispute between his herdsmen and those of Lot (Gen 13:12).
- ▶ He prayed for Abimelech, resulting in his healing and the opening of the wombs of the women in his house (Gen 20:17).
- ▶ By faith he took up arms against Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, recovering his nephew Lot and their belongings (Gen 14:1-15).
- ▶ By faith he paid tithes of all the spoils of battle to Melchizedec, priest of the Most High God (Gen 14:18-20).
- ▶ Several years after God's initial appearance to him, Abraham was again visited by God. This time he was told his offspring would be as multitudinous as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the sea. He believed God, even though his own body was as good as dead, and Sarah was barren (Gen 15:1-6; Rom 4:19).
- ▶ God again appears to Abraham, giving him the covenant of circumcision. At ninety-years of age, and by faith, Abraham and all of the males of his

household were circumcised (Gen 17:1-23).

- ▶ Heavenly messengers appear to Abraham, confirming that Sarah would have a son about that time next year. Abraham believed God (Gen 18:1-16).
- ▶ When the Lord divulged the eminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, by faith Abraham pled for any righteous that were in the cities (Gen 18:20-33).
- ▶ By faith he cast out Hagar and Ishmael, according to Sarah's word, as confirmed by the Lord (Gen 21:10-14).
- ▶ By faith Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac as God commanded him (Gen 22:1-15).
- ▶ By faith Abraham buried Sarah, confessing he was a stranger and a sojourner among those with whom they lived (Gen 23:3-19).
- ▶ By faith he provided a wife for Isaac, being mindful of his covenant with God (Gen 24).
- ▶ According to God's promise, Abraham died in peace, keeping the faith for a full one hundred years (Gen 15:15; 25:7-8).

There is a marvelous example of *"the footsteps of faith."* Here was a life that was lived in the dominating persuasion of the truth of God's promises.

IN DEFENSE OF ABRAHAM

Some sophists, who have the audacity to stand in criticism of Abraham, remind us that he twice said Sarah was his sister. These judges tell us he lied, and did so out of unbelief. I feel compelled to say a word in defense of our father Abraham.

First, I am more anxious to hear what Abraham has to say about them, than what they have to say about him!

The first occasion

The first occasion took place when Abraham and his household went down to Egypt during a grievous famine in Canaan. As they approached Egypt, Abraham (then Abram) said to Sarai, *"Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall*

come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee" (Gen 12:11-13).

When they came into Egypt, the princes of Pharaoh saw Sarai and told the king about her, *"and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house."* We are told he treated Abram well for the sake of Sarai, and *"Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels."*^{NIV} However, it did not go well for Pharaoh's house. It is written, *"But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai."*^{NIV}

Upon discerning that Sarai was actually Abram's wife, the Pharaoh called

While men have sat in judgment on Abraham for this occasion, it is more than interesting to observe that God sat in judgment on the household of Pharaoh. The Spirit speaks not one syllable of condemnation against Abraham.

for him saying, *"What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way"* (Gen 12:13-20). Abram then went his way with all of his household, including Sarai and Lot.

While men have sat in judgment on Abraham for this occasion, it is more than interesting to observe that God sat in judgment on the household of Pharaoh. The Spirit speaks not one syllable of condemnation against Abraham.

The Second Occasion

The second occasion took place when Abraham was briefly residing in Gerar. Here they confronted Abimelech, king of Gerar. The Scriptures say, *"And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah."* We are also told that Sarah said of Abraham, *"he is my brother."*

Things did not go well for Abimelech. Although a heathen, God came to him *"in a dream by night."* His words were enough to suddenly awaken any person of sound mind. *"Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife."* The king, we are told, had not come near to her. He therefore pled with the Lord. *"Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."*^{NKJV}

In a dream, the Lord answered the objection of Abimelech, revealing that He had not allowed him to touch Sarah. *"Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."* Notice how the Lord sided with Abraham, protected his wife, and told the king to have Abraham pray for him.

Early in the morning Abimelech confronted Abraham. *"What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." Then Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?'"* Abraham's answer was candid and without guile. *"Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. But indeed she is truly my*

sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, 'He is my brother.'"

Abimelech then gave Abraham gifts of sheep, oxen, men servants, women servants, and a thousand pieces of silver. It is then written, *"So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children"* (Gen 20:1-18).

I have taken the time to deal with these two events because of the seriousness of the charges leveled against Abraham, who is *"the father of us all."* His critics have displayed an abysmal ignorance of the Word of God and the servant of God. They overlook that Sarah was, indeed, Abraham's half-sister. They also judge Abraham through the eyes of a fuller revelation, not recognizing he had neither Bible nor a table of commandments from God. He was en route to the promised land, and passing through hostile lands.

While the Lord holds up Abraham as the *"father of us all,"* they subject him to demeaning criticisms, attempting to bring him down to the level of mediocre disciples. In so doing, they have injected poison into the bloodstream of the church. Their words cause men to regard Abraham with less honor than God requires. As representatives of God, their

role is to speak of Abraham as God has spoken. The other alternative is to say nothing at all.

LIVING BY FAITH

Walking in the steps of the faith of Abraham is living by faith. Early in this Epistle, we were reminded of this fact: *"The just shall live by faith"* (Rom 1:17). Since Jesus is the *"Author and Finisher of our faith"* (Heb 12:2), it is not enough to start believing. We must continue to do so.

It should be apparent to us that if our faith is credited to us for righteousness, if we are ever found without faith, we will possess no

strange land, he did so by faith. These are *"the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had."*

This was not a different faith, but the faith he had *"while still uncircumcised."* It was the faith he *"obtained"* in Ur, and maintained until he died a hundred years later, when he *"gave all that he had unto Isaac"* (Gen 25:5).

There is a progression in faith that is essential to remaining righteous before God. Believers are solemnly warned, *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God"* (Heb 3:12). Faith has *"footsteps"* that are always leading

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righteousness. Remember, *"without faith, it is impossible to please God"* (Heb 11:6). Abraham's faith in God continued during the twenty-five year wait for the promised seed. It waxed strong in a strange land as well as the land of promise, and in famine as well as in plenty. Even when there was no evidence that he could have a child, he believed! When faced with the barrenness of Sarah, he refused to consider it. His faith stood strong when the word of a cursed city was received, and it rose to the challenge of sacrificing Isaac. While he sojourned in land of promise as in a

forward, moving closer to the goal, and further from the curse.

For those who walk in those footsteps, Abraham is their father. If you are in doubt as to how God regards such people, look to Abraham. He is your example and *"father."* Behold how highly God speaks of him! Consider what marvels he unveils to him! Ponder what is said of him AFTER he left this world!

There you have an index as to how God looks upon those who are willing to believe Him, regardless of circumstance.

CONCLUSION

The passage we have considered is a particularly important one. While it is devastating to institutional religion, it brings great consolation and hope to those who believe God. The imputation of righteousness is not a luxury, nor is it optional. This is the legal side of our salvation, while the remission of sin accents the compassionate side. But both sides are essential, and neither can be

relegated to the position of unimportance.

A religion that leads people to imagine they are safe while their faith is weak, or even non-existence, is a delusion from the wicked one. The Jews rested in their external status, and are soundly rebuked by this section of Romans. Jewry, however, stood for the ultimate fleshly institution. It owed its origin, ordinances,

and benefits, to the Lord of glory. They had done nothing to deserve this status, and everything to be worthy of it being withdrawn. If this is true of them, it is all the more true of Gentile religion.

You are never more right than when you believe in the Lord, moving out upon His word. You are never more wrong than you doubt Him, and do not move out upon

His word. For the believer, that opens the door of hope, for it is never vain to trust the Lord. Faith will always be rewarded by the imputation of righteousness. It is what constrains the Lord to forgive sin, uphold the weak, and cause hope to abound in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In dealing with a text like this, I realize there is a certain risk of being misunderstood. This is particularly true among those with a propensity to legalism—a bondage under which I once labored. Some will consider an emphasis on faith to necessarily involve a minimization of obedience. However, it is quite to the contrary. When faith is emphasized, obedience becomes more of a reality. It is the “*footsteps of faith*” that

leads us into all areas of obedience.

Faith that is no larger than a mustard seed will take you further than a mountain of rules and regulations. It will make obedience refreshing and joyful, and remove the grievousness from the commandments.

A people who insist on doctrinal precision, yet are sloppy in their lives and spiritual persuasions bring no glory to God. The church at Ephesus provides a sterling example of this (Rev 2:1-5). Jesus will open a great and effectual door to those who believe, even if their strength has been sapped by trial. He will, because they have kept the faith, cause their enemies to publically admit they are loved by Him, because they kept His word, and

did not deny His name (Rev 3:8-9).

But for those souls or institutions that live in practical aloofness from God, there is no blessing to be had from Him. The “*blessedness*” of our text cannot be experienced apart from faith. The awareness of that condition will exercise an influence upon the soul that makes the individual equal to the difficulties and vicissitudes of life.

Now, be up and “*walking in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham*.” There are promises to be inherited, and blessings to be enjoyed. There is power to be realized, and fellowship to be experienced. God will credit your faith to you as righteousness, protect you, and speak highly of you. The example of Abraham proves that is the truth.



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 15



GOD'S PROMISE REALIZED THROUGH FAITH

4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: 15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. 16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, 17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. 18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. 19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: 20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Rom 4:13-25, ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit, speaking through the book of Romans, is establishing the necessity and effectiveness of a righteousness that comes from God by faith. Men are not to philosophize or speculate about righteousness. No one is righteous by nature. Indeed, no person can become so through the energy of the flesh or keeping a code of law. Furthermore, the wrath of God is revealed "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (1:18). The initial revelation of that wrath took place

when Jesus Christ died. While bearing our sins in His body on the tree, the Son was "cursed" and "forsaken" by God (Gal 3:13; Matt 27:46). The ultimate and final revelation of that wrath will take place when the Lord Jesus returns in all of His glory (2 Thess 1:8-9).

During this "day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2), a righteousness from God is offered to humanity through the message of the Gospel of Christ. That righteousness is appropriated by faith. This fundamental

aspect of the Gospel has been almost totally obscured by institutional religion. The thrust of Christian labors is often thought to be recruitment, or the making of disciples. While there is an element of truth to this view, it has been greatly corrupted by those committed to building the institution. Once the truth of discipleship is known, the critical role of obtaining a righteousness from God becomes apparent. In confirmation of this, ponder our Lord's comments about being His disciple.

- ▶ *“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he **cannot** be my disciple”* (Lk 14:26). No person can stand between the disciple and the Master. Personal earthly preferences cannot be allowed to compete with allegiance to the Savior.
- ▶ *“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, **cannot** be my disciple”* (Lk 14:27). Those who do not embrace the repercussions of following Jesus will not be received by Him. The world will become crucified to the real disciple, and he to the world.
- ▶ *“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he **cannot** be my disciple”* (Lk 14:33). Personal possessions must not be allowed the prominent place in the disciple’s life. Everything must be left to follow Him. This is a matter of the heart, not a mere external procedure.
- ▶ *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake,*

the same shall save it” (Lk 9:23-24). Bearing the cross, or willingly embracing the rejection of the world and its hardships resulting from faith, must be done on a daily basis. An attempt to retain ones own life in this world will result in its sure loss.

When *“making disciples”* is viewed from this outlook, a whole different perspective is seen. Attempts to make the Gospel palatable to alienated hearts will be seen as foolish and reproachful to Christ. Efforts to obtain mere numbers will also be seen as vain and out of harmony with the will of the Lord.

THE POINT

There is a significant point to these observations. They are not to be seen as a mere diatribe against institutional fanatics. The point is simply this. Unless a person is a real disciple of Jesus, according to His own criterion, the righteousness of God is not perceived as necessary. It may be viewed as interesting, but never as essential. The alarming lack of interest in this subject is indication of the failure of men to become followers of Jesus. They have not put everyone else, and their own life as well, in subservience to Jesus, and thus think nothing of obtaining a righteousness from

God. They have not taken up their cross daily, and thus do not have a dominating conscience of their standing before God. They have not forsaken everything, and therefore have no sense of their critical need of a righteousness from God.

The first three chapters of Romans address the need of following Christ and forsaking everything else. It accomplishes this by confirming the vanity and futility of all effort and relationships apart from Christ and a solid faith in Him. We only obtain significance before God, and are accepted of Him, when we are righteous. That righteousness can only come from Him through faith—faith that has come by hearing the powerful Gospel of Christ.

WHAT IS BEFORE US

Now the Spirit will show the relationship between a righteousness from God, the promise of God, and faith. He will trace the conferment of righteousness back to the promise of God. He will also confirm that only faith can take hold of the promise of God, which cannot be perceived or realized until the promise is believed. There is an interrelationship between the three that is most edifying. Promise, faith, and righteous are a threefold cord that cannot be easily broken (Eccl 4:12).

NOT THROUGH THE LAW

“^{4:13} For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Here is an expression that is pregnant with meaning. There is a threefold accent here that must be seen. **First**, the purpose of God. **Second**, Divine activity. **Third**, the individual realization of blessing. By **“the purpose of God,”** I mean what the Lord intended to do, independent of man’s worthiness or desire. By **“Divine activity,”** I mean God was on the initiative to fulfill His intention, declaring a promise that reflected His purpose, and which He fully intended to bring to pass. By **“the individual realization of the blessing,”** I am pointing out this is not merely a theoretical overview of

possibilities. It is not a theological tenet, to be debated by men.



This is a summary view of salvation—what God has all along intended for His children. It began with Abraham, but was not proposed to end with him. What was experienced by our father Abraham was an introduction of both the

reality and surety of what God determined for all He *“foreknew”* (Rom 8:29-30).

AN OVERVIEW

This is a most remarkable overview of the intricacies of God’s *“great salvation.”* Three key factors are cited: *“righteousness,” “the promise,”* and *“faith.”* All three have their origin in God Himself. The righteousness is *“from God”* (Phil 3:9). The promise was given by God (Heb 6:13). The *“faith”* was obtained from Him (2 Pet 1:1). From the higher view, Deity is the common factor in all of these things. From the lower perspective, they are all directed toward humanity.

The promise of God and the righteousness from God are both apprehended by faith. Further, the

promise of God relates specifically to the righteousness that comes from Him through faith. It is apparent that all boasting is excluded by this arrangement.

This is not a commentary on something exclusive to Abraham. Nor, indeed, does it refer to God's dealings with the Jews alone. This is an inspired explanation of how God accomplished His desire for humanity, who had sinned and come short of His glory. From any view but that of heaven, the situation is an impossible one. Yet, infinite wisdom and relentless love brought it to pass. All of this was done without God forfeiting or ignoring a single facet of His character. It was also accomplished within the circumference of the human will. No one has ever, or can ever, receive a righteousness from God that does not want it.

THE PROMISE

What is "the promise?" This is the Divine commitment to Abraham, given at different times with varying degrees of elaboration. The first expression of it is found in Genesis 12:2-3. "I will **ble**ss thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be **a blessing** . . . in thee shall all families of the earth be **ble**ssed."

The fifteenth and seventeenth chapters of Genesis refer to this blessing as a "covenant" God made with Abraham (Gen 15:18; 17:2-21). This confirmed the determination of God to fulfill His good pleasure.

In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, God again affirmed His intention: "in **ble**ssing I will **ble**ss thee . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be **ble**ssed" (vs 17-18).

The "promise," therefore, was God's commitment to bless "all nations."

The relevance of this to us is confirmed in the third chapter of Galatians, where the covenant God made with Abraham is declared to be the New Covenant which we enjoy in Christ Jesus. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to

thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that **the covenant**, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (3:16-17). The ultimate offspring of Abraham was the Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom the promised blessing is realized.

Furthermore, the New Covenant is, in fact, the first, or original, covenant, as this text declares. The Law, never intended to be a means of justification, "was **add**ed because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal 3:19). All of this emphasizes that God's intention was never to merely direct humanity. It has

From any view but that of heaven, the situation is an impossible one. Yet, infinite wisdom and relentless love brought it to pass. All of this was done without God forfeiting or ignoring a single facet of His character. It was also accomplished within the circumference of the human will.

always been to bless them. In order for that to take place, however, He gave the Law to tutor men concerning their absolute need of a Savior and a righteousness from God.

THE HEIR OF THE WORLD

What an intriguing expression: "that he should be heir of the world." If you are ever tempted to think of salvation as something small and inconsequential, ponder the promise that Abraham would be "heir of **the world!**" Other versions read, "that **the earth** would be his heritage,"^{BBE} "to give **the whole earth** to Abraham,"^{NLT} "should inherit **the world.**"^{NJB}

The Genesis record of God's promise to Abraham does not speak of him being an "heir of the world." There we read the following expressions: "in thee shall **all families of the earth** be blessed" (12:3), "in thy seed shall **all the nations of the earth** be blessed" (22:18). The specific land promised to Abraham was Canaan

(Gen 17:8). The boundaries of the land were even specified (Gen 15:18-21). How is it, then, that the Spirit introduces the thought of Abraham being an "heir of the world."

The Fulness of the Promise

The Spirit is viewing the full extent of the promise to be realized through Christ Jesus. That dimension was so large it could not be expressed in spiritually primitive times. Men must be reconciled to God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit to comprehend the fulness of the promise made to Abraham.

The Psalmist expressed the promise more fully. ". . . but those that wait upon the LORD, they **shall inherit the**

earth. . . But the meek shall **inherit the earth**; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace . . . For such as be blessed of him **shall inherit the earth**" (Psa 37:9,11,22).

The Lord Jesus also referred to this blessing. "Blessed are the meek: for they **shall inherit the earth**" (Matt 5:5).

In the book of Hebrews, the Spirit takes the matter even further. "It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: 'What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.' In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him."

Until that complete blessing, we

“see” the Lord Jesus, the glorified and consummate Man, crowned with glory and honor, superintending the whole world. He is God’s pledge of the time when the “seed of Abraham” will assume the government of the whole world.

If we doubt this will be the case, the Lord spoke through Daniel of this very blessing. *“Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High . . .”*^{NIV} (Dan 7:27).

Ultimate Objective

The term “heir of the world,” therefore, views the promise from the viewpoint of God’s ultimate objective. He has determined to gather everything together into one perfectly harmonious whole. There is a Divine purpose, designed in Christ, “to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ”^{NIV} (Eph 1:9-10). At that time, the promise that Abraham, including “his seed,” would be “heir of the world” will be fulfilled.

Other inspired expressions that speak of this glorious fulfillment are as follows. *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him . . .”* (2 Tim 2:12). *“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in his throne”* (Rev 3:21). *“And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of My Father”* (Rev 2:26-27). *“ . . . and they shall reign for ever and ever”* (Rev 22:5).

Oh, the wonder of the salvation that is “in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). Believers must discipline their souls and minds not to think of salvation only in regards to the resolution of earthly circumstances, or the experience of Divine blessing while we remain “in the body.” Much of contemporary Christianity is on

this basis. For that reason, it is highly restrictive to the soul, hampering the human spirit, and hiding the good things of God. At some point our souls must soar higher than this world, and consider things yet to come. God has made promise concerning inheriting the whole world.

HIS SEED

God’s dealings with Abraham always include his “seed,” or descendants. *“ . . . My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee”* (Gen 17:7), *“thou, and thy seed . . . you and thy seed after thee”* (17:9-10).

In an introductory way, Abraham was promised the whole world. In the most precise way, the Lord Jesus, his “Seed,” is the appointed “Heir of all things.” In the inclusive sense, and because we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), we are also Abraham’s “seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

In the New Covenant, Abraham is not considered independently of his offspring. Ultimately, Abraham’s “Seed” was Christ Jesus. As it is written, *“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ”* (Gal 3:16). Thus, in the most complete sense, the Lord Jesus Christ is the One “appointed Heir of all things” (Heb 1:2).

Lest some be tempted to think this circumstance removes the subject at hand from us, the Spirit affirms that our identity with Christ constitutes us Abraham’s seed also. *“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Gal 3:29). Thus those who are in Christ Jesus are also said to inherit all things. As

it is written, *“He that overcometh **shall inherit all things**; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son”* (Rev 21:7).

A Brief Summary

In an introductory way, Abraham was promised the whole world. In the most precise way, the Lord Jesus, his “Seed,” is the appointed “Heir of all things.” In the inclusive sense, and because we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), we are also Abraham’s “seed, and heirs according to the promise.” The text, therefore, is most relevant to us.

NOT THROUGH THE LAW

The Spirit is showing us the contradiction of Law to faith in the matter of appropriating righteousness. The promise of Abraham becoming an “heir of the world” was not given upon the basis of law-keeping. In fact, the Law was not given until four hundred and thirty years AFTER the promise was made. The promise of heirship was not a reward for keeping the Law.

Applying Old Covenant Promises

The Law promised unparalleled prosperity to the one who was flawlessly obedient to its demands. The blessings would even “overtake” the people, **if** they hearkened to the voice of the Lord. *“Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out”* (Deut 28:2-6).

Some today are saying these promises apply to those in Christ Jesus. Their reason if such were promised under the Old Covenant, how much more are they applicable under the New and better covenant. But their reasoning is flawed. First, the promises were based upon keeping the Law, not upon faith. Second, they had to do with this world, not the world that is to come. Third, God has provided “some better thing” for those

who are in Christ Jesus (Heb 11:40).

What is blessing in the city and in the field compared to being an "heir of the world?" Who is willing to compare the blessing of the fruit of our body, the ground, and flocks of animals with being an "heir of the world?" What person will turn his attention to the basket and the storehouse being blessed when God speaks of being "an heir of the world?" And who will settle for being blessed in coming in and going out when they can be "an heir of the world?" Such thinking is too small for those who have been reconciled to God. We can have higher thoughts.

Not only were these blessings

Not only is the promise of being an "heir of the world" not brought about by keeping the Law, it is not even in harmony with the principle of the Law. The Law postulates waywardness in man. It was given to convince of sin, and stop

FAITH > RIGHTEOUSNESS > HEIR

the boasting mouth. The Law presented moral challenges men could not meet. It provided a sacrificial system to address the imperfection of men. It did not speak of entering heaven, eternal life, or being reconciled to God. It provided no cleansing for the conscience, power for living, or Savior from sin.

thought. Its professed experts are masters of little things. Nearly the whole tenor of modern religion not only encourages minuscule thinking, but actually discourages deep thinking and extensive meditation. This is seen in the songs they sing, programs they promote, and the men they exalt.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

How is that Abraham became qualified to be "an heir of the world?" It was because he was righteous, for only a righteous person can inherit the world. This righteousness, however, was not developed by Abraham. Rather, it was "imputed" to him upon the basis of his faith. He possessed the righteousness by imputation because he "believed God."

Some might object that Abraham was NOT qualified to be "heir of the world," but was totally unworthy of such a magnanimous blessing. From an earthly perspective, this is true. But there is another view—the TRUE one. Our text states the case clearly. He WAS qualified because he WAS righteous. Further, he WAS because he believed God! That is how the New Covenant works. **Those who believe on Christ are counted righteous, and those who are counted righteous are made heirs.**

In my judgment, the contemporary church is afflicted with the virus of small thought. Its professed experts are masters of little things. Nearly the whole tenor of modern religion not only encourages minuscule thinking, but actually discourages deep thinking and extensive meditation.

contingent upon the DOING of men, they also assumed enmity all around. They assumed the need for replenishment and the presence of death and corruption. Remove these factors, and they have no significance whatsoever.

Being an "heir of the world" assumes the removal of all hostile forces and the presence of perfect peace. There is no need for flocks to increase, or to store up food for the time of need.

Not Through the Law

Therefore, a promise of this magnitude—becoming "an heir of the world"—could not be realized through the Law. If men did not have their storehouse blessed through Law, how could they ever hope to inherit the whole world? You cannot earn the remission of your sins—the entry point of Divine acceptance. It should be apparent you cannot earn the world as your reward—the consummation of Divine acceptance.

In my judgment, the contemporary church is afflicted with the virus of small

This all may appear rather technical and inconsequential, but we must not allow ourselves to think in such a shallow manner. If God could not make Abraham an "heir" without him being righteous, then we should certainly regard righteousness as being of the utmost importance. Also, if men cannot be "made righteous" (Rom 5:19) apart from faith, then a high priority must be placed upon believing God.

Because this subject will be developed at length in the succeeding passage, we will proceed to the next verse.

THE LAW VOIDS FAITH

"¹⁴ For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: ¹⁵ Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no

transgression." This is an unusually strong affirmation. Think of these statements: "faith is made void" and "the promise made of none effect." The meaning is that BECAUSE faith is

made void, the promise CANNOT be fulfilled. Arresting words, indeed!

Other versions read, "faith is made void and the promise is nullified,"^{NASB}

“faith has no value and the promise is worthless,”^{NIV} “faith is useless. And in that case, the promise is also meaningless,”^{NLT} and “faith is worthless and the promise is without force.”^{NJB}

What is it that voids faith, making it useless? And how can a promise given by the Almighty God lose its effectiveness and become meaningless? Some would contend that neither things is possible. The Spirit affirms there is a condition that introduces both things into human experience. It is a tragedy that any person would embrace a theology that made the acceptance of these things unlikely, if not impossible.

If the inheritance is obtained through *“the law,”* or by a system of law-keeping, faith *“has no value.”* Because of that condition, the promise of God is *“meaningless,”* for there is no way for it to be realized.

The Law is Not of Faith

The Spirit is making a particularly weighty point. I fear it is little known, if recognized at all, in the church-circles with which I am most familiar. The Law is actually contrary to faith, and does not even allow for its entrance, to say nothing of its maintenance. This is not a mere human conjecture, but a Divine affirmation. *“And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them”* (Gal 3:12).

The Law did not depend upon believing, but on DOING. Faith was not required to do the Law. That is the meaning of the Galatians text. Other versions accentuate this reality. *“The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them,’^{NIV} ‘But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.’^{NRSV} ‘The law is not on the principle of faith; but, He that shall have done these things shall live by them.’^{DARBY} ‘The Law is based not on faith but on the principle, whoever complies with it will find life in it.’^{NJB}*

The Law did not require faith in

God or the anticipation of the Son of God. There was no commandment to believe God, and no promise given to those who did believe God.

Those who were under the Law were given no advantage in believing. This is confirmed by their rejection of the Savior of the world, Who came to them (John 1:11). Even when the thundering of the Law was still ringing in their ears, the Israelites were noted for unbelief, not faith. They perceived the voice of the Lord (which can be believed, as seen in our father Abraham) as the source of death, not life. Thus they requested of Moses, *“Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Ex 20:19).

The Law has nothing whatsoever to do with man as a believer, but deals with

If the inheritance is obtained through *“the law,”* or by a system of law-keeping, faith *“has no value.”* Because of that condition, the promise of God is *“meaningless,”* for there is no way for it to be realized.

him exclusively as a doer.

Faith Cannot Function Under Law

Because the Law *“is not of faith,”* and offers no sustenance for it, faith cannot function under the Law. As soon as the soul depends upon the Law, and consequently upon ones own doing, faith is voided or nullified.

The Spirit addresses this matter in Galatians also. Each time the attempt to appropriate righteousness through the Law is mentioned, extraordinarily hard words are used. *“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain”* (Gal 2:21). *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace”* (Gal 5:4). Thus we have the effects of

trying to be justified under Law powerfully stated.

- ▶ Faith is made void and useless.
- ▶ The promise of God is without force and meaningless.
- ▶ Christ is dead in vain.
- ▶ Christ is become of no effect.
- ▶ Men are thus fallen from grace.

I ask you, is it possible for a more dreadful condition to be contemplated? Why is it that men continue to seek justification by means of the Law? Why do they approach salvation as though it were the result of adherence to a moral code? It is because they imagine they have more power than they really do. They have not perceived the invincibility of sin apart from faith. But God will have none of their reasoning. The Law cannot produce a righteous man, and no amount of human reasoning can change that fact.

THE LAW WORKS WRATH

However, the Law is not powerless. There is something it does, and very effectively. The *“law works wrath,”* or *“brings about wrath.”^{NASB}* The very moment a person begins to think righteousness can be produced by keeping the Law, the wrath of God *“comes.”*

The Law cannot bring grace to the soul, and how sorely grace is needed! But it is too heavy for Law to carry, and does not fit into the system of Law. One person has said, *“It is indeed the nature of every law to afford the opportunity of transgression.”^{ROBERT HALDANE}* No law makes provision for the exercise of mercy. It is inherent in law to demand perfect obedience. That is why is *“works wrath.”*

For a moment, let us ponder how the law works upon the conscience of men who seek justification from it. The more the Law tells what we ought and ought not to do, the more the sinful nature rises to prominence. As it is written, *“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive*

apart from law; but when the commandment came, **sin sprang to life** and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death ^{NIV} (Rom 7:8-11).

With a specificity than is unparalleled, Paul confessed, "But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become **utterly sinful**" ^{NIV} (Rom 7:13).

When the Law entered, it brought no faith and produced no hope. Rather, it is written, "The law was added so that the

In such a case, the Lord does not look for a reason to save, but for a perfect and unwavering obedience. When it is not found, His wrath is focused upon the transgressor, for God has no other alternative.

Legal Systems

I must draw some conclusions from these weighty considerations. Too much theology does not reason upon the truth, drawing from it intended implications.

If the things that have been affirmed are true, then the greatest disservice anyone could bring to the sons of men is a system of Law for justification. When rule-keeping is introduced as the

work within the stricture of Law, for faith cannot survive there. You see, then, what a serious condition has been set before us.

NO LAW, NO TRANSGRESSION

Here is a statement virtually unknown in some circles. "Where no law is, **there is no transgression.**" The next chapter will affirm essentially the same thing. "For until the law sin was in the world: **but sin is not imputed when there is no law**" (Rom 5:13).

This statement is made in support of the affirmation, "The Law works wrath." It is as though the Spirit said, "Where law is, there must be transgression, and only where there is no law is it possible for there to be no transgression." **The very existence of the Law confirms the guilt of humanity.** It substantiates the propensity all men have to sin, which only needs an occasion to rise to the surface.

Thus it is written, the Law "was added **because of transgressions,** till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal 3:19). There was a limitation placed on the administration of the Law: "**until** the Seed to whom the promise referred had come." ^{NIV} Because of this circumstance, "the promise" could not be based upon Law, which was intended to be a temporary arrangement. It could only exist where sin and the sin nature was present. The inheritance, however, looked beyond the temporal realm, to the eternal order, when the promise of being an "heir of the world" would be fulfilled.

The "promise" is founded upon the removal of sin. To put it another way, the forgiveness of sin, the covering of iniquities, and the refusal of God to impute sin (4:6-8). As will be further substantiated in the next chapter, our standing before God is founded upon the **absence of sin**, not its presence. Law, on the other hand, is based upon **the presence of sin**, and the need to make it known.

It may be argued that the New Covenant still acknowledges the presence of sin. After all, provision is made for forgiveness (1 John 1:7,9) and an

First, faith cannot exist under such a system. That is why legalists are virtually void of Divine power. The "exceeding greatness" of God's power is exclusively toward those "who believe" (Eph 1:19). Thus law-binders are thrown into a serious quandary. They cannot become righteous because they do not have faith. And, they cannot have faith because they are under the Law.

trespass might increase ^{NIV} (Rom 5:20).

See, then, the associations of the Law, and let them "sink down into your ears." Add these to the effects of the Law enumerated under the heading, "Faith Cannot Function Under the Law."

- ▶ Sin seized an opportunity through the commandment of the Law.
- ▶ Working through the Law, sin produces every kind of sin within the individual.
- ▶ When the commandment came, sin sprang to life and men died.
- ▶ The commandment that offered life through doing, actually generated death.
- ▶ The Law produced death.
- ▶ It caused the trespass to increase.

More specifically, the "wrath" mentioned is the judgment of God. The Law does not awaken the compassion of God, but His appraisal of the individual.

way of appropriating righteousness drastic consequences take place.

First, faith cannot exist under such a system. That is why legalists are virtually void of Divine power. The "exceeding greatness" of God's power is exclusively toward those "who believe" (Eph 1:19). Thus law-binders are thrown into a serious quandary. They cannot become righteous because they do not have faith. And, they cannot have faith because they are under the Law.

Second, any professed faith they are thought to possess is useless. Their empty intellectualism cannot reach into heaven, or take hold of the effectiveness of Christ's death. Thus, for them, Christ died in vain.

Third, their insistence on being justified by Law puts them outside the circumference of grace. Grace cannot

“Advocate” (1 John 2:1). Indeed, this is true. However, this is a temporary arrangement until we are delivered from “the body of this death” (Rom 4:25; Phil 4:20-21). In “the world to come,” every vestige of sin will be removed, and we will no longer contend with a recalcitrant nature. There will be no need for conviction or remission, for sin will not

exist in any form. Then the saying will be brought to its fulfillment: “Where there is no law, there is no transgression.”

This is precisely why the promise was given to Abraham **before** the Law, and was not based upon the Law. The purpose of God is “eternal” (Eph 3:11). The promise regards an “eternal

inheritance” (Heb 9:15) and “eternal life” (1 John 2:25). The realization of such a marvelous promise, therefore, cannot be on the basis of Law, for Law works wrath, not blessing. Further, the need for Law accents the need for something being received from God through grace. Law proves the impotence of men to measure up to the Divine standard on their own.

BY FAITH THAT IT MIGHT BE BY GRACE

“¹⁶ Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.”

The reasoning of this section of Romans is so powerful, one wonders why the Christian world has not embraced it with heart and mind. Instead, it has become a battle ground for renegade theologians. Among other things, this confirms the utter corruption of “the carnal mind,” which is “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). You can educate such a mind, even culturing it with religious discipline, but it still cannot receive the things of God. It is ever true, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

IT IS OF FAITH

The “it” that depends upon faith is “the promise,” or more particularly, the consummation of the promise. The NIV reads, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith.” The “therefore” refers to the impossibility of such a promise being realized through the Law, which “works wrath.” The Revised version says the fulfillment of the promise “depends on faith.” The NLT reads, “So that’s why faith is the key!”

The clear implication is that apart from faith, it is not possible for this

promise to be realized. The promise of being an “heir of the world” will never come because we have fulfilled the demands of a law. It will only come when we believe the One who made the promise.

You should also see in this passage the applicability of “the promise” to all who are in Christ Jesus. This promise is for all the seed, not Abraham alone. Let no soul think of barely making it to glory, or having a “cabin in the corner of glory land.” Christ has ushered in an era where souls become “heirs of the world.” If you think in terms of such largeness, it will

situation can only be accomplished by the love of God. Apart from that, there is not one shred of hope for humanity.

Works cannot take hold of grace, for the law stands between the one working for salvation and the grace that is required. If one insists upon depending upon self-effort to gain the promise of God, then Law alone can administrate such an attempt. The Law cannot lift us. It can only point out where we are, and the utter hopelessness of our condition.

How different is the grace of God. It

Let no soul think of barely making it to glory, or having a “cabin in the corner of glory land.” Christ has ushered in an era where souls become “heirs of the world.” If you think in terms of such largeness, it will help to overthrow any trust in works. The promise is so extensive that it will not fit into the restricted bag of works.

help to overthrow any trust in works. **The promise is so extensive that it will not fit into the restricted bag of works.** You simply will not be able to think of being an “heir of the world” within the context of duty. But faith is well able to hold such greatness.

THAT IT MIGHT BE BY GRACE

Here we learn more of the nature of our Lord. Salvation **MUST** come by grace. It will not and cannot come by any other means. If Divine favor is not the spring from which life comes, it will not come. The Spirit has already proved that Jew and Gentile are alike under the dominion of sin. The extrication of men from this

is “through grace” that we believe, which is itself a most marvelous accomplishment (Acts 18:27). Tracing salvation back to its ultimate cause, the Spirit affirms, “by grace ye are saved,” and “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:5,8). There simply is no other way for sinners to be saved. God’s grace, favor, and mercy are the **only** root from which the salvation of sinners can sprout. It is the **only** well from which the water of life can be drawn.

And here is the marvel of it all: **only** faith can take hold of grace. The realization of the promise of being an

“*heir of the world*” comes through faith so that it CAN be by grace. Further, it must be “*by grace,*” for there is no other way for guilty sinners to be received by God. The grace of God “*brings salvation*” (Tit 2:11), but only those who have faith can receive it.

In this text, grace is contrasted with works. The Spirit has already affirmed “*There is none who does good, no, not one*” (3:12). Jesus Himself declared, “*No one is good but One, that is, God*” (Matt 19:17). Therefore, human goodness, or morality, cannot be the basis for salvation. This is the meaning of the Spirit’s words in Romans 11:6. “*And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*”^{NKJV} In confirmation of this circumstance, our text says “*the promise*” is appropriated by faith in order that God’s grace can deliver it in all of its fullness.

TO THE END

Over and above the personal realization of “*the promise,*” there is a Divine intention to be accomplished. The commitment is fulfilled by grace “*in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*”^{NASB} The wording of the text may appear strange to some. Why doesn’t the Spirit say “not only those who are Jews, but also those who are Gentiles?” Since Abraham is “*the father of us all,*” whether Jew or Gentile, why contrast those “*who are of the Law*” with “*those who are of the faith of Abraham?*”

Those who “*are of the Law*” are the Jews. They were tutored by the Law, which was their “*Schoolmaster,*” to bring them to Christ. Faith “*came*” to them releasing them from the Law (Gal 3:24-25). While their faith made them children of Abraham, believing Gentiles actually had more in common with Abraham than the Jews. Abraham “*believed God*” without the Law, and before his circumcision. “*The faith of Abraham,*”

refers to this condition—believing God without being under the Law.

Only grace could bring those with the Law and those without it together. Only grace could make the promise of being heirs of the world secure to all the spiritual offspring of Abraham; i.e., both Jew and Gentile.

The Divine interest in “*all the seed*” receiving the promise is noteworthy. Many of the Jews felt this was not possible—that the Gentiles could not be accepted in their uncircumcised state. Thus some of the Jews aggressively taught, “*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*” (Acts 15:1). Conversely, many Gentiles of our time are dubious about those who are “*of the Law*” being saved, feeling they have been altogether cut off. There is a remnant in both categories, and God has established the means of becoming righteous so that both are ensured of their

promises were made. Works cannot unite us with him, for he was declared righteous BEFORE he worked. In him God first revealed this principle: “*God imputes righteousness apart from works*” (4:6).

Although I have mentioned this before, I am compelled to do so once more time. Salvation is not as simplistic as some have imagined. Although it is not so complicated it is difficult to appropriate, its involvements are marked by Divine complexity. Your salvation involves Abraham and the Jews as well as yourself and the Gentiles. Throughout the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, there is unfailing consideration of Abraham and the promises made to him. It contains Divinely appointed procedures that ensure that “*all the descendants*” of Abraham may take hold of the promise. It should be obvious that “*the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*” are intricately woven throughout the fabric of this “*great salvation.*”

In this text, grace is contrasted with works. The Spirit has already affirmed “*There is none who does good, no, not one*” (3:12). Jesus Himself declared, “*No one is good but One, that is, God*” (Matt 19:17). Therefore, human goodness, or morality, cannot be the basis for salvation.

A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS

The Lord is ever mindful of His promise that Abraham would be the “*father of many nations*” (Gen 17:4,5).

Originally, the Lord said to Abraham, “*And I will make of thee a great nation*” (Gen 12:2). From the standpoint of the flesh, there was another great nation Abraham also fathered through Ishmael. After Hagar and Ishmael had been expelled from Abraham’s house, the angel of the Lord told Hagar, “*Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation*” (Gen 21:18). At least twelve nations sprang from Ishmael (Gen 25:13).

The most significant nations springing from Abraham, however, were spiritual. Although it did not seem apparent at the time God first made the promise to Abraham, that promise would be extended to the Gentiles, many of whom would be grafted into the Jewish tree springing from the root of Abraham (Rom 11:17). The vastness of Abraham’s seed cannot be numbered (Rev 7:9)

participation in the promise.

Faith is the factor that secures the promise for “*all the seed.*” As soon, therefore, as men begin to make “*works*” their emphasis, they at once deprive some of the “*seed*” of the intended blessing. By so doing, they become competitors with God rather than participants in His purpose.

Faith unites us with Abraham, “*who is the father of us all,*” and to whom the

Our text declares that Abraham being *“the father of many nations”* is realized by the promise being conferred **by grace through faith**. It is for all who believe. Or, as our text states it, **“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace.”**^{NIV} Believing, or possessing faith, connects us with Abraham. Consequently, it also brings to us the promise made to Abraham, that he would be *“the heir of the world.”*

BEFORE GOD

Abraham’s fatherhood is not to be considered after the flesh, even though many peoples sprang from him. His fatherhood is primarily *“before God,”* not men. The first phrase of verse seventeen is a parenthetical expression: *“(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations),”* confirming that Abraham’s fatherhood is based upon the promise of God. When this explanatory phrase is removed, the verses reads this way: *“who is the father of us all before Him whom he believed.”* Other versions read, *“who is the father of us all . . . in the presence of Him whom he believed,”*^{NKJV} *“who is the father of us all . . . in the sight of Him whom he believed,”*^{NASB} *“He is our father in the sight of God.”*^{NIV}

This is another way of saying Abraham is the spiritual father of those who believe on Jesus. This destroys any confidence in the flesh, so that the Jews could not boast in tracing their lineage back to Abraham—something they were prone to do (Matt 3:9; John 8:39,53).

Strange Reasoning?

This line of reasoning may appear strange to some. It is rarely heard in our time, yet is a vital aspect of viewing our acceptance in Christ. The idea is that in Abraham we behold the manner in which men are justified, or become righteous before God. There is where we can obtain a clearer picture of the cause of righteousness. When we ponder whether or not we are righteous before God, we must look to Abraham. He *“believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.”* It is no different with you. Do you believe God? Have you embraced

the record He has given of His Son? Then He has given you righteousness. The blessedness David described applies to you. *“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”* (Rom 4:6-8).

GOD QUICKENS THE DEAD

BEFORE Abraham had offspring, God called him a *“a father of many nations.”* This was not an analysis of nations already in existence. Such appraisals belong to men, but **not** to God! The great God of heaven **“gives life to the dead . . .”** This was corroborated in the person of Abraham. When Isaac was conceived, *“he considered not his own body now dead”* from the standpoint of reproduction (Rom 4:19). Indeed, as the Spirit says in Hebrews, *“Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in*

creation, and there are aspects of the new order in which He also does this. The offspring of Abraham are a case in point. That is why it says of God, *“and calleth those things which be not as though they were”* (17b). This language does not mean God speaks as though they were in existence even though they are not. Rather, it means it brings them into existence from nothing. Other versions read, *“and calls into being that which does not exist,”*^{NASB} *“and calls into existence the things that do not exist,”*^{NRSV} *“and who brings into existence what didn’t exist before,”*^{NLT} *“and calls into existence what does not yet exist.”*^{NLT}

It is as though God rejuvenated Abraham and Sarah in their old age, enabling them to do the impossible. That rejuvenation did not come from medical wisdom, or any other form of worldly knowledge. By His mighty word, Abraham became capable of bearing children, and Sarah was no longer barren. **God called these conditions into existence.**

The Way God Speaks

This text also emphasizes that God spoke to Abraham in view of what He Himself (the living God) would do. **He did not address Abraham from the natural point of view, but from the standpoint of what He would do.** This is involved in a very wonderful expression concerning God’s foreknowledge. *“Known to God from eternity are all His works”*^{NKJV} (Acts 15:18).

The purposes of God do not revolve around what men will do, but what He will do. In our text, God addressed Abraham from the prospect of His own mighty work. He has never represented Himself as determining the future upon the basis of He foresees men will do.

A Source of Confusion

This manner of Divine speaking has been a source of confusion to many. When God speaks of us, He often does it in view of what He will yet do—not in view of the present circumstances. When He calls us *“sons,” “saints,” “heirs,” “kings,”*

Look what God has done with such a man! The record is intended not only to explain the origin of true righteousness, but to spawn hope and trust in the hearts of those desiring to be found in God’s good favor.

multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable” (Heb 11:12).

Look what God has done with such a man! The record is intended not only to explain the origin of true righteousness, but to spawn hope and trust in the hearts of those desiring to be found in God’s good favor.

Because this subject is further developed in the next verses, I will reserve further comments for that section.

CALLING THINGS WHICH ARE NOT AS THOUGH THEY WERE

God does not work things into existence, as men must do. He simply calls them into existence, determining they will come to pass. He did this in the first

“priests,” and other such things, He does so in prospect of what we will eventually be. We are all of these things now, but in an introductory manner. Just as Abraham begetting Isaac was only the beginning of God’s intended purpose, so our present status is but the “firstfruits” of the greater work that is yet to come.

The church has been seriously divided over the nature of salvation. Some have represented the purpose of God as already fulfilled completely, with little, or nothing, more to be done. However, just as Abraham’s fatherhood was not complete with the birth of Isaac, so our new birth is not complete with what we

presently enjoy. God is going to do much more with us, both in this world, and in the ages to come. He will yet “finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness” (Rom 9:28). He will “perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

Faith can enable us to speak in concert with God, looking forward with confidence to what the Lord will yet do. With certitude we can say, “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Yet, faith will not allow us to become complacent, supposing there is such safety in our state that we may become idle. **As soon as the professed follower of Jesus becomes idle, removing his**

hand from the plow, and ceasing to fight the good fight of faith, he is in the grip of unbelief. By its very nature, such a process is subtle. It is brought on when the soul becomes insensitive and lethargic, feeling at home in the world. This causes sleep to come over the soul.

God still “calls into being that which does not exist.”^{NASB} Blessed is the person who trusts in Him to do so. It should be evident that this is seen most clearly in God imputing righteousness to the one who dares to believe what He has said of His Son. Such a person will realize the bliss of sins forgiven, and the joy of being “made righteous” by a just and holy God.

RISING ABOVE THE REASONING OF MEN

“¹⁸ **Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.**” There is a sharp conflict between the wisdom and power of God and the wisdom of men. This dissonance is so pronounced that faith must rise above the natural order to take hold of the promise of God. As long as men think within the context of this world, they will not be able to receive the promises of God. Although reasonable in the Spirit, Divine commitments are totally unreasonable to the flesh. This is clearly seen in the case of Abraham.

AGAINST HOPE

Herein is a remarkable expression: “Who against hope believed in hope.” Here, two hopes are set before us, and they are antithetical to one another. To take hold of one requires that you let go of the other. Other versions read, “who, **contrary to hope, in hope believed,**”^{NKJV}

“In hope **against hope** he believed,”^{NASB} “**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed,**”^{NIV} “**Hoping against hope, he believed,**”^{NRSV} “Abraham believed him . . . even though such a promise **seemed utterly impossible!**”^{NLT} “**Though there seemed no hope, he hoped and believed.**”^{NJB}

Here is an aspect of “the good fight of faith” – “**against hope.**” For something to be “against hope” means it is beyond anything man can conceive or nature can produce. There was no natural law or principle that could make Abraham a “father of many nations.” If that was going to happen, it must come from God, and God alone. There was no visible or rational grounds for hoping the promise of God would be fulfilled. If God did not make it come to pass, calling into existence things that not yet existed, it simply would not happen.

Our father Abraham went beyond

the sphere of natural abilities, and believed what God had promised. He did so in contradiction of all earthly hope or possibilities. This is the **ONLY** way he could become the father of many nations. As it is written, “**that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.**”

AN OBSERVATION

There is a strain of theology in our world that greatly concerns me. Having been subjected to it, and even embracing it for a while, I know of its debilitating effects. It is a theology that relies upon human wisdom and earthly analysis. It is built upon the logic of men and visible appearance. It produces people who never look for any supernatural working. Such always think within the confines of nature, looking to principles of logic, historical confirmations, and supposed precedents. It teaches people to live on the lower plain of sight and sound, with no regard to a God that calls into being things that do not yet exist. It relies upon language expertise, philosophical hypotheses, and historical analysis.

What value would such things have been to Abraham. What if he had approached the promise of God with such a frame of mind. He had no historical example that could confirm God’s

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promise. There was no form of earthly reasoning that would support the belief of that promise. In fact, to believe it, he had to proceed in contradiction of such things. *"Hoping against hope, he believed."*

There is a great need for this kind of faith today! In fact, no other kind of faith is acceptable with God. If Abraham is the *"father of all who believe,"* then his faith

is the only faith God will receive. Those who base their faith upon historical proofs and evidences really have no faith at all. If what they say is true, and I hope it is not, then they are not related to Abraham. In such a case, they are not justified, have no righteousness, and have *"no hope, and [are] without God in the world"* (Eph 2:12).

If this seems too strong, consider

that this is precisely the point the Spirit is making in this text. He is showing us how men receive a righteousness from God. In so doing, He is pulling down cherished walls of thought that have rendered the church impotent. God will have no pretension in His kingdom. If men do not come to Him like our father Abraham, then they cannot be received. His faith is really the only acceptable faith!

NOT WEAK IN FAITH

"¹⁹ And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." The Spirit now details the manner in which Abraham responded to the promise of God. He reveals how someone *"weak in faith"* would reason, which is a very charitable view. By saying *"not weak in faith,"* the Spirit is not saying such a faith is acceptable. Rather, He is as assuming the desire of such to believe God and trust that His promises will be fulfilled in them. He therefore reasons with them in such a manner as will encourage a strong faith.

NOT WEAK IN FAITH

If *"faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb 11:1), then being *"weak in faith"* is **not** being convinced of the reality of such things, and having little or no assurance they can be experienced.

A person who is *"weak in faith"* falls backward when God utters great promises. The commitments of God are too heavy for *"weak"* faith to carry, and so they overwhelm the individual. Such a person is not to be considered a reject. Rather, believers are admonished, *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations"* (Rom 14:1). Such an one is not beyond hope, but requires some patience from men and work from God. This type of individual is considered unusual in Scripture—a departure from the norm. In our day, those who are NOT weak in the faith have

become unusual.

HE CONSIDERED NOT

At once the critic of Scripture will point out that Abraham DID think about his own body and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Is it not written, *"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall*

We can measure the degree of our faith by the amount of consideration we give to earthly circumstances. Those who think in terms of statistics, historical precedent, and natural reasoning are, at best, "weak in faith." This simply is not how faith reasons.

Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! (Gen 17:17-18). Does this not contradict the statement, *"he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb"*? Indeed, it does not!

This was not the **final** consideration of Abraham. God answered the thought Abraham had in his heart. *"Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac:"*

and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year" (Gen 17:19-21).

Immediately, Abraham's faith rose to prominence, overthrowing the first thought he had. **When such faith arises, God has no regard for any previous thoughts.** They were *"fiery darts"* hurled at Abraham by the wicked one, and quenched with the shield of faith.

The Reasoning of Faith

Now, the reasoning of faith becomes the **only** reasoning. Contrary notions have been cast down and trampled under the feet of faith. **Never again is there a record of Abraham struggling with such a thought.** That very day, in expectation of the fulfillment of the promise, Abraham circumcised himself, Ishmael, and all that were in his house (Gen 17:23-27).

Faith Measured

We can measure the degree of our faith by the amount of consideration we give to earthly circumstances. Those who think in terms of statistics, historical precedent, and natural reasoning are, at best, *"weak in faith."* This simply is not how faith reasons. There is such an alarming degree of this kind of thinking in the contemporary church that it is mind-

boggling. Saints must make war against these bastions of faulty thought.

Because of this, purely earthly forms of wisdom have risen to prominence in the church. These include psychiatry, strategists, fund-raisers, motivators, administrators, educators, etc. Whatever place there may be for some of these

approaches (and their placed are all open to question), it is certainly not one of prominence.

A Point of Concern

Due to the preeminence of these things, men cannot think of beginning a work for God without consulting the statistician or strategist. Large projects

are thought to require fund raisers. Successful preachers and teachers of the Word are imagined to be obtainable only through an approved educational process. But all of these approaches leave little or no room for God. They do not require faith, and do not have God at their center. It is difficult for me to believe they are honorable before the Lord.

STRONG, NOT STAGGERING

“²⁰ *He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;*²¹ *And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*”²² *And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*” Here the Spirit shows the opposite of being “*weak in faith.*” What is here declared is not the description of a super man, but the man who receives a righteousness from God.

STAGGERED NOT

Although the promise given to Abraham transcended the highest reasoning of flesh, yet it did not cause Abraham to “*stagger,*” or “*waver.*”^{NASB} The word “*stagger*” is a strong word. Coming from the Greek word *διεκρίθη*, it means to **doubt, hesitate, or waver**. It means to lose ones spiritual balance, so that the promise cannot be grasped. It involves drawing back from the promise, as though it was too good to be true—an impossibility.

“*Staggering*” involves applying human reasoning to the matter—judging according to the flesh. In fact, the root of the Greek word means evaluate, discern, distinguish. In this case, it is doing so “*according to appearance,*” something strictly forbidden by Jesus (John 7:24).

The reason why men “*stagger,*” drawing back from the promise of God, is “*unbelief.*” Those who believe God do not draw back from His promises, or resort to human reasoning to explain or refute them. Those who demand explanations and proofs for the promises of God are staggering at His word.

STRONG IN FAITH

But Abraham did NOT “*stagger at the promise of God through unbelief.*” Rather than God’s promise causing unbelief to rise, **it caused faith to grow greater in strength.** Several versions accentuate this wonderful truth: “*but was strengthened in faith,*”^{NKJV,NIV} “*but grew strong in faith,*”^{NASB} “*but he grew strong in his faith.*”^{NRSV}

If it is true that man “*lives by every word of God*” (Lk 4:4), we should expect faith to increase when subjected to that word. The Word of God caused Abraham to trust the Lord more fully, more extensively, more consistently. His faith was fueled by the promise, and fortified by God’s commitment.

promises of God.

GIVING GLORY TO GOD

There is much talk these days about giving glory to God. For some people, this is limited to a song of purported praise, or giving thanks publically. There is certainly nothing wrong with either of these. In fact, we would rejoice to see more of that done. The greatest glory is brought to the Lord, however, when His people are “*strong in faith,*” or growing in faith. It is no wonder Paul rejoiced in the condition of the Thessalonians. He said of them, “*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds*

To make sure faith does not grow strong, deprive the people of the Word of the Lord—particularly His promises. Do not tell them what God has determined, or the destiny He has planned for His children. Only speak to them of duty, and continually hold threats before their faces. Draw your words from the cistern of flesh, and appeal to the wisdom of this world. It will not be long until faith will become weak, and the people draw back from, God.

To make sure faith does not grow strong, deprive the people of the Word of the Lord—particularly His promises. Do not tell them what God has determined, or the destiny He has planned for His children. Only speak to them of duty, and continually hold threats before their faces. Draw your words from the cistern of flesh, and appeal to the wisdom of this world. It will not be long until faith will become weak, and the people draw back from, God. Faith only grows when it hears the

toward each other” (2 Thess 1:3). Not content to let the Thessalonians remain in a static condition, Paul prayed for them. “*Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power*” (2 Thess 1:11). That is the kind of faith that brings great glory to God. It does so in the earth, and among angelic hosts in heaven. God never fails to honor such faith – never!

Giving glory to God involves drawing attention to His Person and work—and both are involved in faith becoming strong. **Faith does not grow strong by default.** Nor, indeed, can it flourish in a static or traditional environment. A person, for example, that insists on remaining in an environment where faith is never fed and nourished, will not become “*strong in faith.*” Such a person will be content to embrace a historical position, or mouth some pious platitudes that have been handed down through the organization. In contrast, God spoke to Abraham. Abraham listened and believed. Consequently his faith grew strong, and God was glorified.

It starts with an all-powerful God, reasoning that whatever He says He is fully able to perform.

There is certainly room for more of this kind of reasoning in our time. It will not come, of course, until the promises of God become the focus of our attention. As long as men contrive their own projects, then ponder whether or not God can or will assist them, remnants of doubt will linger in their minds. But when they consider what God has promised, faith will awaken and begin to be strong. It is, after all, by God’s “*exceeding great and precious promises*” that we become “*partakers of the Divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4). Among the things inherent in that

but because he was “*fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.*”²³^{NKJV} Neither, indeed, did he have a lengthy exposure to many workings and words from the Lord. Compared to what we have heard through Christ, the words to Him were introductory and few. Yet his faith took hold of them, sensing the truth David would write more than nine hundred years later. “*The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*” (Psa 12:6).

And how does God react to such faith? “*This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.*”²⁴^{NIV} That is, the solid persuasion of Abraham that God was able to do what He promises was itself the reason God credited his faith to him as righteousness.

Faith does not grow strong by default. Nor, indeed, can it flourish in a static or traditional environment. A person, for example, that insists on remaining in an environment where faith is never fed and nourished, will not become “*strong in faith.*”

FULLY PERSUADED

Faith can bring full persuasion to the heart, so there is no room for doubt to enter. **Believing God influenced the way Abraham thought.** As he embraced the promise by faith, he became “*fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*”²⁵^{RSV}

The meaning of the text is this. Abraham did not take the promise of God and sift it through human reason, testing to see if God was able to do what He said. He was unwilling to think of the promise of God in terms of probability or impossibility. Instead, faith governed his thinking, causing him to be “*fully persuaded,*” or “*fully assured,*”²⁶^{NASB} God was able to do what He promised. **He did not think so much of the thing that was promised as the One who made the promise.** That is how faith reasons.

experience is a solid persuasion of the ability of God to do what He promises.

THEREFORE . . .

“*And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*” I do not cease to marvel at the dogmatic manner in which the Spirit makes this point. He will not let it go. You sense the Spirit knows this line of thinking runs counter to everything that is natural in men.

The faith that brings God’s righteousness to us is not mere intellectual assent. It is not a persuasion that comes from studying purported evidence that the Bible is true, and then formally acknowledging its truth. That sort of thing is altogether too common in our day, but it is not acceptable before God. Abraham did not believe God because he took a course in apologetics,

It is one thing to be convinced of the truth of God’s existence. That is good, and not to be despised. But such a persuasion does not bring God’s righteousness to us. Neither, indeed, is it enough to believe the Bible is true, although it is surely imperative that we do so. The faith that brings righteousness involves a full and dominating persuasion. In our case, that is being “*fully persuaded*” that Jesus Christ is precisely what God has declared Him to be, and that He is fully capable of bringing us to glory. Where that kind of faith is not present, men will not experience the righteousness of God. Until they depend upon Christ, relying upon His death, resurrection, and present life, they remain unrighteous. But where they dare to believe, they will be “*made righteous.*”

While that may appear inordinately strong, the following verses will substantiate that is exactly what the Spirit is affirming. He will make much of Christ, and how God has presented Him. Real faith will embrace it, and do so “*without wavering,*” or “*staggering,*” which is the only response that is acceptable to God.

NOT JUST A HISTORY LESSON

“²³ *Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;* ²⁴ *But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on*

him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; ²⁵ *Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*”

Here is one of the hallmark texts of Scripture. It proves the philosophy (for want of a better term) of Scripture. It also identifies the scope of salvation, and the

The Promises of God are Always Appropriated by Faith, Never by Law—by Given O. Blakely

centrality of God the Father. Here Scripture is lifted above the boundaries of history, and made relevant to our time. Among other things, it confirms that in the Divine economy **history is relevant only if it impacts upon the present.** It is not enough to merely know what happened in the past. In particular, the account of Abraham is not given to merely inform us of this great man—*“the friend of God.”* It is not a promotion of hero-worship.

NOT WRITTEN FOR HIS SAKE ALONE

Keep in mind, the writing to which the Spirit refers was, at the time Romans was written, approximately 1,500 years old. The book of Genesis was written somewhere in the mid-1400’s B.C. The book of Romans was written around 57 A.D. Jesus referred to the writing of Moses (Matt 8:4; 19:7-8; Mk 10:3-5; 12:26; Lk 20:37; John 7:23). When Jesus revealed Himself to the two on the road to Emmaus, He referred to Moses’ writing (Lk 24:27). Paul also referred to Moses’ writings (Rom 9:15; 10:5; 2 Cor 3:15; Heb 7:15).

There is absolutely no question about the validity of Moses’ writings, even though they originated well over a millennia before. They had been copied by hand, and even translated into another language. Yet, none of this is mentioned. The integrity of Scripture is assumed.

I mention these things because of the effects of higher criticism in our time. Men have allowed purported scholars to question the precision of Scripture. While it may all seem quite innocent, it has yielded an environment in which unbelief can and does flourish. No such approach is ever taken to the word of God in Scripture. There is no reference to original manuscripts, copies of Scripture, sloppy scribes, human interpolations, etc. If the Word of God is going to have its intended influence upon us, we must rid ourselves of any tendency to doubt its integrity. With absolute consistency, *“the Scripture”* is always presented as absolutely accurate and trustworthy.

Not for His Sake

The record of righteousness being imputed to Abraham is not intended to merely provide information on him. **It is a principle of Scripture that persons are mentioned within the context of redemption.** It is ever true, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”* (Rom 15:4).

There is an intrinsic danger in approaching Scripture as mere history. We are to **learn** from the examples found therein, for they are strategically placed in Scripture. Through the various

There is an intrinsic danger in approaching Scripture as mere history. We are to learn from the examples found therein, for they are strategically placed in Scripture. Through the various personalities mentioned in Scripture God reveals facets of His Person and purpose.

personalities mentioned in Scripture God reveals facets of His Person and purpose. This includes Adam, Cain, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Pharaoh, David, and Nebuchadnezzar. In all of them we learn something of God that pertains to our salvation. They are all relevant to us.

In the case of Abraham, the record of him being accounted righteous is not written to acquaint us with him, or to show how God uniquely favored him.

BUT FOR US ALSO

Whatever we think of this account, we must not allow our thoughts to stop with Abraham. In our thinking, we must bridge the gap of time between Abraham, and ourselves. He is *“the farther of us all.”* The subject with which the Spirit is dealing is NOT unique to Abraham. He was a pioneer of things to come **TO US.** In him we see something that we are presently experiencing.

This should enhance our

appreciation of Abraham. **No person perceptive of the role of Abraham in God’s eternal purpose will stand in criticism of him.** His name is not to be subjected to reproach or shame. The dominant thing we are to recall about Abraham is this: His faith was *“imputed to him for righteousness.”*

It is with some degree of shame and contrition of heart that I acknowledge there were years in my own ministry where this truth was hidden from me. I also admit that I have been part of a movement that has made very little, if anything, of Abraham’s faith being credited to him for righteousness. By God’s grace, I intend to *“revenge my disobedience”* in this matter.

If the record of Abraham being accounted righteous is written for our sake, then we must make much of it. If our view of the salvation and Word of God does not require the consideration of *“our father Abraham,”* it cannot be right. Such a view is distorted, and will eventually lead to erroneous conclusions and misdirected conduct.

The history recorded in Scripture contributes to the development and proclamation of sound doctrine. **This is so because God’s dealings with men were dictated by His character, not their persons.** Those dealings represent a certain consistency in our Lord that must be seen in order for faith to grow.

An Additional Thought

One additional thought on this passage is in order. Among self-professed scholars, there is a frequent reference to “the author’s intended meaning” in Scripture. This “meaning” is thought to be at the root of Scripture, bringing out its true meaning. But what of the text we are considering? What of Moses’ record of Abraham’s faith being accounted to him for righteousness? Do you suppose that Moses’ “intended meaning” was to establish that this righteousness was also for succeeding generations? If so, he certainly gave no indication of such a personal intent—in any of his writings. His word was God’s word.

The Scripture must be viewed as primarily the Word of God. It is HIS meaning that is to be uncovered, whether the holy man moved to write the words knew it or not. While this may appear to be a small and inconsequential point, it will significantly impact HOW we read and comprehend Scripture. If we read it as a message from one of our peers—a fellow man—we will not derive the nourishment intended by it. But if we receive it *“not as the word of men, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe”* (1 Thess 2:13), it will nourish our souls.

TO WHOM IT SHALL BE IMPUTED

Herein is a wonderful thing. Those who imagine the first thirty-nine books of the Bible have little or no relevance to us, must take this passage into consideration. Here, what happened to Abraham is said to also happen to us. We obtain righteousness in the same way as our father Abraham, by having our faith accounted to us *“as righteousness.”*

It is not that **Abraham’s** faith is reckoned to us for righteousness, but the faith **we** possess is the basis of our righteousness.

The **“IT”** that is imputed to us is our faith. Thus the RSV reads, *“That is why **his faith** was reckoned to him as righteousness.”* It is no wonder such faith is called *“precious”* (2 Pet 1:1). Whatever brings the righteousness of God to us is a most inestimable treasure!

When the Spirit says *“shall be imputed,”* He is not referring meaning from our time forward—or the time of the writing of the book of Romans forward. Instead, He is speaking of Abraham being accounted righteous upon the basis of his faith. The Lord not only did this for Abraham’s sake, but in prospect of Abraham’s offspring, who would also believe God. The expression views Abraham as **the first of a vast spiritual generation**, of which believers in our day are blessed to be part.

IF WE BELIEVE ON HIM

Notice the precision in this text. It is not simply believing that God exists, or believing in Him in disassociation from the Lord Jesus Christ. *“But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, **IF** we believe*

on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Abraham relied upon God bringing Isaac and a multiplicity of offspring into the world from nothing. We believe upon God as bringing Jesus back from the dead, and exalting Him to His right hand in the heavens. In Abraham’s case, the

effectiveness of Christ’s death and resurrection. It takes in the abandonment of all confidence in the flesh, and a wholehearted embrace of the Gospel.

Keep in mind, the type of faith being described is *“the faith of Abraham,”* not that of mere intellectual consent or agreement. In involves not staggering at

In His resurrection, Jesus came back from the battle with the powers of darkness, having plundered them in His cross (Col 2:15). In His resurrection He left the promised mortal bruise upon the head of the old serpent, sealing his doom.

impossible would occur in the future. In our case, it occurred in the past. In both cases, only God could bring the matter to pass.

We learn from this that our salvation hinges upon the resurrection of Christ. His death is validated by His resurrection (Rom 1:4). This is poignantly stated in Romans 10:10: *“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.”*^{NKJV} Peter also made this association. *“Who by Him [Jesus] do believe in God, **that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God”** (1 Pet 1:21).*

What Does it Mean to Believe on Him?

To *“believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,”* is to lean the whole weight of our soul upon God, depending on Him to make us acceptable in His sight. It is to trust Him in the capacity of the Father of Jesus—the One who sent the Savior into the world, delivered Him up, raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand. It is to be *“fully persuaded”* this is sufficient to make God both just and the Justifier of the one who believes on Jesus.

Believing on God involves the persuasion of the truth of His record of Jesus. It also includes a reliance on the

the promise of God, but being strong in faith. It includes not considering fleshly oppositions, or arguments that contradict the truth of God. Wherever this kind of faith is not found, no faith can be found.

The twenty-fifth verse is one of the most precise statements of Christ’s work in all of Scripture. It compresses a great body of redemptive truth into a single sentence—something that could only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit. While this was something perceived by the Apostle, it is also something to which He was illuminated by the Spirit. There is no possible way for this statement to be concluded by observing Christ’s death. An historical perspective, or an analysis of words cannot yield this knowledge. It is something that must be revealed. *“Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”* Let us ponder the greatness of this expression. Here is food for faith.

DELIVERED FOR OUR OFFENCES

This is something that GOD did, not man. It is quite true that Judas betrayed the Son of man (Mk 14:41). It is also true that the people *“delivered”* Him to Pilate (Matt 27:18). Pilate also *“delivered Him to be crucified”* (Matt 27:26). It is written, *“the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him”* (Lk 24:20). But this is not the **“delivered”** of reference! **It is NOT what men did to Jesus that brought salvation within our reach, but what**

the Father did to Him!

The people did not “*deliver Him*” for the offences, or transgressions, of humanity. **That is something God did.** If God the Father had not “*delivered Him*,” the powers of darkness and all of humanity would have been impotent to harm a single hair of His head.

The Lamb of God was “*stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*” **It is God** who “*wounded*” the Son “*for our transgressions.*” **It is the Father** who “*bruised*” Him “*for our iniquities.*” The “*chastisement of our peace*” was laid upon Him **by God the Father.** The “*stripes*” by which we “*are healed*” are not those inflicted by men, but those inflicted **by the Father**, who “*made Him to be sin,*” causing Him to be made a “*curse*” for us (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). It was **the Lord** who “*laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (Isa 53:4-6).

Viewing Christ’s Death Properly

This is why the Apostles do not make much of the fleshly sufferings of Jesus during His trial and on the cross. It is not that the agonies were not terrible beyond description. Nor, indeed, are we to avoid a consideration of them. However, **we are not saved by what men did to Jesus.** They were, to be sure, Christ’s “*murderers,*” as Stephen said (Acts 7:52). The Jews did “*kill*” Jesus, as Peter charged (Acts 3:15). Yet, as God’s “*Lamb,*” He was **offered up by God** for fallen humanity, “*delivered for our offenses.*” How vividly Peter declared this as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. “*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*” (Acts 2:23).

Our Offenses

The phrase “*for our offenses*” is a significant one. It means that **God made Jesus responsible for sin in its totality**, exacting the penalty for sin from His “*only begotten Son.*” Jesus was NOT a martyr, but a sacrifice—and there is a great difference between the two. A martyr is slain by His enemies. As a sacrifice, Jesus was delivered up **by God** because of our transgressions.

It is necessary to emphasize that God placed sin in its aggregate upon the Son. Sin was dealt with in mass, or in its totality. This is why Jesus is referred to as “*the Lamb of God which taketh away the SIN of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus is also said to have entered the world to “*put away SIN by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Heb 9:26). God “*condemned SIN in the flesh*” of His Son (Rom 8:3). Jesus was made “*to be SIN for us*” (2 Cor 5:21). All of these emphasize sin in its entirety.

In order to make the matter more personal to us, Christ’s atonement is also associated with “*sins.*” This assists us to

It is the nature of sin that makes it so terrible. It is offensive to God, and attempts to overthrow His power and authority. Therefore, the word “offenses” is not a casual word. When we think of sin, transgression, iniquity, and the likes, our soul should shudder because of what Christ had to suffer.

consider our Lord’s death from a very individualistic viewpoint. Thus, we are told Jesus was “*manifested to take away our SINS*” (1 John 3:5). He “*died for our SINS*” (1 Cor 15:3), and “*gave Himself for our SINS*” (Gal 1:4). He also bore “*our SINS in His body on the tree*” (1 Pet 2:24). God sent His Son into the world “*to be the propitiation for our SINS*” (1 John 4:10).

Thus Jesus being “*delivered for our offenses*” is seen to be completely effective, dealing with all sin. It is also perceived as intensely personal, promoting thanksgiving and obedience—“*our sins.*”

The Heinousness of Sin

Among other things, this reveals the heinousness of sin, that required such a death. If the sin of Adam and Eve could cause death to be passed over the entirety of the human race, what was involved in

the sins of the whole world being placed upon Christ? It is awesome to consider!

If men are ever tempted to minimize sin, they are to consider what Jesus was required to do in order for their sin to be removed. Whether we are talking about the sin of Adam and Eve, the incredibly wicked reign of Manasseh, or the fierce opposition of Paul to the church, it all required the death of Jesus.

It is the **nature** of sin that makes it so terrible. It is offensive to God, and attempts to overthrow His power and authority. Therefore, the word “*offenses*” is not a casual word. When we think of sin, transgression, iniquity, and the likes, our soul should shudder because of what Christ had to suffer. A person who takes sin casually, easily explaining it away, is an ungodly person, and is crucifying the Son of God afresh, putting Him to an open shame.

The Nature of God

This also reveals the nature of God, who cannot overlook sin as though it were trite and excusable. In showing His glory to Moses, God revealed His absolute intolerance with sin: “. . . *and that will by no means clear the guilty*” (Ex 34:7). He confirmed the same through Nahum: “*and [I] will not at all acquit the wicked*” (Nah 1:3).

It is further said of God, “*You hate all workers of iniquity*” (Psa 5:5). This explodes the popular saying, God hates sin but loves the sinner. God makes no such distinction in this statement. Of the Son the Father said, “*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness*” (Psa 45:7; Heb 1:9).

If sin required God to “*deliver up*” His sinless Son, let no person make any attempt to explain their sin, or to justify their involvement in it.

The Indebtedness of Man

The delivering up of Jesus for “*our offenses*” has removed all obligation to the flesh. No person owes anything to the flesh. Our indebtedness is now to our Lord and Savior. Thus it is written, “*Therefore,*

brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom 8:12). Because we have been *“bought with a price,”* we are to *“glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Cor 6:19-20).

No longer can we live according to the dictates of our lower and sinful nature. The time we spent in the flesh is sufficient. No more time is to be given to it. Thus it is written, *“For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries”*^{NASB} (1 Pet 4:3).

RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION

Because men do not speak often of

Once again, it should be noted that salvation is often approached with unbecoming simplicity, as if it is no small thing for a person to be justified. Anything, however, that requires the death of the spotless Son of God, and His return from the regions of the dead, is any thing but simplistic.

justification, they speak little of Christ’s resurrection. But this is not the case with the Holy Spirit. The matter of Christ’s resurrection is pivotal throughout Scripture, and particularly in the matter of our justification.

Once again, it should be noted that salvation is often approached with unbecoming simplicity, as if it is no small thing for a person to be justified. Anything, however, that requires the death of the spotless Son of God, and His return from the regions of the dead, is any thing but simplistic.

In the fifth chapter, the Spirit will remind us we are *“now justified by His blood”* (5:9). By this He means the death of Christ was the point at which God judged sin. The forfeiture of Christ’s life made it just for God to forgive sinners.

Repeatedly, we are told justification is *“by faith”* (Rom 3:28; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:24). That is, faith is the means through which we appropriate justification.

Romans 3:24 affirms we are *“justified freely by His grace.”* In our justification the will and favor of God are poured out upon us because of His abundant grace.

First Corinthians 6:11 says we are *“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* Our acquittal from sin is on the behalf of Christ, and is applied by the Spirit of God.

We are also said to be *“justified by Christ”* (Gal 2:17). Jesus Himself enters into the process, mediating the benefits of the Covenant to us.

How is it the Spirit here says Jesus was *“raised for our justification?”* Does justification really involve all of these things? Indeed, it does! It is no small thing for a guilty sinner to be freed from culpability and be made righteous **before God**. Our hearts should stand in wonder at it. Any approach to Scripture than minimizes the greatness of salvation should be abandoned with haste.

First, we could not have been justified if Jesus had not risen from the dead. His resurrection confirmed that our sins had been removed. It should be apparent to us that the *“work”* required for our salvation was not completed at Calvary. Before Jesus committed His spirit to God the Father, He said, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). What did He mean? He meant that the sacrifice was finished—that the work God gave Him to

do on the earth was completed. Even before He went to the cross, Jesus told the Father, *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4). In this case, all of the preparations required for His sacrifice were completed. As well, He had faithfully kept those given to Him by the Father.

In His resurrection, Jesus came back from the battle with the powers of darkness, having plundered them in His cross (Col 2:15). In His resurrection He left the promised mortal bruise upon the head of the old serpent, sealing his doom.

His resurrection was also the gate through which Jesus entered into the heavenly sanctuary, where His blood was presented, *“having obtained eternal redemption for us”* (Heb 9:15). Now men are justified from heaven, where the risen Christ is ministering—in *“the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man”* (Heb 8:20).

Without the resurrection of Christ, *“your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins”* (1 Cor 15:17). If Jesus is not risen, we have no message to deliver, and all preaching is vain and pointless (1 Cor 15:14). But if Jesus is risen from the dead—and He assuredly is—then our preaching is **not** vain, our faith is **not** vain, and we are **not** still in our sins. *“He was raised for our justification!”*

It is no wonder that the Spirit speaks of our salvation with such a triumphant note. *“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”*^{NKJV} (Rom 8:34). He truly was *“raised for our justification,”* i.e., that we might experience being *“made righteous.”* Until Jesus returned from the dead, the righteousness of God could not be conferred upon the sons of men. But Jews has been *“delivered up,”* and *“is risen indeed”* (Lk 24:34), and thus the promised justification has become a reality in *“all who believe.”*

CONCLUSION

This passage has revealed the nature of the faith that saves. It is the

sort of faith that Abraham had, who is *“the father of us all.”* It **does not**

stagger at the promise of God, but is strong. It does not take into account

The Promises of God are Always Appropriated by Faith, Never by Law—by Given O. Blakely

impossibilities that flesh poses, or consider circumstances that contradict what God has pledged to do. Saving faith, if I may use that term, is **“fully persuaded that what God has promised, He is able to perform.”**

THE GREAT REVELATION

This is the faith Abraham possessed in primitive times, before the Law, and well before any significant elaborations on the New Covenant, as in the book of Jeremiah (31:31-34). If anything, in this **“day of salvation,”** faith is larger under Jesus. There is a greater degree of trust because of the fuller revelation of the One on whom faith moves us to rely. The greater extent of the revelation of Divine intent causes faith to abound even more.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED

This text has also more clearly shown to us what it means to be saved. There is a certain shallowness to the common approach taken to salvation that is uncomely for saints, and reproachful to Jesus. While salvation, or the deliverance of God, involves extrication from sin, it also involves translation into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. What we have received is infinitely greater than what was taken from us.

We have received a righteousness from God that qualifies us to be heirs of the world. Our real inheritance is the world to come, not this one. **One of the great restrictions of a Law system is that one cannot think big enough to give honor to God.** Since the Law is not of faith, it cannot produce a longing to inherit the whole world. But faith produces that longing, and strengthens one to live in joyful anticipation of it. There is a tremendous penalty—perhaps even an eternal one—to be paid for minuscule thinking about God’s great salvation.

TENDENCIES THAT LIMIT

The tendency to relate salvation only with the remission of sin is not commendable. There is a blessedness that finds God unwilling to impute sin to those who believe. But there is also an imputation of His own righteousness to those who have faith. The possession of faith—the kind of faith Abraham

had—brings to us a righteousness that will stand in the courts of heaven.

THE LAW AND FAITH

There is also the incompatibility of faith with a system of Law. Here is a point that thoroughly destroys the legalistic approach to God. **“If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.”** Faith cannot function under Law, and the promise is completely ineffective within a system of law. A person lives by faith, or he cannot live at all before God. He cannot live by doing, or by works. The promise is either given to those who believe, or it cannot be given at all.

THE GRACE OF GOD

The grace of God is also integral to salvation. Grace brings salvation to us, or we do not receive it at all. What is more, only faith can appropriate grace. No amount of doing, however arduous, can cause the grace of God to be poured out upon us. We also see this in Abraham.

REQUIRED WORKS

Our salvation required two great works which were absolutely beyond any human capabilities. Jesus had to be delivered by God for our offenses. He also had to be raised again for our justification. If either of these had not occurred, we could not have been justified. God Himself had to accomplish them both, thereby confirming they were in strict concert with His will, and brought satisfaction to His heart. This aspect of faith is affirmed with unusual power in the tenth chapter of Romans. **“But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the**

dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame’”^{NIV} (10:6-11).

If salvation were by OUR works, we would be required to bring Christ down from heaven that He might die. Then, we would have to go down into the abode of the dead, and bring Him back. Under no circumstances can the death and resurrection of Christ be eliminated. They are an absolute requirement. Since neither of them could be instigated by our power, it should be evident that they are works of God. The point of the text just quoted is that the Gospel apprizes us of

There is also the incompatibility of faith with a system of Law. Here is a point that thoroughly destroys the legalistic approach to God. “If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.” Faith cannot function under Law, and the promise is completely ineffective within a system of law. A person lives by faith, or he cannot live at all before God.

them both. If we will believe and acknowledge them, we will be saved. The message is near to us—within the grasp of faith.

FULL PERSUASION

Only faith can cause us to be **“fully persuaded,”** without a tinge of debilitating doubt. Because faith fastens on the good word of God, and because it sees God as the preeminent, it is convinced God is able to perform what He has promised.

Here is something the wisdom of men in all of its facets cannot accomplish. It cannot touch the heart, or cause confidence and assurance to surround the conscience. Equally true, those who labor under the Law are deprived of these indispensable qualities. Both the wisdom

of men and enslavement to Law produce fear and doubt. They are not able to move out upon the promises of God, but regard them from a purely intellectual point of view.

God is greatly to be praised for such a marvelous salvation. He is also to be glorified by the kind of faith that perceives and rejoices in these realities. Make it your aim to testify of these things,

for they are not commonly known. But everywhere there is a tender heart, it will be warmed and satisfied with the greatness of this message. Faith and hope will grow strong when hearing this word.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 16



THE TRIUMPHANT NATURE OF FAITH

5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ 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. Rom 5:1-5, NKJV

INTRODUCTION

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD (5:1)
- II. ACCESS INTO GRACE BY FAITH (5:2a)
- III. REJOICING IN HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD (5:2b)
- IV. GLORYING IN TRIBULATION (5:3a)
- V. TRIBULATION PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE (5:3b)
- VI. PERSEVERANCE PRODUCES CHARACTER (5:4a)
- VII. CHARACTER PRODUCES HOPE (5:4b)
- VIII. HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT (5:5a)
- IX. THE LOVE OF GOD IS Poured INTO OUR HEARTS (5:5b)

With great power, the Spirit has affirmed that when righteousness is sought through law, *“faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect”* (4:14). This being the case, those under the Law are left in a perpetual state of agitation, for without faith it is not only impossible to please God, there can also be no quietness within. As we will see, this is a critical point. The impact of doctrine upon the individual tells more of its association with the truth than the words which contain the doctrine. By “words which contain the doctrine,” I do not mean Scripture, but the representations of Scripture given by men.

GOD’S DOCTRINE IS EFFECTIVE

When proclaimed and received doctrines do not yield the results described in Scripture, they are false. The

doctrine of God, when received, always produces the effects promised by God. This is the proclamation of the Lord Himself. *“My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass”* (Deut 32:2). Isaiah also confirms this marvelous reality. *“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”* (Isa 55:10-11).

These utterances reach their highest

fulfillment in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God's "doctrine" and "speech" are at their highest level in the words of the Gospel. The "word of the Gospel" (Acts 15:7) waters more, causes more, and gives more than any other word from God. It has provided a more complete expression of His Person, and contains more of His power. It is a more complete message, and accomplishes more than any other Divine utterance.

All of this is by Divine intention. It does not suggest that other words from God lack power, or that they are in any way deficient or unnecessary. However, now that Christ has put away sin and plundered the forces of darkness—now that He is exalted to the right hand of God, and been given all power in heaven and earth, God is free to speak more extensively concerning His purpose. In the Gospel, He declares more of Himself than ever before. He unfolds more of His intentions than He has before. He promises more that ever was offered under the Law. All of this is a remarkable commentary on the effectiveness of Christ's atoning death, confirming resurrection, and presence in heaven.

EFFECTIVE UPON EARTH

Christ's death, resurrection, enthronement, and present intercession, are also effective upon the earth. That effectiveness, as we will see, is realized by faith among the sons of men.

Experience

Much of the religion of our day is merely philosophical. It has little or no practical element to it. Some even object to any presentation of the Gospel that includes the subjective, or experiential, point of view. However, it is absurd to think of a salvation that is not experienced, or a Gospel that has no word relating to human experience. After all, sin and alienation are experienced, and produce a host of other experiences. The devastating wake of sin has produced trouble, sorrow, pain, death, sickness, disquietude within, and hopelessness. It introduced a defiled conscience, hatred, foolishness, deception, and evil desires.

What would constrain any person to

imagine God would present a salvation that did not reach as far as transgression? Is it not written, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom 5:20). If sin infected our whole person, much more will salvation bring wholeness to us.

Valid Experience

Our text will deal with the very core of spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit will not even mention many things that are emphasized by religious sectarians. Some have chosen to accentuate spiritual experiences that are not stressed by the Holy Spirit—experiences that are nowhere

We owe no allegiance to any teaching that is not a MAIN POINT of the Apostolic doctrine. Such teachings will inevitably distort our understanding, cause confusion in our minds, and create division among the people of God.

bound upon the saints of God.

It is not my purpose to question the validity of these experiences, or the integrity of those who stress them. However, I do intend to emphasize with all of my being the approach to experience taken by the Spirit of God. **We owe no allegiance to any teaching that is not a MAIN POINT of the Apostolic doctrine.** Such teachings will inevitably distort our understanding, cause confusion in our minds, and create division among the people of God.

I am going to take the liberty of mentioning some experiences that are valid, yet are inappropriate as an emphasis. They are experiences that are not common in all the household of faith. They are also never emphasized by the Spirit. Men are never condemned for lacking them, and never applauded by God for having them. I do this with great caution, realizing I will be misunderstood by some. Yet these things must be said for the sake of those of tender heart. Keep in

mind, I am not denying the reality of these experiences, or stating those who claim them are lying. I AM saying, the Spirit does NOT emphasize them, or bind them upon the children of God. In fact, He does not even mention some of them, thus making them purely a creation of men. I AM saying they are not a suitable basis for the unity of God's people, or an acceptable foundation for dividing them. I AM saying God has not made an issue of such things among His saints, and men are entirely out of order in doing so.

The "second blessing," the baptism of the Spirit, speaking in other tongues, healing the sick, dreams and visions, being slain in the Spirit, holy laughter, animal sounds, etc. These are only representative of a host of emphases men have espoused. If you are unfamiliar with them, it is of no consequence. There are people who evaluate the whole of their identity with God upon the basis of these things. With no hesitancy whatsoever, I affirm this is totally wrong. It not only cannot be substantiated by God's Word, it is in stark contradiction of it.

RELATING THIS TO OUR TEXT

Our text will deal with the heart of Kingdom experience. It will deal with the powerful effects of faith and consequent justification. These are at the core of what occurs to believers, and is common among them. Not only that, this is a declaration of Divine intention. It tells us where God is going with salvation, and what He has purposed to take place through it. These are things we are to expect in ALL believers.

Where these things are lacking, one of two conditions exists. Either the individual has not believed the Gospel, or, because of spiritual infancy, these things have not yet been seen. Our text assumes the latter, as it is addressed to those who are in Christ Jesus.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Once again, I want to emphasize the nature of this text. I do so because it is at variance with so much of the religion of our time. When the Holy Spirit determined to show us the effects of our identity with God, these are the things He

chose to open up to us. He holds before us Divine priorities as made known in the experience of those who believe. If these things have no relevance to us, we ourselves are alienated from God. **There can be no reconciliation to God where disinterest exists in things pertaining to that reconciliation.**

The subjects now placed before us reflect the purpose of God for His people. They announce to us the Divine intention behind Christ's death. They show us what to look for in our own persons, and where to place our emphasis. Here are things on which we must unite, and where division is not permitted.

These are matters concerning which no human opinion is of any value whatsoever. None of these things are optional, or may be viewed as unnecessary or irrelevant. There is a solid foundation under every proclamation. All of this will be readily apparent to every humble and contrite heart.

WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD

5:1 **Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** We will not come to the effects of the righteousness that comes by faith. Let me again emphasize the importance of this righteousness. While some men banter over the name by which we are called, or the day on which we gather, or some particular experience in the body, the Lord sets His righteousness before us. He does not take for granted that we have it, but affirms it is realized through our faith. It does not come by means of a law, or through a procedure. If we do not have this righteousness, it makes no difference whatsoever what else we may claim to have. All such claims are worthless.

HAVING BEEN JUSTIFIED

Believers are apprized they are already justified because of their faith: i.e., **“having been justified.”** Other versions read, **“being justified,”** ^{KJV} **“since we have been justified,”** ^{NIV} and **“since we are justified.”** ^{RSV} It is BECAUSE we ARE justified, that the benefits now expounded are realized. They do not belong to us because of what we have done, but because of what we ARE. That is not an incidental observation! God cannot and will not bless an unchanged person. **We must be made acceptable before we can experience the benefits of the covenant.**

This is a critical matter with God. Multitudes of professed believers, unaware of this truth, are trying to gain Divine acceptance. Not persuaded the Lord has received them, they labor under the bludgeon of law, trying to measure up to their perception of an approved state. It is a most difficult way to live, as they

themselves will acknowledge. But our text says we are already **“justified,”** already accepted and standing in the favor of God.

Justification has been mentioned six times to this point. Under the law, **“the doers of the law shall be justified”** (2:13). By the deeds of the law, **“there shall no flesh be justified”** in the sight of God (3:20). We are **“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (3:24). The conclusion is that **“a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law”** (3:28). If Abraham was **“justified by works, he has**

not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?; unless indeed you are disqualified” ^{NKJV} (2 Cor 13:5). The personal persuasion of faith is a kingdom asset without which we cannot make any progress. Further, the awareness of our faith is the way we have of knowing we have been justified, and are in a state of Divine acceptance.

Knowledgeable Expressions

There is no substitute for the knowledge of personal justification—of being confident of our standing with the Living God. Ponder some of Scriptural expressions of this confidence.

The personal persuasion of faith is a kingdom asset without which we cannot make any progress. Further, the awareness of our faith is the way we have of knowing we have been justified, and are in a state of Divine acceptance.

“... for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim 1:12).

“For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven” (Heb 10:34).

something to boast about, but not before God” ^{NKJV} (4:2). Jesus **“was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification”** (4:25).

It is apparent that the BASIS of our justification is outside of ourselves and independent of our own works. The MEANS of appropriating that justification is our faith. **Therefore, all who have faith ARE justified, and all who do not remain in a state of alienation.** It is no wonder we are admonished, **“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you**

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 creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

Just as surely as the individual can be convinced of personal alienation from God and the need for justification, so a settled persuasion of reconciliation and justification can be realized. The doctrine—**“having been justified”**—can be apprehended by faith, and the heart fully

convinced of its reality. In fact, the teaching of this passage assumes this to be true. That is the strength of the passage. Where assurance of justification is lacking, the words that follow will have no comforting effect upon the soul.

This must not be approached as though it were a cold and lifeless doctrine. This is not a point upon which official positions are to be developed. It is not to be approached in the spirit of the scribes, and Pharisees, and lawyers. This relates to obtaining the righteousness of God, not maintaining a theologically acceptable position—and there is a vast difference between the two.

Much of my earlier life in the faith was spent trying to maintain a correct theological position, without regard to my own standing with God. I can testify with authority to the unprofitableness of such an emphasis. Knowing you are justified does not allow the individual to maintain erroneous views of Scripture. Faith will never settle for a lie, a distortion, or a misplaced emphasis. As soon as men do this, they are no longer walking by faith.

PEACE WITH GOD

Note the firmness of the text. We HAVE BEEN justified, and “we **HAVE** peace with God.” These are **possessions**, not mere positions! **It is essential to our victory over the world that we know how we stand with God more than where we stand with men.**

The Spirit now shows us the effect of justification upon our persons. It is legal, but not **merely** legal. It is recognized in heaven, but not **only** in heaven. There is a blessed fruit yielded by the tree of justification that is both essential and enjoyable. It is “*peace with God.*”

The Spirit now shows us the effect of justification upon our persons. It is legal, but not merely legal. It is recognized in heaven, but not only in heaven. There is a blessed fruit yielded by the tree of justification that is both essential and enjoyable. It is “peace with God.”

The prophets spoke of an era that would be characterized by quietness within the soul. “*For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: ‘In returning and **rest** you shall be saved; In **quietness and confidence** shall be your strength’*” (Isa 30:15). Again, it is written, “*The work of righteousness will be **peace**. And the effect of righteousness, **quietness and assurance** forever*” (Isa 32:15). Both of these verses are written in the form of a hebraism. That is a type of Hebrew poetry in which the same truth is stated two different ways.

This way of Divine communication is particularly evident in the Psalms and Proverbs, as well as throughout the Prophets. Thus, Isaiah 30:15 equates “*rest*” with “*quietness and confidence*,” while Isaiah 32:15 parallels “*peace*” with “*quietness and assurance*.” Elihu well said of this kind of peace, “*When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?*” (Job 34:29).

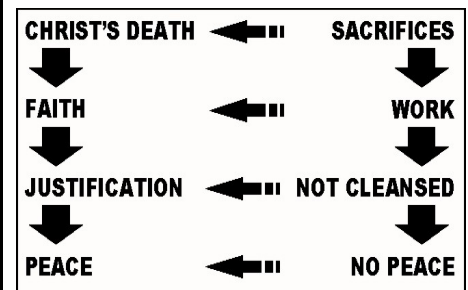
“**PEACE**,” therefore, not only means there is no longer a war between the individual and God, but that there is an acute sense of safety and tranquility. This kind of peace is expressed by the Psalmist in a most practical way., “*I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety*” (Psa 4:8). The awareness of being at peace with God has wide-sweeping ramifications. It yields the fruit of assurance, confidence, and boldness, to name a few.

No Peace Under the law

The peace in our text is realized through the purging of the conscience—the removal of a sense of guilt and defilement. This marvelous benefit could not be realized under the Law, for there was no justification under that covenant.

One of the passages that most precisely conveys this thought is found in the tenth chapter of Hebrews. It perfectly parallels the passage now before us. The Spirit recalls to our minds the highest and most lofty occasion under the Law: the day of atonement. Year after year, sacrifices were made that had no satisfactory impact on

those for whom they were made. “*For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, **make those who approach perfect***” (Heb 10:1). Elaborating upon this failure, the Spirit clarifies the meaning of “*perfect.*” He is not speaking of moral perfection, but of the perfection, or cleansing, of the conscience. “*For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, **once purified**, would have had **no more consciousness of sins***” (Heb 10:2).



Under the Law a sacrifice was made according to Divine commandment. It was offered in a manner specified, in the place He ordained, and by the individual He designated. It was the kind of sacrifice He demanded. The sacrifice itself was a work of man, and was not attended by faith in the ones for whom the sacrifice was made. Although the Divinely specified order was followed, the “*worshipers*” were not “*cleansed*,” that is to say, their sins were not removed from them. The reason for this failure is declared: “*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*” (Heb 10:4). As a result, the ones who were coming near to God according to the Law only remembered their sins, with their conscience remaining defiled. This condition is described in the words, “*But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year*” (Heb 10:3). **They had no “peace with God.”**

We HAVE Peace with God

How different the condition of those who are in Christ Jesus! Because they have been justified by faith, they **HAVE** peace with God. There is no enmity between them and God. Their conscience is no longer defiled with the taint of guilt. Although they remain in the domain of trouble and toil, yet they themselves experience confidence and assurance.

They have quietness in their soul, knowing that God is working all things together for their ultimate good (Rom 8:28). Their “*peace*” is not a mere formality, but something that is experienced in their hearts.

This kind of tranquility of soul cannot be obtained by arduous activity. You cannot work to obtain it. It is the fruit of faith, for we are justified “*by faith*.” Mark it well, **where men find it difficult to believe God, they will be unduly troubled by the circumstances, and life in general.**

The Pharisee who stood and “*prayed with himself*” sited his works as a basis for being heard by God. “*God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess*” (Lk 18:11-12). He was not praying before God, but before men, with an acute consciousness of those about him, not the One above him. That is why Jesus said he “*prayed with himself*.” He was oblivious of God, and thus spoke as though he had confidence.

Peace with God is not after the Pharisaic manner! It is peace BEFORE God, as well as with God. It is being confident when we are in the presence of God, as well as our enemies. Those who have “*peace with God*” can come boldly, or confidently, into the presence of God. In fact, they are exhorted to do so. “*Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb 10:19-22).

“*Peace with God*,” therefore, refers to a state of mind and heart that is in tune with ultimate reality. There is a quietness that settles over the soul because we know we are “*justified*” before God, washed clean, and made suitable to stand in His presence. That awareness

spills over into every aspect of life. We are not afraid of our enemies, and we are not afraid to let our requests be made known unto God. We are not afraid to face God, and we are not afraid to face man! Life does not cause us to fear, nor does death. If we appear before the tribunals of men, we will not be moved, nor does the thought of appearing before the throne of God cause us to be shaken. The person with peace knows the things that are present cannot separate him from the love of God, nor can the things that are to come. All of that is in “*peace with God*.”

This means peace will assist us in knowing the proper direction to take, decisions to make, and how to react. We decide in favor of “*peace with God*.” Whatever disrupts our fellowship with God, and our persuasion of acceptance, is to be avoided.

This is a peace that can dominate, or rule, the heart. In fact, this is what it WILL do if we will permit it do so. Thus we are admonished, “*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful*” (Col 3:15). Every major translation says the same thing: “**RULE** in your hearts.” The word “*rule*” means to govern or arbitrate—literally, to be an umpire. We would say, preside over your hearts, or control and direct them. This means peace will assist us in knowing the proper direction to take, decisions to make, and how to react. We decide in favor of “*peace with God*.” Whatever disrupts our fellowship with God, and our persuasion of acceptance, is to be avoided. No matter how long you have been in Christ Jesus, you will be amazed at how consistently peace will lead you.

Remember, this is something those who are justified HAVE, not something they SHOULD have! Those who do not possess peace either are not justified before God, or are not aware that they are. In our time, many fall into the latter

category. Because they have heard so little of the Gospel of Christ, they can scarcely imagine they are “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6). But they are, and that is one reason for the presence of this marvelously comforting text.

THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

The basis of this boldness and confidence, aspects of peace, is not that God is our Friend, but that Christ is our Savior and High Priest! **No person, regardless of seeming spiritual progress, is familiar enough with God to come before Him apart from Christ.** Whatever you may think of your reconciliation, or the covering of your sins, you CANNOT come before God without coming through Jesus. Perhaps the four living creatures (Rev 4:6-9) can stand before the throne of God independently (although that is doubtful), but you cannot!

Our peace is “*through the Lord Jesus Christ*” because His sacrifice, and His sacrifice alone, enabled God to justify us. **Our exoneration from sin MUST be right.** If a valid dissenting voice can be heard from heaven, earth, or hell, our justification cannot be right. If any personality can justly raise an accusation against those whom God has justified, then they have not been justified at all! **If our salvation is not right, it is not real!** If God is not just in acquitting us, we have not been acquitted! That is why it is written, “*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*”^{NKJV} (Rom 3:24-26).

All of this may seem quite needless to say, but it is really most needful to say. That is why the Spirit has said it! Many treat salvation as though it were a mere Divine technicality, with no regard for the righteousness of God, or maintaining His integrity and holiness throughout the

entirety of salvation. It is the complete disregard for this aspect of our salvation that has moved men to imagine they are locked into Christ rather than "accepted" and "received" in Him.

Those who espouse a salvation that allows for sin and a lack of fellowship with God have thrown Jesus aside, as though

His necessity ended at the cross. But He is as necessary now as when you "first believed." The more fellowship you have with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the greater the peace you possess. This is the ordained means through which progress is realized.

Should that fellowship diminish, and there is no need for this to occur, peace

will also decrease. When this happens, temptation gains strength, resisting the devil is more difficult, and God is not as present as before. One cannot be comfortable before God and comfortable with sin at the same time. Light cannot have fellowship under any conditions. There should be no need to comment on the effects such conditions will yield.

ACCESS INTO GRACE BY FAITH

"2a . . . through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand . . ." The Spirit continues to elaborate on the effects of our justification by faith. These are very practical, or utilitarian, benefits, and relate to daily living and spiritual progress. All of these require righteousness and faith. Furthermore, neither of these possessions can be maintained in isolation of the other. Where there is no righteousness, there is no faith. And, where there is no faith, there can be no righteousness. It is necessary to affirm this because men insist upon separating the two. It is not possible to possess God's righteousness if there is no trust in Him, or unreserved acceptance of His promises. Any approach that allows for Divine acceptance without the presence of faith, is simply not true.

For purposes of clarification, faith is not defined by men, but by God. The manner of faith has been seen in Abraham, who did not consider contradicting fleshly circumstances, and was persuaded God was able to do what He promised. That is the faith that saves, and no other faith is recognized by God. **The words that follow are built upon these foundational Kingdom realities: righteousness and faith.**

THROUGH WHOM

The Spirit will not allow us to forget the necessity of the Son. His presence at the right hand of God, and His intercessory and mediatorial work, are imperative to our continued acceptance. We come into Divine favor through Jesus, and that favor is maintained through

Jesus. If the communication between the individual and Jesus is not clear, the benefits that accrue from Christ's death, resurrection, and consequent enthronement will not be realized. Our salvation from wrath depends upon our relationship to Jesus (Rom 5:9). Being more than a conqueror depends upon our identity with Him (Rom 8:39). We cannot even believe in God apart from Christ. As it is written, *"who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead*

There is a carnal religious structure that leads men to think they are safe in a creedal view rather than in a vibrant Divine fellowship. But such a view is only a delusion, fostered by the wicked one to keep men from entering into rest.

and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God"^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:21).

This aspect of our salvation cannot be overemphasized. It has nearly been obliterated by the sectarian emphases of our day. Those with no real knowledge of grace depend upon their own efforts to bring them to glory. Those who entertain a corrupted view of God's grace view themselves as already there, with no regard to the jeopardy of their surroundings. In both cases, fellowship with Christ is neglected, even though we have been called into that vibrant and life-sustaining activity (1 Cor 1:9). The *"communion of the Holy Spirit"* (2 Cor

13:14), and being *"taught by"* Jesus (Eph 4:20-21) are not viewed as essential by many, and are thus ignored.

This text will not only affirm the reality of such things, but will show them to be absolutely essential.

WE HAVE ACCESS

Those who are justified by faith and have peace with God, also have "access" to the heavenly realms. This is an "access" that is needed. It is not a mere luxury, or option that can be disregarded.

The very concept of "access" suggests something outside of the domain of flesh and blood. It speaks of a legal admission into an area unlawful for others. The word "access" means **privilege of entrance. At once you should see that salvation involves a continuous experience-** "access." Faith is not only required to take you out of Egypt, it is required to bring you into Canaan.

Not only is faith necessary for Isaac to be born, it is also essential for him to be offered up to God.

In churches with whom I have been affiliated, there is a marked absence of the concept of "access." There is, of course, that blessed remnant that has taken hold of these things. But they have done so in spite of the institution, and not because of it. **There is a carnal religious structure that leads men to think they are safe in a creedal view rather than in a vibrant Divine fellowship.** But such a view is only a delusion, fostered by the wicked one to keep men from entering into rest. It leads men away from God and salvation.

Notice how the responsibility falls upon men, even though the blessing comes from God. He does not say we are guaranteed the promised benefit, but that we have **“ACCESS”** to it. It is obtainable, but we must enter into the appointed area to obtain it. This does not mean the realization of the benefit is totally dependent upon our effort. Here is the view declared in Scripture. First, God has, through Christ, brought the blessing close to us. Second, in Jesus, He has raised us up and made us sit together with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). But there is a small distance that yet remains to be traversed by us. It is small when compared to the distance that once existed between us and the essential benefit. From the standpoint of diligence and faithfulness, however, it is challenging enough to engage all of our ransomed powers. All of this makes perfect sense to faith, but absolutely no sense to the flesh.

Him (Jesus Christ) we have obtained access to this grace.^{NRSV} The idea is that Christ has personally brought us into this realm through our faith. The New Living Translation reads this way: *“Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege.”*

dominion over our lives (Rom 6:14), and it is *“by the grace of God”* that we maintain our manner of life in this world (2 Cor 1:12). It is called *“THIS grace”* because it is the very grace by which we were justified, and in which we are to remain.

IN WHICH WE STAND

We are not passive in this declared benefit. God has put us into Christ! From another perspective, He has raised us up and made us sit together with Christ in heavenly realms. From the standpoint of our text, He has given us access to *“this grace wherein we stand.”* The NIV reads, *“in which we NOW stand.”* This is the only realm in which Divine requirements can be fulfilled. Here is where we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). This is the domain where the flesh is crucified (Gal 5:24), the old man put off, and the new man put on (Eph 4:22-24).

God’s people are required to get into the area where needed spiritual resources can be obtained. This is one of the reasons why God’s people must insist upon a wholesome spiritual environment, where the soul can be cultured, and heavenly realities obtained.

God’s people are required to get into the area where needed spiritual resources can be obtained. This is one of the reasons why God’s people must insist upon a wholesome spiritual environment, where the soul can be cultured, and heavenly realities obtained. Religious fads and imagined worship that is “in vogue,” are a great hindrance to this requirement. They belong more to this world than the world to come, which never has to update its heavenly manners.

The words *“this grace”* parallels with the *“heavenly places”* of Ephesians 2:6. The Ephesian text emphasizes the realm to which we have come, and our text emphasizes the benefit to be found there. The idea of the text is that justification has resulted in the believer being put where the required blessings can be obtained. These are the *“all spiritual blessings”* referenced in Ephesians 1:3. The placement is described in First Corinthians 1:30. *“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.”*^{NASB} Referring to the same glorious reality, Ephesians says, *“But God . . . made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus”* (Eph 2:4-6). All of this refers to the *“access”* our text affirms is possessed by those who are justified by faith.

Here is where we are *“taught by God”* (1 Thess 4:9), the *“whole armor of God”* is put on (Eph 6:10-18), and steadfastness and constancy are realized (1 Cor 15:58).

A Place of Benefit

Blessing and benefit are here. An acute consciousness of the Lord and His Christ are maintained here. Covenant blessings are experienced here. The *“grace wherein we stand”* is the realm where we are *“filled with all joy and peace in believing”* (Rom 5:13). It is where prayer is answered, and we are *“changed from glory unto glory”* (2 Cor 3:18). In this sacred place we *“obtain mercy and find grace to help, in the time of need”* (Heb 4:16). Here vision is clarified and an anchor for the soul is realized.

As a matter of observation, a religion that must continually be updated does not reflect the eternal order, but the temporal one. While creativity and innovation are certainly not wrong of themselves, when they are applied to such things as worship, prayer, preaching, and other staple kingdom activities, a door is opened that will let more in than godly people desire. One only has to behold the effect of current religious trends to confirm this is the case. None of them, I emphasis NONE of them, has made God more accessible, or the blessing of God more obtainable. **Such benefits are consistently realized by faith, not procedure.**

INTO THIS GRACE

The phraseology used by the Spirit is critical to our understanding. *“Through*

The words **“THIS GRACE”** are like a nail upon which our advantage continually hangs. Apart from this *“grace”* there is no advantage whatsoever. Initially, we are *“justified freely by his grace”* (Rom 3:24). *“Everlasting consolation and good hope”* are also realized by God’s grace (2 Thess 2:16). It is *“under grace”* that sin loses its

Other References to this Realm

Standing in grace is another view of **abiding in Christ** (John 15:1-8). It also is the same as **remaining in Christ’s love** (John 15:10), and **“continuing in the Son and in the Father”** (1 John 2:24). This is **walking in the light** (1 John 1:7), **living by faith** (Heb 10:38), and **walking in the Spirit** (Gal 5:25).

Our text addresses the same thing from a different perspective. All of the views place the responsibility for

maintaining the position in which they have been placed squarely upon the believer. To be sure, God will underwrite the task, guaranteeing our efforts are not in vain. But if anyone thinks abiding or standing can be achieved with no effort on the part of the individual, the evil one has deceived them. It makes just as much sense for Jesus to have laid down His life without any effort, as for you to lay down your's without exertion.

Involvement Is Required

Salvation makes no provision for passive involvement—a sort of spiritual automation that allows for the benefits procured by Christ to pass to the recipient without their involvement. Multitudes of professed *Christians* appear to be living as though this was not true. Their persons are not involved in what they call salvation. They are spiritually emaciated, and appear to think little or nothing of it. They imagine their connection with the institution is sufficient—but it is not.

STANDING

The very posture of “standing” assumes a hostile environment, enemies, and the possibility of debilitating weakness. Standing means nothing if there is no resistance, no tendency to fail, or no opponents to face.

“Standing” not only assumes militant surroundings, it also implies boldness, courage, and freedom from fear and a withdrawing spirit.

“Standing” cannot be accomplished on the feet of human works, but within the framework of God’s grace. That is precisely why we are given free access to the grace of God, that we might be “able to stand” (Eph 6:11). Apart from this grace, “standing” is not possible. Those, therefore, who hear and know little or nothing about the grace of God are at a decided disadvantage—and it is greater than they dare to imagine.

A divided house, for example, “cannot stand” (Mk 3:24). There are some who are weak, whom God must “make” to stand (Rom 14:4), but that is not a lifetime guarantee. At some point, the believer must become “strong in the grace

of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:1), and “in the power of His might” (Eph 6:10). Our faith must “stand” (1 Cor 2:5). We ourselves are to “stand fast in the faith,” continuing to trust in the lord (1 Cor 16:13). We are admonished to “stand fast in the liberty” for which Christ has freed us (Gal 5:1). There is standing to be done “against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11), and standing “in the evil day,” under focused and intense onslaughts by Satan (Eph 6:13). We are to think in terms of standing “perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col 4:12).

And how is all of this to be accomplished? How will we be able to fulfill such lofty requirements? Our text tells us.

Because we have believed on His Son, according to His own record, God has lavished His favor upon us. In Christ, He has placed us in the realm where His loving favor dominates, and where it is not restrained. Our responsibility is to remain there.

DIVINE FAVOR

It is in **grace** that we are enabled to “stand.” Peter put it this way, “this is the true grace of God **wherein ye stand**” (1 Pet 5:12). The grace of God speaks of His love and favor, His preference and attraction. When someone is in the grace of God, they are in His favor, and receive His benefits. Thus “Noah found **GRACE** in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8).

Because we have believed on His Son, according to His own record, God has lavished His favor upon us. In Christ, He has placed us in the realm where His loving favor dominates, and where it is not restrained. Our responsibility is to remain there, not succumbing to the devil’s attempts to lure us away from the sacred citadel of Divine favor.

Adam and Eve were once in God’s favor, and then were drawn away from it

(Gen 3:24). Israel experienced the love and preference of the Living God, then moved Him to abhor them (Psa 106:40). King Saul was chosen and favored of God to be king, then so conducted his life that God “repented” He had “set up Saul to be king” (1 Sam 15:11).

Stern Admonitions

Men are not to take for granted they will remain in God’s favor. Solemnly saints are told, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor 10:22). Believers are told they “should not lust after evil things” (1 Cor 10:6), neither be “idolaters” (10:7). We are admonished to not “commit fornication” (10:8), or “tempt Christ” (10:9), or “murmur” (10:10).

Those in Christ are warned, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12), and take every measure to avoid being “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). They are told to “harden not” their hearts, as Israel did in the day they provoked God to anger (Heb 3:15). Those in Christ are exhorted, “quench not the Spirit,” and “grieve not the Spirit” (1 Thee 5:19; Eph 4:30).

Why are such warnings issued? What purpose do they serve if we are standing in the grace of God? They are given because of the necessity of remaining in God’s grace. The same God who delivered us can be provoked to anger—by the very people He once delivered. If you are naive enough to doubt that, let king Saul and the Israelites speak to your heart. Their record is written “for our admonition,” not our information! If we imagine God cannot be provoked by His own creation, and thrust them from the very realm in which He placed them, then we must seriously consider Adam and Eve.

Spiritual stability can only be realized within the circumference of God’s favor. That favor can only be realized through faith, for salvation is “by grace through faith” from beginning to end (Eph 2:8). Remember, “without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6). It makes no difference whether you have

received the initial promise like Abraham, or are asked to offer up what God has given you, like Abraham offering Isaac—faith is imperative. Heaven does not take your faith for granted, but puts it to the test, that it might appear to honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus (1 Pet 1:7). Why would men take it for granted? It is only because Satan tempts them to do so.

Be sure, the faith that saved you can ensure that you are kept. We are, after all, *“kept by the power of God through faith”* (1 Pet 1:5). God is pleased with everyone who is believing, regardless of their past. Equally true, God is displeased with everyone who is not believing, regardless of their past. There is absolute consistency in these things.

Let every believer see to it that they remain where God has placed them. Your faith will ensure this happens, for faith is always honored by God, and never overlooked by Him. It is never vain or disappointed to trust God! How marvelous to begin in a place where we can, by the grace of God, remain; to be placed in a realm where we can abide!

REJOICING IN HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD

“2b . . . and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” What powerful effects are wrought in our justification! Not only are iniquities forgiven and sins covered, we are placed in a realm where spiritual firmness and solidity are realized.

Presence behind the veil, where the Forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus”^{NKJV} (Heb 6:19b).

desert of oppression, deep pit of near-despair, and the storms of persecution., The evil one has nothing in his arsenal that can dent the helmet of *“the hope of salvation”* (1 Thess 5:8).

Anticipation

While in this blessed domain a new kind of rejoicing is experienced. It has no parallel in the world, and is so lofty the flesh is incapable of imagining it. This is a joy that is common to all believers—to everyone who has been made to sit with Christ Jesus in heavenly places. It is not an impulsive joy, but springs from faith. The Spirit refers to this as *“joy of faith,”* or *“joy in the faith”^{NASB}* (Phil 1:25). Because it is *“of faith,”* joy can increase and abound. It is exhilarating, but is not exhilaration. It is emotional, but not emotionalism.

It buoys up the soul, enabling the child of God to make progress under pressing and difficult circumstances. This hope can survive the desert of oppression, deep pit of near-despair, and the storms of persecution., The evil one has nothing in his arsenal that can dent the helmet of “the hope of salvation”

Here is something for which holy men prayed. Paul, for example, did not discontinue praying for the saints of God. He prayed God would give them *“the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling”* (Eph 1:17-18). This was no passing notion, for through the Spirit the Apostle saw the necessity of such illumination.

One of the great spiritual contradictions of our time is the development of mega-churches with pygmy hope—large religious institutions with little or no awareness at all of the glory that is to come. It is reflected in the brevity of their gatherings, the shallowness of their preaching, and their lack of spiritual appetite. This is not intended to be a mere diatribe against legitimate and God-honoring growth. It IS intended to point out that it is serious to lack the critical aspects of life in Christ.

REJOICING IN HOPE

This is a rational joy, proceeding from the awareness faith brings of the hope set before us. You have, after all, been called in *“one hope of your calling”* (Eph 4:4). That *“hope”* is personal, yet differs nothing from the hope of all other believers. There is a single hope, common to all believers, yet intensely personal.

By its very nature, this *“hope”* involves a lively awareness of the exalted Christ, and *“the heavenly places”* into which we have been raised. It is also accompanied by a solid persuasion that we too will be there soon, with our Lord and in possession of an *“eternal inheritance”* (Heb 9:15). Where these elements are missing, the believer is wholly inadequate, and can expect little or no victory.

Powerful and Essential

This vibrant hope, or expectation of glory, is *“as cold waters to a thirsty soul”* (Prov 25:25). It buoys up the soul, enabling the child of God to make progress under pressing and difficult circumstances. This hope can survive the

Rejoicing

This hope is frequently related to rejoicing. Romans 12:12 admonishes believers to *“rejoice in hope.”* Hebrews 3:6 goes so far as to say we are Christ’s household only **“IF we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”^{NKJV}** Indeed, that is an arresting consideration! Referring to this confident joy, Hebrews 3:14 also makes a firm statement. *“For we have become*

Steadfast and Sure

It should at once be obvious that *“hope”* is something firm and steadfast, for men cannot be set to rejoicing in something that is not sure. In fact, this hope is described as *“an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast”* (Heb 6:19a). Unlike anchors employed on the seas of earth, this anchor is secured upward, within the heavenly realms—*“the*

partakers of Christ **IF** we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. ^{NKJV}

Romans 15:13 also shows the association of joy with hope. “Now may the God of hope fill you with **all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**” ^{NKJV} Here we see an abounding hope requires “**all joy and peace in believing,**” which is only possible through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Those in Christ are to be continually reminded of the hope set before them. Their minds are to be challenged and comforted by the proclamation of their determined conformity to the image of the Son (Rom 8:29-30). If they are told of their duty, they should be told twice as much of their inheritance. If they are corrected, they should be given exceeding great and precious promises to provide a joyful incentive to shape up. We have the example of the Son of God Himself, who moved flawed churches to correct their condition by holding lofty and joyful promises before them (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21).

Having come from a background where a great deal of emphasis was placed on being the right church, or the “New Testament church,” I can tell you I never heard any emphasis remotely similar to these. In fact, if I had not read the texts for myself, I would have had no idea they were even in the Bible!

OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Here is a marvelous thing! Notice the reality with which Kingdom hope is associated: “**we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**” This is a dominating hope that swells and rises above the pandemonium of this world. Other versions read as follows: “**we exult in hope of the glory of God,**” ^{NASB} “**we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God,**” ^{NRSV} “**we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.**” ^{NLT}

We do not rejoice in the hope of only seeing God’s glory, but of SHARING in it—participating in it. Every person that has dwelt upon the earth will see God’s glory. There is nothing unique about that. As it is written, “**And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall**

see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 40:5). All, indeed, will “**see it together,**” but all will not “**share**” in it!

What Does It Mean?

What does it mean to rejoice in hope of sharing the glory of God? This is the “**glory of God**” as it will be revealed in the sons of God. The whole creation is waiting for this unveiling, as well as we ourselves. As it is written, “**For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.** For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body**” ^{NASB} (Rom 8:19-23).

According to God’s eternal purpose, everything is moving toward an appointed end, or conclusion. The entire natural order is sensitive to this crowning culmination. However, the most pronounced longing is found within those who have been justified by faith. They have been given more insight into the appointed terminus of all things, and are eagerly awaiting it.

The “**glory of God**” will override all other glories, moving them into oblivion. No competing glory will be able to survive the Lord Jesus returning in His glory, the glory of the Father, and that of the holy angels. The natural order, which has several times been shaken by God drawing near, will burst into flame at the appearing of His glory (2 Pet 3:10-12). This glory will be unveiled in the Person of Christ, who is “**the express image of God**” (Heb 1:3), and the “**fulness**” of His Person (Col 1:19; 2:9).

The saints are rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, because when His

glory is seen, their’s will be seen also. As it is written, “**When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory**” (Col 3:4). No more dissimilarities will be seen in the saved, but they will “**bear the image of the heavenly**” (1 Cor 15:49). No more struggle! No more frustration! No more cry of wretchedness! The glory of God will end all such things!

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all things presently competing with the glory of God will be gone, dissolved in the wake of a greater glory—a revealed glory. Satan will be banished.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all things presently competing with the glory of God will be gone, dissolved in the wake of a greater glory—a revealed glory. Satan will be banished. Principalities and powers will be thrown down in every quarter of the universe.

Principalities and powers will be thrown down in every quarter of the universe. The blazing glory of God will be seen for what it really is—dominating, invincible, and forever more. All other glories will be seen for what they are: subservient, powerless, and only for a time! It is no wonder faith moves us to “**rejoice in hope of the glory of God!**”

We must not fail, however, to see the relation of this glorying to justification by faith. When the righteousness of God is imputed to us, it produces these effects. This is the “**effect of righteousness**” (Isa 32:17)—what we experience as a result of possessing the righteousness of God.

No child of God can do without “**rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.**” This is not a luxury, but a necessity, else it would not be integral to God’s great salvation. If you desire this kind of joy., your mind must become enthralled with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It will not be found in your circumstances or

in your attainments, however good they may appear to be. When you can see this

truth concerning the righteousness of God being given to you, and rejoicing will be

kindled. What is more, the salvation of God is calculated to help you see it.

GLORYING IN TRIBULATION

“^{3a} And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations . . .” Just as justification is wide in scope and profound in depth, so are its effects. When faith is counted to men for righteousness, no small accomplishment has taken place. This involves a Divine pronouncement, to be sure, but it also is the “*work of God.*” Just as the natural creation was filled with all manner of life and activity, so is the new creation pervaded by all kinds of fruit and expression. Already we have been told of “*peace with God,*” free “*access*” into the grace in which we stand, and “*rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.*” Already, we have heard of benefits far surpassing any advantages before Christ. Yet, there is more.

NOT ONLY SO

Life in Christ is the “*not only so*” life, or the “*more than that*”^{RSV} blessing. As we will see, living by faith addresses every facet of life, both pleasant and unpleasant.

Thus far, the benefits affirmed have been pleasing: peace with God, access to grace, and rejoicing in hope. **The Spirit now lingers on the matter of rejoicing.** It is not limited to the contemplation of our future glory. Justification enables us to deal with the present, even when it is most grievous. When we talk about salvation, we are not philosophizing, or dealing in mystical speculation and mortal opinion. A religion that leaves one in the realm of philosophy brings no advantage to the individual. Our experience in this world must be touched by what we believe, and this is precisely what faith does.

GLORYING IN TRIBULATIONS

The suffering of godly people has long been a mystery to those without faith—and even to some who have faith. Here is a part of life in Christ that is conveniently ignored by the religious opportunist. Some who choose to deal with it seek their personal advantage rather than that of the suffering saint.

There are even professional high-paid careers that are wholly occupied with helping the troubled. While I do not deny that some good has come from these efforts, they are far inferior to the benefits of being justified by faith.

What Is Tribulation

Here is an extremely strong word that every person senses is laden with difficult things. Etymologically,

Here a fresh aspect of tribulations is seen. They are an appointment! They come by Divine direction, and are governed by the purpose of God, not the shifting circumstances of life. Properly seen, tribulation, or affliction, is one of the manners in which God works with us, conforming us to the image of His Son.

“*tribulation*” comes from *θλίψω*, which means *affliction, anguish, trouble, persecution, burdened, and afflicted*. It involves being pressed together with *hardship, experiencing oppression, being distressed, and placed in straits—between two hard places*.

Elsewhere, Paul uses this precise word to testify to the hardships brought on by faith. He shows the wide variety of “*trouble.*” “*But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions (θλίψεων), in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults [riots], in labors, in watchings, in fastings*” (2 Cor 6:4-5).

These “*tribulations,*” or “*afflictions,*” are not to move the believer from the joy

of salvation, but to bring solidity and stability. Thus we are exhorted, “*That no man should be moved [shaken from the foundations] by these afflictions (θλίψεων): for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto*” (1 Thess 3:3).

A Fresh Aspect Seen

Here a fresh aspect of tribulations is seen. They are an **appointment! They come by Divine direction, and are governed by the purpose of God, not the shifting circumstances of life.** Properly seen, tribulation, or affliction, is one of the manners in which God works with us, conforming us to the image of His Son. In this experience, the Holy Spirit is actually changing us from one stage of glory to another. Moving us further from the world and closer to the Lord.

Tribulation is similar to a threshing process, where the chaff is separated from the wheat. It is like a smelting process, where impurities are removed from the righteous. Of itself, tribulation, anguish, and trouble, are anything but pleasant. Yet the believer is enabled by grace to derive the best from the circumstance, seeing more clearly, and becoming more confident.

The Devil's Confusion

I do not know if the devil is continually confused, but should not be surprised if this is the case. If God is never confused, and the devil is the precise antithesis of God, it seems reasonable that he is continually confused and bewildered at the responses of the saints. We know from the book of Job that Satan thinks the righteous will be moved away from God by trouble and hardship. Here was Satan's reasoning. “*But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face . . . Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face*”

(Job 1:11 ; 2:4-5).

Because of his thorough wickedness, the devil is unable to learn, or to be taught. Thus he continues to think men can be moved away from God by trouble and difficulty. Wherever he is given leave by the Sovereign God, he brings hardship upon the saints, whether a thorn, a storm, a beating, or despair. He thinks if life is miserable for the saints, they will deny the Lord and go back to their old ways. That is his intent behind trouble, tribulation, anguish, and distress. However, his view is the wrong view, and is to be thrown down to the ground.

A Heavenly View

Our text is a heavenly view of trouble, an inspired perspective. It declares the manner in which FAITH perceives tribulation. It announces how justification equips the believer to face the most grievous hardship.

Unbelief causes both heart and lips to murmur and complain when difficulty hems men in on every side. How vividly this was seen in Israel and their wilderness wanderings (Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num 14:2; 16:41). Their trouble brought out their unbelief. For the one living by faith, it brings out their trust and reliance upon the Lord. **Trouble, then, is a most accurate test that will determine whether the person is really walking by faith.**

Glorying

We not only rejoice in hope of the glory of God, but *“we also glory in tribulations.”* Other versions read, *“rejoice in our sufferings,”*^{RSV} *“exult in our tribulations,”*^{NASB} *“boast in our sufferings,”*^{NRSV} *“have joy in our troubles.”*^{BBE} Capturing the aspect of admonition in the text, the NLT reads, *“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials.”*

Glorying is confident joy and insightful boasting. It comes from spiritual insight and understanding that sees beyond the trouble into the purpose and love of God. Glorying recognizes the temporality of trouble and the eternity of salvation. It comprehends that sifting is

occurring in tribulation, and rejoices in the prospect of the outcome. Unlike the swine, the eyes of the elect are not turned downward. Rather, they are looking upward, a stance that enables rejoicing to take place IN trouble or tribulation.

Glorying in tribulation is the opposite of murmuring when trouble comes. Such glorying delights the Lord, frustrates the devil, and strengthens the saints. It brings the aid of heavenly

Let it be clear, the glorying, or rejoicing, is not in the tribulations themselves, but in the effects wrought by them. When it is known they come by appointment, are strictly measured so they will not overcome us, and will yield a harvest of good things, men may glory in tribulations.

powers and overcomes evil powers.

Let it be clear, the glorying, or rejoicing, is not in the tribulations themselves, but in the effects wrought by them. **When it is known they come by appointment, are strictly measured so they will not overcome us, and will yield a harvest of good things, men may glory in tribulations.**

It must be remembered that the way to the crown is by the way of the cross. Believers must be told this, else life will become too burdensome to them. That is why holy men were noted for *“strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God’”* (Acts 14:22). The godly therefore reason, *“If I am suffering many tribulations, I am in the process of entering God’s kingdom. I am coming closer to the inheritance and further from the curse. These sufferings of mine prove I am on the way that leads to life, and therefore I will rejoice.”*

When is it that God ministers comfort and consolation to us? When do we experience the rich solace that strengthens the heart, firms up our hope, and causes peace to flow like a river into us? Is it not in tribulation? As it is written, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ”*^{NKJV} (2 Cor 1:4-5).

Only If Need Be

There is a sweetness in considering various aspects of our trials. One of the most precious is this: **our trials are only experienced as necessary.** Thus it is written, *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that 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”*^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:6-7). Our tribulations are brief, and always with purpose. They only come to us if they are needed – needed to refine our faith, which is tested by fiery trial. Properly received, our tribulations will enable our faith to be found *“to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* It is no wonder that we *“glory in tribulations!”* By grace, we are privy to both their purpose and outcome.

The Strength of Divine Love

The love of Christ for us is so intent and unrelenting that we cannot be separated from it by *“tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword”* (Rom 8:35). The love of God in Christ Jesus is so strong toward us 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 creature, shall be able to separate us”* from it (Rom 8:39).

But this is no lifeless dogma. It is no

spiritually impoverished and impractical creed. This is the truth, and is confirmed to the heart in the experience of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, and other hard aspects of life. This is the knowledge that enables us to *“glory in tribulations also.”*

We exult in the confirmation of sonship that they bring. We joy in the rich consolation that is ministered to us in the midst of them. We leap for joy at the anticipation of being finally relieved of them all. We spiritually boast in the accomplishments of our Lord through

them. Through them He is removing our dross, readying us for glory, conforming us to His image, and confirming the sufficiency of His grace. There is a Divine work being accomplished in all of your tribulations and difficulties! It is He that is working within you (Phil 2:13).

TRIBULATION PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE

*“^{3b} . . . knowing that tribulation produces perseverance . . . ”*There is a level of knowledge that can only be experienced by faith. It is a product of justification, and a proof of Divine favor. This knowledge is not theoretical, academic, or hypothetical. It is the kind of knowledge that yields both confidence and joy, as well as peace and strength.

There is a blight upon the church that can only be removed by special *“eye salve.”* I refer to it as an academic blight that exalts the scribes rather than the Savior, and gives honor to the lawyers rather than the Lawgiver. It is a malignant infection that puts more stress on the mind than the heart, and makes little or no room for faith. This approach to learning is completely incapable of producing the kind of knowledge declared in our text. This condition exists because such erudition cannot reach the heart, effect the conscience, or open the heavens. While there may be place for it, it is an extremely small place, nothing to be compared with the *“large room”* into which God places us by faith (Psa 31:8). In order to think in concert with our text, you must be set in a *“large place”* (Psa 118:5), where restrictive walls of flesh no longer exist.

INTUITIVE, YET COGNITIVE

This knowledge is both intuitive and cognitive, which circumstance is indeed most marvelous.

Intuitive

By *“intuitive,”* I mean instinctive—a knowledge that is inherent in the new creation. There is a sense in which it is not learned, but received. Just as the brute creation possesses certain instincts

from birth, so the new creation has a certain kind of knowledge from its genesis. This is the kind of knowledge described in a marvelous aspect of the New Covenant. *“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . . I will put my laws into their hearts,*

This is something God Himself does. It is not a learning process as ordinarily conceived. It is the nature of the “new man” to know certain things—to sense their truth, and be able to move out upon them. This is another way of saying, “for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest”

and in their minds will I write them” (Heb 8:10; 10:16).

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Those who are born again sense the truth of our text, even before they have heard it. By this, I mean it will not sound strange to them the very first time they hear it. The sound of the words, which is essential, will confirm what they already sense in their hearts.

Cognitive

By *“cognitive,”* I mean knowledge that comes from intellectual awareness and judgment. It is knowledge reflected in thought and perception. It is learned through both teaching and experience, and is an area of growth. In the Kingdom of God, cognitive knowledge always is in strict agreement with intuitive knowledge, and vice versa. To put it another way, the laws written upon and put within our hearts and minds are in strict agreement with the Scriptures, which have been written by inspired and holy men of God. What the new creation senses by its very nature, is confirmed by *“every word of God.”* Conversely, every word of God will be readily acknowledged to be the truth by all those with a love for the truth, which is inherent in the *“new man.”*

All of this is not an intellectual bypath, intended to introduce confusion to the believer. It rather shows to us why *“knowing”* is given such a high priority in the New Covenant. Unlike mere erudition, this knowledge produces a rich confidence that enables the child of God to stand in the midst of a raging storm and tumultuous waves.

Not Applicable in Nature

Young men or women can memorize certain mathematical tables and theorems, yet totally lack any confidence to employ them for building a large structure or resolving a challenging problem. But if you could write those tables and theorems on their hearts, then they would make sense to them when they heard them, and they could use them productively. Their confidence would move them into action as though they had worked with them for many years. That is the known power of confidence.

In nature, this scenario is not possible. But this is not the case in grace. Not only is this possible, it is integral to the New Covenant.

Let me be as precise as I can on this matter, for it is a critical aspect of understanding living by faith. When we read words like “we know . . .” or “knowing that . . .” it is assumed the individual has been born again. **It is assumed that the words may be new, but will not be strange.** They will not offend or confuse the hearer, but will be confirming and uplifting. The very process of edification assumes there has been a change in the individual. In that change, the heart is infinitely more advanced than the mind. It possesses a greater sensitivity and understanding than the mind. Yet, until the mind is blessed with confirming knowledge, the experience of the believer will be limited, and his experiential involvement with Christ abridged. Expression will tend to be clumsy, and spiritual naivete will cause unnecessary stumbling and error.

Some Illustrations

Some illustrations of this will suffice to confirm what I have said. The following are things “we know.” For many genuine believers, they are totally new intellectually, yet they are not strange, abrasive, or hard to receive. You do not want to miss how marvelous this is.

*“And **WE KNOW** that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose . . . For **WE KNOW** that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens . . . 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 . . . **WE KNOW** that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death . . . **WE KNOW** that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one . . . And **WE KNOW** that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is*

true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (Rom 8:28; 2 Cor 5:1; 1 John 3:2,14; 5:19,20).

There are many believers who know these things in their hearts, but are cognitively unaware of them. They have been written into their minds in this way: their minds are now able to receive and delight in these affirmations. They are written in their hearts in this sense: they recognize their truth and are capable of relying upon them without fear or doubt.

The Reason for this Diversion

Perseverance is consistency, dependability, and faithfulness. It is continuing in the race when it makes no sense to the flesh to do so. It is refusing to quit. It is remaining strong. It is looking up when nothing but black clouds are hovering over us.

There is a reason for this brief diversion. The text before us affirms things that will stagger the natural mind, but rejoice the new heart. The person whose mind is renewed, and is devoted to serving the Law of God (Rom 7:25) will immediately see the truth of them. Such an one will relate what is said to life, and find it brings a comforting clarity and understanding that nature in all of its refinements cannot produce. The Spirit will now take us into high places that will suffocate the flesh, but bring refreshing vitality to the spirit.

TRIBULATION PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE

Here is a statement flesh cannot receive. It sees tribulation as producing nothing of value, but only sorrow and grief. The KJV reads, “tribulation **worketh** patience.” Other versions read, “suffering **produces** endurance,” ^{RSV} “tribulation **brings about** perseverance,” ^{NASB} “trouble **gives us** the power of waiting,” ^{BBE} “hardship **develops** perseverance,” ^{NJB} and “problems and trials . . . **help us** learn to endure.” ^{NLT}

Tribulation is productive because it has a purpose. Trouble is not mere happenstance or fate. The difficulties that you have faced are not circumstances of chance. Something is taking place in them—something that is necessary and good. When you are in tribulation, you are in a productive mode, where very real and essential kingdom qualities are being fashioned. In your trouble, something is being given to you—something from God. Something is being developed in you—something by God. You are being helped along to another stage of glory by your afflictions! Can you believe that?

What Is Perseverance, or Patience?

The older word “patience” means continuing to run under hardship. It is continuing to row in the midst of a storm. It is still trusting when all of experience seems to contradict the promise. Patience, or perseverance, involves waiting on the Lord. It is looking to the Lord while we run, and expecting the fulfillment of His Word. Patience is Abraham continuing to believe God for Isaac twenty-five years after the promise. It is Abraham taking Isaac to the mountain to sacrifice him to God, even though he was the only one through the promise of God would be realized. It is Sarah receiving strength to conceive against all the laws of nature.

Patience is Samson waiting for a chance to take hold of the pillars. It is David faithfully keeping a few sheep until the challenge of Goliath. It is Moses keeping the sheep of Jethro in the desert. It is Joshua and Caleb remaining faithful until they got to the promised land. Perseverance is Paul writing from prison, listening for the Lord during a ship-breaking storm, and getting up after he was stoned.

Perseverance is consistency, dependability, and faithfulness. It is continuing in the race when it makes no sense to the flesh to do so. It is refusing to quit. It is remaining strong. It is looking up when nothing but black clouds are hovering over us. It is looking for food in a famine, expecting water to come out of a rock, and preparing a meal for three when there is only enough for one last meal for two. Perseverance is singing at

midnight when your feet are in the stocks. It is shaking a serpent that has bitten you into the fire, and continuing with what you were doing.

Most Clearly Seen in Christ

This virtue is seen most clearly in our Lord Jesus Christ. Perseverance is praying when your sweat is like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. It is admitting you are the Son of God before those who mock you, and finding a

We are not speaking of some Kingdom novelty that can be received or neglected with no lasting results. Perseverance is something that is necessary, required, mandatory, and imperative. There is no salvation without this—no promise of life that excludes it.

Eternal life will be given only to those *“who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality”* (Rom 2:7). The rich

endures to the end shall be saved” (Matt 24:13). Ponder the exhortation of Paul. *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”* (2 Tim 2:3). Let there be no lingering doubt in your mind concerning the essentiality of enduring, persevering, and having patience unto the end!

How Does It Come?

And how is such endurance realized? How is perseverance developed in the people of God? It is through tribulation, trouble, affliction, and persecution! All of these produce a vehement desire to get out of this world and into the next! Faith responds to difficulty by shouting, *“I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day”*^{NKJV} (2 Tim 1:12b).

During tribulation it may not seem as though you are making any progress. Your tears may blind your eyes, and your sorrows weigh down your heart. But in your trouble the Spirit is changing you to another stage of glory. As you live by faith, you are becoming more determined to obtain the prize. The crown of glory is looming larger, and the promised inheritance is becoming more precious. The world is receding into the background, and a *“better country”* is coming more into view. Your flesh is growing weaker, and your spirit is growing stronger, being renewed day by day! If you are in Christ, you too *“know”* this to be true.

We are not speaking of some Kingdom novelty that can be received or neglected with no lasting results. Perseverance is something that is necessary, required, mandatory, and imperative. There is no salvation without this—no promise of life that excludes it.

person to save when on the cross of cursing. Perseverance is setting your face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem and die for the sins of the world, even when your own disciples try and dissuade you from doing so. Perseverance is carrying your own cross, taking care of your mother when you are dying, and considering the joy set before you when you are being made sin and cursed by your own Father.

Absolutely Essential

promises of God are only inherited through *“through faith and patience”* (Heb 6:12). It is ever true that we *“have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise”* (Heb 10:36). With stern yet gentle words we are admonished to *“run with endurance the race that is set before us”*^{NKJV} (Heb 12:1).

If you are ever tempted to quit, or be less aggressive to obtain the inheritance, think of the words of Jesus. *“But he who*

PERSEVERANCE PRODUCES CHARACTER

“^{As} and perseverance, character . . .” The KJV reads, *“and patience [worketh] experience.”* The ASV reads, *“steadfastness [produces] approvedness.”* Taking the words to their full etymological meaning, the NLT reads, *“endurance develops strength of character in us,”* and the NJB reads, *“perseverance develops a tested character.”* The word *“character,”* or *“experience,”* comes from the Greek word *δοκιμήν*, which means *“having the quality of having stood the test: matured or proven character.”* It also stands for *“the experience of testing, and the proof of genuine evidence.”*

The word *“experience,”* is used in the KJV, Websters, Duoay-Rheims, Darby’s, Basic Bible English, and Young’s Literal Translation. It emphasizes the PROCESS by which true character, or worth, is established. The word *“character,”* used in the NKJV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NIB, NLT, and NJB stresses the result of the process, which is proven character. Both translations are technically and spiritually correct.

Thus, we understand this verse to mean, **through the testing and consequent continuance in well**

doing, true character is developed. To put it another way, **by enduring the tests through which we are caused to pass, our profession is validated, and we are proved to be real disciples.**

SPIRITUAL CHARACTER

Character is moral **excellence—the ability to make the right choices when faced with competing influences, and remain faithful when one must suffer to do so.** Some people, like the unfaithful spies of Israel, are so intimidated by opposition that they shrink back in fear (Num 13:31-33). In

their cases, the circumstances proved they did NOT have faith. The identical circumstances confirmed that Joshua and Caleb DID have faith (Num 14:6-9; 14:30,38).

An untried person, if there be such a thing, is not to be placed in areas of kingdom responsibility. Such do not have the confidence and assurance that comes from passing through the floods and fires of Divine testing. That is precisely why the people of God are not to led by novices (1 Tim 3:6).

The experience, or development of character, is beautifully stated by the Apostle Paul. In harmony with our text, he shows that tribulation proved the worth of the faith he possessed. *"We are troubled on every side, yet **not distressed**; we are perplexed, but **not in despair**; Persecuted, but **not forsaken**; cast down, but **not destroyed**"* (2 Cor 4:8-9). What he **experienced** was tribulation. What did NOT happen proved his character.

In our text, Paul speaks of trials differently than James. On the surface, they seem to contradict one another. Paul says patience, or endurance, produces a tried character. James says the opposite: *"the trying of your faith worketh patience"* (James 1:3). But there is no contradiction between the two. James is speaking of the **testing itself**, while Paul is referring to the **outcome** of the testing. Our text is saying, true character has been developed in the fire of trial. It is the conclusion of the process. James is saying, the fire of trial comes upon us so that our character may be proved true. The process has an appointed purpose.

This is precisely the affirmation of James, who pronounces a blessing on the enduring, or persevering, one. *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him"*^{NKJV} (James 1:12).

The truth of the matter is that God places men in circumstances that will

bring out what is really in them. **For those who live by faith, the result will always be good!** It simply is not possible to live by faith and walk in the Spirit, then succumb to the trial.

The Corinthian Dilemma

There was a certain kind of testing to which the Corinthian church was subjected. False teachers came among

The process of which our text speaks—real character being developed through the enduring fierce trials—is something that is known by the believer. This is not theoretical knowledge, but experiential knowledge.

them, spouting such heresies as can scarcely be imagined. Some said there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12). Others doubted that Paul was even an Apostle (1 Cor 9:1-3). Still others declared they were followers of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (1 Cor 1:1:12; 3:4). There was even contemptible conduct around the table of the Lord (1 Cor 11:20-22). It was a sorrowful situation.

And how will the Spirit speak of those circumstances? What will He say of the heretical teaching and conduct that had arisen in their assembly? Here is His assessment. *"For there must be also heresies among you, **that they which are approved may be made manifest among you**"* (1 Cor 11:19). The NIV reads, *"No doubt there have to be differences among you **to show which of you have God's approval.**"* The NRSV reads, *"Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only **so will it become clear who among you are genuine.**"* What revelation trouble brings!

There you have a reason for church squabbles, dissension, factions, and false doctrine. These are provings from God—provings that *"must needs be"*—to put the profession of men to the test. The Lord thus puts men into the fire to see the real worth of their faith. This is a circumstance to be recognized.

When such tests are over, those who have been justified by faith, and are living by faith will always pass the trial. They will always end up on the other side of the raging sea. Their faith will be proved genuine by the blast of the fiery furnace and the ferocity of the testing waves. Even during their trials, they who wait upon the Lord will be able to mount up with wings like eagles, run and not be wear, walk and not faint! (Isa 40:31)

In the Scriptural sense of the word, *"experience"* is not having something unique happen to you. It is not being struck down by the Spirit, or engaging in some activity that is considered euphoric or exhilarating. Real experience is going in the dungeon like Joseph, and passing the test. It is entering the lion's den like Daniel, and talking to the king in the morning. It is going into to a raging inferno, like the three Hebrew children, and only losing your bonds. That is real *"experience."*

Experience is young David facing the giant and seasoned warrior Goliath, and leaving the battle field with the sword of a decapitated enemy. It is Noah finishing the ark, entering it, and coming out after the flood had ravaged the world. That is real experience!

Experience that is Known

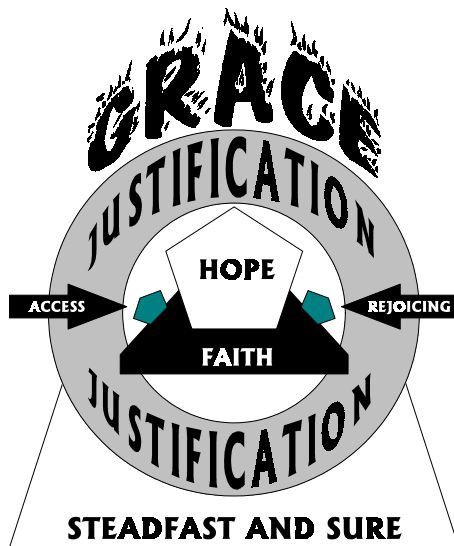
The process of which our text speaks—real character being developed through the enduring fierce trials—is something that is known by the believer. This is not theoretical knowledge, but experiential knowledge. It empowers the trusting one to shout, *"I cried to the LORD with my voice, And He heard me from His holy hill"* (Psa 3:4). The believer confesses, *"I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my*

fears” (Psa 34:4). With joy, the one who lives by faith acknowledges, *“This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles”* (Psa 34:6). The faith of such a person is not true because he passed through the trial. Rather, **he passed through the trial because his faith was true.**

Faith tells the person this, and thus causes him to become more steadfast after the trial than he was before. Through a storm, advancement is made—against the wind, and in spite of the weakness of the tried sailor! The trial, therefore, becomes a confirmation of the work God has already done within the believer.

The words of Jesus are appropriate at this point, revealing the nature of the Kingdom. *“We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen”* (John 3:11). So it is with all the saved, who are proved true through trial. They can now speak authoritatively. For faith, that is a rich consolation, indeed!

CHARACTER PRODUCES HOPE



“^{4b} . . . and character, hope.” For the second time in this short passage, the Spirit brings *“hope”* before us. He first affirmed that, being justified by faith and having access into grace through Jesus Christ, we stand and *“rejoice in hope of the glory of God”* (5:1-2). Hope is like a precious gem, held by the setting faith upon the ring of justification, and garnished with the precious stones of access and rejoicing. The whole of the beautiful arrangement glows with the grace of God, and is steadfast and sure.

What marvelous associations have been made with this *“one hope”* of our calling (Eph 4:4)! Justification, faith, peace, access, standing firm, rejoicing, and the glory of God! What an excellent commentary on the richness of hope, and the sustaining power it brings to the believer! These are matters relating to receiving a righteousness from God.

WHAT IS HOPE?

As I have already indicated, hope is

a confident and joyful expectation of the future. It is faith in its forward posture. Just as faith reaches backward to the atoning death of Christ and obtains the benefits related to it, so faith reaches forward to the consummation of all things. It is convinced of the promised advantages related to the return of the Lord.

There is nothing ambiguous or uncertain about hope. It brings a certitude to the soul that can only be realized by faith. That certitude is referred to as *“the full assurance of hope,”* and is to be maintained until the grand conclusion of all things. As it is written, *“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (Heb 6:11-12). The idea is that of being fully convinced of the promises of God. It is understood they are considered valuable—*“exceeding great and precious”* (2 Pet 1:4), and that the trusting one is not willing to forfeit them.

A hope like this (and none other is acceptable) places a high value on *“the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 1:13). It can be held only by the one who is not at home in this world—the person who has believed God and received a righteousness from Him.

Every person who is born again has this hope. It is not possible to come into Christ and be void of it. Here is how the Spirit states the fact. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope*

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:3-5). Both the NIV and NRSV reads that God *“has given us new birth into a living hope.”* The NASB reads, *“has caused us to be born again to a living hope.”*

The new birth, therefore, has put us into this living hope. It so sensitizes us to the eternal realm that we want to be with the Lord. This hope is necessary if we are to last through our tenure in this world and obtain the inheritance that is reserved for us in heaven. The hope also ministers a solid conviction to our hearts that God will keep us by His own power and through our faith in Christ.

The Rarity of Scriptural Hope

It is a matter of deep concern to me that such a hope appears rare indeed in our time—at least among those of the common Christian community. One rarely hears any illusion to the world to come, or being with Christ, to say nothing of having it dominate the conversation. I have personally spoken to hundreds of believers who confess to never having heard a message dealing with such realities. Such things ought not to be.

THE COMPLICATING FACTOR

Although we are born again into a living hope, there is a complicating factor. We are also occupying a hostile realm that militates against that hope. That hope must be maintained, else it will fade away. It must be nourished, for it must be strong to survive being in *“this present evil world”* (Gal 1:4).

When we are begotten to a living hope, it is not wound up like an automatic toy, so that it runs without our personal involvement until the day of the Lord. Viewing the condition of many believers, it appears as though some are convinced this is the case. Our salvation depends upon hope. It must be present with us at all times. Is it not written, *“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it”*^{NKJV} (Rom 8:24-25). There really is no such thing as salvation without hope, and our hearts should be repulsed by the very

will get them through the wilderness! The more they are tested, the more their hope will grow. After forty years, when Caleb arrived in Canaan at the age of eighty-five, he said this to captain Joshua. *“And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for*

The recollection of our deliverances causes hope to grow. The furnaces and fires through which we have come have served to ignite our hope and cause it to grow and flourish. God has not only delivered us, He IS delivering us. He not only IS delivering us, He will yet deliver us. As it is written, *“Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us”*^{NKJV} (2 Cor 1:10).

THIS WE KNOW

Now this is something that we *“KNOW.”* We only have to consider how far we have come by God’s grace to feel the freshness of renewed hope. This is something common to every child of God: *“experience produces hope.”* The more our character is refined and matured, the stronger hope becomes.

God’s people should make much of rehearsing the righteous acts of the Lord. Hope is refreshed when you *“Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you”* (Mark 5:19). When kingdom laborers report *“all that God had done with them”* (Acts 14:27), hope awakens within the believers.

The various trials through which you have passed are tutors. They have confirmed God’s faithfulness to you, and that is fuel for hope. Take hold of this truth, and doubt it not. *“Experience worketh hope.”*

Born in 1697, and confessing his faith in Christ in 1716, John Gill said this of hope. *“Hope is a gift of God’s grace, and is implanted in regeneration, but abounds, increases, and becomes more strong and lively by experience of the love, grace, mercy, power, and faithfulness of God.”*

That is an observation birthed in, and confirmed by, experience with God—experience in the furnace and flood. It is common among all who live by faith, and it is exceeding precious.

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notion that is possible. When we see timorous and halting believers who are unsure of glory, and unpersuaded of their position in the Son, our hearts and minds should leap into action. Such poor souls stand in need of nourishment, strengthening, and edification, else they will not be equal to the challenges of life.

How can hope be sustained? What provision is there in God’s great salvation that will ensure hope becomes strong? How can it increase and become more dominant in our hearts and minds? Our text has the answer.

EXPERIENCE PRODUCES HOPE

Kingdom experience, or the development of spiritual character, produces hope. Hope is fashioned when we survive the fire and flood of testing! Joshua and Caleb’s longing for Canaan

you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said” (Josh 14:10-12). What kept that man through the prime of his life, from forty-five to eighty-five? Why did he not ask to be entered into a Israelite version of a rest home? Why did he still want the land of the giants—a exceeding great mountain filled with fortified cities? Why did this man think he could drive out the enemy and possess the land for which he longed forty years earlier?

It was hope! His hope had grown during the wilderness wanderings, not diminished! It had become more robust through the plagues and chastening of the camp, and the challenges of the enemy. His *“experience”* had produced hope!

HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT

“⁵ Now hope does not disappoint . . . ” There is a hope that is disappointed—a hope that cannot be fully realized. Solomon well said, *“When a*

wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, And the hope of the unjust perishes” (Prov 11:7). Again he wrote, *“The hope of the righteous will be*

gladness, But the expectation of the wicked will perish” (Prov 10:28). By this he meant the longings of the wicked will never be satisfied. Their hope is all in

Faith sets spiritual life into motion, causing it to grow and flourish. Through it, we are oriented for glory--by Given O. Blakely

vain, and, because of that, what they expect cannot be realized.

But it is not so with the righteous—with those whose faith has passed the test! Their hope is actually a pledge or guarantee of what is to come! Their hope has been spawned by their new birth, and is no imagination of the mind. It has grown in their tribulations.

THE DIVINE MANNER

It is God's manner to first whet the appetite for the blessing before bringing it to pass. Before He gave Adam a wife, He first produced circumstances that would move Adam to want a wife. Before He brought Israel out of Egypt, He first produced an environment that made them want to come out. Before He gave them Canaan, He worked to develop in them a longing for a land of their own.

Before we inherit the ultimate blessing, God moves us through various tests and provings of our faith. He does so to produce a profound longing for His promises within us. He has no mind to cast us down, but to cause us to hope in His word. When we yield to that intent, glorying in our tribulations, knowing they are *"working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (2 Cor 4:17), our hope will come to pass! We will realize what we long for, praise the Lord!

As with Abraham, faith convinces us *"that what He had promised He was also able to perform"* (Rom 4:21). Hope vaults us into the mode of expectancy, for it is guaranteed by God Himself. **"HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT!"**

How often have you been disappointed with fleshly expectations? Things simply did not turn out as you desired—and your desires were even good and wholesome. Your employment, your home, your church, or even your spouse or your children, fell short of what you had hoped. Did not such things break your heart? Perhaps you did receive grace to overcome the circumstances. God might even have brought some spark of good from it all, as a reward to your faith. But in the end, things were not as you expected or desired.

NO DISAPPOINTMENT IN HOPE!

In Christ, you have entered another order—one where hope is not frustrated and deep desires to not go ungratified! Child of God, you must believe this, for it is the truth! *"Hope does not disappoint us"* ^{NIV}—not the hope to which God has begotten you!

Before we inherit the ultimate blessing, God moves us through various tests and provings of our faith. He does so to produce a profound longing for His promises within us. He has no mind to cast us down, but to cause us to hope in His word.

The Lord can speak to your heart the very words He once spoke to Israel. They are even more true in Christ Jesus. *"But Israel shall be saved by the LORD With an everlasting salvation; You shall not be ashamed or disgraced Forever and ever. For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: 'I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, In a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, Seek Me in vain'; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right"* (Isa 45:17-19).

When God promises an *"eternal inheritance,"* He declares *"things that are right!"* Not only are they *"right,"* but because He has created all things and you with purpose, He is fully capable of bringing His promises to pass. He has not asked us to seek His face in vain, or without solid expectation! If He did not say to the seed of Jacob, *"Seek Me in vain,"* how much less has He said so to those who are in the Son!

Every one possessing the *"one hope"* can, in their measure, say with Paul, *"according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be*

ashamed" ^{NKJV} (Phil 1:20). The hope we have received is *"good hope,"* and comes through the grace of God, who has promised to fulfill his word to us. That is involved in the expression *"everlasting consolation and good hope"* (2 Thess 2:16). It is another way of saying it is not possible for those who have the hope not to realize its fulfillment.

Because of His commitment to those who trust in Him, God, *"determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us"* ^{NKJV} (Heb 6:17-18).

HOPE REQUIRES AFFIRMATION

Who is able to measure the terrible effects of obscuring this hope, or not speaking of it, or calling it into question? What of those poor souls who rarely have the hope set before them to ponder, contemplate, and embrace more fully? What massive deterioration of soul begins in those who are only told of earthly things, and continually confronted with issues that have no Scriptural foundation?

If we are saved by hope, and if God orders our lives so as to augment and strengthen hope, what favor has any done for us by accentuating the here and the now? Those who are bent on making us look at things of the earth have hurt us, they have not helped us. It makes no difference how noble they may appear, or how friendly and concerned they seem to be. If their words and manners do not assist us to look up, and *"set out hope in God"* (Psa 78:7), they are really our enemies, not our friends.

But those precious souls who sharpen our countenance with their heavenly considerations and manners, and who speak to us of *"the hope set us"* (Heb 6:18), are the dearest of all friends. They will lend us aid in getting through our difficulties. They will help us to reach our *"desired haven"* (Psa 107:30). Count them a dear treasure!

Take hold of this word, and doubt it not: *“Hope maketh not ashamed!”* ^{KJV} Hear it again. *“Now hope does not disappoint”* ^{NKJV} Let’s the words sink down into your ears. *“And hope does not disappoint us.”* ^{NIV} Refresh your soul with it. *“And this expectation will not disappoint us.”* ^{NLT}

This is the hope of *“ever being with the Lord”* (1 Thess 4:17). It is the confident expectation of being *“like Him”* when we see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). It involves finishing the race (Heb 12:1-2; 2 Tim 4:7), obtaining the prize (1 Cor 9:24), and hearing the words *“Well done, good*

and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23). This *“hope”* speaks of being *“absent from the body, and present with the Lord”* (2 Cor 5:8). It shouts to us of entering into our house that is in heaven, fashioned by God Himself (2 Cor 5:1-5). It holds before us the prospect of sitting with Jesus in His throne (Rev 3:21), reigning with Him (2 Tim 2:12), and being a *“joint heir”* with Him (Rom 8:17).

Those in possession of such a hope *“will not be ashamed!”* There will not be a single element of disappointment when they come to the end of their earthly journey! They will not be disappointed in

life, and they will not be disappointed in death. When they are raised from the dead, they will not be ashamed, and when they stand before the throne of Christ, they will not be ashamed. When they are given their inheritance, and receive their reward, they will not be dissatisfied. When they hear Christ’s assessment and confession of them not one note of dissatisfaction will be heard.

You can believe this with all of your heart, with nothing doubting. Hope does not in any way disappoint! It never produces a bad crop, never crushes the heart, never caused shame and disgrace.

THE LOVE OF GOD POURED IN OUR HEARTS

“^{5b} . . . because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

These are not empty words: *“Hope maketh not ashamed.”* They are not heavenly oratory which, like words from men, color the truth so as to make it more palatable. These words clarify the truth, making it more sure to our hearts. For this reason, the Spirit elaborates on the subject, showing us WHY hope does not disappoint or make us ashamed.

LOVE POURED OUT

Here is the glorious reason. *“The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts.”* ^{KJV} Like a mighty torrent, the Holy Spirit has poured God’s love into our hearts. What a remarkable picture of God’s grace! I suppose that some think God cannot *“pour”* His love into our hearts. That certainly is not a common way of speaking. Then again, this is not a common thing that happens! **We should not expect extraordinary blessings to come in ordinary ways!**

The expression *“shed abroad,”* or *“poured out,”* comes from a single Greek word: ἐκκέχυται. This is not a casual word, but an unusually strong one. On the negative side, murder is described by this word as the **shedding** of blood (Matt 23:35). On the positive side, the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was said to be Jesus *“shedding forth,”* or *“pouring out”* the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

This word denotes an abundance,

full experience, and rich satisfaction. It is being given over completely to something, devoted to it, and filled up with it.

Religious men have been able to

heavenly places to those who are seated in heavenly places.

This love is not OUR love for God, but God’s love for us! It is

Like a mighty torrent, the Holy Spirit has poured God’s love into our hearts. What a remarkable picture of God’s grace! I suppose that some think God cannot “pour” His love into our hearts. That certainly is not a common way of speaking. Then again, this is not a common thing that happens! We should not expect extraordinary blessings to come in ordinary ways!

capitalize and even institutionalize being *“filled with the Spirit.”* Such doctrines have been introduced in connection with this condition (Eph 5:18) as stagger the sensitive heart. But who has ever been able to capitalize being filled with the love of God? What institution or pattern of theological thought has ever sought to exploit that idea? This is too lofty for flesh—it cannot even corrupt the idea! To have the love of God shed forth, or copiously poured out into our hearts is a most arresting consideration. There is nothing in the flesh that can assign any value to it, or move men to desire it, or anything like it. It cannot be related to a fleshly experience or soulish sensation. It defies carnal explanation, or even fabrication. The expression, *“the love of God has been poured out in our hearts”* is a heavenly one that soars high above the natural man. It is uttered from the

GOD’S love, not our love! Thus, the NIV reads, *“God has poured out His love into our hearts.”*

Two things should be evident to us in this declaration. **First**, God’s love for us is so *“great”* it can be poured out in abundance. In fact, it is called *“great,”* or exceedingly large. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”* ^{NKJV} (Eph 2:4-5). **Second**, in Christ we receive new hearts that are capable of receiving an abundance from God. Just as you cannot pour out an abundance into a small and restricted vessel, so a circumscribed and hard heart cannot receive the abundance of God’s love. It must be made new and enlarged.

This love was not poured out into

our hearts by an impersonal means. God's own Holy Spirit poured His love into our hearts. That is one of His indispensable ministries. He brings to us an enlarged awareness of the love God has for us. This is not an empty emotional passion, or a flickering desire for our betterment. This is a strong preference for us. It reflects a willingness to save us, lead us, strengthen

When this love is poured out into our hearts, we become acutely aware of His affection and desire for us. This awareness compels us, thrusting us into a live of personal sacrifice and anticipation. Only the Holy Spirit is capable of pouring this love into us. It is not a love that can be learned academically, or apprehended through logical processes. It is a work only

from heaven, but from within. The Holy Spirit does not merely fall upon us, bringing fleshly sensations, erratic behavior, and unintelligible utterances. He is "given to us" (1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). This is not an experience, but a Person—and there is a vast difference between the two. It involves experience, to be sure, but the pinnacle of the blessing is the Person of the Holy Spirit!

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And what does the Spirit come to do? What does this text declare His work to be in regards to our subject? Why is it that hope is not associated with shame. How is it that those who possess the hope purify themselves, even as He is pure (1 John 3:3)? It is not because of moral compulsion, or a set of rules, or threats of condemnation. All of these do play a role in spiritual life, but not the primary one. None of them are sufficient to induce consistent and indefatigable effort.

us, and bring us spotless into His presence with exceeding joy. This is a sacrificial love, a considerate love, a beneficial love.

God can do through the Holy Spirit—and He does it for every one of His children!

It is only to the degree that we perceive the love of God that hope springs eternal within! If there is doubt concerning God's love for us, there will be no joyful expectation of the future. Examine yourself and see if this is not the truth. When you see the extent of God's love for you, you will withhold nothing from Him. In return, He will so clarify your future glory, that no price will be too great to pay, and no suffering too long or painful to endure. All of this is intensely personal and gratifying. That, dear child of God, is how the Kingdom of God works, and it is all for your advantage.

In the world, it is possible to be loved by someone who brings us no advantage, and may even bring harm to us. It is also possible to be legitimately loved by someone who cannot effectively communicate that love to us. But God is not restricted in this manner. His love is right, holy, and beneficial. It brings good things to us, for God desires to do us good. Once He said it to Israel, even more He says it to those in His Son. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" ^{NKJV} (Jer 29:11). The Lord is, indeed, abundant in goodness!

Because the Holy Spirit knows and searches "the deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10), He is a capable Administrator of this love. As He pours God's love into our hearts, we become aware of "the things God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9-10). The rich promises of God begin to shine with eternal glory, the Word is more satisfying, and Jesus becomes more precious. All of this because we have seen something of the greatness of God's love for us.

THE SPIRIT IS GIVEN TO US

God is careful to remind us of what we have received in Christ. The love of God is not poured out into our hearts

CONCLUSION

We have perused a text of great magnitude, and have not been able to do it justice. My purpose has been to set forth the truth in such a manner as will provoke both thought and effort. This passage has placed before us the sure effects of being made righteous. While righteousness is imputed to us "without works," it is neither impersonal nor ineffective. Rich fruit is to found on the tree of justification. The tranquility of peace with God is realized. With that peace comes refreshment from the presence of the Lord rather than intimidation. Fear flies away, and a certain tranquility of soul is experienced

in the very presence of the Lord.

There also comes a realization that we have access to the grace we so sorely need, and that God is forward to give it to us. We can confidently approach the throne of grace to "obtain mercy and find grace in the time of need" (Heb 4:16). Our petitions will not be denied, but will be joyfully received and honored by the God who is thoroughly satisfied with the Person and accomplishments of His Son. So we come to Him, expectantly, and with great confidence. We can come as often as we desire, stay as long as we want, and obtain as much as we seek. It is coming

into the presence of the Lord and obtaining grace that enables us to stand against all the wiles of the devil, and in all manner of trials.

Receiving the "gift of righteousness," and accessing the grace of God wherein we stand, we are set to rejoicing in anticipation of beholding the glory of God, and being ourselves glorified. This is no small accomplishment, for once we were in the grip of the fear of death. Now, however, it holds no dread for us. The future is now bright with promise.

While we await the return of our

Lord and our consequent glorification, life is seen in a entirely new perspective. Now our tribulations are seen as an appointed means to an end. They are the door that opens to endurance, perseverance, and spiritual constancy. As life brings stress and burdens to us, our spiritual muscles are strengthened. Our wills become more determined, and we resolve to obtain the prize at any cost.

There is another glorious accomplishment of which we become aware. As we gain more experience in the faith-life, coming through more trials, and overcoming more enemies, hope is

becoming stronger. It now speaks more clearly to our hearts. It is more difficult for circumstances to obscure the future, which is shining brighter and brighter. Heaven is now eclipsing earth, and the afflictions through which we are passing are offset by *"a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (2 Cor 4:17).

In the stillness of the trying night, hope can be heard to whisper to us: "You will not be disappointed!" From heaven the shout can be heard over the din of battle: "You will not be ashamed for trusting in Christ and looking forward to the glory!"

And when the "old serpent" tries to convince us this is all of our own doing, the Holy Spirit witnesses to our spirit, "It is I who has poured out the love of your God into your heart. I have assisted you to see His great love, and it is because of this that you are not overcome. I have been given to you to ensure you comprehend the love of God, and at last receive your reward."

Now tell me, child of God, is that not a worthy salvation Does it not bring honor and glory to God to so perceive it? Isa there any reason for your expectation to be weak? And it is all the truth!

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 17



THE VICARIOUS ATONEMENT

5:6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Rom 5:6-11 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

There have been many significant deaths in history. The first violent death was that of a righteous man, Abel. His blood cried out for vengeance to God from the ground (Gen 4:10-11). "All flesh," with the exception of "eight souls," died in the Noachic flood (Gen 7:21; 1 Pet 3:20). There was the unique death of Moses, whose spirit was taken from him at the peak of his strength, and whom God Himself buried (Deut 34:1-6). Although death was common, these were uncommon deaths from which much can be learned. The death of Christ, however,

is the most profound and thorough death ever experienced.

The most significant and meaningful death of all time is that of the Lord Jesus Christ. No death was, or can be, like His. He died in the prime of life, around 33-34 years of age. His death was a miracle of itself, for no man took it from Him, and He did not die under the curse passed in the garden of Eden, for He had no sin. His death was necessary, and yet it was voluntary. In it He was cursed, but man was blessed. Although God sent Jesus into

the world, and was with Him throughout His life, He forsook Him in His death. His death was required by God for the sins of the world, and not His own. He was appointed to death, but unlike men, the appointment was before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). There surely is no death like that of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Because of the purpose of His death, it had to be voluntary. If, in fact, He did not "lay down" His life, He could not have died, for He was "without sin" (Heb 4:15). Therefore, the Father gave Him a

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHEN WE WERE WITHOUT STRENGTH (5:6)
- II. DYING FOR ANOTHER IS SCARCE (5:7)
- III. GOD HAS DEMONSTRATED HIS LOVE (5:8)
- IV. A "MUCH MORE" SITUATION (5:9)
- V. ENEMIES WERE RECONCILED (5:10a)
- VI. ANOTHER "MUCH MORE" SITUATION (5:10b)
- VII. REJOICING IN GOD (5:11a)
- VIII. RECEIVING THE RECONCILIATION (ATONEMENT) (5:11b)

commandment to lay down His life, and take it up again (John 10:17-18). In strict and unwavering obedience, He volunteered, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb 10:9). The death of Christ was unique from every consideration.

Much of the contemporary talk about Christ's death is wholly without substance. It does not have the incense of Divine good pleasure upon it, and is sorely lacking in Scriptural perspective. Men compare God giving the life of His Son, with the possibility of men offering their sons. Staggering at such a consideration, they lose a sense of the real nature of Christ's death, looking upon it from a human, rather than a Divine, point of view. **When flesh considers the death of Christ, it never gets at the truth.** The flesh is not capable of perceiving the death of Christ correctly and with everlasting benefit. It will view His death from a sentimental point of view, a medical perspective, or some other human

outlook. Such views always lack benefit.

The death of Christ must be seen correctly for its intended benefits to be realized. Here is a vast reservoir of grace for every humble and contrite heart. Here is a death profound enough to engage our hearts and minds in both time and eternity. In Christ's death, Divine objectives were realized that could not have been accomplished in any other way.

Things were achieved in Christ's death that are so marvelous, only the Holy Spirit can open them to our understanding. Here is an event that is remembered every Lord's day by those who sit at the Lord's table. In this death there is substance for the soul, encouragement for the heart, and considerations for the mind. We learn something about God Himself here, as well as receiving more profound insights into the nature of the Son. When we ponder the death of Christ, we begin to see the enormity of sin, the magnitude of grace, and the profound desire of God to rescue His creatures from the fall.

SALVATION IS NOT SIMPLISTIC

While I have already made mention of this, I must again elaborate upon it. Salvation is not simplistic. The holy nature of God would not permit Him to simply take sinful man back to himself. He could not ignore sin, and treat it as though it had not occurred. In the death of Christ not only were the needs of men satisfied, but the requirements of God were also addressed. What was required by fallen men, and demanded by a holy God, could only be accomplished through infinite wisdom. After four thousand years, not only had mankind utterly failed to correct their condition, there had been

absolutely no progress in that area. Moral and spiritual decline continued uninterrupted from man's expulsion the garden. The only favorable change that occurred in men followed a divine initiative. But more than this, no one knew what could be done about the human condition. No man and group of men could suggest a proposal for the reclamation of sinners. The plan, and the execution of the plan, had to come from God—the offended Party.

The significance of the death of Christ is seen against the backdrop of the sacrifices made under the Law. There God acquainted men with a substitutionary, or vicarious, sacrifice. The idea of "atonement" and "reconciliation" through blood was introduced. Apart from these types and shadows, the death of Christ is not seen as precisely as possible.

Much preaching about Christ's death is from a sympathetic and fleshly viewpoint. Men are prone to compare God giving His Son for us to the impact of an earthly father giving up his son. Others present the death Christ in such a manner as to lead men to view it as though Christ was a mere martyr. I am careful to say these conclusions are not always preached. Rather, men are left thinking in this way because they have not heard the Scriptural representation of Christ's death. It is seen more as emotionally staggering than spiritually profound.

This passage will show that Christ's death was not a mere favor, but a Divinely **required substitution**. His death was vicarious, and could not be avoided without all men perishing. It was endured by Christ in the place of, and for the benefit of, fallen humanity.

WHEN WE WERE WITHOUT STRENGTH

"^{5:6} For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." The spirit will now develop the necessity of Christ's death, and the benefits that have accrued from it. He will also confirm to our hearts that if our natural condition was satisfactorily addressed by His death, there should be no doubts about God finishing the work in those who have been

justified by that death.

STILL WITHOUT STRENGTH

With spiritual skill, the inspired Apostle has already laid the groundwork for the expression "without strength." This is not a casual word, depicting a condition that was mild. Some versions tend to lead to that conclusion by translating the words "still weak" (RSV,

NRSV), "yet weak" (ASV), "were weak" (Darby), and "still ailing" (Young's Literal). While "weak" may be an acceptable word from the etymological viewpoint, it is altogether unacceptable because of the ordinary understanding of the word—"not strong enough." But that is not the meaning of the Spirit here. He is not saying men were simply deficient in strength, but that they had NONE.

The idea here is that of utter helplessness, or having NO strength at all. It is not that some strength existed, but not enough to accomplish salvation. It is that NO strength was found in humanity at all. Thus other versions more precisely translate the phrase “*still powerless*,”^{NIV} “*still helpless*,”^{NASB} “*powerless*,”^{NIB} “*utterly helpless*,”^{NLT}.

This was a continuing condition, unchanged by time, the testimony of creation, the human conscience, or the Law of God. Thus we read, “**YET** without strength,”^{KJV} “**STILL** without strength,”^{NKJV} “**STILL** helpless,”^{NASB} and “**STILL** powerless.”^{NIV} The perspective developed by this expression is as follows.

- ▶ Adam and Eve lost their strength when they sinned, and men still have no strength.
- ▶ Men saw the testimony of creation, speaking of God’s eternal power and Godhead, and they are still without strength.
- ▶ Even though men heard the testimony of their conscience, which bore the testimony of holy Law, they still have no strength.
- ▶ Although the Law of God precisely defined sin, and gave sufficient incentives to prompt men to obey it, they still have no strength.
- ▶ After four thousand years of Divine longsuffering, humanity remained totally void of spiritual strength.
- ▶ There was not a single person who had the strength to change his moral and spiritual condition.

Thus, the Divine analysis of humanity is justified, and seen to be totally true: “*There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one*” (3:10-12). Over and again, the Spirit will drive home the truth of these words, confirming the nature and need of a righteousness from God.

Men may argue about the aptitude of unreconciled men. God says they are “**WITHOUT** strength.” The intellectual prowess of men may be exalted, but God

declares they are “**WITHOUT** strength.” Purported scholars may speak eloquently about man’s free will, and how he can make some progress, but God says he is “**WITHOUT** strength.” Men are not hypothetically “**WITHOUT** strength,” they are totally void of it. They are power **LESS** and hope **LESS**.

If the God of heaven did not undertake to save humanity by His own mighty hand, there would not have been a single acceptable individual in the history of the world! If it were not for the death and resurrection of Jesus, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham would **not** have been saved. **In fact, there could have been no faith in the world apart from “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”** (Rev 13:8). The promise of an appointed Savior was the soil from which faith sprang. The atoning death of Christ was as necessary for Adam and Eve as for Saul of Tarsus and you!

If the God of heaven did not undertake to save humanity by His own mighty hand, there would not have been a single acceptable individual in the history of the world! If it were not for the death and resurrection of Jesus, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham would not have been saved.

“Without strength” confirms there was a continued degeneration in human nature. The very words “without strength” imply a downward trend, and a certain deterioration. All of this underscores the necessity of the Son of God. His appointment as our Representative, humbling Himself to come into the cursed realm, laying down His life, and taking it up again was a Divine necessity. This is true because we were “**without strength**.”

In summary, “without strength” confirms there was nothing in us that

recommended us to God, or proved us worthy of His praise. It also substantiates we were unable to correct that condition.

IN DUE TIME

This is a significant expression: “*in due time*.” It is a word of expectancy and purpose. Other versions read “*at just the right time*,”^{NIB} “*according to the time*,”^{DARBY} and “*at the appointed time*.”^{NJB} The death of Christ was accomplished in a timely manner. It occurred at the appointed time. If it has taken place prematurely, its benefits would have been beyond the reach of humanity. If it had been too late in time, it would have been pointless. In order for Jesus to fulfill the will of God, He had to come into the world and accomplish the Father’s will at the appointed time—a precise time for which adequate preparation had been made.

The Scriptures make much of this critical aspect of our salvation.

▶ “*Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, **The time is fulfilled**, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel*” (Mk 1:14-15). The NIV reads, “*The time has come.*” The juncture in time had come when the purpose of God was to be fulfilled, and it was on schedule.

▶ “*Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until **the time of reformation***” (Heb 9:9-10). “*Reformation*” refers to the **real** new order—the time of the New Covenant. During this era, and under the administration of Jesus, God is reshaping men, conforming them to the image of His Son. He is orienting them for glory—the eternal ages. This, the Spirit affirms, is related to a specific time, designated and purposed by God.

- ▶ *“But when **the fulness of the time** was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”* (Gal 4:4-5). The phrase *“the fulness of the time”* confirms that throughout history things progressed toward the introduction of the Son of God. When the appointed time came, He entered unto the world, *“made of a woman, made under the Law.”*
- ▶ *“For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once **in the end of the world** hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Heb 9:26). The *“time”* of Christ’s sacrifice is here seen as a line of demarcation. It introduced the closing age of this world, and the final era of history. Other versions read, *“the end of all ages,”*^{NKJV,NIV} *“the consummation of all ages,”*^{NASB} *“the end of the age.”*^{RSV} *“the end of the old order,”*^{BBE} *“the full end of the ages,”*^{NLT} and *“the end of the last age.”*^{NJB} The *“end of the world,”* in this case, is an era, and not a point in time. Jesus appeared the first time at the

times,^{DARBY} *“these final days,”*^{NLT} and *“the final point of time.”*^{NJB}

The Significance of “due time”

The *“due time”* was the appointed time. It was also the appropriate time. In His infinite wisdom, God did not send His Son into the world until sufficient time had been allowed for the following.

- ▶ Confirm the testimony of nature was not sufficient to recover humanity.
- ▶ Substantiate the insufficiency of the conscience to correct the human condition.
- ▶ Establish the Law was weak through the flesh, and not adequate as a means to salvation.
- ▶ Verify there was none who was righteous, sought God, or did good.
- ▶ Prove the absolute need for a Savior.
- ▶ Allow for the development of a sense of spiritual need under the tutelage of the Law.
- ▶ Develop a special people through whom the Savior would come, and within which He would be properly raised.
- ▶ Culture a special land, *“His land,”* in which the sacrifice would be made.
- ▶ Allow for the development of the a

been met.

In this world, God’s appointments are always related to time—to a specific juncture in history. Noah entered into the ark on the *“selfsame day”* designated by the Lord (Gen 7:13). Israel came out of Egypt on the *“selfsame day”* appointed by God (Ex 12:41). Isaac was born to Sarah at a *“set time”* in a specific *“year”* (Gen 17:21; 18:14). Daniel spoke of times that were *“appointed”* by God (Dan 8:19; 11:27,29,35). Jesus told His disciples both *“times”* and *“seasons”* were in the power of God (Acts 1:7).

The devil was not able to stop the Savior from entering into the world, even though he was the first one to be told about it (Gen 3:15). The slaying of Abel, the barrenness of holy women in the Messianic lineage, the slaughter of the infants by Pharaoh, and the killing of babies two years and under by Herod, could not thwart the entrance of the Deliverer from heaven. He came at the precisely appointed time. Everything was ready, and the world was prepared.

What Does This Mean?

This truth is not something to tantalize the intellect. It is a message for the heart. The fact that Jesus came into the world in *“due time”* means He is effective. His salvation is accessible. His grace is obtainable. His mercy can be received. His grace is within our reach. Because He came in *“due time,”* what He brings can be realized. Remission can be acquired, and His fellowship can be enjoyed. His sacrifice is effective, and His intercession is sure. Whoever believes on Him *“will not be ashamed!”*

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beginning of that era. He will appear *“the second time”* (Heb 9:28) at its close. The duration of this period is *“the day of salvation.”*

- ▶ *“Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in **these last times** for you, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God”* (1 Pet 1:20-21). Once again, the Spirit relates the revelation of the Son of God with the close of the ages, or the end of time. Other versions read *“the end times,”*^{ASV} *“the end of*

proper concept of God through the Law and the Prophets.

- ▶ Confirm the sinfulness of humanity, and its irreversible downward bent.
- ▶ Culture a longing for a Savior as defined and promised by God Himself.
- ▶ Demonstrate that neither time nor circumstance can abort the purpose of Almighty God.
- ▶ Show that the human condition could not be corrected apart from Divine intervention.

If Jesus had come into the world before *“the fulness of time,”* or the *“due time,”* these requirements would not have

CHRIST

The Spirit is careful to use proper words—words that convey the truth in all of its power. He does not say *“Jesus”* died in *“due time.”* Nor, indeed, does He say *“the Son of man”* died in *“due time.”* To be sure, it was the Person of *“Jesus”* who died. It was also the *“Son of man”* who died. His death, however, obtained its effectiveness because He was *“the Christ”*—the appointed and anointed One of God—the *“chosen of God”* (1 Pet 2:4). The word *“Christ”* means **Anointed One, or Messiah**. It refers to one appointed to fulfill a specific task. In this case, it was the reconciliation of the world

to God, with all that was entailed in that awesome commission (2 Cor 5:18-20).

Jesus is the “*anointed*” One declared by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 61:1-4), confirmed by Christ’s own words (Lk 4:18-19), and declared by the Apostles (Heb 1:9).

It would have done no good for a Savior to die for us who was not appointed. Also, if the one appointed did not die, our state would have remained unchanged.

Although this is generally known among believers – i.e., that Jesus is the one chosen by God – it is not something to be taken for granted. We must often be reminded of this reality, for it causes our faith to become more deeply rooted in the Lord. It also moves us away from knowing Jesus “*after the flesh*” (2 Cor 5:16).

God has “*anointed*” Jesus above all others (Heb 1:9). He was, indeed, “*foreordained before the foundation of the world*” (1 Pet 1:20), being the Lamb “*slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev 13:8). Although He volunteered to offer the required sacrifice, He did not take the honor upon Himself, but was “*called of God*” (Heb 5:3-4). It was the Father who gave Jesus the commandment to “*lay down*” His life and “*take it up*” again (John 10:17-18). It is He who sent the Son into the world (1 John 4:14), and “*gave*” Him to be the propitiation for our sins (John 3:16; Rom 3:25; 1 John 4:10).

It is this circumstance that makes Jesus “*the Christ*.” It also puts salvation and all of its benefits within our reach. It confirms the strong desire of God to save us, and His commitment to accomplish what neither man nor Law could do. You may recall the good confession of Peter included Jesus being “*the Christ*.” Here is how God revealed the Son to Peter. “*Thou art THE CHRIST of the living God*” (Matt 16:17-18).

THE UNGODLY

“ . . . Christ died for the **UNGODLY**.” The very word “*ungodly*” jars the soul. It is a strong word, speaking

of a condition that is obviously not to be desired, yet in which all were found. This is how “*WE*” are described.

Notice the manner in which this word is given to us. First, the Spirit refers to an event that occurred when “*WE*” were “*without strength*.” Now He affirms Christ died for the “**UNGODLY**.” “*We*,” then, were “*ungodly*,” else there would be no point to the declaration. Further, being “*without strength*” confirmed that we were “*ungodly*,” otherwise Christ’s death would have no relevance and application to us. The word “*ungodly*,” therefore, is used to further describe the condition of “*without strength*.” There is no person out of Christ to whom “*ungodly*” does not apply. It stands for the entire human race. Fix it in your mind, **if Christ’s death was not for everyone, it was for no**

It would have done no good for a Savior to die for us who was not appointed. Also, if the one appointed did not die, our state would have remained unchanged.

one. A vicarious sacrifice must be for all who have offended God– “*the ungodly*.”

The History of the Word

In the New Covenant writings, there is a single word translated “*ungodly*.” It is ἀσεβής (in various forms), which etymologically means irreverent, godless, or wicked. Doctrinally, this word means **unlike God**, for the nature of God Himself defines what is right and true. The “*ungodly*” are “irreverent” because they are not like God. They have sinned, and “*come short*” of His glory. They are godless and wicked by way of contrast. That is, sin, like a virus, has infected their whole nature, making them unlike God in their manners and expressions.

The Spirit uses this word thirteen times in the New Covenant writings. It is always a significant word, summoning up a sense of someone reprehensible to God.

- ▶ God justifies the “*ungodly*” (Rom 4:5).
- ▶ Christ died for the “*ungodly*” (Rom 5:6).
- ▶ The Law is for the “*ungodly*” (1 Tim 1:9).
- ▶ If the righteous are scarcely saved, what about the “*ungodly*”? (1 Pet 4:18).
- ▶ The flood came upon the “*world of the ungodly*” (2 Pet 2:5).
- ▶ The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is an example for those who live “*ungodly*” (2 Pet 2:6).
- ▶ The day of judgment will include the “*perdition of ungodly men*” (2 Pet 3:7).
- ▶ “*Ungodly men*” turn the grace of God into lewdness, and deny Jesus (Jude 4).
- ▶ In a prophecy of the flood, and the coming of Christ as well, Enoch mentioned the “*ungodly*” who had “*ungodly deeds*,” committed them in an “*ungodly*” manner, and sinful words spoken by “*ungodly sinners*” (Jude 15).
- ▶ In the “*last time*” mockers will walk in their “*ungodly lusts*” (Jude 18).

If a person will consider this word through the filter of Scripture, a sense of its meaning will register upon the soul. The knowledge and understanding of these expressions will summon up a whole framework of thought every time one hears the word “*ungodly*.”

Before Christ

Before Christ, the Spirit employed a number of different words to convey the idea of “*ungodly*.” Throughout the 1,500 years of the Law’s administration, the Lord was developing a concept of “*ungodly*” among His people Israel. In those spiritually primitive times, He would present the word by contrast, defining those who were in obvious contradiction of His law as “*ungodly*.”

- ▶ **Beilyaal בְּלִיעַל:** Often translated “*Belial*,” mostly “*ungodly*.” It means evil, worthless, good for nothing, unprofitable, base, and wicked (2 Sam 22:5; Psa 18:4; Prov 16:27; 19:28). Twice, this word is simply translated “*wicked*” (Deut 15:9; Nah 1:1,11).

Sixteen times, it is translated “*Belial*” (examples: Deut 13:13; Judges 19:22; 1 Sam 1:16; 2 Chron 13:7).

- ▶ **Rasha** רָשָׁע: This word means wicked, a criminal, or a law breaker. It refers to one who has sinned against God and/or man (2 Chron 19:2; Job 34:18; Psa 1:1,4,5,6; 3:7; 73:12).
- ▶ **Aviyl** אָוִיַל: This word means unjust, or perverse in ones ways (Job 16:11).
- ▶ **Lo N** לֹא־נָ: This is a modifying word closely related to our prefix “UN,” as is “*UNgodly*.” It is used once in the Psalms where it is used of an “*ungodly nation*” or people (Psa 43:1). In that text it means a body of people who are not recognized by God because they are unlike Him in their ways.

The Concept Developed

Thus, the Holy Spirit developed a conscience within men of what made a person unacceptable to God. Briefly ponder the words and ideas He employed to accomplish this.

- ▶ Worthless, good for nothing, and unprofitable.
- ▶ Breaking the law, and offending both God and man.

This is what sin produced; the crop that it yielded among the sons of men. They became “ungodly.” Men actually became more like the devil who deceived them, and less like God who made them!

- ▶ Unjust, perverse, corrupt, and defiled.
- ▶ Not like God, and not accepted.

This is what sin produced; the crop that it yielded among the sons of men. They became “*ungodly*.” **Men actually became more like the devil who deceived them, and less like God who made them!** For who is the very epitome of being worthless, lawbreaking, corrupt, and unlike God? Is it not the devil himself?

Conclusion

It is no small thing, therefore, that “*Christ died for the ungodly*.” He died for those who had lost their worth, who had offended God, were corrupt, and in whose persons Godlikeness could no longer be found. Men stood in need of a Savior.

“*The ungodly*” refers to the entirety of the human race, not a segment of it. Christ did not die only for the corrupt Gentiles. Nor, indeed, did He only die for the lawbreaking Jews. He surely did not die only for those who had reached the moral depths, like the Gentiles described in the first chapter.

It is important to get the full impact of this declaration. It will highlight the depths to which man fell, and the extent to which God has gone to save him. It is also vital to see that “*ungodly*” is a vivid description of the entirety of humanity. On a personal level, it is a description of **us**—“*when WE were without strength*.”

Here, real insight can be obtained concerning the effects of transgression, and the obvious need for a Savior.

DYING FOR ANOTHER IS SCARCE

“*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.*” Here a strong appeal is made to our hearts. This is more than passing along information. It helps us to gain a perspective of the remarkable revelation of God and Christ that are found in Jesus’ death. It is exceedingly rare for anyone to die for another—for any reason.

With great power the Spirit will show us the love of God far surpasses any known to mankind. It has no equal or parallel among the sons of men. His love is not distinguished by a certain Greek word, as some incorrectly affirm. Perhaps you have heard some sophist refer to God’s love as the “*agape*” kind of love. This is NOT a true saying. Some examples will confirm what I have said.

Uses of AGAPE. One of the Greek words used for “*love*” is *agape* (ἀγάπη). It reflects the idea of deep interest and

concern, choice and devotion to. Its use, however, is not limited to Divine expression. In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, “*For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?*” (Matt 5:46). Both references to “*love*” come from “*agape*” (ἀγαπήσητε and ἀγαπώντας). Scripture speaks of those who “*loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*” (John 12:43). The word used there is “*agape*” (ἀγάπησαν). Jesus once upbraided the Pharisees because they loved “*the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets*” (Lk 11:43). Again, the word used is “*agape*” (ἀγαπάτε).

Uses of PHILEO. Another Greek word for “*love*” is “*phileo*” (φιλεῖω). This word indicates a love that is emotional, where the feeling of affection is found. Although generally applied to the love of men, its use is not confined to that. Jesus said of His Father, “*For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all*

things that Himself doeth: and He will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel” (John 5:20). The word used here is “*phileo*” (φιλεῖ). During His last evening with the disciples, Jesus said, “*For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God*” (John 16:27). Again, the word “*phileo*” is used of God’s love (φιλεῖ).

The rich love of God and Christ cannot be fully appreciated from a linguistic point of view. Language itself breaks down when speaking of Divine qualities. We will find that the love evidenced in Christ’s substitutionary death confirms this to be the case.

NOT TOTALLY STRANGE

It is not that one person dying for others is totally strange. Corrupt Caiaphas, the high priest who headed up the proceedings of Christ’s death, spoke of one dying for many. He reasoned, “*it is*

expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). He was not thinking of redemption from sin, but of appeasing the Roman government so the nation of Israel could be spared. Yet, God had put this word in his mouth for succeeding generations—to see the truth of a vicarious atonement. Of Caiaphas' words the Spirit says, *"And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad"* (John 11:51-52).

A PERSPECTIVE IS BEING DEVELOPED

Our text does NOT say "Christ died for the offspring of God." It does NOT say, "Christ died for those created in His image." Nor, indeed, does it say "Christ died for those who had great potential." While there are elements of truth in those sayings, they are not in order when speaking of Christ's death.

Although man still bore the image of God, the need for and reality of redemption could not fully register upon our hearts unless we saw what sin had done to us. Christ did not die for us because we were like God, but because we were NOT like God. He did not die for us because we were good, but because we were NOT good. It was not our potential that compelled Him to die, but our condition. To think in any other manner dulls the significance of His death.

When properly seen, the vicarious atonement will not leave men boasting in their worth. It will not allow an exaggerated view of the attainments or potential of natural men. Rather, it will throw the spotlight of glory upon God and Christ. It will accent the love and grace of God, while showing the shame and degradation into which sin brought man.

In my judgment, there is a great need for this perception in our time. It devastates the foundation of fundamentally false views of mankind as found in evolution, psychiatry, and philosophical views of human need.

SCARCE AND DARING DEATHS

Political fervor has moved some to

speaking of noble souls who have laid down their lives for their country. We must be careful not to disdain such rare displays of courage. However, this falls far short of the meaning of our text.

No Such Incident in Scripture

Here is a most noteworthy observation. We have NO example in Scripture of a person stepping forward to die in the place of a righteous person, or for one deemed "good." There are records of martyrs: Abel (Gen 4:3-8), the prophets slain by Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:13), Zechariah (2 Chron 24:20-22), John the Baptist (Mk 6:18-24), Stephen (Acts 7:58-60), James (Acts 12:2), and Antipas (Rev 2:13). But they were slain for a cause, their love for the Lord, and because of their testimony.

A SOLITARY HISTORICAL EXAMPLE

"The affecting case of Damon and Pythias is one. Damon had been condemned to death by the tyrant Dionysius of Sicily, and obtained leave to go and settle his domestic affairs on promise of returning at a stated hour to the place of execution. Pythias pledged himself to undergo the punishment if Damon should not return in time, and deliver himself into the hands of the tyrant. Damon returned at the appointed moment, just as the sentence was about to be executed on Pythias; and Dionysius was so struck with the fidelity of the two friends, that he remitted their punishment, and entreated them to permit him to share their friendship; (Val. Max. 4. 7.) This case stands almost alone." (Barnes Commentary)

Whether we consider the Word of God covering the period before the Law, during the Law, or in the age of grace, we have no example of a person volunteering to die for "a righteous man," or one considered to be "good." There is no record of one stepping forward to take the place of a martyr, whether before, during, or after the Law.

An Example of Submitting to Jeopardy

There is an example of noble men who submitted themselves to certain jeopardy for a righteous man. One such occasion is recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Second Samuel. *"David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David said with longing, 'Oh, that someone would give me a drink of the water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!' So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he*

would not drink it, but poured it out to the LORD. And he said, 'Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this! Is this not the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?' Therefore he would not drink it"^{NKJV} (2 Sam 23:14-17). The response of king David confirms the rarity of such nobility—just as our text says. But we still have no record of one man dying in the place of another.

Peter once told Jesus, *"I will lay down my life for Thy sake"* (John 13:37), but he was not speaking of a substitutionary death, and really did not realize what he had said. Jesus responded, telling Peter he would deny him three times before the night was over. Still, we have no record of one man laying down his life in the place of another.

The ONLY place this concept is pressed into the Scriptural record is in the animal sacrifices—and those were not voluntary on the part of the animals. Nor, indeed, were they effective to accomplish the desire of the Lord (Heb 10:6).

The Most Vivid Expression

The most vivid expression is found in the account of Abraham offering up Isaac at the commandment of the Lord. Before he could plunge the knife into his "only son," the angel of the Lord stopped him, saying it was now evident that he truly feared the Lord. It is then written, *"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering IN THE STEAD OF HIS SON"* (Gen 22:12-13). The NASB reads, *"in the place of his son."*

What Do We Learn From This?

Herein a most wonderful truth is revealed. **God has so orchestrated Scripture as to accentuate the death of His Son!** While it may be conceptually possible for a one to die for "a righteous man," God did not allow any such record in Scripture. It might even be conceivable for someone to "dare to die" for a "good man." But no such account was permitted in Scripture! Throughout history, there may have been an occasion here or there where some daring soul died in order that a noble soul might live on. There is, however, no such record in Scripture. I

understand this to be by Divine design. God will not share the glory of Christ's death with any other!

Our text leaves us unable to site examples of the possibilities stated. There is really only one such example, and it is that of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the

Lord Jesus said, "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13), **a solitary example leaps to the forefront of our minds!**

It is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, distinguished from all other

deaths. No other death has ever been like His! Abel's death falls short, as well as that of the holy prophets, and even John the Baptist. No martyr's death can compare with this! Profane history cannot produce a solitary example of this kind of love. Jesus, and Jesus alone, proves His word to be true.

GOD HAS COMMENDED HIS LOVE

"⁸ **But God demonstrates** (commendeth, KJV) **His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" We are, indeed, on hallowed ground! The **existence** of God's love is beyond all question, for it is integral to His nature. The spirit twice affirms, "**God IS love**" (1 John 4:8,16). His love, however, extends beyond the perception of natural men. Creation, with all of its magnificent expanse, has never uttered a single syllable about "*the love of God.*" It can only speak of His "*eternal power and Godhead*" (Rom 1:20). The concept of God has been entertained by men throughout the world, and is reflected in their idolatries. But not a single tribe or people have ever conceived of a God who "**IS love.**" No idol has ever been made to a loving God. No philosopher, however astute and disciplined in thought, has ever conceived and declared that "**God IS love.**" Idolatrous men have conceived of a "goddess of love," but NEVER of a god who IS love.

Even after God has **revealed** His great love, it is exceedingly difficult for some poor souls to perceive it. And all who have perceived it in any degree acknowledge they have seen only the hem of the garment of Divine love. This is the love that is "*poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*" (Rom 5:5). Only the heavenly Guest can open its fulness to us. Take, for example, "*the love of Christ*" that is nothing less than an expression of the love of God. It is said that the effectual ministry of the Holy Spirit includes making us able to "*know the love of Christ which passes knowledge*" (Eph 3:19). Divine love cannot be deciphered by word studies and

academic discipline. At some point, the human spirit must be influenced by the Holy Spirit if this love is to be comprehended.

We now enter into a consideration

In the death of Christ more of God's love is seen than was perceived in His earthly ministry. It constitutes a more extensive witness, and confirms things only suspected by those who saw His marvelous works and heard His wondrous words.

of God's love that is transcendent to philosophy and human reasoning. It is described as "*His OWN love.*" This is not a description of love from an academic viewpoint, as is so common in certain circles. **Here is a love that is seen in an action rather than a definition.**

A LOVE THAT IS COMMENDED

The KJV reads, "*But God commendeth his love toward us . . .*" Additional versions employing this word include ASV, Websters, Darby, Duoy-Rheims, and Young's Literal. Other versions read, "*But God shows His love for us,*"^{RSV} "*But God proves His love for us,*"^{NRSV} "*But God has made clear his love to us,*"^{BBE} "*So it is proof of God's own love for us.*"^{NLT}

I prefer the word "*commends,*" for it appears to carry more of the meaning of the text. Although incapable of disclosing the full intent of the expression, the word

translated "*commends*" literally means "to stand with." The picture is that of God Himself standing along side the dying Jesus saying, "See how I love you," or "This is your evidence of My love," or "My Son is doing this because I have loved you."

This parallels a previous expression concerning the death of Christ: "*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood*" (3:25). The meaning is that God has placed the death of His Son in a conspicuous place, where all of the light of glory can shine upon it. When it comes to deeds done in the earth, the Father has elevated the death of His Son above them all. **The greatest witness of His love is seen here, in the vicarious and atoning death of Jesus Christ!**

The greatest confirmation of Divine love is **not** found in your deliverance from trouble. As great as that may be, many heathen and blasphemers have experienced similar things. The greatest attestation of God's love is **not** found in your healing or the provision of your needs. As great as those may be, many of God's enemies can point to such occasions in their experience.

In the death of Christ more of God's love is seen than was perceived in His earthly ministry. It constitutes a more extensive witness, and confirms things only suspected by those who saw His marvelous works and heard His wondrous words. In Christ's death, God **CONFIRMED** His love. He **EXHIBITED** that love, forever removing all doubt concerning its reality from those who believe. For those who will believe the Gospel, there will be no doubt of His love.

In my understanding, the declaration of this verse is not intended to provoke thanksgiving—although it surely will. **Rather, it is to move us to trust, reliance, and confidence!** Thanksgiving springs from faith, and not vice versa. If the people of God can believe, they not only step into the realm where impossibilities become possible (Mk 9:23), they will provoked to unparalleled thanksgiving and praise.

Something Noteworthy

There is something that is particularly noteworthy in this text. The expression is in the PRESENT tense, not in the past. Inadvertently, some might read it this way, “God commended His love toward us,” or God demonstrated His own love toward us.” But that is not how it reads. God **COMMENDETH**, or commends, His love toward us. Other versions read, “demonstrates,” “shows,” “proves,” It is in the present tense.

So, what does this mean? Is it at all significant that God speaks in this manner? Indeed it is! God is **in the process** of confirming His love to us. This is something He is doing now through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is nothing less than an elaboration of what was said earlier, “*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (5:5).

Here is a facet of being “*taught by God*” (John 6:45). It is not possible to consider the death of Christ without the living God drawing near! **He has forever associated Himself with the death of His Son!** Wherever faithful souls look intently upon God’s dying Lamb, they will come under the influence of the mighty God. That, and more, is involved in this verse. God is still commending His love through the death of His Son!

WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS

After affirming that unlikelihood that anyone would lay down their life for a worthy person, the Spirit now strongly affirms the conditions under which Jesus died. Rather than dying for righteous people, He died for sinners. He did not die for good people, but for sinners. But even

that is not the whole of it. He did not die for them after they had made some attempts to reform. He did not even die for them after they had conceded they were not sufficient. He did not die because they had asked for God to supply a remedy for their sinful condition. Rather, He died “**while we were yet sinners.**”

The Scriptural Concept of a Sinner

Among the many deficiencies of modern religion, is the perception of “*sinner*” that it has fostered. Men do not tend to assign the significance to this word that is intended in Scripture. As a result, the value of Christ’s death has been greatly obscured. Until the weightiness of our state is perceived, the importance of Christ’s death will not be clearly seen, and consequently will be

The love of God and Christ was not motivated by our love, or our response, for neither existed when Jesus died. At that time, we were “yet sinners.” Further, His death was not required because of what we COULD be, but because we were “yet sinners.”

neglected and under-emphasized.

Ponder some of the uses the Spirit makes of this term—“*sinner*.” The wicked men of Sodom were “*sinner* before the Lord exceedingly” (Gen 13:13). The Amalekites, whose name was blotted out by God, were known as “*the sinners*” (1 Sam 1 5:18). Jesus said He came to “*bring sinners to repentance*” (Matt 9:13). Jesus was betrayed into “*the hands of sinners*” (Matt 26:45). The healed blind man affirmed “*God does not hear sinners,*” and the Spirit ratified his words by recording them in Scripture with no disclaimer (John 9:31). The entirety of Adam’s progeny were “*made sinners*” by his act of “*disobedience*” (Rom 5:19). Jesus Himself, although He came into the world “*to save sinners*” (1 Tim 1:15), was Himself “*separate from sinners*” (Heb 7:25).

“*Sinners*” are sinful. That is their nature, and sin is what they do. Regardless of the degree of their expression of sin, they are “*sinner*” by nature—because of **who they are** as well as what they have done.

The sin of sinners clings to them. That is another reason for them being “*sinner*” – not only because of what the **are** doing, but because of what they **have** done. “*Sinners*” are given over to sin. Such are “*servants of sin*” (Rom 6:17,19). When the publican sought mercy from God, it was because he knew he was “*a sinner*” (Lk 18:13).

All Merit Is Removed

Christ did not die for those who WERE “*sinner*,” for those who were “**YET sinners.**” All merit, or worthiness, is therefore removed. There can be no ground for boasting, for the required death was accomplished WHILE we were still sinners.

The love of God and Christ was not motivated by our love, or our response, for neither existed when Jesus died. At that time, we were “*yet sinners.*” Further, His death was not required because of what we COULD be, but because we were “*yet sinners.*”

CHRIST DIED FOR US

What a marvelous affirmation: “*Christ died for us.*” There is no way to improve on that word. Every major translation reads precisely this way: “*Christ died for us.*” Some paraphrases read “*Christ gave His life for us,*”^{BBE} “*Christ did die for us.*”^{YLT} And what is the intention of this expression? It cannot be any ordinary or common word, for the love of God is being commended in this death of Jesus Christ.

Vicarious

Here we come to the matter of substitution—of Christ’s death being vicarious. The expression “*for us*” does not mean because of us, but in our stead, or place. Christ’s death was vicarious.

In the English, “*vicarious*” is a very weighty word. It involves paying a penalty that was due another, thereby bringing an advantage to sinners that is wholly

undeserved. The idea of appointment is involved in the word, so that a person who does something vicariously cannot take the matter on himself. What is done must be accepted by the one to whom it is presented, else it has no value whatsoever.

In such a substitution, the punishment due to one is inflicted upon the another—the vicarious one. But that is not all of the matter. **In salvation, the punishment is inflicted by the One who was offended, and to Whom the debt is owed—the Living God.**

Jesus did more than simply “die.” He did not die naturally, but supernaturally. Some affirm He died of a broken heart, as indicated medically by water and blood flowing from His side. But the Spirit makes no such statement. This is a human analysis, not a Divine one. Jesus **laid down** His life. No one took it from Him (John 10:17-18). He dismissed His Spirit, it was not taken from Him (Lk 23:46). He offered Himself to God (Heb 9:14).

The Requirements

TRANSFER OF SINS. In order for Christ’s death to be effectual for us, the sins of the world had to be placed upon Him. In the Kingdom, one cannot die for another unless the infractions that incurred the penalty are transferred to the substitute.

This requirement was pictured under the Law, where the sins of the people were transferred to the atoning victim. Because of the complexities involved in atonement, several sacrifices were used on the day of atonement. Most of them were killed, but one was not. It was the “scape goat.” The law specified, “*And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:*

and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness” (Lev 16:21-22). There the Lord portrayed a key factor in a substitutionary, or vicarious, sacrifice.

The Scriptures say this of the Lamb of God. “*the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (Isa 53:6). Again it is written, “*Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree*” (1 Pet 2:24). The placement of our sins upon Jesus, and Him carrying them in His body on the tree, fulfilled the type introduced in the scape goat.

SIN MUST BE JUDGED BEFORE THE BLESSING CAN BE GIVEN.

In A remarkable statement of what occurred when Jesus died, the Spirit says, “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles*

5:21). Here again, two requirements are fulfilled. Jesus not only carried our sins, but was “made” to be sin by God. This was no mere technicality! When Jesus was born, He was “*God manifest in the flesh*” (1 Tim 3:16). When He died, He was “*made to be sin;*” that is, He was the embodiment of sin—sin incarnate!

These are the righteous involvements of a vicarious atonement. Not only must the sin of man be addressed, the righteousness of God must be satisfied. God Himself must exact the penalty on a victim He has chosen. It must result in God being just in conferring righteousness upon those for whom Christ died—“*sinners.*”

Foreshadowed Complexities

The complexities of salvation were foreshadowed in the Law. A multiplicity of sacrifices, an altar, high priest, and tabernacle were all necessary to prefigure what was going to be accomplished in Christ. Christ, the vicarious sacrifice, was

In order for Christ’s death to be effectual for us, the sins of the world had to be placed upon Him. In the Kingdom, one cannot die for another unless the infractions that incurred the penalty are transferred to the substitute.

through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13-14). Notice what marvelous accomplishments are here declared. The curse of God was expended on Christ. This was done that the blessing might come upon those who believe. Both accomplishments are realized by means of a vicarious sacrifice.

Again it is written, “*For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor

the High Priest, sacrifice, altar, scape goat, and “*fit man*” all in One.

All of this is involved in “*Christ died for us.*” His death was vicarious because we were “*yet sinners.*” It is effective because He was pure and undefiled. It satisfied God because the due penalty was paid. Now He could be “*just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus*” (Rom 3:26). Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift (2 Cor 9:15). What great and unparalleled wisdom is revealed in this arrangement.

A “MUCH MORE” SITUATION

“*Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*”

Our text is doing much more than establishing an official theological position. There is a vast difference

between edifying the people of God and making sure they hold to what is conceived to be, a properly structured, or

systematic, theology. Sectarianism has contributed to a lifeless view of Scripture, which, in turn, has yielded a spiritually weak and emaciated people.

If people are considering the coming of Christ and the end of the world, it is not strange to find them enamored about the sequence of events, with little regard for being prepared to meet the Lord. In the matter before us, it is not uncommon to find people haggling over whether or not being justified means you can fall away or not, as though justification were the end of the matter. Now, the Spirit will launch the vessel of thought upon the sea of ultimate reality. He cares nothing for the traditions and speculations of men, but is wholly devoted to filling us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may *"abound in hope"* through His power (Rom 15:13).

THE "MUCH MORE" VIEW

The expression *"much more"* is mentioned seven times in the book of Romans—five times in the fifth chapter. This is its first occurrence (5:9,10,15,17,20; 11:12,24). The workings of God are like a swelling wave that grows larger and larger. They differ from such a swell in that they do not dissipate or grow smaller. Thus, on a very broad scale, what God is doing in salvation is infinitely larger than what He did in creating the natural order. On more focused level, what He is doing in the New Covenant is larger than what he did under the Law.

On an even more microscopic level, what the exalted Christ is doing now is on a larger and more magnificent scale than what He did in His death. I must state this with care, lest it appear as though the death of Christ has been rendered obsolete by what Jesus is doing now. God forbid! **What He is doing now is based upon the accomplishments of His death.** He is now building the superstructure of Divine purpose upon His indispensable and foundational death **"for us."**

The phrase *"Much more then"* moves us from the foundation to the building, from the beginning to the culmination, from the start to the finish.

It involves, but is not limited to, the remission of sin. There is a certain mentality afoot among believers that views man's extrication from sin as more difficult than bringing him the rest of the way to glory. This is a fatal error.

From our limited perspective, was getting Israel out of Egypt a greater work than getting them into Canaan? What answer do you suppose Moses would give you? How would Joshua and Caleb answer? And, were you able to ask ancient Lot whether getting into Zoar took more than getting out of Sodom, he would no doubt ask you to remember his wife. Time is the great tester of man. We sorely need an exalted King to bring us safely through

The mother of much erroneous theology is traced to this precise misconception: that bringing someone into glory who has been justified, requires little more than a word. The big work is thus perceived as coming away from servitude to Satan, and being delivered from a condemning conscience.

it to the obtaining of our inheritance.

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Let no one doubt that being conformed to the image of God's Son is a most magnificent work. Jesus could not do it before He died, and He did not do it before He ascended back to the Father. But let the Lord speak for Himself on this matter. *"Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us"*^{NASB}

(Rom 8:34). That is the *"much more"* picture!

If Christ could justify us when He was *"crucified through weakness"* (2 Cor 13:4), what will He do now that He has been enthroned in the heavens! To say it another way, if Christ could free us from the dominion of the devil at His weakest point, what will He do for us at His strongest point—in His majesty?

JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD

"Much more THEN" refers back to verse eight. If God commended, or demonstrated, His love toward us when we were *"yet sinners,"* what will He do now that we have been justified? We ought not expect anything mediocre.

The Spirit will not let us forget the role of Christ's blood in our justification. He fulfilled the requirement of the Law itself—*"life for life"* (Ex 21:23).

To this point, several different views of justification have been presented. **1--** We are justified freely by God's grace (3:24). **2--** We are justified by faith (3:28; 5:1). **3--** We are justified by Christ's blood, or the forfeiture of His life. Among other things, this confirms that faith lays hold of both cause and benefit. The cause is Christ's blood. The benefit is remission and the imputation of righteousness—and faith takes hold of them all.

We are justified **"NOW."** For those who believe on the Son, this is a present reality. Iniquities ARE forgiven, sins ARE covered, and God WILL not impute sin to the justified one (4:7-8)! Those in Christ NOW have their names written in heaven (Lk 10:20; Heb 12:23), are *"accepted in the Beloved"* (Eph 1:6), and are *"heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"* (Rom 8:17). Being justified, they NOW have peace with God (5:1) and access to the grace wherein they stand (5:2). They are no longer of the world (John 15:19), are not debtors to the flesh (Rom 8:12), and are the *"sons of God"* (1 John 3:1-2). All of that is involved in being **NOW "justified by His blood."** Sin does not make sense within the context of reconciliation.

Now that we are justified, Christ can “*dwell in our hearts by faith*,” while the Holy Spirit is bringing us from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). Now God can work in us, “*both to will and to do of His own good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13). But lest we begin to take His work for granted, the Spirit reminds us of Christ’s blood—of the dying Lamb, whose life was required if we were to be made clean. Before God could receive us, He had to deal with our sins in the person of His Son. Life through death! Blessing by means of a cursing!

SHALL BE SAVED FROM WRATH

God did pour out His wrath upon the Son, cursing Him (Gal 3:13), forsaking Him (Mk 15:34), and making Him “*taste death for every man*” (Heb 2:9). But that occasion did not exhaust the wrath of Almighty God. Upon the Divine calendar, there remains “*the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*” (Rom 2:5). At that time God’s wrath will be “*revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*” (Rom 1:18). Then it will be poured out “*without mixture*” (Rev 14:10).

Jesus has delivered us from the coming wrath. As it is written, “*You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son*

from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come”^{NKJV} (1 Thess 1:10). That deliverance is sure to those who cling to the Son by faith. But that relationship is imperative.

THROUGH HIM

We dare not leave our “*first love*,” as did Ephesus (Rev 2:4). It is good to give heed to the Psalmist. “*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him*” (Psa 2:12). You do not want Him to say to you, “*I have this against you*” (Eph 2:4). He is your only guarantee of deliverance from “*the wrath to come*.” Jesus does not deliver you from sin and Satan, and then recline until the work automatically runs its course. And, if He does not do that, how could any mere mortal justify such conduct? If God has “*called us into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Cor 1:9), that fellowship must be maintained. We must remain sensitive to His tutelage and guidance, else deliverance will not be possible.

How appropriate is the exhortation of the Spirit to Ephesus. “*Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding*

darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:17-24). That is the process by which God is saving you now, through Christ.

If this work seems too good to believe, remember, this is the “*much more*” work. As you “*continue in the Son, and in the Father*” (1 John 2:24), standing faultless before the Father and being excluded from His wrath is “*much more*” possible that getting you out of sin in the first place. That is an extremely weak way of saying it. Yet, it is how the heart must reason when assailed by doubt.

Remember, this passage is intended to strengthen your faith, and to convince you of the greatness and sureness of salvation in Christ Jesus.

ENEMIES WERE RECONCILED

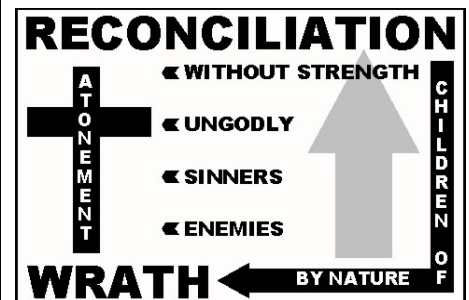
“^{10a} *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son . . .*” Now the Spirit expands our perception of salvation, revealing what an extensive and glorious work it is. The further the Spirit takes this matter, the greater the distance that is created between the believing heart and conventional religion. We will find that our condition was much worse than ever conceived by the natural mind.

WHEN WE WERE ENEMIES

The thought of being an enemy to God is most arresting. There are people who cannot receive such a notion. They reject it forthrightly, openly affirming that God has no enemies—that He has a deep and abiding affection for everyone. However, after they have presented all of their imaginations, the Spirit refers to a

time when “*we were enemies*.” Those who are not in the Son are, in fact, God’s enemies. Take, for example, the Jews, who are a chosen people. Of those who are not in the Son, the Spirit says, “*As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes*” (Rom 11:28). Paul mentions some teachers who were “*enemies of the cross of Christ*” (Phil 3:18). In a vivid description of our former state, the Spirit says, “*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*” (Col 1:21). David spoke of the scattering of God’s “*enemies*” (Psa 68:1), affirming He would wound their “*head*” (Psa 68:21). In a great Messianic prophecy, Isaiah said the

coming Savior would “*prevail against His enemies*” (Isa 42:13). “*His indignation*,” the Lord declares, “*is against His enemies*” (Isa 66:14).



Should men be reluctant to perceive the Living God in this manner, Nahum speaks to the nations. “*God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will*

take vengeance on His adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for His enemies” (Nah 1:2). Jesus, we are told, will rule “till His enemies be made his footstool” (Heb 10:13). Let no one question that God has enemies!

The whole matter comes even closer to home when believers who are flirting with the world are solemnly told, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whoseever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). Were that single morsel of truth to be ingested by the contemporary church, a revival of epochal proportions would break forth!

If anyone should understand these sayings, it is those who “were enemies.” If anyone should be able to make sense of them and shout the “Amen” to them, it should be those who are now in the Son, who “were enemies.”

What Is An Enemy?

An enemy to God is hostile toward Him, and fights against Him. It is a futile hostility, and a vain fight, but it nevertheless exists. God’s enemies will crucify the Son of God if given a chance to do so! They will contradict His word, and vilify those who bring it—and all without a twinge of conscience.

God’s enemies hate Him. God spoke of those who “hate me” (Ex 20:5; Deut 32:41). The first chapter of Romans mentioned “haters of God” (1:30). Jehu once said to king Jehosaphat, “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD?” (2 Chron 19:2). These are very real conditions, and we were all in that category before God put us into Christ, delivering us from the power of darkness, and translating us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:13).

What Made Us Enemies?

“When we were enemies,” we were alienated from Him in our minds and because of our wicked works. Scripture puts it this way. “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” NIV (Col 1:21). We did not think like God. To

put it in words taught by the Holy Spirit, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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” (Isa 55:8-9). There can be no accord with God or acceptance by Him where this condition exists. These verses are preceded for a stern exhortation—one that could not be fulfilled under the Law. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for

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He will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7).

Those who are enemies of God have the wrath of God abiding upon them, and are condemned all ready (John 3:18,36). When at last they confront the Lord, they will be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess 1:9). It is ever true, “But the wicked will perish; And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures, They vanish-- like smoke they vanish away” (Psa 37:20).

Ponder, precious soul, when you were in that classification. As an enemy of God, 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” (Eph 2:12).

RECONCILED TO GOD

From that inimical state, we were

“reconciled to God!” The hostility between us was replaced with peace (Rom 5:1). The variance between our thoughts and His was replaced with the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Our disparate ways were removed when He put His law into our mind, and wrote it on our heart (Heb 8:10).

To be “reconciled” to God is to be brought into conscious harmony with Him. It is to think like Him, and no longer be set to resist His thoughts and ways. There is fellowship and accord in reconciliation.

Those who simply cannot see things God’s way are not reconciled to Him. It should be of deep concern to every believer that variance with God is so common in the professed church. As James would say, “My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3:10).

THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON

This marvelous reconciliation is not without cost. As great as our God is, making us one with Himself required “the death of His Son.” Without this death, you could not have “the mind of Christ.” Without this vicarious atonement, the law of God could not be put into your mind or written upon your heart. You could not have peace with God apart from Christ’s death. Apart from that death, you could not be welcome in the most holy place!

When you come to the Lord’s table, this is an area of especially fruitful meditation. As you take the bread and the cup, speak to yourself. “Father, if Your Son did not die, I could not see Him as You do—the Beloved Son in whom You are well pleased.” Think, “If Jesus did not die, I could not hate sin as I do, or desire to be with the Lord as strongly as I do.” This is involved in being reconciled to God! “If my Savior did not lay down His life for me, I could not delight in the Law of God, or comprehend something of its depth.”

When Were We Reconciled?

And when did this reconciliation take place? Provisionally, it took place when Jesus died. As it is written, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled

us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation^{NASB} (2 Cor 5:18-19). The work was done right there, when it looked to the flesh as though Jesus had been overthrown! Now the cry goes out to all, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). It is a word backed up by eternal purpose, fortified by everlasting love, and

implemented by a eternal High Priest.

And what were we when all of this took place? **We were "enemies!"** We were reconciled to God "**when we were enemies.**" Christ's vicarious death, and our faith in His blood (Rom 3:25) **changes our state!** It corrects our condition! The thing that caused the variance --sin-- was removed.

Not to be forgotten is the fact that sin had stirred God's anger toward us. He

has promised no good to His enemies. In fact, "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa 7:11). Yet, even though His nature moved His angry against the wicked, His great mercy compelled Him to provide a covering for their sin. While they remained His enemies, He provided a means to change them that was both righteous and effective. It was a means that would change their nature, for He could not change. As He Himself said, "*I am the LORD, I change not*" (Mal 3:6). A marvelous work, indeed!

ANOTHER "MUCH MORE" SITUATION

" 10b . . . much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Here is another "*much more*" affirmation. The Spirit is reasoning with us concerning the firmness of our salvation. He is confirming to our hearts that we have good reason to expect the work to be finished, performed "*until the day of Jesus Christ*" (Phil 1:6). Because believers are engaged in a fierce and unrelenting warfare, they require "*everlasting consolation and good hope through grace*" (2 Thess 2:16). Indeed, the Spirit is delivering such a precious and sweet elixir to us!

HAVING BEEN RECONCILED

Here is something human reason cannot perceive, but faith can see clearly. We are presently in the state of reconciliation! We have been reconciled to God, and can come to Him , entering into the holiest with a true heart, a conscience that is free from guilt, and bodies that have been washed with pure water.

Here is something human reason cannot perceive, but faith can see clearly. We are presently in the state of reconciliation! We have been reconciled to God, and can come to Him , entering into the holiest with a true heart, a conscience that is free from guilt, and bodies that have been washed with pure water (Heb 10:22). There is no need for any child of God to live aloof from Him, or conduct the affairs of their life while relying on human wisdom and strength!

A Sad Situation

While I do not desire to dwell upon this, we are living in a time when the truth of reconciliation is generally neglected in the church. Satan has deceived the professed church into eating from the forbidden fruit of the world's wisdom. There exists in the modern church a most profound reliance on human wisdom. It is staggering to consider! Academics have been exalted above atonement. Rudiments occupy a more prominent place than reconciliation. The wisdom of God has been replaced by the wisdom of the world. Myriad believers wander through life under the oppression of a condemned conscience, unaware they

are reconciled to God. It is a sad and pathetic situation.

But it is sadder still that so little concern can be found about this condition. There is so little talk these days about the reconciliation accomplished in Christ that one wonders if the bare facts of it are known. In over fifty years of contact with religious leaders, teachers, and preachers, I am astounded I have heard so very little about reconciliation or justification. I have

been in circles where more is said about the role of women in the church than of Christ in redemption. I have heard more discussion about the shepherds of the local assembly than the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. In some circles, more is said about purported experiences of the Holy Spirit than the Savior who sent Him.

For some, these are forbidden topics, but someone must speak up about them! There is a languishing spirit in the Western church that can be changed to rejoicing by the awareness that we have "*been reconciled.*" There is still an exchange program in place that can be enjoyed by every believer! Jesus is here to "*appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations*" (Isa 61:3-4).

The Biggest Mission Field

The biggest mission field has always been, and still is, the church! The Holy Spirit, who moved holy men to write Scripture, gave us precious few words that were delivered to unreconciled people. The words of Peter to the Jews are provided (Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12). We have the words of Stephen to the Jewish council (Acts 7:2-53). There is Paul's discourse to the Athenians and Stoics (Acts 17:22-31). We also have a record of his words to some opposing Jews (Acts

22:1-22). We have some summary statements Paul made to Felix (Acts 24:24-25) and Agrippa (Acts 26:29). All of them—every single letter and syllable, and word—could fit in a rather small booklet—one of very few pages.

The only extensive words of Jesus following His enthronement are addressed to “the churches” (Rev 1:11-3:22). All of the Epistles were written to believers, and the Gospels appear to have been also. There is a resounding message that comes through in all of this writing. It concerns Jesus Christ, and the reconciliation accomplished through Him. All of the correction and practical instruction were given to guide people back within the circumference of hearing.

The church needs to be told they are reconciled to God! This necessity is not wholly due to their ignorance of the truth. Rather, it is because they have an accusing adversary who is working night and day to deprive them of this knowledge. He accuses them in their own thoughts, through distorted teaching, and through their enemies. His accusations and fiery darts can only be repelled by the shield of faith. That faith can only come by hearing, and hearing can only come by the “word of Christ.”

Before the Spirit can take us to higher realms, He must first convince us we have been justified through our faith and reconciled to God. There is a welcome sign in heaven confronting every believer who will draw near through the blood of Christ!

SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE

But this is not the end of the matter. The Spirit reasons further with us, revealing the implications of our reconciliation. If God reconciled us when we “were enemies,” what will He do now that we are “joined” to Him (2 Cor 6:17)? If Jesus’ death reconciled us, what will His life—His present life—do?

Here is the glad announcement. “**Much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**” If Jesus threw Himself into reconciling us, what do you suppose He is doing now? If, when it came

time for Him to die and return to glory, “*He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem*” (Lk 9:51), how determined is He that we be with Him? I will tell you! It is “*much more!*”

Christ’s Intercessory Ministry

The expression “*saved by His life*” refers to the intercessory ministry of Jesus. Contrary to the benighted teaching of some, God has not put salvation on an automatic pilot. He has positioned the Son at His own right hand, and given Him all power in heaven and in earth. The purpose for this allocation is that the Son might “*bring many sons to glory*” (Heb 2:10). He is bringing “*us to God*” right through the land of the enemy (1 Pet 3:18). It is Christ’s commission to “*give*

Many a soul has experienced times when it was more difficult to come to God as a Christian than it was when a sinner. Because of some foolishness, or snare of the devil, their conscience has become contaminated, and a cloud of despair has settled over their soul. They learn first hand of the impotency of human wisdom and natural ability.

eternal life to as many” as God has “*given*” to Him (John 17:2).

Christ’s intercessory work is more challenging and extensive than His reconciling death. To accomplish the reconciliation, He appeared “*once in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Heb 9:26). He made “*one sacrifice for sins forever*” (Heb 10:12). It was an aggressive and difficult work, but it was a “*short*” one, never again to be repeated.

But what of His intercessory work? What does the Holy Spirit say about it? This is Christ’s present “*life*,” the life by which we “*shall be saved.*” Here is what the Spirit says. “*But this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to*

make intercession for them” (Heb 7:24-26). Those who speak simplistically of salvation do well to give heed to these words! If you are in Christ, you are presently being “*saved*” by Christ’s life. It is His intercession that is presently saving you. Should Jesus cease to intercede for us, we would forthwith drop into hell, and that without remedy!

Notice how the Spirit speaks. He says Jesus is “*able to save completely those who come to God through him.*”^{NIV} I understand such an affirmation does not fit into certain views of salvation, but what matter is that? Who should be concerned when God contradicts men? The solution is very simply. Discard what man has said, and take hold of what the Lord has said. He has declared you are being saved by Jesus AS you come to the Father through Him.

Many a soul has experienced times when it was more difficult to come to God as a Christian than it was when a sinner. Because of some foolishness, or snare of the devil, their conscience has become contaminated, and a cloud of despair has settled over their soul. They learn first hand of the impotency of human wisdom and natural ability. Such poor souls, laden with guilt, have sought the aid of their brothers and sisters. They have fallen into the slough of

despondency, and wrestled with feelings of rejection and unworthiness. They will tell you there are times when it takes all the spiritual energy you have to draw near to God.

There have been champions of the faith, like Paul who have had “*fears within*” (2 Cor 7:5), “*despaired of life*” (2 Cor 1:8), and nearly had “*sorrow upon sorrow*” (Phil 2:27). Every child of God will become acutely aware the work is not yet finished in him. Life, with all of its complexities and difficulties can cause men to confess, “*Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet*” (Phil 3:12-13).

There is a message for such

souls—and all believers will experience this at some time. It is this: **“WE SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE!”** This is even more apt to be take place than our deliverance from bondage to sin! It is a **“MUCH MORE”** circumstance!

You can believe our God is *“able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy”* (Jude 24). He is able to do it because of an appointed and interceding King, our High Priest! The One who wrought the salvation is

maintaining it.

Two Conditions

The passage has presented two conditions, contrasting them for us. There are two conditions of believers, and two of Christ. One set of conditions is in the past, and one exists now. In the past we were enemies and Christ died. In the present, we are reconciled and Christ lives. Our condition is better, and so is that of Jesus.

Our text, however, concludes that our betterment is owing both to Christ’s

death and to His life. His death without His resurrected life would have left us enemies to God, dead in trespasses and sin. His life without His death would be ineffective for us now, and we would perish in the way.

Without Christ’s death, God could not reconcile us. Without His life, He could not bring us to glory. And, if we needed Christ’s death, **“much more,”** we need His life. Thank God He *“ever lives to make intercession for”* us! Put the accent where God has put it!

REJOICING IN GOD

“^{11a} And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” The manner in which the Spirit speaks to the churches is both refreshing and challenging. Even after He has brought us to the mountain of justification by faith, and lifted us higher to behold a living, reigning, and interceding Christ, He does not stop. Those with small appetites for spiritual things cannot remain long with the Spirit of God. While you are still standing amazed at the insights He ministers, He continues to speak.

THE “NOT ONLY THAT” VIEW

Here is another expression, similar to *“much more.”* Through utterances like this the Lord expands our thoughts and assists us to grow in our understanding. He has used this terminology before, in the third verse of this chapter.

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.”^{NKJV}

Here, the Spirit is continuing the thoughts initiated in the beginning of this chapter. This is showing us the harvest reaped in justification. It is abundant, and it is precious. Let me remind you of them, lest they slip from your mind.

- ▶ We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (5:1).
- ▶ We have access into this grace wherein we stand (5:2a).
- ▶ We rejoice in hope of beholding and participating in the glory of God (5:2b).

- ▶ We glory in tribulations (5:3-a).
- ▶ We know tribulation results in endurance (5:3b).
- ▶ We know that endurance develops character, or trustworthiness (5:4a).
- ▶ We know that character results in a confident hope (5:4b).

Those with small appetites for spiritual things cannot remain long with the Spirit of God. While you are still standing amazed at the insights He ministers, He continues to speak.

- ▶ Hope does not make us ashamed (5:5a).
- ▶ God’s love for us is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5b).

Verses 6-10 are an elaboration of the love of God, which the Spirit has poured out into our hearts. They have expounded the extent and effectiveness of that marvelous love. It found us when we were sinners, and wonderfully reconciled us through the death of His Son. It provided for us when we were enemies, and resulted in our reconciliation. The love of God not only provided deliverance from sin and the world, but has supplied a way of entrance into the presence of God, now by faith,

and finally in all fulness. That is the love that is poured out as a mighty river into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is refreshing and abundant!

Now, the Spirit resumes the unfolding of the effects of justification. In this manner, He has anchored us to Jesus instead of to the benefits. He briefly touches on the effects of justification, but lingers upon the means by which it was accomplished. This is the Divine manner, and can be seen throughout the Epistles. The accent is always placed on the redemptive role of Jesus, with the secondary emphasis upon the effects of that redemption upon the believer. After that problematic areas are addressed, and always with a mind to get back to the Savior and His *“great salvation.”*

REJOICING IN GOD

“And not only that, but we also rejoice in God.” Here again is a most powerful expression. Rejoicing in God is something unique to those in Christ Jesus. Prior to Jesus, some few souls rejoiced in the Lord. It was always urged upon the righteous, and most generally related to temporal deliverances. The Psalmist urged the *“righteous”* to *“Rejoice in the Lord”* (Psa 33:1; 97:12). Isaiah told his peers a day was coming when *“You shall rejoice in the LORD, And glory in the Holy One of Israel”*^{NKJV} (Isa 41:16). Joel urged the people to *“rejoice in the Lord”* because of the rain He had given them, causing their floor to be *“full of*

wheat” (Joel 2:23). The faith of Habakkuk rose above his generation when he shouted, “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab 3:18).

This precise phrase, “rejoice in God,” is mentioned one other time in Scripture, and it is by David. “But the king shall rejoice in God” (Psa 63:11). But his was not as lofty a statement as our text. It was not owing to any deficiency in David. Rather, he lived during a time when greater things were not known as fully as they are now. He rejoiced at the faint outline of God. Those in Christ rejoice in a more fully revealed God!

What Does It Mean?

What does it mean to “rejoice in God,” or “rejoice in the Lord” (Phil 4:4), or “joy in God?”^{KJV} It is to make our boast in God, or to glory in Him. It is to joyfully speak of His doings, and savor the knowledge that He is for us.

Joying in God involves tracing our reconciliation back to Him. It flows from the spring of spiritual understanding that can only account for our change by pointing to the Lord.

Such rejoicing is often associated with words, although it is not limited to them.

Hear Mary rejoice in the Lord following Gabriel’s announcement to her. “My soul magnifies **the Lord**, and my spirit has rejoiced in **God my Savior**. For **He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant**; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For **He who is mighty has done great things for me**, And **holy is His name**. And **His mercy is on those who fear Him** from generation to generation. **He has shown strength with His arm**; **He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts**. **He has put down the mighty from their thrones**, and **exalted the lowly**. **He has filled the hungry with good things**, and the rich **He has sent away empty**. **He has helped His servant Israel**, in remembrance of **His mercy**, as **He spoke to our fathers**, to Abraham and to his seed forever” (Lk 1:46-55).

There are EIGHTEEN direct

references to God in this joyful expression. It was the articulation of a heart filled with faith. Mary was joying in God. Her spirit, or her real person, was rejoicing in God her Savior. She believed what was said, and her heart began rejoicing.

To rejoice in the Lord is to enjoy Who He is and what He has done. It is to confess with gladness that you have been a recipient of His favor and mercy.

Before Christ, this kind of rejoicing was not common. Some few souls would break forth in this manner. However, this is no longer the case. Now those who are reconciled to God, who have been justified by his grace, DO rejoice in God. That is their manner. It is the mode, so to speak, of the Kingdom. Wherever such rejoicing is **not** found, there is little or no knowledge of justification. Mark it well, and see if this is not the case.

Too, this is not a commandment or an exhortation, as in Philippians 4:4. In our text, joying in God is the **result** of being reconciled to Him. It is something that IS done, not something that ought to be done. This is confirmed by the Spirit’s assessment of the people of God. “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). The phrase “rejoice in Christ Jesus” parallels the expression of our text, “joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I will go so far as to say it is not possible to know you are reconciled to God, and have access to Him, without rejoicing in Him.

THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Even rejoicing in God must go up to the holiest place “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I am continually impressed with the Spirit’s insistence that we consider this. He will make no allowance for acceptance with or access to God apart from Christ Jesus. The marvelous change

that has already been wrought in us by faith has not removed the continued necessity of Jesus. Salvation never removes the need for Jesus!

Although I do not wish to stand in judgment of others, I have often wondered if much of the modern expressions of “praise” could be classified as “rejoicing in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I wonder how much of it is accompanied by even a minimal awareness of God. I wonder if the Lord Jesus Christ is really

Joying in God involves tracing our reconciliation back to Him. It flows from the spring of spiritual understanding that can only account for our change by pointing to the Lord.

in the forefront of thought.

I say this because I am impressed with how very little of God and Christ are known today. It is staggering to consider the sparsity of the knowledge of justification and reconciliation. If it is true that “joying in God” is a fruit of being justified, and being reconciled to God, how then can those who are ignorant of these things rejoice in the Lord?

Let it be clear, rejoicing in the Lord, or joying in God, is not a mere obligation. It is part and parcel of justification. The soul that has been cleansed from sin, and knows it, will be “glad in the Lord” (Psa 32:11). Such joy cannot be subdued. It will break forth when one is beaten for Jesus’ sake (Acts 5:41). It will rise above the groans of prisoners in a dark Philippian jail (Acts 16:25).

Even when hard tribulations come upon the reconciled one, this joy will erupt like an unstoppable fountain. Satan cannot stop it! Our enemies cannot stop it.

It flows as strong as your faith allows.

One of the great handicaps of much of the religion of our day is its suppression

of the joy of the Lord. Because of a fleshly emphasis, reconciliation has been pushed into the background of thought. It is neither dominant in preaching nor

thinking, and men are the worse for it. Where men are ignorant of reconciliation, Satan gains the advantage over them, forcing them into defeat.

RECEIVING THE RECONCILIATION (ATONEMENT)

“^{11b} . . . through Whom we have now received the reconciliation.” The KJV and The Webster Bible use the word *“atonement”* instead of *“reconciliation.”*

Atonement

The word *“atonement”* is anchored in Old Covenant procedures, which were a shadow of what we have in Christ. The word *“atonement”* is used an extraordinary number of times in the sacrificial law (Exodus through Numbers). The KJV uses the word seventy-six times. The NKJV uses it eighty-three times, the NASB seventy-nine times, the NIV ninety-three times, and the NRSV seventy-seven times. It is a prominent word under the Law, to say the least.

Under the Law, there was only a ceremonial cleansing, which left the conscience defiled (Heb 10:1-4). It actually had more to do with sparing the people from wrath rather than bringing righteousness to them. It denoted a covering for sin.

This, of course, was fulfilled in Christ, yet to a fuller extent. A real removal of sin took place, and an effective cleansing of the conscience.

Reconciliation

The English word *“reconciliation”* only occurs once in the Law, and that only in the KJV (Lev 8:15). Even then, the altar was the object of the reconciliation, and not the people. Other versions use the word *“atonement”* in this verse.

The English word *“reconcile”* is also used only once in the Law, also only in the KJV (Lev 6:30). There it refers to the sin offering which was brought into the holy place, whose blood had been presented for atonement, or *“to reconcile.”* It was to be burned with fire, and not to be eaten.

Why Mention This?

There is a reason for this brief explanation. In my judgment, there is very good cause for the KJV’s use of the word *“atonement”* in our text. When reading the word *“atonement,”* something unique would be experienced. The individual whose mind was bathed in Scripture, and who was familiar with the procedures of the shadowy Law, would at once recall those ancient ceremonies. That would provide a greater insight into the death of Christ, which fulfilled those ceremonies.

It is a principle in Scripture, that Divine provisions are to be appropriated. It is not enough to simply speak of them. The salvation of God is never to be reduced to a set of theological theorems. It is something to be experienced, just as surely as sin and alienation have been experienced.

A PIVOTAL TRUTH

Here is a pivotal truth of Scripture, and one we do well to consider deeply. It is one thing for Christ to have atoned for the sins of the world. It is quite another for that atonement to be *“received.”* It is one thing for God to have been *“in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.”* It is quite another thing for that reconciliation to be *“received.”*

It is a principle in Scripture, that Divine provisions are to be appropriated. It is not enough to simply speak of them. The salvation of God is never to be reduced to a set of theological theorems. It

is something to be experienced, just as surely as sin and alienation have been experienced. This is embodied in the statement of First Corinthians 4:20. *“For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power.”*^{NASB}

THROUGH WHOM

It is not possible to be reconciled legally or experientially apart from Jesus Christ. Let it be clear that this is the Christ presented in the Gospel, which is *“the record God has given of His Son”* (1 John 5:10). Much of what is presented as Gospel today is really *“not a Gospel.”* The presentation of the Lord Jesus as a grand problem solver and supplier of mere temporary provisions is a gross distortion of the Christ of the Gospel.

Those who have to do with Jesus will have to deal with sin, for He is a Savior from sin. They will have to face the matter of being an enemy of God, for Christ reconciles men to God. Consideration will have to be given to the sure punishment of sin, for Jesus was *“smitten of God and afflicted”* because of the sins of men. Where men do not come to grips with these issues, they cannot be reconciled to God, for that is what reconciliation is all about.

Now, our text affirms that we *“receive”* the reconciliation, or atonement, through Christ Jesus. By that, it means He alone wrought the reconciliation, and He alone can bring us into it. That is involved in our Lord’s word to His disciples. *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). *“By me”* is more than a mere legal provision. It speaks more of Jesus **escorting us to God**, rather than us coming using Him much like a ticket into the Divine presence. We are told Jesus *“once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring*

us to God" (1 Pet 3:18).

In this text "*through Whom*" means the Lord Jesus Himself has brought the reconciliation to us.

WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED THE RECONCILIATION

While our salvation has not yet been fully realized, we have received much. In

presently enjoying Divine acceptance and favor! We have "*received the atonement.*"

However, one may reason, "It does not seem to me that I have received the atonement." How can a timorous soul be assured of this? Consider the fruits that have been declared. They will tell you the truth of the matter. Receive their testimony, and rejoice!

in the thought of being freed from mortality and the propensity to sin? Do you, in fact, prefer to be "*absent from the body and present with the Lord?*" If this describes you, then you have "*received the atonement,*" for that is the fruit of being justified from sin and reconciled to God.

Are you able to see good that has come from your tribulations? Can you rejoice in seeing how you have become more stable, and able to endure through them? Has your hope grown as you have perceived more of the love of God? If this describes you, then you have "*received the atonement,*" for that is the fruit of being justified from sin and reconciled to God.

Receiving the atonement always yields a crop of good things for the soul. And, if you are doubtful that you have received it, go to the banquet of salvation and receive it afresh. Drink in the good things of God as though it was for the first time.

And, does the thought of God delight your heart? Do you rejoice that He is your Father, and has done good to you? Does the consideration of what He has brought to you in Christ bring joy and refreshment to your heart? If this describes you, then you have "*received the atonement,*" for that is the fruit of being justified from sin and reconciled to God.

this case, we have "*NOW received the reconciliation.*" This is why we have access to God. It is why we have access into the grace wherein we stand. It is why we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and can perceive the benefits of tribulation. This is why we "*joy in God.*" **It is because we have been reconciled!**

Do you have "*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?*" Are you desirous to come into His presence, and feel at liberty to make your requests known to Him? Do you know you have access to this grace, and feel a freedom to seek it? Have you been liberated from the goads of a condemning conscience? If this describes you, then you have "*received the atonement,*" for that is the fruit of being justified from sin and reconciled to God.

Receiving the atonement always yields a crop of good things for the soul. And, if you are doubtful that you have received it, go to the banquet of salvation and receive it afresh. Drink in the good things of God as though it was for the first time. There are things involved in your justification that you have not yet seen, and they will rejoice your heart.

But we must not leave the matter there, lying like a cold and lifeless stone in our hearts. We must take this truth up and reason upon it. Note the affirmation. "*We have NOW received the atonement.*" What Christ has accomplished NOW belongs to us. Its benefits have been passed to us through our faith. We are

Are you set to rejoicing at the thought of seeing the Lord, and being forever with Him? Do you "*rejoice in hope of the glory of God,*" finding great delight

CONCLUSION

See what a rich bounty the Spirit has spread before us! The Lord Jesus, as a vicarious sacrifice assumed all of our liabilities. He bore the full brunt of Divine judgment against them. His obedience, and perfect fulfillment of every Divine requirement, has so thoroughly pleased God that He has opened the wells of salvation. Now, by the grace of God, we can draw water from them with joy (Isa 12:3). The water in them is abundant and most refreshing. Draw it out! Draw it out!

Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth" (Gen 26:15). The "*earth*" of human reasoning and the wisdom of men has been thrown into the wells of salvation. Large clumps of religious tradition have stopped the water of life from flowing to thirsty souls. Some have even forgotten there are "*wells of salvation,*" given to produce a "*joy unspeakable and full of glory.*"

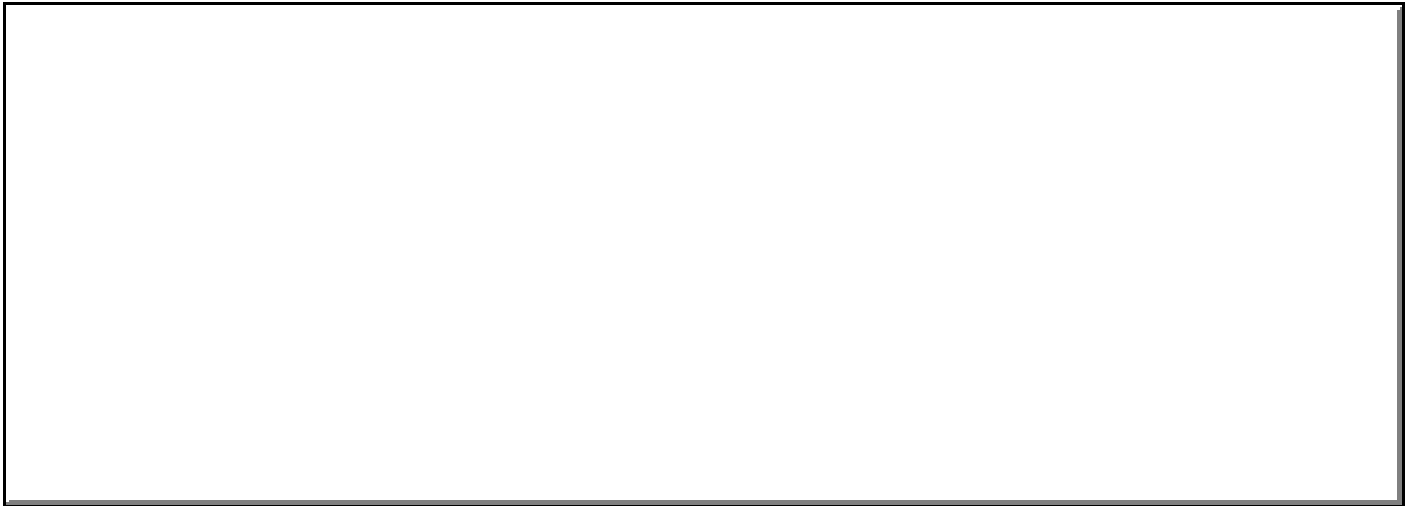
them once again. "*And Isaac dug again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water*" (Gen 26:18-19).

For a long time, many of these wells have been stopped by the traditions of men. Like the wicked Philistines of old, the once rich wells have been largely "*stopped.*" As it is written, "*Now the*

But that is not the end of the matter, praise the Lord. As in ancient times, those wells can be unstopped. Their restricted flow is not permanent. Isaac revisited those stopped wells, and opened

There are wells to be uncovered—wells that refresh the people of God. We have dealt with one in this text: the well of vicarious atonement. We have previously dealt with others: the wells of justification by faith and imputed righteousness. Have they not yielded

refreshing water? And once they are opened, the saints will be encouraged to look for more refreshing wells. Perhaps you, like Isaac's servants, will dig in the neglected valley, and find "there a well of springing water!" Drink and dig, child of God! Drink and dig! You will never be the same for doing so, for Christ has unleashed a torrent of refreshing water.



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 18



ONLY TWO MEN

5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned; ¹³ (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.) ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:12-21 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

The truth of Christ's atoning sacrifice is so significant and needful, the Spirit will elaborate extensively upon it. This involves a Divine principle, and does not conform to the world's wisdom. When, therefore, the world's pattern of thought is extensive, a special initiative is required to penetrate the heart with the powerful

truth of the Gospel. While there were strong believers in Rome, they were located in a citadel of worldly power and wisdom. There was a conflict between the Roman way of thinking (political and philosophical)



and the manner of the heavenly kingdom. With spiritual skill, the Apostle uses his spiritual weaponry to throw down the philosophical bastions of thought that

From heaven's point of view (which is the true view), there are only Two Men. Everything hinges on them-by Given O. Blakely

dominated that region.

At the time Paul wrote Romans, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, and Neoplatonism were the main philosophical schools in the Western world. These patterns of thought were primarily concerned with ethics and religions. The Apostle Paul encountered some of this kind of thinking in Athens (Acts 17:18). In order to show the relevance of these philosophies to our time, I beg your indulgence as I give a brief synopsis of them. This section is provided for those with an interest in seeing the remarkable likeness our society bears to the thinking of the heathen world at the time Romans was written. This kind of thinking has had a remarkable impact on the religious thought of our time.

EPICUREANISM. The essential doctrine of Epicureanism is that pleasure is the supreme good and main goal of life. Intellectual pleasures are preferred to sensual ones, which tend to disturb peace of mind. True happiness, Epicurus taught, is the serenity resulting from the conquest of fear of the gods, of death, and of the afterlife. The ultimate aim of all Epicurean speculation about nature is to rid people of such fears . . . **In biology, Epicurus anticipated the modern doctrine of natural selection.** He postulated that natural forces give rise to organisms of different types and that only the types able to support and propagate themselves have survived . . . **Epicurean psychology is thoroughly materialistic.**

The modern acceptance of the theory of evolution, and an emphasis on the seen are expressions of this philosophy.

STOICISM. Stoicism was the most influential philosophy in the Roman Empire during the period preceding the rise of Christianity. The Stoics, like the Epicureans, emphasized ethics as the main field of knowledge, but they also developed theories of logic and natural science to support their ethical doctrines. **Their most important contribution to logic was the discovery of the hypothetical syllogism . . .** According to them the human soul is a manifestation of the Logos. **Living according to nature or reason, they held, is living in conformity with the divine order of the universe.** The importance of this view is seen in the part that Stoicism played in developing a theory of natural law that powerfully affected Roman jurisprudence . . . the four cardinal virtues of the Stoic philosophy are wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance, a classification derived from the teachings of Plato . . . Thus, before the rise of Christianity, Stoics recognized and advocated the brotherhood of humanity

and the natural equality of all human beings.

The exaltation of human wisdom and logic, so dominant in the academic and religious world, is a form of stoicism.

SKEPTICISM. The principles of skepticism were first explicitly formulated by the Pyrrhonists, a school of Greek philosophy deriving its name from its founder, Pyrrho of Elis. Pyrrho, whose primary concern was ethics, maintained that human beings can know nothing of the real nature of things, and that consequently the wise person will suspend judgment . . . During the Renaissance the influence of ancient skepticism was reflected preeminently in the writings of the 16th-century French philosophical essayist Michel de Montaigne. The greatest exponent of modern skepticism was the 18th-century Scottish empiricist philosopher David Hume . . . **Elements of skepticism may be found in other modern schools of philosophy, including pragmatism, analytic and linguistic philosophy, and existentialism.**

Systematic theology, the exaltation of language expertise, and the denial of the miraculous order are all forms of this view.

NEOPLATONISM. Neoplatonism is a type of idealistic monism in which the ultimate reality of the universe is held to be an infinite, unknowable, perfect One . . . **Salvation for such a soul is still possible, the Neoplatonist maintains, by virtue of the very freedom of will that enabled it to choose its sinful course.** The soul must reverse that course, tracing in the opposite direction the successive steps of its degeneration, until it is again united with the fountainhead of its being. The actual reunion is accomplished through a mystical experience in which the soul knows an all-pervading ecstasy.

The overstatement of the power of the human will, together with a virtual denial of Divine intervention, are related to this view.

WHY SO LITTLE IS BEING SAID ON THIS SUBJECT

The subjects of justification by faith, receiving a righteousness from God, and a vicarious atonement are rarely mentioned in our time. This is because they contradict the contemporary way of thinking. It is certainly not because of any lack of revelation on the subject. Nor, indeed, is there a lack of extensive teaching on these matters by the Holy Spirit. As we have found in the book of Romans, a considerable emphasis is even placed on these subjects. Not only are they themes of Apostolic development, they are among the primary ones. Where these are missing, faith cannot survive.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE ENTRANCE OF SIN THROUGH ONE MAN (5:12)
- II. A PARENTHETICAL THOUGHT (5:13-17)
 - A. Until the Law (5:13)
 - B. Nevertheless Death Reigned (5:14)
 - C. The Gift Is Not Like the Offense (5:15)
 - D. The Gift Is Not Like the Result of the Offense (5:16)
 - E. The Reign of Death and the Reign of Life (5:17)
- III. ONE MAN EFFECTS ALL MEN (5:18)
- IV. DISOBEDIENCE AND OBEDIENCE (5:19)
- V. ABOUNDING OFFENSE AND ABOUNDING GRACE (5:20)
- VI. THE REIGN OF DEATH AND THE REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (5:21)

I am going to wax bold concerning the reason for the prevailing ignorance on the matter of a righteousness from God and the vicarious atonement of Jesus. It can be traced to two key factors, both of which are firmly rooted in the flesh.

- ⊗ First, the carnal, or natural, mind is being given the ascendancy in religion. The wisdom of men, together with the external disciplines of learning, have been assigned the greater weight in learning the truth of God.
- ⊗ Second, the truth of the Gospel is being sifted through humanly developed theologies. The Scriptures are being read with crystallized theological views in mind, rather than in faith.

As a result, the truth of the Gospel has been forfeited, and a grossly deficient church has gained prominence. I am aware these are most serious charges.

The Western world is now living in an age when religion is dominated by the purveyors of human wisdom. Academia and human logic have displaced faith, and natural reason is sitting upon the throne.

THIS WILL BECOME APPARENT

These conditions will become very apparent in the section now before us.

The reasoning will sound foreign and flawed to those who have not embraced the truth of the Gospel. However, this is the reasoning of the Holy Spirit.

If we were not speaking of salvation, the reception of a righteousness from God, and Divine acceptance, perhaps we could be more tolerant of the wayward thinking of men on these matters. We might consider being more patient if we were speaking of dietary practices, political persuasions, and economic considerations. But that is not the case.

We are rather speaking of the fall of men and their utter impotency to correct their condition on their own. We are also

confronted with a Divine analysis of the situation, and are being exposed to what God has done through Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. The Holy Spirit has confronted us with the inevitability of standing before God Himself, before whom not a single righteous or good person can be found apart from faith in Christ. That is His assessment, and we are obliged to accept it in faith. All of this is associated with the following.

- ▶ God has sent His Son into the world to address our situation (1:3; 8:3).
- ▶ In due time, Christ died for the ungodly (5:6).
- ▶ Righteousness is imputed to those who believe on Him who raised Jesus from

the dead (4:24).

- ▶ The forgiveness of iniquities, the covering of sin, and the refusal of God to impute sin to the individual (4:6-8).
- ▶ Having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (5:1).

We are dealing with weighty matters, and it behooves every person to gird up the loins of their mind and take hold of what the Lord is saying. Profit will come from giving heed to these things. God will show us that the presence of sin and the presence of righteousness are both traced to a single origin. At the root of the matter, one person stands for all who proceed from that one. As we will see, this is a significant truth.

THE ENTRANCE OF DEATH THROUGH ONE MAN

“5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Sin made a single entrance into the world. In the beginning, it was not here. It had a beginning, or genesis, in this world.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world . . . ” There is a form of reasoning here that must not elude us. In order to confirm the greatness and effectiveness of our salvation, the Spirit will show us how and why we fell into sin.

The Explanation

With great effectiveness, the Spirit will now show us how all men came to be sinners. Although *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (3:23), that is not the root of the matter. Rather, it is the **evidence** of something that occurred prior to individual transgression. The human conditions that are being explained are *“ungodly”*(5:6), *“sinners”*(5:8), and *“enemies”*(5:10). How did men come to be unlike and hostile to the Living God? Why do men sin? Why are they enemies to God? This passage explains those conditions.

Immediately a bit of theological nonsense is exposed and cast violently down to the ground. Some teach the earth was occupied before Genesis 1:1. Because of some decadent generation, men assume, it was judged and a new creation started with Adam. Still others believe that sin entered the world through Satan, and before Adam. Other kindred speculations are put forward by men who place reason before faith, and analysis before believing.

With great effectiveness, the Spirit will now show us how all men came to be sinners. Although *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (3:23), that is not the root of the matter. Rather, it is the evidence of something that occurred prior to individual transgression.

Through One Man

Sin made its entrance into the world through *“one man.”* That man is identified in verse fourteen as *“Adam.”* One might wonder why it does not say *“Eve,”* for she was the first to partake of the forbidden tree, and was the one deceived (Gen 3:6; 1 Tim 2:14). Our text is viewing Adam as the progenitor of the race, not merely as an individual. He is the federal head of humanity. They all bear his likeness, and have come from him. As it is written, *“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth”*^{NIV} (Acts 17:26). We have all *“born the image”* of Adam, as affirmed in First Corinthians 15:47-49. In this matter, one stands for the many, and the many bear the likeness of the one.

Neither position is true. The Holy Spirit certainly knows how to speak *“expressly.”* Additionally, He *“searches all things, yes, the deep things of God”*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 2:10). The Spirit, then, is qualified to speak on the subject of the origin of sin in this world. He will also inform us of the inception of death, confirming it did not exist in any form until after man sinned. **He will show us how to think on this matter.**

The Proposition

Remember, the proposition that is being proved true is this: righteousness comes from God, through Christ, and by faith. Those without understanding remonstrate at this. They imagine that God deals with each person upon the basis of individual merit. While there is an element of truth to this, it is far from being the whole of the matter. We will now see why the principle of a vicarious atonement—one dying for the many—is effective and according to Divine law and righteousness.

SIN ENTERED THROUGH ONE MAN

A Single Transgression

Sin did not enter the world in a flood-like manner, but through a single transgression. This passage will refer to that deed as “sin,” “transgression” (5:14), “offense,” “fall” (5:15,17,18), and “disobedience” (5:19). The deed is described in a single verse of Scripture—a deed which is the precise point at which sin “entered into the world.” “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen 3:6).

The full nature of sin was in that first transgression. Satan was its fountain, and his “wiles” were the means of Eve being deceived. God’s Person and word were ignored, and self-interests were sought. To the flesh, the transgression of reference appears inconsequential and unworthy of harsh judgment. It consisted of eating a piece of fruit. The deed through which sin entered into the world was not the murder of Abel. Sin did not enter through the violence and murder of Noah’s day. It was not brought in by the molestation of Dinah, sister to Simeon and Levi. It came into the world by eating a piece of fruit!

The **nature** of sin is what makes it so bad. To sin, people must forget God, listen to the devil, and blot the thought of heaven from their minds. The word of God must be thrust away and fleshly interests must become dominant. Sin is rebellion against God and the exaltation of self. It is the ultimate act of thanklessness and selfishness.

Given a Chance, Sin Will Dominate

Our text will confirm the real nature of sin. Once it makes an entrance, it rapidly gains the dominance. When sin penetrates, it at once gains a foothold. That is its nature. Those who do not learn from the Scriptural account of Adam and the entrance of sin, will not be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Once sin had “entered into the world,” nothing or no one on earth could stop its infectious expansion. Only God can stop the spread of sin, or negate its consequences. Four thousand years of human history confirmed this to be the case. Had not God intervened in Jesus, sin would still

have been ruling the world uncontested.

Give No Place to the Devil

It is no wonder we are admonished, “Neither give place to the devil” (Eph 5:27). To give him a “place” is to provide an opportunity^{NASB} for him, make room for him^{NRSV}, or make provision for him to gain a foothold.^{NIV} If you wonder what he will do, consider Adam and Eve. The dominance of sin and its ruthless rule over the children of men is traced back to a single point in time. It all began when Adam provided an area in which Satan could work, and work he did! The day he ate from the forbidden tree at the behest of his wife—even though he himself was not deceived—sin entered into the world like a mighty torrent. Now, six thousand years later, it has, and continues, to ravage every rational being until liberation from it is realized in the salvation of our God.

individual. **All men die because Adam sinned.** His sin is what brought the curse of death upon humanity. When sin entered, the right to live was forfeited, for the bond with Deity was broken. There is no true life where there is rebellion against God.

Spiritual Death

God told Adam he would die “in the day” he ate from the forbidden tree (Gen 2:17). On the surface, it did not appear as though that occurred. Adam did not die until 930 years later (Gen 5:5). Death, however, is no more simplistic than life. In the very day Adam ate, he died spiritually, and was therefore driven out from the presence of the Lord (Gen 3:24). He and Eve were separated from God, for death means separation.

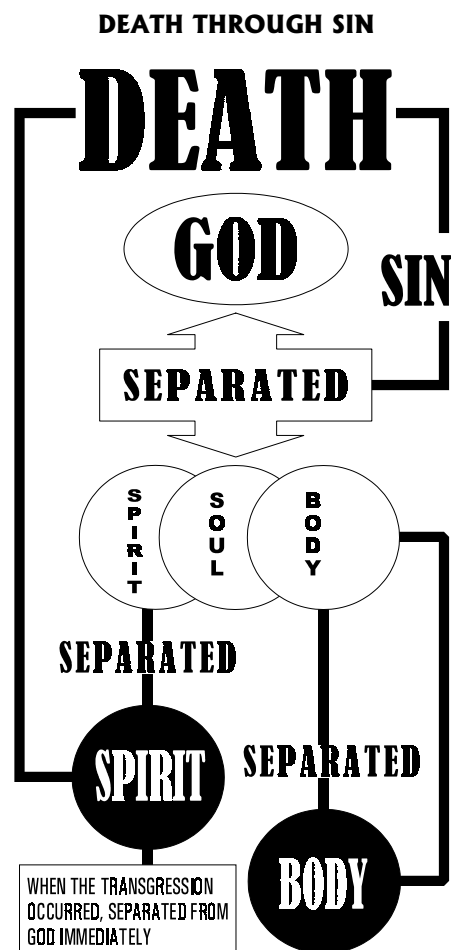
In this spiritual death, the spirit of man became “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). There was no longer accord between God and man—no unanimity, or fundamental agreement. In a sense, man became fragmented and divided in his nature.

Death in its totality entered a realm where it did not exist previously. That is a staggering thing to consider! The ultimate death was experienced—separation from God. Death also took place in the human nature—the dissolution of the union forged in creation by the Almighty Himself. The seen and unseen part of men could no longer live in harmony, and would eventually be separated from each other. This “death” in sins was the result of being separated from God, who alone is the Source of life.

Death in the Flesh

The very moment sin entered into the world, the process of fleshly deterioration began. Ultimately, the body would be separated from man’s unseen part. The effects of the “tree of life” may account for the longevity of life that existed until the time of Abraham. However, it seems more likely to me that long life was a token of mercy from the Lord to allow for the expansion of mankind both before and after the flood. This is, of course, a matter of conjecture.

The only way for any person to avoid death is by Divine intervention. In such a case, consignment to physical



The wages of sin (Rom 6:23) are traced more to Adam than to the

death would be suspended. We have three instances of such a suspension. Two have already taken place, and one is yet to come. Enoch was “translated” without experiencing, or “seeing,” death (Heb 11:5; Gen 5:22-24). Elijah was carried up into heaven in a whirlwind without experiencing death (2 Kings 2:1,11). In both cases, no body was left behind. All of the involvements of these two incidents are not known, and it is not wise to speculate upon them in carnal curiosity.

The other, and future, incident of the suspension of death will occur when the Lord comes again. At that time, there will be an entire generation that will not experience death in the ordinary manner. They will be “changed” in an instant, without a dying process (1 Cor 15:51-52). The thought of this great change is refreshing to consider.

In these three instances, although death is not experienced in the ordinary way, there is a “change,” wherein the individual is adapted for glory. In the latter case, we will receive immortal bodies. We do not know of the details of change that occurred in Enoch and Elijah.

Nature Died Also

When sin entered into the world, not only did man die spiritually, and his physical constitution begin to decay, there was also a death sentence passed upon all creation. Scripture apprizes us of this extensive judgment. “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:20-22). The shroud of death has been thrown over the entirety of the natural order. It is all headed for demise. Whether we ponder the massive universe in which our small world exists, or the unimaginable vastness of celestial bodies beyond human view, everything is dying. Like man, and because of the sin of man, nature is groaning under the weight of corruption, which is the prelude to death.

Adam and Nature Rejected!

Because sin separated man from God, all that was created for man was also consigned to death. This means the entire

natural order has been written off. **There is a sense in which it cannot be salvaged—either man or the environment in which he is found.**

This condition is precisely why Jesus said, “You *MUST* be born again” (John 3:7). It is also why God promised, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). This is why there will be “a new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13). The “new creation” is necessitated because of the total rejection of the old.

Sin is a principle that is antagonistic toward God. It moves men to commit transgression, and quickly gains preeminence over them. The universal presence of death is undeniable confirmation that sin is “in the world.” Our text affirms it is here because of what the first man, Adam, did.

When assigning values and priorities to matters, the truth just stated must be brought into our thinking. **Anything that can be ultimately traced back to Adam or the natural creation cannot be allowed the place of prominence.** The death sentence has been passed upon all such things. Whether it is fleshly appetites, money, earthly wisdom, or places and things, all are to be subordinated to a quest for the new creation. Ultimately, the entire natural order will “pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” In view of this, the Spirit solemnly asks us, “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (2 Pet 3:10-12).

Without dwelling upon the matter, it should be noted that a phenomenal amount of contemporary religion has its foundation in the natural order. All such religion will go up in flame, together with the foundation upon which it rests.

And All Because of Sin!

The remarkably extensive curse of death came in with sin! It did not enter with an abundance of sin, but with a single transgression! If we are ever tempted to minimize sin, or pass it off as common, we must consider its consequences. It should be abundantly evident that anything capable of causing such universal and unwavering demise, must be firmly resisted. Nothing is of any value whatsoever until a remedy for sin and its curse is realized.

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FOR THAT ALL HAVE SINNED

Here, the Spirit is looking at the end from the beginning. The point is that “all have sinned” because they possess a sinful nature. Adam’s offspring cannot rise higher than himself. In fact, there is a degradation in his progeny rather than improvement. Thus, our text is saying, **the justification for God passing death upon all men is seen in their natural tendency toward, and preference for, sin.**

“All have sinned” because “all” are by nature sinful. This truth is beyond all controversy as confirmed by the universal requirement, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). While men may argue about whether or not the term “total depravity” (an expression NOT used by the Spirit), is proper, we must agree on the facts in the case. First, “all have sinned,” and second all have been consigned to death.

THE REASONING PRESENTED

The reasoning of our text is most profound. In summary, this is what the

Spirit will develop. **If sin and death can enter through one man, much more can righteousness and life enter**

through One. The Spirit will show us that no descendant of Adam can rise higher than him. Another Man **MUST**

appear on the scene, else the whole race will be lost. Salvation in all of its greatness is not a novelty, but a necessity!

** A PARENTHETICAL THOUGHT **

“¹³ (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.)

The Spirit now enters an extensive parenthetical thought. This is an

amplification of verse twelve—an explanation of a profound utterance. [*“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”*]. In this explanation, the Spirit is addressing the objection that sin is not possible if there is no law to transgress.

The novice might reason that the cause of death being passed upon Adam is, indeed, obvious. He violated a specific command, and thus received his just dues. “How,” flesh reasons, “could death enter into the world upon the trespass of a single person? Should not everyone be judged on their own merit, without regard to Adam’s transgression?”

In addressing this objection, we are not to understand this specific objection was formally raised—although here and there that is no doubt true. Rather, this is the manner in which the flesh reasons. Frequently the Spirit anticipates what flesh will say, whether or not it has been expressed audibly or in writing. Just as the Spirit reasons in a certain way, so does fallen man. Both forms of reasoning

are consistent, and never depart from their manners. Examples of the Spirit anticipating this type of reasoning are found in the following texts: *“And do you think this, O man . . . You will say to me then . . . But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? . . . You will say then . . . But someone will say . . . But someone will say.”* (Romans 2:3; 9:19,20; 11:19; 1 Cor 15:35; James 2:18).

There is such a disparity of thought between God and man that whatever truth is made known by the Spirit, flesh will object to it. That is precisely why God said to the most externally cultured people in the world, *“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’* (Isa 55:8-9).

The argument will also confirm that death did, in fact, enter the world when **Adam** sinned, and that it reigns universally. If we are to understand vicarious atonement, it is essential that we understand the principle taught here.

1. UNTIL THE LAW

“¹³ For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.” The Spirit now addresses the period of history BEFORE the Law. He has already told us that the Law brought the knowledge, or consciousness, of sin: *“for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20). Although sin had not been defined and judged through a Divinely written code, i.e., the Law, yet the curse of God remained upon it.

SIN WAS IN THE WORLD

When sin entered the world *“by one man,”* Adam, it remained in the world, infecting every person by virtue of their

relation to Adam. Sin was not *“in the world”* as an influence external to man, but as corruption resident IN man.

The presence of sin in the world is confirmed by several historic incidents. It is seen at the individual, family, city, national, and global levels.

- ▶ The murder of Abel (Gen 4:8).
- ▶ Lamech kills a man (Gen 4:23).
- ▶ Violence filling the earth prior to the flood (Gen 6:11).
- ▶ The attempt to build the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-7).
- ▶ The grievous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20).

- ▶ Esau despising his birthright (Gen 25:31-34).
- ▶ Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery (Gen 37:28).
- ▶ The lie of Potiphar’s wife against Joseph (Gen 39:17-19).
- ▶ The oppression of Israel by Egypt (Ex 1:14).
- ▶ The sins of the heathen nations Israel displaced when they entered into Canaan (Deut 9:4-5; 12:2-3).

The point to be seen here is that sin really did infect the entire race of man. *“Sin was in the world”* before the Law which defined and cursed it!

The Point Being Made

Candidly, we are dealing with a very profound verse—an example of lofty spiritual reasoning. **The Spirit is teaching us concerning the effectiveness of Christ’s vicarious death.** He is going to trace the effectiveness of the imputation of righteousness to ONE MAN—Jesus Christ. In order to show the validity of this reasoning, he is confirming that the dominance of sin is equally owing to ONE MAN—Adam.

Although “*sin was in the world*” without the presence of Divine law, that sin does not account for the presence of death. **Death does not occur because Adam’s progeny sinned, but because Adam sinned!** Death entered when Adam sinned, being passed upon all of his offspring. The reign of death cannot be accounted for by the depravity of men, or the presence of reprehensible sins like idolatry and sodomy, as outlined in the first chapter of Romans.

SIN IS NOT IMPUTED WHERE THERE IS NO LAW

This parallels the expression found in 4:15; “*for where no law is, there is no transgression.*” The One NOT imputing the sin is the Lord Himself. Transgression assumes the presence of law, without

which sin is not credited to men. How, then, can we account for the fact that “*all have sinned*” and are under the sentence of death? If they have not transgressed a law, when can it be said they are sinners?

Some have reasoned on this verse in this manner. “If sin is not imputed where there is not law, then the fact that sin was

evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). Because he transgressed a law, sin as imputed to him. But it was not imputed ONLY to him. It was also passed upon all his family—everyone who came from him. **Thus, one stood for all,** which is the point being made by the text.

Although “*sin was in the world*” without the presence of Divine law, that sin does not account for the presence of death. Death does not occur because Adam’s progeny sinned, but because Adam sinned! Death entered when Adam sinned, being passed upon all of his offspring.

in the world before the Law confirms that some kind of law was really present.” Now, that may make sense to the flesh, but it does not make our text any clearer, for no specific law is cited.

The transgression that brought death into the world was Adam’s transgression. He violated a law; “*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and*

The Spirit is making the point that death is ALWAYS the penalty for sin. But this truth must be seen correctly. Infants, and the mentally incompetent, for example, do not die because **they** have sinned. They, like everyone, die because **Adam** sinned! “***By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men***” (v 12).

Simply stated, when we see death ruling over all men, we must not be drawn aside to the different manners in which men die. Some leave the world in a good old age.

Others have their lives terminated abruptly by some tragedy. Still others are removed from this world in the fiery trial of persecution.

If we are asked, “Why must men die?” We simply answer, **Because Adam sinned!** That is the powerful point of our text, and it will set the stage for the affirmation of the effectiveness of Christ’s atoning death.

2. NEVERTHELESS DEATH REIGNED

“*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.*” The word “*nevertheless*” refers to the condition stated in the previous verse: “*but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*” Even though the period between Adam and Moses was not characterized by infractions of articulated law, still death dominated that time. This confirms that “*thou shalt surely die*” was passed to all of Adam’s offspring.

DEATH REIGNED

No person was able to reverse the Divine decree. “*Death reigned!*” with all

of his seeming wisdom, man could not remove the curse, reduce its effectiveness, or neutralize its power. “*Death reigned!*” Wherever man is found, death is found with him. Whether he is in isolation or in a society, death is reigning.

Here is the longest single period in human history. It is no less than 2,500 years long, comprising 42% of all time. It is 66% longer than the 1,500 years of the Law’s administration. It is 25% longer than the “*day of salvation*” to date(2000 A.D.).

Great civilizations were formed during this time. The Egyptian empire, Hammurabi, Babylonian empire in

Mesopotamia, Sumerian civilization, Phoenicians, Aegean civilization, Indus Valley civilizations, the Yang-shao and Lung-shan cultures (China), Danubian culture (central Europe), etc.

Legendary cities were built during this time. Troy, Athens, Stonehenge, Lagash, Ur, Tangier, and Sidon.

Remarkable skills were developed from Adam to Moses. Clay pottery, weight balances, writing, bronze implements, ships propelled by oars and sails, musical instruments, a 365 day calendar, mathematical systems, iron smelting, medical treatment, and glassmaking.

Yet, with all of these apparent advancements, “*death reigned from Adam to Moses,*” universally and without interruption. Death was like a monarch. As one has well said, “Under his dark and withering reign, people sank down to the grave.”^{Barnes} In his reference to death, Bildad the Shuhite referred to “*the king of terrors*” (Job 18:14). David referred to “*the terrors of death*” (Psa 55:4)—things

sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam,^{NASB} “*even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam,*^{NIV} “*even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam.*^{NRSV}

The point of the verse is NOT that death reigned over a SEGMENT of humanity whose sin was not like that of

THE FIGURE OF HIM

In saying Adam was “*the figure of Him that was to come,*” the Spirit introduces the Savior into the dialog. He is going to show to us the effectiveness of Christ’s vicarious atonement. Adam was not a figure of Christ in WHAT he did, **but in the IMPACT of his deed upon those who came from him.** He was not a “*figure*” in the sense of passing on blessing, or foreshadowing the good that the Savior would accomplish. Rather, as a federal head, Adam stood for all who sprang from him. By “*federal head,*” I mean the representative of all natural men, who bore his likeness, and participated in God’s dealings with him. He is the principal figure of natural men. As such, what happened to him was also brought upon all who are in him.

The phrase “*even over them*” refers to those living “*from Adam to Moses.*” All men were under the dominion of sin, even though sin was not the result of breaking laws given during that time. Death reigned because Adam sinned, and passed along that sinful nature to his progeny.

associated with the reign of death.

On the individual level, “*it is appointed unto man once to die*” (Heb 9:27). On the global level, “*death reigned from Adam to Moses.*” The fact is beyond all controversy! There was no culture from Adam to Moses that did not acknowledge the inevitability of death.

EVEN OVER THEM

The extensive of the curse is seen in the reign of death “*even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.*” Other versions read, “*those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam,*^{NKJV} “*even over those who had not*

Adam. Those who hold to the view that this is what the text means consider this to refer to infants. If that were the case, however, he would have said “*those who had not sinned,*” NOT “*those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam.*” The point of the text is that death reigned over EVERYONE from Adam to Moses, even though they had not broken a specific commandment.

The phrase “*even over them*” refers to those living “*from Adam to Moses.*” All men were under the dominion of sin, even though sin was not the result of breaking laws given during that time. Death reigned because Adam sinned, and passed along that sinful nature to his progeny.

At once, the flesh will remonstrate, saying this is not fair. But the flesh is wrong! This is a righteous way, for it was carried out by God Himself. That no unrighteousness is in the arrangement is confirmed by the domination of sin over the race of Adam, and the uncontested reign of death. Had it been possible to salvage a single person from Adam’s race, it would not have been written off in favor of a “*new creation.*” This will become more evident as we proceed through this passage.

The Spirit will confirm to us that our blessing is owing to a single Person, just as our cursing is traceable to one man. Life comes because of One just as surely as death reigned because of one. This is the principle lesson of this passage.

3. THE GIFT IS NOT LIKE THE OFFENSE

“¹⁵ ***But the free gift is not like the 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.***” Here the Spirit begins a comparison between the two federal heads, Adam and Christ Jesus. Adam is the head of the natural order, and Jesus of the spiritual one. Each one of them determines the destiny of all who spring from them. In both cases, the effects will be traced to a single deed. Cursing will result from one, and blessing

from the other. Further, the effects will spread to all of the posterity, excluding none of them.

Both Adam and Jesus, the “*first man*” and the “*Second Man,*” are uniquely responsible for the condition of their offspring. Their children are like them, bearing their likeness and the Divine assessment of them.

THE FREE GIFT

This is an explanation of the “*righteousness*” announced in the Gospel

of Christ “*a righteousness that is by faith from first to last*”^{NASB} (1:17). Notice with what care and God-honoring speech this righteousness is mentioned: “**free gift . . . the grace of God . . . the gift by grace . . . abounded unto many.**” Having proved the whole of humanity to be under the power of sin, their reclamation can only be accounted for by the grace of God and the work of Christ. Men could not correct their condition, but were actually locked into sin because of Adam. No person should stumble at this, for Scripture clearly teaches we were

“servants of sin” (Rom 6:16,17,20) and “free from righteousness” (3:20b). Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). That this excludes no natural person is confirmed by our text: “so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

IT IS NOT LIKE THE OFFENSE

The gift is singular, as was the offense. “**THE** offense” was Adam’s transgression, through which sin entered into the world. “**THE** free gift” is righteousness, which came because of the vicarious, or substitutionary death of Christ.

Within the framework of these gracious words, the Spirit will confirm that the effects of Christ’s death are more extensive and wide-sweeping than the effects of Adam’s transgression. What has resulted from the death of Jesus far transcends what resulted from the sin of Adam. By this He means Christ elevates us above the first state of Adam, bringing a greater and more precise likeness to God than was borne by Adam at the first.

BY ONE MAN’S OFFENSE

Here again, the ails of the human race are traced to a single deed by a single man: “one man’s offense.” Without appearing redundant, that offense was eating the fruit of the forbidden tree.

And what was the effect of that single deed? It is stated so as to accentuate the extensiveness of that effect: “**MANY** died.” By saying “many,” the text does not suggest there were some who did NOT die. Rather, this is a way of pointing out that Adam did not simply bear the curse himself. In a very real sense, he ate the sour grapes, and his children’s teeth were set on edge (Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2).

This is the ultimate generational curse! It dwarfs the Lord “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Num 14:18). This visitation was to all of Adam’s generation, without exception. “Many,” therefore, stands for all, and not for a portion.

“Many” frequently is used in the sense of all. Romans 6:3 refers to “as many of us as were baptized into Christ,” meaning ALL who were baptized into Him. Romans 8:14 says “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God,” meaning ALL who are so led. The word “many” pictures the multiplicity of fruit that comes from a single seed.

MUCH MORE! MUCH MORE!

If we cannot see the extensive effects of Adam’s sin, we will not be able to see the glorious impact of Christ’s death. The manner of the Kingdom—which

is ONE being the fountainhead for the many—is seen first in Adam, and then more precisely and extensively in Jesus.

Both the “*grace of God*” and “*the gift by grace*” have come to us from “*ONE man*.” The “*grace of God*” is His willingness and eagerness to bless us with salvation. “*The gift by grace*” is His own righteousness which He confers upon us. Neither of these can be experienced independently of the “*Second Man*” (1 Cor 15:47). If God does not deal with us through Christ, we are confined to the Adamic curse.

In Christ, both “*the grace of God*, and *the gift by grace*” ABOUND, or are ministered in copious supplies. The NIV reads, they “*overflow to the many!*” —and Christ is “*the Firstborn among MANY brethren*” (Rom 8:29). What they receive because of Him and through Him far exceeds the order of Adam. It reaches deeper and elevates higher. In Christ there is greater measure and greater certainty than ever there was in Adam.

The people of God must seek deliverance from small and minuscule thoughts of God and His great salvation. What we have in Christ is “*abounding*.” It is given in abundant measures, and increases exponentially like the waters that gushed from the wilderness rock. Ours is a “*much more*” salvation!

4. THE GIFT IS NOT LIKE THE RESULT OF THE OFFENSE

“*16 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.*”

Again, “*the gift*” is “*the gift of righteousness*” (5:17), which is the theme of this passage. While there are similarities between Adam and Christ, there are also enormous differences. The likeness is seen in one standing for the many. The difference is in the nature of what is passed to their offspring.

Notice how the Spirit continues to take us back to the source of the curse:

“*ONE who sinned.*” Try as you may, you can only come up with two men in this text: Adam and Jesus. The clear teaching is that God deals with all men upon the basis of one man—whether Adam or Jesus.

THE JUDGMENT

Here, the entrance of sin and death into the world is called “*the judgment.*” Simply stated, “*the judgment*” was that rebellious man would not be received by God, and could not live in His presence. Further, because of these conditions, death was passed upon him, and he was condemned!

Do not miss the power of this statement. It reveals the nature of God, and the nature of sin as well. “*The*

judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation.”^{NASB} Do you wonder about the magnitude of sin? In this verse do you not see how reprehensible it is? “*One single offence brought condemnation!*”^{NJB}

Adam’s single sin did not bring a rebuke, but condemnation! It did not bring a mere reprimand, but condemnation! The previous verse showed us that all of the effects of sin flowed from a single man. **This verse confirms the consequence of condemnation came from a single deed!** At its root, the lostness of the human race is traceable to the single transgression of a single man.

THE FREE GIFT

There is a slight change in the reasoning of the Spirit here. The Spirit does not say the free gift came from Christ's death, as compared with Adam's transgression. Instead, He says *"the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification."*^{NASB} The idea is that the free gift removed the *"many transgressions"*.

The *"gift of righteousness"* undoes the effects of sin, causing men to stand pure and acceptable before the Lord whom they had offended. Thus, they are no longer condemned.

When God took the sins of the world—the *"many transgressions"*—and placed them upon the Son, the result was *"justification,"* or the imputation of righteousness, upon all who believe (3:22). That single deed had more far-reaching effects than the sin of Adam. This will be confirmed with unusual power.

You see, then, the superior work wrought through Jesus Christ, the *"Second Man."* **In Adam, God started with a single sin, and condemned the whole of humanity. In Christ, He started with many transgressions**

and justified all who are in Him!

CONCLUSION

The sin of Adam was like a spiritual virus injected into the spiritual bloodstream of humanity. It produced a flood-tide of sin which quantitatively far exceeded the transgression of Adam. The wisdom of God is seen in Him taking those many offenses—all flowing from a single transgression—and through them bringing about the reconciliation of fallen man. Just as surely as all who are in Adam die, all who are in the Son will be freed from both sin and death!

5. THE REIGN OF DEATH AND THE REIGN OF LIFE

"¹⁷ 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."

The reign of death is traced to one man—Adam. The reign of *"the gift of righteousness"* is traced to one Man—Jesus Christ. Men die because of Adam. They live in a state of righteousness because of Christ. Two men, and only two, determine the ultimate state and destiny of all men!

By nature, all men are the offspring of Adam. Regardless of their attainments, death *"reigns"* over them because of that association. They are *"made sinners"* because of that relationship. They are in a state of *"condemnation"* because of that connection. These are the unwavering declarations of our text.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

We MUST see that whatever does not come from Christ ultimately is traced back to Adam, brings condemnation, and promotes sin. I understand these are strong words, yet they must be said. Much of today's religion is more related to Adam than to Jesus. It is more natural than spiritual. At some point, the individual must rely completely upon Jesus Christ

and His atoning death, else its benefits will not pass to him.

Although I have said this before, it bears repeating. **God has written off**

development of a vicarious atonement as the basis for conferring righteousness upon those who have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The Spirit keeps taking us back to Adam and his single recorded sin. He reaffirms that the human condition is owing to a single individual and a single transgression. *"By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man."*^{NIV} It was the single sin of Adam that enabled sin to reign over all men! You will rarely hear this truth affirmed in our day—or any other, for that matter. It so contradicts the wisdom of men that they will not take these words into their mouths. Notwithstanding, this is the truth. To refuse to declare it is to cause the mist of ignorance to descend upon men, robbing their hearts of the joy of salvation and the confidence and assurance that can be possessed.

This is true because the powerful effects of Christ's death are only as clear to us as the pervasive impact of Adam's sin are seen.

MUCH MORE THOSE . . .

Here we make the transition from Adam to his offspring who *"receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness."* Here another difference is seen between the offspring of Adam and those of Christ. Adam's children had the

By nature, all men are the offspring of Adam. Regardless of their attainments, death "reigns" over them because of that association. They are "made sinners" because of that relationship. They are in a state of "condemnation" because of that connection.

Adam and the natural man. He has declared no good to be in them. Whatever has its genesis in Adam or nature has been rejected by God, regardless of its seeming worth. Only those created anew in Christ are acceptable, and a *"a new heavens and a new earth"* are a suitable habitat for all who are a *"new creation"* (2 Cor 5:17). The comprehension of this by faith will quickly resolve many difficulties and assist all, from the least to the greatest, in developing a proper focus.

ONE MAN'S OFFENSE

Remember, we are beholding the

sentence of death passed upon them independently of their sin. They did not “receive” the sentence, but had it imposed upon them. They do not have sinful natures because they chose to have them, but because, by virtue of their relation to Adam, they were born with them.

Those who come from Christ, however, are quite different. They possess what they have “received.” It has not been imposed upon them, but they have received it by faith. Notice how refreshingly this is stated. “Those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness.”^{NIV} In general, they receive God’s loving favor, coming into the area of blessing. In specific, they receive His “gift of righteousness,” whereby their sins are covered and His own righteousness is imputed unto them.

And what can be said of these people? What effect does grace and the

gift of righteousness have upon them? How does it compare with what they received from Adam?

On a scale more grand and expansive than what they were in Adam, they “exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”^{NRSV} Rather than being a slave, they become “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:5-6). **They reign over the very lusts that once reigned over them!** Once death reigned, now they reign! Death belongs to them (1 Cor 3:22), and cannot separate them from “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39). There is a note of triumph in their life.

Now death is a blessing to them, for “Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them’” (Rev 14:13). Although it is an enemy, it is their “last enemy,” and they will soon mock it shouting, “O

death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor 15:55).

In the meantime, life belongs to them, and they reign in it. Whether “Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—” everything belongs to them, and they belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God (1 Cor 3:22). In a kingly act, they refuse to let “sin reign” in their “mortal body” (Rom 6:12). As princes, they buffet their bodies and bring them into subjection (1 Cor 9:27).

And how is it that such a “reign in life” is realized? It is NOT because of disciplined habits, or learned conduct. It is not because they follow a manual of conduct, or adhere to certain fleshly regimens. No! They “reign in life by one, Jesus Christ!” Their triumph in life is traceable to “one Man.” Their victory in its totality is owing to Him! Remove Him, and they have nothing.

END OF PARENTHETICAL PARAGRAPH

ONE MAN EFFECTS ALL MEN

“¹⁸ 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.” The Spirit now returns to the argument at hand, showing the effects of Christ’s vicarious atonement. In verses 14-17, the Spirit has emphasized the **PERSON OF CHRIST**, as compared with the person of Adam. He has referred to the Savior as “Him that was to come” (v 14), “one man Jesus Christ” (v 15), the One to whom “many offences” were imputed (v 16), and “one, Jesus Christ” (v 17). Now, the Spirit will shine the light upon Christ’s death, showing what marvelous effects have come from it.

men, they also are brought to two acts, or deeds. One was wrought in a garden, and the other on a hill, the place of the skull. One was done out of self interest, the other in the interest of others. One was the result of yielding to temptation, the

- ▶ **Canaan, Noah’s son.** When Noah’s younger son looked upon his nakedness, he incurred a curse for himself and his descendants (Gen 9:25).
- ▶ **The people of Meroz.** Because they did not come to the help of God’s people, the inhabitants of Meroz were cursed (Judges 5:23).
- ▶ **Gehazi, servant of Elisha.** When Gehazi was covetous, taking a reward from Naaman which was rejected by the prophet, God placed the leprosy of Naaman upon Gehazi and his seed forever (2 Kgs 5:27).
- ▶ **Achan, who coveted the cursed thing.** When Achan coveted and took what God had cursed, Israel lost a key battle, and his entire family suffered death with him (Josh 7:1-24).
- ▶ **Abraham.** Because Abraham obeyed God, hearkening to His voice, all nations of the earth were blessed in his Seed (Gen 22:18).
- ▶ **The Passover.** During the Passover and consequent exodus from Egypt, the

Not only does the condition and destiny of all men narrow down to two men, they also are brought to two acts, or deeds. One was wrought in a garden, and the other on a hill, the place of the skull.

other to a commandment from God.

One Can Effect Many

A single deed can have sweeping effects upon other people. Some lesser deeds that come to mind are as follows.

ONE MAN’S OFFENSE VERSUS ONE MAN’S RIGHTEOUS ACT

Not only does the condition and destiny of all men narrow down to two

people were spared from Divine judgment because of the blood of that sacrifice (Ex 12:27).

What we are considering, therefore, is not a strange teaching. The principle of one being the fountain of either cursing or blessing is found throughout scripture.

A SINGLE OFFENSE

Because this is so contradicting of the wisdom of the world, the Spirit places great stress upon it. Whenever such an emphasis is found in Scripture, the truth expounded is always a key to the opening of large vistas of Kingdom reality.

Think of it! What is described in Genesis in these words, “she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen 3:6), is here called “the offense of one,^{2KJV} or “one man’s trespass,^{2NKJV} or “one transgression,^{2NASB} or “one trespass.^{2NIV} One time, one man, one sin! And what was the result of that dreadful moment, for it was not an extended period like the building of Babel, or the corruption of Sodom.

“Judgment Came!”

Here is what happened, and our hearts must take these words in. “Judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation.^{2NKJV} Other versions read, “there resulted condemnation to all men,^{2NASB} “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men,^{2NIV} “one sin brought condemnation upon everyone.^{2NLT}

Everyone was condemned because of “one transgression!” From this fact we learn of the malignancy of sin, God’s utter

hatred of it, and the impotency of men to stop the spread of sin once it has entered. If men are unable to behold sin in themselves, they ought to consider that condemnation has come to them because of Adam’s sin—“one sin.” To be sure, Adam’s nature is in them, and they have sinned also. But if they cannot see that yet, they are in a state of condemnation by

act of obedience, just as Adam’s act was the premier act of disobedience.

“Justification of Life”

What a difference there is between the effects of Adam’s “offense” and Christ’s “righteous act!” The phrase “justification of life” means acquittal that results in life—spiritual life. Adam’s

One vicarious sacrifice became the basis for the conferment of righteousness and life upon all who believe. If the Father has such a high regard for the death of His Son, He will surely bless those who hear the record He has given of His Son, and embrace it heartily by faith!

virtue of their identity with Adam! His sin resulted in “condemnation for all men!”

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ONE

Now the Spirit powerfully affirms the reality and effectiveness of Christ’s vicarious atonement. “Even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” The “righteousness” which He mentions is not the sinless life of Christ, but the righteous deed He accomplished when He died. Thus other versions read, “through one Man’s righteous act,^{2NKJV} “even so through one act of righteousness,^{2NASB} and “the result of one act of righteousness.^{2NIV}

This is the “act” formerly declared in this chapter. “Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6), “Christ died for us” (5:8), “the death of His Son” (5:10). That single deed is the basis for the undoing of all Adam brought upon us. It is the premier

transgression introduced sin into the world. Christ’s righteous deed brought exoneration from sin. Adam’s sin brought death, Christ’s righteous act brings life.

Other versions read, “leads to justification and life for all,^{2NSRV} “justification that brings life for all men,^{2NIV} “leads to acquittal and life for all men.^{2RSV} The idea is that once our sin was put away, we became alive and sensitive to the God from whom we were estranged by sin. Where once there was death and a lack of response, now there is life and an acute sensitivity to, and love for, God. And it is all because of “one righteous act” accomplished by the Redeemer! One vicarious sacrifice became the basis for the conferment of righteousness and life upon all who believe. If the Father has such a high regard for the death of His Son, He will surely bless those who hear the record He has given of His Son, and embrace it heartily by faith!

DISOBEDIENCE AND OBEDIENCE

“¹⁹ For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” The Spirit has not yet finished with establishing this truth to our hearts. He has traced our sinfulness and dead condition to one man. He has traced our release from sin and our triumph in life to one Man. Our condemnation is traced to a single deed committed by a single man. Our release

from condemnation to the condition of being alive unto God is traced to a single act of righteousness. Now the Spirit drives the point even deeper into our heart.

ONE MAN’S DISOBEDIENCE

Fix In your mind how the Spirit speaks of the entrance of sin. What appears rather simplistic in Genesis is seen as much more complicated in Romans. The Gospel has not only brought “life and immortality to light” (2 Tim

1:10), it has opened to us the magnitude of sin as well. As it is written, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one 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 is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness”

From heaven’s point of view (which is the true view), there are only Two Men. Everything hinges on them--by Given O. Blakely

(Rom 1:16-18).

Here, Adam's sin in the garden is called "*one man's disobedience*." One man disobeyed God! The reference is not to a life of disobedience, as lived by Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 2:22). It is again to a single act committed at a point in time. Adam's "*disobedience*" occurred when he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree!

We know very little about the life of Adam, even though he lived for nine hundred and thirty years.

- ▶ He gave names to all cattle, birds, and every beast of the field (Gen 2:20).
- ▶ He received a wife from God and called her "Woman" and "Eve" (Gen 2:23; 3:20).
- ▶ He begat Cain, Abel, Seth, and many sons and daughters (Gen 4:1-2,25; 5:4).
- ▶ He lived 930 years and died (Gen 5:5).

The thing for which Adam is noted in this text is his "*disobedience*." That is the thing that most impacted our race!

MANY WERE MADE SINNERS

The result of "*one man's disobedience*" was devastating. It is of such a remarkable nature that theologians still have a difficult time with the affirmation. This was not the result of the "*disobedience*" of a family, or a city, or a nation, or even a world. It was the result of "*one man's disobedience*."

Here is the revealed result of Adam's "*disobedience*." "*Many were MADE SINNERS*." Nearly every version of the Scripture reads the same. Some alternate readings are, "*the many have been constituted sinners*,"^{BBE} and "*many people became sinners*."^{NLT}

Why are people sinners? Some will respond, "Because they sin, for sinning is what makes people sinners." But that is not what the Spirit says in this text. **He affirms they are sinners because of the "*disobedience*" of Adam.**

By affirming we have been "*made sinners*," the Lord removes any temptation for men to claim innocence.

God did not make men sinners judicially. That is, He did not simply pronounce them sinners. By virtue of Adam's federal headship, and because all of his offspring partake of his nature, "*many were MADE sinners*." While it may appear but a technical point, it is necessary to strongly affirm it. **Men are not sinners because they sin, but sin because they are sinners.** They were "*made sinners*" because of "*one man's disobedience*," not

Here, Adam's sin in the garden is called "*one man's disobedience*." One man disobeyed God! The reference is not to a life of disobedience, as lived by Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 2:22). It is again to a single act committed at a point in time. Adam's "*disobedience*" occurred when he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree!

because of their many acts of disobedience.

The Adam-nature, shared by everyone that comes into the world, is a corrupted nature. Knowing this, David confessed, "*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me*"^{NIV} (Psa 51:5). Speaking of all men, the Psalmist also says, "*Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies*"^{NIV} (Psa 58:3). Job was correct when he lamented, "*Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!*"^{NIV} (Job 14:4). Later, Paul would say we were "*by nature children of wrath*" (Eph 2:3).

All of this is affirmed in our text, and that with great power. "*By one man's disobedience many were made sinners.*"

THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE

All of the preceding statements are leading up to this grand announcement—the effects of a vicarious atonement. "*So also by one Man's*

obedience many will be made righteous."^{NKJV} The New Living Translation reads, "*But because One other Person obeyed God, many people will be made right in God's sight.*"

What is the "*obedience*" to which our text refers? Although Jesus did "*always those things*" that pleased the Father (John 8:29), that is not the "*obedience*" of reference. Even though our blessed Lord did "*nothing*" of Himself, but spoke only as His Father had "*taught*" Him (John 8:28), that is not the "*obedience*" mentioned here. Jesus did nothing of His own accord, but only what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). Still, that is not the "*obedience*" to which the Spirit refers. In all of the above reference many words and deeds were covered. But our text speaks of a single act of obedience—one righteous act!

It is the death of Christ that is called "*the obedience*." Like Adam received one commandment, there was a sense in which Jesus also received a single commandment. He put it this way, "*Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father*"^{NKJV} (John 10:17-18).

Paul also mentioned this singular act of obedience in his remarkable exposition of what was involved in Jesus coming into the world. "*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*" (Phil 2:8). Jesus laying down His life in the death of the cross, therefore, is the "*obedience of One Man*."

MANY WERE MADE RIGHTEOUS

Just as the one act of disobedience in Adam constituted all men sinners, one act of obedience by Jesus constituted many men righteous. That is the express statement of our text: "*so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*"^{NRSV} You must exercise your faith to take hold of this truth.

This very truth is strongly affirmed in the fifth chapter of Second Corinthians. Here again is a remarkable statement of justification. *“For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Cor 5:21). The NIV reads, *“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

The point is strong here, and must be reaffirmed. **As needful as our obedience is., we are not made righteous by our obedience, but by the obedience of Christ!** Further, it was not Christ’s obedience to the law that made us righteous, but His obedience

“unto death, even the death of the cross.” If Jesus had not died, bearing our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24), His sinless life would have carried no significance for us. We would have remained sinners by virtue of our descent from Adam, and personal involvement in sin as well.

Our *“faith in His blood”* (Rom 3:25) brings the imputation of righteousness to us from God! When we believe what God has declared of His Son, He is kindly disposed to make us righteous by giving us His own righteousness.

For those who feel this minimizes the necessity of obedience on our part, the following should be considered. Our text

says that through the *“obedience of One”* we are made righteous. With a thorough familiarity with *“the deep things of God,”* and total expertise in expressing the truth precisely and with power, this is how the Spirit declared the matter. We do well to forthwith abandon any view of Scripture that does not permit us to speak in words *“taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”*^{NASB} (1 Cor 2:13).

I have a growing discontent with powerless teaching that insists on neutering the text of Scripture by pressing it through the colander of the wisdom of men. It is always best to say it like the Spirit did. Our text is surely one that must be so approached.

ABOUNDING OFFENSE AND ABOUNDING GRACE

“²⁰ Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more . . .” Here the Spirit takes up the matter of sin being in then world before the Law. He is going to show us that the Law *“entered”* to accentuate the reality and wickedness of sin, causing it to *“abound.”* Remember, from Adam to Moses, *“sin was in the world.”* It was not, however viewed within the structure of a moral code. Men were constituted sinners because Adam disobeyed God. Nevertheless, they were really sinners, and the Law would show that to be the case.

THE LAW ENTERED

There came a point in time when *“the Law”* came into the world. This entrance is described in a number of ways. From one perspective, *“the law was given through Moses”* (John 1:17). From another view, *“it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator”* (Gal 3:19b). From yet another, the law *“was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come”* (Gal 3:19a). The entrance of the Law was a hallmark in human history.

THAT THE OFFENSE MIGHT ABOUND

Contrary to the ideas of some, the Law was not given to enable men to

become righteous. It was not intended to correct the human condition. Our text plainly states it *“entered that the offence might abound,”*^{KJV} or *“that the transgression might increase,”*^{NASB} or *“to multiply the offences.”*^{NJB}

provoked to even more sin through God’s holy law. Sin had brought hostility toward God as well as alienation from Him. Thus, in his most excellent treatise of the ministry of the Law, Paul confessed his own experience. *“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died”*^{NIV} (Rom 7:8-9).

Thus sin burst from its banks, flooding into the whole of life in unprecedented levels because of the Law. The Israelites, for example, which were not noted for indulgence and fornication in Egypt (at least not according to the record), broke over the boundary of morality at the very foot of Mount Sinai. They were naked, worshiped an idol, danced, drank, and indulged in revelry (Ex 32:19-25; 1 Cor 10:7). All of this occurred with the arresting sound of the Law still in their ears. Sin had become *“exceeding sinful!”* Or, in the words of our text, *“the transgression increased.”*

To sensitive souls, who did not practice such corruption, their hearts became more sensitive to the sin they had.

Here the Spirit takes up the matter of sin being in then world before the Law. He is going to show us that the Law *“entered”* to accentuate the reality and wickedness of sin, causing it to *“abound.”*

How is it that *“the offense”* was caused to *“abound”* by the entrance of the Law? There are, in my judgment, at least two ways in which this took place.

- ▶ FIRST, the perverse nature of sin, which already existed, was seen more clearly. In this sense, that very sin *“by the commandment might become exceeding sinful”* (Rom 7:13). Thus, the dreadful plight of the sinner became more apparent, whetting a desire for deliverance from sin.
- ▶ SECOND, man’s corrupt nature, received from his father Adam, was

Under the bludgeon of the law, like David, they would cry out, *“O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great”* (Psa 25:11). *“My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away”* (Psa 31:10). *“Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest”* (Psa 51:2-4).

Thus, the *“offense”* abounded, and the transgression increased. The Law, then, was most effective in its work. It entered to cause the transgression to increase, and increase it did—both in perception and in quantity! **In this, God’s assessment of humanity was confirmed to be true, and thus He was justified.**

WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE ABOUNDED MUCH MORE

The increase of sin, however, was not the end of the matter. As great as sin is, grace is greater! The capacity for sin to increase is significant, but the capacity of grace to proliferate is more significant! *“But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”*^{NASB} *“But where there was much sin, there was much more grace.”*^{BBE} *“But however much sin increased, grace was always greater.”*^{NJB}

There are at least three ways to view this text, and all of them are certainly true.

FIRST, as sin abounded in the first

man Adam, so grace abounded even more in the second man Jesus. More grace was in him than sin was in Adam. Thus, the *“second man”* far exceeds the *“first man”* in every way. Jesus was *“full of grace and truth,”* proving the superiority of both (John 1;14).

SECOND, grace was able to reach into the depths and retrieve man from sin and degradation, then set him in the heavenly places in Christ—higher than Adam was in all of his innocence. Grace can take the same powers blasted by sin, restore and fill them with the Divine nature. It can regenerate an unregenerate, lift the fallen, and raise the dead to everlasting life. The worse the condition, the more adequate grace becomes.

THIRD, the effects of Christ’s obedience far transcend the effects of Adam’s disobedience. Christ’s one act of righteousness has produced much more than Adam’s single offense. What Christ’s death has accomplished has wrought a multitude of benefits in a multitude of people that has superabounded over the trespass of Adam.

If you are able to receive it, the more readily sin is seen in truth, the greater and more effective the grace of God becomes. Thus, in this great salvation, sin itself works against the old

serpent. The Law identified it, causing it to spring forth in its real nature. But then the Gospel comes, proclaiming with power the grace of God who can not only eradicate the guilt of sin, but also impute His righteousness to the person once enslaved to sin. Then it also brings an eternal inheritance, reserving it in heaven for us. All the while, we are *“kept by the power of God through faith”* until the appointed time, when we will have an abundant entrance ministered to us into the everlasting Kingdom.

In every way, grace has abounded over and exceeded sin, enormous though it was. In every way, Jesus has outdone

If you are able to receive it, the more readily sin is seen in truth, the greater and more effective the grace of God becomes. Thus, in this great salvation, sin itself works against the old serpent.

Adam. In every way, grace has proved more effective than sin. What sin has done, grace has done much more. Whatever Adam has brought, Jesus has brought more. Thank God for His grace! Obedience has out-shined disobedience.

THE REIGN OF DEATH AND THE REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Everyone is under the reign of someone or something. Either Satan rules men or Jesus Christ does. Either sin reigns in death, or grace reigns through righteousness. These contrary reigns cannot take place simultaneously. Men are governed by either Satan or Christ, but not by both. Sin or grace rules them,

but never at the same time!

SO THAT . . .

This is an explanation of **WHY** grace abounds *“much more”* where sin abounds or increases. Everything God does is for a *“cause”* (Ezek 14:23). **The reason for grace abounding is that it might exercise the dominion.** Ordinarily, men do not think of grace as a ruling or governing factor. They tend to think of it in terms of tenderness. **While**

God’s grace is tender and gentle with wounded sinners, it has a nature that rules.

SIN REIGNED IN DEATH

Sin reigns in an environment of death. Wherever there is separation from God, insensitivity to His Person and will—wherever men do not have eyes to see and ears to hear—sin is ruling. When men were severed from God, sin got up on the throne and began its ruthless rule.

Wherever dull and spiritually listless souls are found, sin is governing the individual. There are no exceptions to this rule, for sin reigns *“in death.”* That is the habitat in which it flourishes.

Sin and death are wed together, and work together. Those who are gripped with the *“fear of death,”* for example, are, by virtue of that condition, in bondage. As it is written, *“who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Heb 2:15).

GRACE REIGNS THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS

When grace abounds, however, it changes the entire situation. Death is no longer the environment in which the believer is found. Because of that, sin can no longer reign, for sin and life cannot mingle.

Grace reigns *“through righteousness,”* or justification.^{NRSV} That is, when the individual is aware of his acceptance by God, and knows his name is written in heaven, grace takes the throne of life, exercising a beneficent rule. This righteousness is what is imputed to us. It is the righteousness that comes from God by faith in Christ Jesus. It is the

righteousness announced in the Gospel, and procured by the vicarious death of the Son of God.

Stated another way, when we are in right standing with God, His favor rules over us, subduing our enemies and lifting us up to higher realms. His grace effectively teaches us to *“to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”* (Tit 2:12). Empowered by the Holy spirit, we refuse to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies (Rom 6:12). Rather than yielding to the *“deeds of the body,”* they are *“mortified”* under the capable leadership of the Spirit (Rom 8:13). Thus grace reigns within the environment of imputed righteousness, empowering us to maintain a heavenly stance in a condemned world.

TO ETERNAL LIFE

There is an objective to the reign of grace. It is not simply to cause us to live acceptably in this world. That is a requirement, to be sure. But it is a means to an end, and not the end of itself.

The real aim is to obtain *“eternal life.”* That is *“the promise that He hath promised”* (1 John 2:25), the sum of

Divine commitment. While we have eternal life now, it is only in the first fruit sense. The bulk of it is yet to come. Thus we are admonished, *“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Tim 6:12). Such a fight is a kingly one. The objective is to know we have eternal life now (1 John 5:13), and enter into the fulness of it at the appearing of the Lord Jesus. And how will such a condition be achieved? It is by grace reigning through righteousness. It is by our sins being removed from us, God’s righteousness imputed to us, and the knowledge of both being realized through faith.

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Sin has so infected and affected men that they can make absolutely no progress toward God without Christ. But men must not despair because of this situation. Rather, they must take hope, for Christ has already confirmed His willingness to *“bring us to God”* (1 Pet 3:18). God has received His sacrifice, and exalted Him to His own right hand in order to *“bring many sons to glory”* (Heb 2:10). Every child of God has good reason to be optimistic about being fully equal to the challenges of life in this present evil world, and fully prepared for a future with the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Try as you may, you cannot find more than two men in the passage we have covered. The condition of all men is traced to these two men: Adam, the first man, and Jesus, the Second Man. Both stand for all those who come from them, and are the cause for their condition. The establishment of this reality is more than a mere doctrinal treatise—although it is surely one of the premier examples of *“sound doctrine.”* The truth that has been effectively expounded is that of the vicarious death of Jesus. Not only has *“One died for all,”* He becomes the basis for the conferment of the blessing of God.

Ponder the marvels of what has been revealed in this section of Scripture. Behold the effects of the first and Second man, the *“first man Adam and the last Adam”* (1 Cor 15:45,47). See how extensive and effective they are!

ADAM	JESUS CHRIST
Sin entered the world	Grace entered the world
Death entered the world	Life entered the world
Committed an offense	Brought a free gift
Many are dead	Grace and gift abound
One that sinned	The free gift
Judgment to condemnation	Many offenses to justification
Death reigned by one	We reign in life by One
All men condemned	Justification and life
Disobedience made many sinners	Obedience made many righteous

Although men may boast of their independence, it is only an imagination. What we are by nature is traced to Adam, and what we are by grace is traced to Christ Jesus.

The reason for Christ’s atoning death is seen more clearly in view of these things. Because the fall of humanity came through one man, the rescue of humanity must also come from one Man. A Champion had to come that could assume all of the liabilities of mankind, absorb the full brunt of Divine wrath, and come back to rule from heaven.

Jesus is truly *“the Firstborn of the new creation.”* He has set the tone for the children of God. He is not a mere pattern to be emulated, any more than Adam was as example to be followed. By virtue of being the federal head of a new creation, all who are in Him partake of His nature. They are blessed by God because of Christ, and not because of their personal achievements.

Two men. Both are effective in what

they have passed on to their constituency. Both are the patterns of those who follow them. The first man brought in sin, death, and all of the dreadful things associated with them. The Second Man brought in righteousness and life, and all of the blessed things associated with them.

The environment brought about by the first man was death. Within that framework, no good could be produced, and no one could become righteous. It was a hopeless situation that could only be resolved by God making "all things new." To this day, death cannot produce anything acceptable to God. There must

be life, response, sensitivity, and alertness to walk with God. One must have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Where life is not found, Adam is the prominent one. In such a condition, the individual is not accepted, and all effort is futile. If what we have can be traced back to Adam, it is unacceptable, for the whole Adamic order has been rejected. A remake is required.

Where life IS found, Christ is the prominent one. He is the One behind the life, and the Reason the life has been conferred. God has blessed the individual

because of Christ. It is His obedience that has brought the blessing of righteousness, and His act of righteousness that has lifted us up on the eagle's wing.

All men are sinners by virtue of who they are, not what they have done. They were "made sinners" by the offense of Adam, and sin because of that. This by no means excuses what sinners do. It rather explains their conduct, and confirms their need of a Savior.

God is greatly to be praised for such a marvelous arrangement. His salvation provides for the rescue of all sinners.



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 19



DEAD TO SIN, ALIVE TO GOD

^{6:1} What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ 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. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ 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. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 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. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. – Romans 6:1-14 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Because men are prone to be merely speculative and philosophical in their religion, the Spirit will elaborate on the impact of justification upon human conduct. When righteousness is imputed to us through faith, it has an immediate effect upon our persons. Both thought and deed are influenced by the imputation of righteousness. However, this is not automatic: i.e., it does not occur without the conscious involvement of the

individual.

THE REALITY OF THE NEW BIRTH

The new birth is very real. The stony unreceptive heart is actually removed, and a new and pliable heart is given (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). The “laws” of God are “put” into the mind and “written” upon the heart (Heb 8:10). Showing the thoroughness of this Divine work, it is also stated conversely. “I will **put** my laws

into their hearts, and in their minds will I **write** them” (Heb 10:16). This is another way of describing the change that takes place when a person is born again, justified, or made righteous. A certain accord is created within the redeemed in which they participate in the Divine nature, brought into harmony with God.

A very real peace is realized between the justified one and the Justifier. There

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. DO YOU KNOW? (6:1)
- II. WHAT SHALL WE SAY? (6:2-3)
- III. BURIED AND RAISED WITH CHRIST (6:4)
- III. UNITED WITH CHRIST IN DEATH AND RESURRECTION (6:5)
- IV. THE OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED (6:6)
- V. DEAD AND FREED FROM SIN (6:7)
- VI. WHAT WE BELIEVE (6:8)
- VII. DEATH IS ONCE (6:9)
- VIII. RECKONING AND HOW TO DO IT (6:11)
- IX. DO NOT LET SIN REIGN (6:12)
- X. WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR MEMBERS (6:13)
- XI. THE IMPACT OF GRACE UPON SINNING (6:14)

is an undeniable sharing of the Divine nature, and a cleansing of the conscience from the guilt of sin. The change that takes place is not metaphorical. It is not theoretical or idealistic. However, neither is it mature, or fully developed.

AT FIRST

At first, our new life is more

intuitive than cognitive; more instinctive than intellectual or thoughtful. The “newborn babe” in Christ is not able to fully explain the change that has taken place in him, or satisfactorily interpret why his preferences have changed. The new believer is much like the blind man who was healed. He could not explain all of the ramifications of his healing, but could only say, “*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see*” (John 9:25).

In a sense, in the beginning of our new life, feeling or disposition, is more advanced than the mind. Although we expect “*new born babes*” to be changed, have new appetites, and be determined to advance, we should not expect them to be articulate about their justification and its effects.

Because of this circumstance babes in Christ speak more in terms of “This is what I think,” than with sound spiritual reasoning and Scriptural concepts. But this is not intended to be a permanent situation.

JUVENILITY MAKES VULNERABLE

Furthermore, true confidence and assurance cannot be brought to maturity while remaining in this spiritually juvenile state. Satan directs a flood of

erroneous teaching toward such souls, seeking to dislodge them from the moorings of their faith. This inundation of error is so massive and powerful there is little hope of surviving it unless the individual grows up into Christ (Eph 4:15). In Christ Jesus, growth, or going “*on to perfection*” (Heb 6:1-3) is a necessity, not a luxury or casual option.

WHAT OUR TEXT WILL SHOW

Our text will show how justification changes our entire circumstance. It will reveal how unreasonable sin is because of where we are and the power that surrounds us. With unusual power, the Spirit will declare that we have been identified with Christ in every aspect of the Gospel: Christ’s death, His burial, and His resurrection. He will further relate this participation with a point that can easily be identified. Like the stones that were stacked in Jordan to testify of the crossing of Israel, so the Holy Spirit will erect an unforgettable memorial to our participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

In doing this, allowance is made for the development of a hearty faith and a strong confidence in the believer. In Jesus we have really died and really been raised. The effects of that death and resurrection are equally real.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

^{6:1} *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*” As I have said before, it is the manner of the Spirit to lead us into a thoughtful frame of mind. He is not content for us to be dominated by mere excitement or be placed under the control of inferior feelings. As is characteristic of the Spirit, He will ask the questions before He gives the answers (Rom 3:5; 4:1,3; 7:7; 9:14,30; 11:4; Gal 4:30). There is a reason for this approach. Because believers have the laws of God written upon their hearts and put into their minds, the answer of the Spirit will be more a confirmation than a revelation. He so instructs us, enabling us to be able to recognize the answer, as opposed to merely memorizing it or giving it by rote.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY THEN?

The statement we are to consider more deeply is this: “*That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*” (5:21). The reign of grace is now to be considered – the reign of grace within us. This reign is as real as the reign of death! Its effects are as pronounced as those of death’s rule. In fact, they are even of a greater magnitude. “**MUCH MORE, we shall be saved from wrath**” through Jesus (5:9). “**MUCH MORE, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life**” (5:10). “**MUCH MORE the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many**” (5:15). “**MUCH MORE they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one,**

Jesus Christ” (5:17). “*But where sin abounded, grace did **MUCH MORE** abound*” (5:20).

What will we say in regards to this great salvation? How will we relate it to our daily lives? Have we really entered into a new dimension of living? Are we still vassals of Satan, or can we expect to turn the tables on him, living no longer in sin and disobedience? Are we to expect that God’s grace is given to us without causing newness of life? Are we to expect nothing new to transpire within us when we experience the remission of sin and the consequent imputation of righteousness?

SHALL WE CONTINUE IN SIN?

The flesh will reason that we should continue in sin. If grace abounds “*much more*” when sin abounds, then, flesh

reasons, the more we sin, the more grace we receive.

This is the logic of the flesh, not its precise words. Men might reason in these words. "No matter how often I sin, the Lord always forgives me." Or, "Even when I forsake Him, He never forsakes me." Or, "No matter what I do, or how deeply I fall into sin, the Lord will bring me back, because He loves me."

But all such reasoning is foolish, and unbecoming of those who have been justified. **If the reason for justification is to rid us of sin, the grace that effects justification can certainly not promote sin or excuse its presence.**

A continuance in sin is a denial of the grace of God. It evidences a refusal to be taught by grace to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts," and live "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit 2:11-12). The grace of God, when received, will not allow the individual to persist in sin. One may concoct a doctrine that affirms no sin or deviation from the truth can cause a person to fall away from grace. But that foolish affirmation does not make it so. In fact, a fall from grace can be effected by resorting to a system of Law to be justified. As it is written, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal 5:4). How much more is this true of the one who continues to **transgress** that law?

It might appear strange that such reasoning is introduced, for rarely will you hear someone put forth an argument like this. The Spirit, however, is not referring to a specific argument of the flesh, but to the **manner** in which the flesh reasons. It leads a person to continue to sin in the expectation of receiving grace and repeated forgiveness.

But this reason is flawed to the core. Sin is not the cause of grace. **Rather, it is the cause of Divine wrath and indignation!** Is it not written, "for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of

disobedience" (Eph 5:6; Col 3:6). **Grace comes to us because of what Jesus has done, not because of our sins!**

CERTAINLY NOT!

"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." The KJV reads, "God forbid!" While this is not technically a good translation, it is a good one spiritually. It means God has not allowed for any such conclusion. Other translations read, "God forbid," ^{KJV,ASV,} Douay-Rheims "By no means," ^{NIB,Websters} "Far

If the reason for justification is to rid us of sin, the grace that effects justification can certainly not promote sin or excuse its presence.

be the thought," ^{Darby} "In no way," ^{BBE} "Let it not be!" ^{Youngs} "Of course not," ^{NLT} and "Out of the question." ^{NJB}

The intent of this expression is simply this: It is not possible for such a things to even occur! It is not possible for sin to be encouraged by grace, or for it to continue where God's favor is received. **When the reign of grace begins, the reign of death ends!** Furthermore, grace cannot be increased by continuance in sin. It does not abound BECAUSE sin abounds, but WHERE it once, or formerly, abounded.

This expression reflects an utter abhorrence for sin, and particularly continuing sin. **Those who persist in sin do not need grace, but repentance.** As it is written, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Tim 2:25-26).

Those who are standing in "the true grace of God" (1 Pet 5:12) develop such a distaste for sin, that the thought of continuing in it is repulsive to them. Grace not only removes sin, but makes sin detestable. This is involved in the marvelous promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Let it be clear, this expression "God forbid!" or "Certainly not!" refuses to allow us to entertain the notion that grace allows for or encourages sin. It will not permit us to imagine we may indulge in sin expecting to receive grace.

HOW CAN WE LIVE IN SIN?

"How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Other versions read, "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" ^{NKJV} "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" ^{NIV} "How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" ^{NRSV}

To this point, only two deaths have been mentioned. **First**, the death into which all men sank because of Adam's sin (5:12,14,15,17,21). **Second**, the death of Christ (5:6,8,10). No reference has been made to any death toward sin, only death **IN** sin, and a death **FOR** sin. Now, however, a third type of death will be expounded: death **TO** sin.

Think of the magnitude of the expression "dead to sin." Among other things, this shows that becoming righteous before God is more than a mere legal transaction. Grace, which takes sin away, cannot nourish sin, encouraging its continued expression. When sin is found in the child of God, grace has been suppressed and, to some degree, rejected. It is necessary to speak strongly about this matter, else our text will have no real significance for us. **Keep in mind, this is not a description of what we were when grace found us, but what we are after grace has raised us.**

"Dead to Sin"

Sin is related to death in at least three ways. Two of these ways have already been mentioned. The spirit will now develop the third relationship.

- ❑ There is a death **“IN”** sin (Eph 2:1; Rom 5:12; 7:9). This is the condition of all men by nature.
- ❑ There is a death **“FOR”** sin (1 Pet 3:18; 1 Cor 15:3). This is Christ’s vicarious death, that fully addressed all of the ramifications of sin.
- ❑ Death **“TO”** sin (Rom 6:2,7,11; Col 3:3). This dead occurs when we are reconciled unto God, justified, and made righteous.

There are two fundamental senses in which we are *“dead to sin,”* and they are both glorious.

- ❑ First, we have been *“justified from all things,”* thereby freeing us from the guilt of sin (Acts 13:39). Our sins are not imputed to us, as God refuses to do so (Rom 4:8). The guilt of sin can no longer dominate those living by faith, and cannot condemn them. Their conscience has been *“purged”* (Heb 9:14). They are *“dead to sin.”*
- ❑ Second, since Jesus is made unto us *“sanctification”* (1 Cor 1:30), we have been separated from servitude to sin. We no longer have an obligation to sin, for we have been freed from its rule as well as its guilt. The *“new man”* has no appetite for sin, and finds it detestable. That is why grace can teach the child of God to say *“NO”* to sin in all of its forms (Tit 2:11-12).

As the Spirit will establish in the seventh chapter, the child of God is not without **exposure** to the principle, or law, of sin. In fact, that *“law”* dwells within him. *“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”* (Rom 7:23). On the surface, this may appear to contradict the affirmation that we are *“dead to sin.”* However, death to sin does not mean we are insensitive to it or wholly incapable of responding to it. It DOES mean that the part of us that is united to Christ IS fully separated from sin. As John says, *“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God”* (1 John 3:9). And again, *“We know that whoever is born of God does not sin;*

but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18). Just as surely as our old self was alive to sin and dead to God, so our new self is dead to sin and alive to God.

As the seven chapter substantiates, however, the believer is not either an *“old man”* or a *“new man.”* Instead, while he is *“in the body,”* he is a complex dichotomy in which both the *“old”* and *“new”* man reside. Elsewhere, the Spirit strictly charges us to *“put off the old man”* and *“put on the new man,”* yielding our whole persons to the *“new creation”* (2 Cor 5:17).

Beginning in this chapter, the Holy Spirit will develop the reality of the *“new creature”*—that which is *“born of God.”* He

We have been freed from the guilt of sin, and thus owe no allegiance to it. We have been joined to Christ, and are thus superior to it. We have been taught by God of its malignity and condemning power, and thus should have no appetite for it. For the child of God, sin is totally unreasonable and thoroughly distasteful.

will firmly establish that justification has yielded very real and marvelous results.

Not the least of these results is death *“to sin.”* There is a part of us to which sin has no attraction. We *“died to sin.”* ^{»NKJV,NASB,NIV,NRSV} **We were separated from its guilt and power, and owe no obligation or debt to it.** Our justification, therefore, was more than simply liquidating our indebtedness to God, or forgiving our sin. **It involved extricating us from the tyranny, or dictatorship, of sin itself.**

This deliverance is confirmed by the response of believers to the Gospel of

Christ. When men cried out *“What shall we do”* (Acts 2:37), or *“Here is water, what doth hinder me from being baptized”* (Acts 8:36), or *“What must I do to be saved”* (Acts 16:30), they confirmed sin was losing its power over them. Satan would never have permitted them to cry out in such a manner if he could have stopped it. Sin itself was unwilling to let them go. Yet, their initial calling upon the name of the Lord revealed a death to sin was beginning, and would be culminated when they *“put on Christ”* (Gal 3:27). This is the death to sin of our text.

How Can We Live in Sin?

A stirring question, indeed! **How can those who have been disentangled from sin maintain their identity with Jesus and continue sinning?** What form of reasoning would support such a postulation?

To live in sin, or continue to transgress, would be to return to death IN sin, and consequent separation from God. As we will see, the Spirit is not saying it is impossible for believers to sin, for He will admonish us to cut loose from sin. **Rather, He is affirming that it is unreasonable and foolish to sin!** We have been freed from the guilt of sin, and thus owe no allegiance to it. We have been joined to Christ, and are thus superior to it. We have been taught by God of its malignity and condemning power, and thus should have no appetite for it. For the child of God, sin is totally unreasonable and thoroughly distasteful.

What Is Required to Live in Sin

In order to *“live in sin,”* or continue to sin, several things must take place. Living in sin is never innocent, never accidental, and always deliberate. To continue in sin, one must:

- ❑ Resist the Spirit, fighting against His relentless influence (Acts 7:51).
- ❑ Quench the Spirit, refusing to hear what He is saying to the churches, and choosing to thrust His influence from from us (1 Thess 5:19).
- ❑ Grieve the Spirit, choosing to indulge in things that offend Him, stifle His

influence, and compete against His gracious leading (Eph 4:30).

- ❑ Allow the entrance of an evil heart of unbelief, from which we were once delivered (Heb 3:12).
- ❑ Make a place in which the devil can work, influencing us to turn away

victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5).

- ❑ Spurn walking in the Spirit, which assures we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal 5:16).
- ❑ Reject the consideration of the return of our Lord, which hope leads us to

In a sense, it is not easy to sin. It requires a change of focus—from the Lord Jesus Christ to “*this present evil world.*” It demands earth-centeredness and worldly-mindedness. To live in sin, one must think primarily of himself, refusing to do the will of the Lord. He must return to the pit from which he was “*digged*”(

from Christ and follow him (Eph 4:27).

- ❑ Allow Satan to get an advantage of us, even though we have been delivered from him (2 Cor 2:11a).
- ❑ Be ignorant of the devices of the devil, even though God has revealed his ways and subtleties (2 Cor 2:11b).
- ❑ Refuse to hear Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25).
- ❑ Cease to seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God (Col 3:2).
- ❑ Refuse to set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:2).
- ❑ Fail to put on the whole armor of God, that we might stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:10-18).
- ❑ Decline to add to our faith those things God has supplied in abundance (2 Pet 1:5-8).
- ❑ Refuse to hear Christ and be taught by Him (Eph 4:20-21).
- ❑ Fail to resist the devil by continuing steadfast in the faith (1 Pet 5:8-9).
- ❑ Refuse to live by faith, which is the

purify ourselves as He is pure (1 John 3:3).

- ❑ Withdraw from fellowship with Christ, who of God is made unto us “*wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*” (1 Cor 1:30).
- ❑ Fail to confess our sins to God, who is “*faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).
- ❑ Stop walking in the light, thereby losing the fellowship of kindred believers and the cleansing power of Christ’s blood (1 John 1:7).
- ❑ Be beguiled by the Devil, from whose kingdom we have been delivered (2 Cor 11:3; Col 1:13).
- ❑ Refuse to live by “*every Word of God,*” thrusting it from us rather than desiring and eating it (Lk 4:4).
- ❑ Reject the injunction to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33).
- ❑ Fail to pay attention, giving due heed, to the message of the Gospel, allowing ourselves to drift away from it (Heb 2:1).

In a sense, it is not easy to sin. It requires a change of focus—from the Lord Jesus Christ to “*this present evil world.*” It demands earth-centeredness and worldly-mindedness. To live in sin, one must think primarily of himself, refusing to do the will of the Lord. He must return to the pit from which he was “*digged*” (Isa 51:1). To continue in sin is to once again be under the domination of Satan, from whom Jesus delivered us.

Sin, particularly continual sin, is never an innocent matter. It defies all sound reasoning, or spiritual thought. It contradicts the work of redemption, conflicts with the grace of God, stifles the work of the Holy Spirit, and negates a profession of faith.

When we are tempted to sin, we must shout to our souls, “*How can I, who am dead to sin, live any longer in it?*” We must reply as Joseph did to the wicked wife of Potipher: “*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” (Gen 39:9). If Joseph could reason in such a manner **without** the Ten Commandments, **without** a Bible, **without** the indwelling Spirit, and **without** the Gospel of Christ, how much more are those in Christ Jesus able to so think. For those in Jesus, sin is really illogical and unreasonable.

One of the great blights of our time is the casualness with which sin is approached within the professed church. A sense of its malignity and offensiveness can scarcely be perceived. It is tolerated within local congregations, and often even erupts among its leaders. All of this confirms there is very little awareness extant in the professed church of what has really occurred in salvation. Within this context, our text is most relevant. It will reason with us with great power and persuasiveness.

DO YOU KNOW?

“³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”The Spirit will now confirm that believers really are “*dead to sin.*” The death is not a figurative or symbolic one, but a very real one. It is not external, but

it is real. It cannot be perceived with the eye, but it is real. It is a death accomplished in our association with the Lord Jesus Christ. The arguments that will now be set before us are unusually powerful. Evidence will be presented that is common to every person in Christ.

DO YOU NOT KNOW?

The interrogation “*Do you not know?*” is rhetorical, but not only rhetorical. It is like saying, “Are you really ignorant of what has happened to you?” or, “Don’t you realize what has really taken place?” The Spirit uses this form of

teaching again in verse sixteen. It is again used in chapter seven (7:1). Frequently the Spirit asks “do you not know?” i.e., in First Corinthians (3:16; 5:6; 6:3,9,15,16,19,24). This is a way of introducing something that can and should be known. It is obvious to faith, but is obscured when men walk in the flesh.

AS MANY OF US

This introduces a common experience—something that occurs to everyone involved in the ordinance that is mentioned. What follows happens to everyone participating in the activity that is specified. It should also be observed that few, if any, were aware of this reality to easy measurable degree.

The Purpose of this Teaching

Let it be clear, this is not a diversion from the Spirit’s teaching on justification. It is not the development of a new subject. The sixth chapter of Romans puts a handle on the truth of justification and imputed righteousness. For this reason, an event will be expounded that is both common and perceptible. The Spirit will not refer to an emotion, or a spiritual occurrence that is difficult to identify. To proceed in such a manner would only obscure the truth that is being declared.

BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS

“ . . . as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” As soon as the word “baptized” is mentioned, a host of speculative arguments are introduced by those in the grip of sectarianism. There are religious ranks in which baptism is not common. Their theology is challenged by this forthright statement, and thus they seek to neutralize what is said with fanciful explanations.

Some say it is a spiritual baptism that is placed before us—one that cannot be seen or sensed in any way. It can only be identified by understanding, and cannot be associated with a point in time. It is, they say, a general statement like “we, being many, are one body in Christ” (Rom 12:5).

Others say this refers to a baptism in the Spirit. It may be associated with some physical phenomena, depending on the teaching embraced, but is basically an

unseen happening.

These views, and others related to them, rob the text of its power. They throw the truth declared into a dark and mystical pit in which the precious and needed truth required cannot be easily seen. If the event of reference—“baptism”—is not readily apparent, it will not be able to convey the confidence intended.

Baptism

To assist us in our understanding of this most controversial subject, the Spirit reveals there is only “one baptism” (Eph 4:5). The word “baptism” (the noun form) is used twenty-two times in Scripture. Three different occasions are referenced by this word.

- βάπτισμα** – The “baptism” of John the Baptist (Matt 3:7; 21:25; Mk 1:4; 11:30; Lk 3:3; 7:29; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24; 18:25; 19:3,4; **βαπτισματος** Acts 1:22)
- βάπτισμα** – Also used for being overwhelmed with suffering, or suffering unto death. Christ referred to this as His own baptism (Matt 20:22-23; Mk 10:38-39; Lk 12:50).
- βάπτισμα** – Also used of the baptism that is common to all believers (Eph 4:5; 1 Pet 3:21; **βαπτισματος** Rom 6:4; **βαπτισματι** Col 2:12).

In its noun form, “baptism” is never referred to being baptized “with the Holy Spirit” – never. The phrase “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” or “the baptism of the

references: John and repentance, the latter being another view of John’s baptism.

There should, then, be no controversy over the baptism common to believers! Christ’s baptism of suffering unto death is certainly not common to all believers, nor is martyrdom, which is a similar baptism (1 Cor 15:29). John’s baptism was obviated with the enthronement of Jesus, as it was instituted in anticipation of Christ (Acts 19:4), and was not accompanied with the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

A Common Baptism

This is the baptism that is common throughout the book of Acts, and pertains to all who have obeyed the Gospel (Acts 2:38,41; Acts 8:12,13,16,36,38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:15,33; 18:8; Acts 19:5; 22:16). It should be obvious to all that this involved a bodily action in which the individual being baptized took a certain initiative.

- Those who “gladly received the Word were baptized” (Acts 2:41).
- Both “men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12).
- The Ethiopian eunuch wanted to be, and was, baptized in water (Acts 8:36,38).
- Saul of Tarsus “arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18; 22:16).
- Peter asked who could forbid water that Cornelius and his house could be baptized (Acts 10:47-48).

As soon as the word “baptized” is mentioned, a host of speculative arguments are introduced by those in the grip of sectarianism. There are religious ranks in which baptism is not common. Their theology is challenged by this forthright statement, and thus they seek to neutralize what is said with fanciful explanations.

Holy Ghost” is not found a single time in any version of Scripture. In fact the words “the baptism of” are **ONLY** used in this way by the Spirit: “the baptism of John” (Matt 21:25; Mk 11:30; Lk 7:29; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 18:25), and “the baptism of repentance” (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). Every version of Scripture limits the words “baptism of” to these two

- The Philippian jailor was baptized “the same hour of the night” (Acts 16:33).
- The Ephesians were rebaptized in the same outward manner as John baptized, but for a different reason (Acts 19:4-5).
- Peter associates baptism with water, declaring by the Spirit that it “now

saves us" (1 Pet 3:21).

Those insisting that the baptism of Romans six is a spiritual baptism, or that it has nothing whatsoever to do with being baptized in "water," are simply wrong. There is only "one baptism," and it is common to all who are in Christ. The accounts of actual baptisms in Scripture leave no question about the action involved.

"Baptized Into Christ"

Baptism, however, involves more than an external activity. Both "water" and "Spirit" are involved in the new birth (John 3:5-8). There is an action that takes place within as well as without. In fact, it is the inward action that validates the outward one. Also, it occurs simultaneously with the outward action. The two are not to be divorced.

Think of the magnitude of the words "baptized INTO Jesus Christ." This phrase is also used in Galatians 3:27: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." At the point of our baptism, we actually become one with the Lord Jesus. We are "joined" to Him, becoming "one spirit" with Him (1 Cor 6:17).

This is the unity for which Jesus

The Spirit is strengthening our faith and revealing the implications of our justification. When a person is "made the righteousness" of God (2 Cor 5:21), there is no place for sin. Lest the believer be discouraged with the thought that he is a helpless vassal of sin, the Spirit will now show us that we have been linked up with Jesus, and consequently with omnipotence. He will not relate that vital association with a mystical experience that is unsure and difficult to identify. Rather, the Spirit will point to our baptism, declaring with power what actually occurred to us at that time.

BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH

"... as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into His death?**" In the New Covenant, **the believer actually participates in the Gospel.**

Not only did Jesus die for us, we died with Him! Keep in mind that the Spirit is here expounding our death TO sin: "How shall we, that **are dead to sin, live any longer therein?**" (Verse 2). This is not a theoretical death to sin, but a very real one. In participating in Christ's death, we cease to participate in sin, for Christ has nothing to do with sin.

It is true that sins are "washed

the powerful effects and benefits of Christ's death now belong to us! Ponder the revealed associations of the death of Jesus Christ.

- He gave His life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28).
- His blood was "shed for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28).
- In His death, as the Lamb of God, He took away "the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
- He gave His "flesh" for "the life of the world" (John 6:51).
- He laid down His life for the protection of the "sheep" (John 10:11-17).
- He died that He might gather into one the scattered people of God (John 11:51-52).
- He died that He Himself might bring forth much fruit (John 12:23-24).
- When He died, the "prince of this world was cast out" (John 12:31).
- In His death, a means was provided through which He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32-33).
- Through His death Jesus purchased "the church of God" (Acts 20:28).
- In His death is justification, redemption, and remission of sin through God's righteousness (Rom 3:24-25).
- We were reconciled to God by the death of Jesus (Rom 5:10).
- In Christ's death, God "condemned sin" in the flesh of His son (Rom 8:3).
- Jesus died that He might be Lord of the living and the dead (Rom 14:9).
- Through Christ's death, our bodies and spirits were purchased (1 Cor 6:19-20).
- Jesus died that we might live to God, and no longer for ourselves (2 Cor 5:15).
- In dying, Jesus was made to be sin for us that we might be made "the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21).
- He died that we "through His poverty might be made rich" (2 Cor 8:9).
- In His death, Jesus delivered us "from this present evil world" (Gal 1:4).
- In dying, Jesus delivered us "from the curse of the Law" (Gal 3:13).
- Jesus died to redeem us, that we might receive "the adoption of sons" (Gal 4:5).
- We have been made nigh to God through Christ's blood (Eph 2:13).

We are baptized "into" the death of Christ. This means that all of the powerful effects and benefits of Christ's death now belong to us! Ponder the revealed associations of the death of Jesus Christ.

prayed on the even of His betrayal. "That they all may be one, as You, Father, are **in Me, and I in You;** that they also may be one **in Us**" (John 17:21). It speaks of accord, harmony, and spiritual oneness. Christ, therefore, is "in" the believer (Col 1:27), and the believer is "in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17).

The Point Being Made

This text is not an argument for the validity of baptism. The validity and necessity of baptism does not need to be proved. It is affirmed to be a commandment (Acts 10:48; 22:16), and is now associated with being in Christ.

away" when we are baptized. But that is certainly not the whole of the matter. We are also baptized INTO Christ's death—which is WHY our sins are washed away. When young, I heard many a person attempt to show the necessity of baptism by saying we contacted the blood of Christ in baptism, and it alone could wash away sin. The argument had an element of truth in it, yet was not found in Scripture. It was a feeble attempt on the part of man to justify the need to be baptized.

Our text speaks much more strongly on the matter! We are baptized "into" the death of Christ. **This means that all of**

- ❑ On the cross Jesus put to death the enmity between Jew and Gentile, making us one new man before God (Eph 2:14-15).
- ❑ Jesus gave Himself for the church in order that He might present it to Himself "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27).
- ❑ He "made peace" through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- ❑ In His death, He "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col 2:14).
- ❑ In His death Jesus "spoiled," or plundered, principalities and powers, making a triumphant public display of them in His cross (Col 2:15).
- ❑ Jesus died that we might "live together with Him" (1 Thess 5:10).
- ❑ He died to "redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit 2:14).
- ❑ Jesus "tasted death for every man" (Heb 2:9).
- ❑ Through His death, He destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14).
- ❑ By means of His death, Jesus delivered "them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb 2:15).
- ❑ Jesus obtained "eternal redemption" for us through his death (Heb 9:12).
- ❑ In the New Covenant, and because of Christ's death, "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10).
- ❑ In the offering of Himself in death, Jesus has "perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb 10:14).
- ❑ Through Jesus' death, you have been

redeemed "from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers" (1 Pet 1:18-19).

- ❑ Jesus died that he might "bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18).
- ❑ Through His death, Jesus "hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Rev 1:5-6).

This is by no means an exhaustive list. It does, however, confirm the magnitude of the benefits that flow from the death of Jesus Christ. His was not a

that receiving the gift of righteousness is, in fact, God's answer to the sin problem. The power of sin is diffused in Christ, and we are now obliged to obey it.

All of this remarkable benefit is associated with our baptism! The fact that people argue about the necessity and validity of baptism only confirms their ignorance and blindness to the truth of the Gospel. For those, however, who believe, great consolation will be

Let no person question whether or not they should be baptized, or whether or not any blessing is associated with it! As for those who say baptism has nothing whatsoever to do with salvation, their own speech betrays them. They have denied the truth of this text, which says baptism is "into" Christ's death.

simplistic death, and the fruit that comes from it is not small or undistinguished.

When the Spirit says we have been "baptized into His death," a truth of unspeakable magnitude has been affirmed. **This means all of the benefits resident in that death become ours!** What God has declared flows from that death, flows to those who are baptized into it!

There is no way to justify continued sin when we are baptized into Christ's death! There is no place for sin in His death, and no reason why it should dominate us. That is the point of this passage. **The Holy Spirit is showing us**

experienced, and confidence to resist the devil received. What a great God, who can pack such a vast body of truth into a single seemingly insignificant act.

Let no person question whether or not they should be baptized, or whether or not any blessing is associated with it! As for those who say baptism has nothing whatsoever to do with salvation, their own speech betrays them. They have denied the truth of this text, which says baptism is "into" Christ's death. Who is the fool who would say Christ's death has nothing to do with salvation? That is what the opponents of baptism have really said, and it is inexcusable! Actually, to oppose baptism is to oppose Jesus.

BURIED AND RAISED WITH CHRIST

"⁴ 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." The text is based upon the foundation of the previous statement: "as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were

baptized into His death."

The teaching of verse four cannot be true if the reality of verse three has not been experienced. The Spirit will now elaborate upon that death. He will show us that just as a resurrection followed Christ's death, so a resurrection follows our identity with that vicarious death.

BURIED WITH HIM

The burial of Christ is an essential part of the Gospel. "The Gospel . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that **He was buried** . . ." (1 Cor 15:1-3). In order, therefore, to be saved, we must not only be joined to Jesus in His death, but in His burial as well. We must participate with Him there.

Notice precisely how we are “buried with Him.” It is “through baptism.” Other versions say “by baptism.” The New Jerusalem Bible reads, “by our baptism.” The baptism of reference is the one that is “into His death.” It occurred when we, like Saul of Tarsus, “arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). It occurred when you, like those on the day of Pentecost, “gladly received the Word” and “were baptized” (Acts 2:41).

Buried Into Death

In nature, first men die, then they are buried. In the Spirit, however, we are “buried . . . into death.” Nearly every translation says the same thing of this burial with Jesus. It is “into death.” The ASV and Darbys reads “unto death.” The BBE reads, “We have been placed with Him among the dead.” The NJB reads “by our baptism into His death we were buried with him.”

The teaching is that in our baptism we entered into the domain of death to sin, for that is what is being expounded: “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (V 2). We entered into a realm where sin is neither allowed nor encouraged. Sin cannot survive in this spiritual province. From the standpoint of a Person, this domain is Jesus Christ. From the view of an expanse, it is the “heavenly places.” Here sin is out of place. Nothing about Christ or the heavenly places will lead a person to believe it is all right to sin. No person in fellowship with Christ will ever conclude there are advantages to be had in sin. No individual dwelling in heavenly places will be attracted to sin. Here is where men die TO sin! It is where they lose their appetite for it, and sin becomes repulsive to them.

Valid Form Must Agree with the True Doctrine

Endless Arguments

Men have longed argued about “the form” of baptism. Some choose to sprinkle water upon the candidate, calling that baptism. Others pour a modest amount of water upon the head of the person, calling that baptism. Some merely dip their finger in some water and smear it upon the head of the individual, calling that baptism. As you may suspect, fanciful

arguments are advanced to justify these practices. They range from claiming personal preference to saying mere convenience is sought.

Sprinkling

Some have justified sprinkling as a form of baptism by pointing to the prophecy of Ezekiel. Referring to the era of salvation Ezekiel prophecies, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness” (Ezek 36:25). That, however, is something God said He would do, not something men would do. Further, it spoke of sanctification, or setting apart, and not of an outward form. The New Covenant equivalent of this sprinkling is

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the purging of the conscience from dead works in order that we might serve God (Heb 9:13-14; 1 Pet 1:2).

Pouring

Those who seek to justify pouring as the form of baptism point to the manner in which God Himself baptized. On the day of Pentecost, the promise of Jesus was realized: “but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). We know this is the case, because Peter alludes to that experience as specifically fulfilling Jesus’ word (Acts 11:15-16).

When Peter explained that experience, he referred to the prophecy of Joel. “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh . . . and on my

servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). Thus, the proponents of pouring say, “If pouring was good enough for God, it is good enough for us.”

The idea of “pouring,” however is associated with unimaginable abundance—not water trickling from a small vessel. When God “poured out” His Spirit, men were inundated with it. They were engulfed with His Spirit, just as surely as if they had been plunged into a vast ocean.

It would, indeed, be valid to baptize someone by pouring water upon them. It would, however, require a vast amount—something like pouring a ton of dirt upon a casket that had been placed in the earth.

Immersion

Others, myself included, contend that immersion, or being plunged beneath the water, is the manner in which we are buried with Christ “through baptism.” From the standpoint of etymology, or language, this is beyond all controversy. The word used in our text (“baptism”), comes from the Greek word βαπτίζω, which means “to dip repeatedly, immerse, submerge.” It also has a secondary etymological meaning, “to cleanse by dipping, or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water.”^{Thayer’s Greek Lexicon}

This is the word used in Luke sixteen, when Jesus said the rich man in hell asked Abraham to have Lazarus “DIP” the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue (Lk 16:24).

Notice, the technical meaning of the word “baptize” includes at least three things. (1) Submerging, (2) Cleansing, and (3) The use of water (“with water”). How marvelously this accords with the words of Scripture! A burial, or submerging, and a cleansing associated with water.

The Strength of Doctrine

Even though these arguments, taken from language, are most impressive, they do not carry the weight of Scripture. In my judgment, they should not be used to convince men of the form of baptism,

for they are not *“the sword of the Spirit”* (Eph 6:17). The doctrine, or teaching, concerning baptism will convince the believer of the only acceptable manner in which baptism is to be carried out.

First, there really are no “forms” of baptism. Baptism is itself the form. Later, in this very chapter, it is referred to as *“the form of the doctrine”* (6:17). Though seemingly simplistic, this wording is critical to our understanding of baptism. The *“form”* is of the doctrine, not the act. This means that in baptism there is a precise likeness to the thing into which we are baptized. In this case, it is Christ’s death. Because baptism is a *“burial,”* it perfectly depicts that action in an external manner. If the means by which baptism is accomplished are at variance with the truth it affirms, the action becomes meaningless.

Jesus was *“buried”* in a tomb (John 19:40-42). His entire body was placed into it. His head or His feet were not hanging out of it. He was not in the tomb figuratively, but bodily. Others buried His body, He did not bury it Himself.

Thus we are *“buried”* in water, being placed in it, and covered by it (Acts 8:38). The action perfectly correlates with the *“burial”* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as surely as Christ was really *“buried,”* so we were really *“buried with Christ.”* In the body, someone else baptized us, like Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-39). Our burial *“with Christ,”* however, was accomplished by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. In our identity with Christ, we also became identified with the body of Christ. As it is written, *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink”* (1 Cor 12:13).

JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED

At this point we rise above petty arguments into the domain of sound doctrine. It is not enough that we died to sin, or that we died with Christ, or that we were buried with Christ. We will find that the point of our baptism was not

going down but coming up. It is life, not death, that is the ultimate point.

Death First, Then Life

In nature, life precedes death. In the Spirit, it comes after death! In the beginning, first there was darkness, then there was light (Gen 1:2-3). First there was Cain, then there was Abel (Gen 4:1-2). Esau was born first, then Jacob (Gen 25:25-26). In the realm of the Spirit, the

In regeneration, death not only occurs first, it is in order to the experience of life. There must FIRST be a death to sin before there can ever be life toward God. Many a poor soul is not sensitive toward God simply because they continue to nurture their appetite for sin.

worst is first and the best last. As *“the Second Man,”* Jesus is the best man (1 Cor 15:47).

One further thing is seen in this pregnant text. In regeneration, death not only occurs first, it is in order to the experience of life. There must FIRST be a death to sin before there can ever be life toward God. Many a poor soul is not sensitive toward God simply because they continue to nurture their appetite for sin.

By the Glory of the Father

In our baptism we are raised just like Jesus was – *“by the glory of the Father.”* Bodily, John the Baptist raised Jesus out of the water. Philip raised the eunuch out of the water. But in our baptism, *“the glory of the Father”* raises us from death TO sin. That is, God was personally involved in our baptism. His Person, purpose, and power were there! Therein we became His *“workmanship”* (Eph 2:10).

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead raised us, who were dead in trespasses and sin – from death to sin (Eph 1:20-2:1).

An Important Distinction

It is true that prior to coming into Christ, we were *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Eph 2:1). **But that is not the death which required our burial!** The point being expounded by the Spirit is that we have become ***“DEAD TO SIN,”*** not that we were *“dead in sins.”* Our burial with Christ constituted the beginning of our departure from a life of sin. Not only were our sins washed away, our servitude to sin was terminated!

In baptism, our resurrection was in order to a new life. We embraced new loves, new hates, new purposes, and new desires. We began a new life, which is the point of the text.

WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

The only reason we have died **to** sin is in order that we might live unto God! If there is no *“newness of life,”* there really is no point to being *“buried with Christ.”* The burial and the resurrection are in order to *“walk in newness of life.”* Most versions read the same. The NIV reads, *“live a new life.”* Others read *“might be living a new life,”*^{BBE} *“begin living a new life.”*^{NJB} These translations are an accommodation to a shallow thinking generation for which words have little meaning.

“Walking”

“Walk in newness of life” is a very descriptive expression. The word “walk” comes from a word meaning *“spending some time in a place, walking around.”* In this text, the secondary meaning of the word is employed: *“How one conducts his daily life; behave, live, , or the manner or kind of life that is lived.”* There is also the idea of *“progress, and taking advantage of the opportunities.”*^{Strong’s, Thayer} A strong word, indeed! We can expect a great deal of liberating truth to be found here.

Walking in the newness of life involves occupying the heavenly places into which we have been placed (Eph 2:6), and where all of the spiritual blessings are realized (Eph 1:3). It consists of living in view of these spiritual blessings, and so conducting our lives as to never be beyond their reach. There is progress in walking

in "newness of life," as we are "changed from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of our God" (2 Cor 3:18).

By saying that, like Jesus, we are raised "by the glory of the Father" in order to walk in "newness of life," the Spirit means we are empowered by God to do so. Not only is this the Divine objective, we are marvelously enabled to do precisely that—"walk in newness of life." Where such a life is not being lived, "the power thereof" is either not known, or it is being denied (2 Tim 3:5). In the case of the former, where the power is not

comprehended, our teaching and prayers must be devoted to the eyes of their understanding being opened so they will know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph 1:19).

As we will see, baptism is not an empty and powerless symbol! It is not a lifeless liturgy! Further, it is not a subject about which men are to speculate or argue. God has spoken on this subject, and we are obliged to believe what He has affirmed.

One Further Thing

I have long observed the miserable failure of those who constantly preach baptism, to project the newness of life into which baptism inducts us. Those who aggressively affirm the necessity and benefits of baptism must be exhibits of its effectiveness and power. Where these exhibitions are not found, it would be best to allow others who are more familiar with "the newness of life" to declare the revealed role of baptism in the Divine economy. The reason for this should be obvious. **The doctrine is weakened by a deficient walk.**

UNITED WITH CHRIST IN DEATH AND RESURRECTION

"⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."

The Spirit will now embark on a most powerful form of spiritual reasoning. Not only does death to sin precede being raised to walk in a new life, **those who die to sin WILL be raised to walk in newness of life.** Just as surely as death follows life in the natural realm, life follows death in the spiritual realm! The only real question is whether or not we have been united with Jesus in His death. If we have, we will also be joined to Him in His resurrection.

UNITED TOGETHER

Prior to this, the Spirit said we were "baptized into Jesus Christ," "baptized into His death," and "buried with Him by baptism into death." The point is that a very real union between Christ and the believer is formed in our baptism. We may not have been fully aware of it, but it happened. We may not have been able to articulate it, or speak with confidence about it, but it happened. Even if we were handicapped by weak and beggarly doctrines taught to us, if we were united with Jesus in the "likeness of His death," we were just that certainly united with Him in the "likeness of His resurrection." There is a real and effective oneness with Jesus that is accomplished in baptism.

"PLANTED"

Again emphasizing the "form of the

doctrine," the Spirit refers to our baptism as being "planted together" with Christ. The word "planted" means "planted together, grown together, united with, and closely identified with."^{Strong's}

The point is that a very real union between Christ and the believer is formed in our baptism. We may not have been fully aware of it, but it happened. We may not have been able to articulate it, or speak with confidence about it, but it happened.

Ungodly people are referred to as plants the Father "has **not** planted" (Matt 15:13). In the sense of our text, we were "planted" in expectation of the fruit that would follow - like the planting of a vineyard (Matt 21:33; Mk 12:1; Lk 13:6). Planting is much like burial. What is planted is placed beneath the ground. But here an additional aspect of our baptism is unveiled. Our burial has been like placing a seed in the ground from which new things will come.

In a strict etymological sense, the word "planted" can mean engrafted, or becoming a part of. Looking at our

baptism from this perspective, we come into a union with Christ's death whereby its benefits pass to us, like the life of the tree passes into the branch that has been engrafted into it.

THE LIKENESS OF HIS DEATH

Why does the Spirit say the required death is a "likeness?" The word "likeness" comes from a specific term meaning "that which is made after the likeness of something." It also means "an outward resemblance."

This word is used five times (including our text) in the New Covenant writings, and enforces the intention of this text. (1) Gentile idolaters changed the glory of God "into an image made like unto man," birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things (Rom 1:23). (2) Romans 5:14 reminds us that those between Adam and Moses died, even though they had not sinned "**after the similitude** of Adam's transgression." (3) Jesus is said to have been sent into the world "**in the likeness of sinful flesh**" (Rom 8:3). (4) He is also said to have taken upon Himself "the form of a servant, and was made **in the likeness of men**" (Phil 2:7).

Christ's death is the preeminent death. The death in our text has validity only because we are joined to Him. Our death has no efficacy of its own. Christ's death is powerful, ours is only in the likeness of His death.

The Tone of the Text

The tone of the text is undeniable. In nature, there is a finality to death that is morose. But here, death leads to life. Death is not the end of the matter, but rather is its beginning. By using the expression “*planted together in the likeness of His death*,” the Spirit is saying a resurrection is expected, and will come.

CERTAINLY WE SHALL BE

“... certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Other versions read, “we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection,^{AKJV} “we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”^{NIV} This is something that is sure and unwavering. **It is not possible for those united with Jesus in His death to come short of being united with Him in His resurrection life.**

Again, our resurrection is a “*likeness*,” deriving all of its power from Christ’s resurrection. **Apart from**

Christ’s resurrection life, we are confined to the old life. Thus, our baptism becomes effective because Jesus is risen from the dead. This is precisely what First Peter 3:21 states. “... *in the days of Noah, during the construction of*

teaching is rarely heard in the Christian world. Even though it is given to assure the hearts of “*God’s elect*” (Rom 8:33), it has been withheld in preference of teaching that promotes sectarianism, personal careers, and institutionalism.

It is not possible for those united with Jesus in His death to come short of being united with Him in His resurrection life.

the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.^{NASB}

CONCLUSION

As you can see, the teaching of the Spirit in this section is very powerful. It is an exposition of what occurred when our sins were remitted and we were given “*the gift or righteousness*” (Rom 5:17). It should also be apparent to you that this

What little is being said about baptism these days generally serves to only obscure what this passage teaches. God’s people are suffering at the hand of preachers and self-acclaimed teachers. Many choose to ignore the subject altogether, while others argue against baptism, relegating it to the class of “*works*,” whereby men cannot be saved. In all of this nonsense, the people of God have suffered hurt. They have been deprived of a spiritual touchstone from which remarkable confidence can come.

THE OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED

“⁶ **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.**”

Here is something that is intended to be **known**, or comprehended with understanding. This is not a dead tenet of some creed, but a life-sustaining statement of reality. Already, the remarkable power of spiritual knowledge has been emphasized.

- ❑ We know the Law speaks to those under it, to stop the mouths of all men and render them guilty before God (3:19).
- ❑ We know that tribulation results in endurance, or spiritual stamina (5:3).
- ❑ We know that endurance results in experience, or proven character (5:4a).
- ❑ We know that proven character results in a confident hope (5:4b).
- ❑ We know that all who have been baptized were put into Christ’s death (6:3).

We are not, then, dealing with religious speculations or opinions. This is

experiential knowledge—knowledge that is acquired in our participation with Christ. What will now be declared by the Spirit is already known intuitively by the one united with Christ. It is not enough, however, to sense these things. They must be comprehended or Satan will gain the advantage over us through his subtleties and delusions

OUR OLD MAN

“... **our old man was crucified with Him.**” Our death to sin will now be explained in a most vivid way. This passage will also prepare us for the teaching of the following chapter, which expounds more fully on the nature and presence of OUR “*old man*.”

What Is OUR “Old Man?”

First, it is something that belongs to us—“*OUR old man*.” Other versions translate it “*our old self*,”^{NASB,NIV,NRSV} “*our old sinful selves*,”^{NLT} and “*our former self*.”^{NJB} The Amplified Bible reads “*our old (unrenewed) self*.” These later versions are actually more of a commentary than they are translations. I have observed that those with a penchant for precise translations rarely, if ever, deal

with passages like this.

For those who are interested, the Greek words employed here are *παλαιός ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος*. They are all simplistic and uncomplicated words. Translated literally, and in the sequence written, they are “*old and worn out, our man*.” The word translated “*old*” means “*opposed to what is new, antiquated, worn out, obsolete, and an old part*.” The word translated “*man*” is transliterated (letter for letter) “*anthropos*,” and means “*a human being, man, or person*.”

There is, then, a part of us that is not changed in regeneration—“*our old man*.” He is not rendered extinct, but must be “*crucified*,” or pinioned upon the cross with Jesus, until he finally expires. Theologically, this is called “*the sinful nature*,” although that is too impersonal, as though we were dealing with a sort of force that lacks personality.

“*The old man*” is “*the flesh*” of Romans seven and eight. It is “*the natural man*” of First Corinthians 2:14, and “*the flesh*” of Galatians 5:17. This is the part of us coming from Adam, whose image we

have surely born (1 Cor 15:45-49).

Even though we died and been buried with Christ, there remains a part of us that must be subdued in the power of the resurrection. This is *“the old man”* that is to be *“put off”* in preference for putting on *“the new man”* (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). This is the part of us that sins, and is only capable of sinning.

When we begin our life in Jesus, *“our old man”* is crucified for us. He is put upon a place of confinement and restraint, so that he cannot exercise control over us. Like the impenitent thief, he cries out to be released. *“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If thou be Christ, save Thyself **and us**”* (Lk 23:39).

The essential thing to learn in this passage is that this part of our nature is restrained by the cross. But we must know this in order to gain the victory. If we are joined to Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection, the unregenerate part of us has been *“crucified with Him.”* This parallels *“dead to sin”* (6:2).

THE BODY OF SIN

“ . . . that the body of sin might be done away.” The reason for crucifixion of the old man is precise and large. It is in order that *“the body of sin might be done away,”* or *“destroyed.”*^{KJV} Most translations, with very few exceptions, read *“the body of sin.”* Some, tainted by the limitations of their translators, read, *“sinful body,”*^{RSV} *“that sin may lose its power in our lives,”*^{NLT} and *“the old self which belonged to sin.”*^{NJB}

This is not our flesh and blood bodies, although they are certainly *“vile”* (Phil 3:20). This is the mass of sin, the totality of what we are apart from Christ. It is another way of saying *“You must be born again”* (John 3:7). Not only must the new come to us, the old must go. That *“going”* process begins when we are baptized into Christ and the *“old man”* is

crucified. Then, he begins to die. Because this *“old man”* is tied to our bodies, and remains as long as they do, his presence cannot be eliminated until they have been separated from us in death.

“The body of sin” is also mentioned in the second chapter of Colossians. There its destruction is also related to our baptism. *“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body*

death apart from the cross of Christ. He cannot be *“destroyed”* by disciplines and procedures contrived by men (Col 2:19-23). This is a critical aspect of redemptive truth that is scarcely mentioned in our time. I should not be surprised if myriad of believers, in fact, have never so much as heard the truth shouted out in this text.

NO LONGER SLAVES

“ . . . that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” If the *“old man”* is

Every advantage is given to us when we become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Our sins are remitted. Our conscience is purged. We are reconciled to God. We are given the Holy Spirit. We have peace with God. We are granted access into the grace of God, wherein we stand. Our old man is crucified.

of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” NKJV (2:11-12). In this text, the removal of the mass of sin is related to the *“circumcision of Christ”* rather than to His cross. The cross is WHERE the *“old man”* is dealt with. *“Circumcision”* is HOW Jesus separates the *“old man”* from our essential person. He cuts the *“flesh,”* or *“old man,”* away from us. While it resides with us, living, as it were, in our house of clay, it is really not a part of us. In Christ we are a complex, and oft confusing, dichotomy—an *“old man”* and a *“new man”* dwelling in a frail tent.

The *“old man”* cannot be made good, nor can he be reformed. His destiny is *“destruction.”* Thus he is *“crucified”* in order to end his ruthless rule. Our text will affirm precisely WHY this action was taken. Beginning with regeneration, the *“old man”* dies by degrees, just as we are changed from *“glory to glory”* by degrees (2 Cor 3:18).

An important thing must be seen here. The *“old man”* cannot be put to

not crucified, we will not cease to serve sin. Everyone begins new life in Christ with the crucifixion of the *“old man.”* That is standard procedure.

Every advantage is given to us when we become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Our sins are remitted. Our conscience is purged. We are reconciled to God. We are given the Holy Spirit. We have peace with God. We are granted access into the grace of God, wherein we stand. Our old man is crucified. In view of that, and much more, it ought to be apparent that we *“should no longer be the slaves of sin.”*

It goes without saying that as long as men are not joined to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, sin has dominion over them, and they are slaves to it. *“No longer”* means we were slaves of sin until we were joined to Christ.

Once again, you can see that sin has no place in Christ. Provision has been made for the remission of sin, but none has been made for continuance in it. A propitiation has been supplied for sin, but no allowance it made for it to remain. Life must be toward God, or it will not remain. Apart from God, we cannot survive.

DEAD AND FREED FROM SIN

“For he who has died has been freed from sin.” Here is the genius of

the New Covenant. Sin is overcome by death. Sin, like the Law, which is its

“strength” (1 Cor 15:56) can only dominate a person who is alive to it. This

is not a death that can be effected by men. We are *“buried with Him by baptism INTO death.”* We actually participate in Christ’s death. Not only did He die vicariously in our place, we also died with Him. As it is written, *“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God”* (Col 3:3). The words *“are dead”* equate to those of our text, *“has died.”* It is an action that has already taken place. The passage with which we are dealing traces your death back to your baptism, when you died with Christ, were buried with Him, and raised with Him.

To be *“freed from sin”* does not

mean the believer no longer has to grapple or struggle with it. It does not mean he will never again have to acknowledge sin, or that he no longer requires an Advocate before the Father. Rather, it means that in Christ we are free from the **dominion** of sin and from **servitude** to it.

The word translated *“freed”* is **δικαιώται**, and is the word elsewhere translated *“justified.”* The idea here is that we are free from the guilt and power of sin—*“justified from all things”* (Acts 13:39). Our baptism into Christ’s death resulted in our procurement of the forgiveness that was based upon that

death. This *“freed from sin”* speaks of a release from the guilt of sin and from its domination. **It follows, therefore, that until remission is experienced, sin will dominate over us.**

Once more, it is our identity with Christ’s death that brings death to sin. That death involves complete justification from every infraction of the law. It also includes the imputation of the righteousness of God. It is not possible for sin to dominate the individual that lives with an acute awareness of these two realities. That awareness, brought by faith, diffuses the power of sin.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

“^s Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” If you were to ask the average Christian today what they

approached that way in Scripture. *“Believing”* speaks of what we have embraced—things on which we are depending. Chiefly *“believing”* centers in

When men do not live for Christ, it is because they have not died to sin. If they have not died to sin, it is because they are not been united with Christ in His death, and not risen to walk in newness of life.

If you have been in Christ for any length of time, you know how exceedingly rare this kind of life is. It should be a great concern to us when the principle aspect of spiritual life is rare among professed believers. I have even witnessed its rarity among religious leaders—preachers and teachers. It is time for God’s people to insist those who teach and preach declare the truth of the Gospel.

When men do not live for Christ, it is because they have not died to sin. If they have not died to sin, it is because they are not been united with Christ in His death, and not risen to walk in newness of life. We know this is the case because of the certainty of our text. *“Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”^{NASB}* We believe that because it is the truth. Faith does not doubt this affirmation, but takes it for granted, knowing that what God has promised, He is *“able to perform”* (4:21).

While we will surely be gathered to the Lord and be forever with Him, that is not the life of reference. This text refers to living now—being sensitive to the Lord, and in active fellowship with Him. Spiritual life is to be expected! Walking in the light is not the exception, but the rule. We believe and delight in this reality.

believe, you would be faced with a host of contradicting answers. Very few would probably answer in the manner *described in Scripture.* *“But WE BELIEVE that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they”* (Acts 15:11). *“Now if we be dead with Christ, WE BELIEVE that we shall also live with Him”* (Rom 6:8). *“For if WE BELIEVE that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”* (1 Thess 4:14). *“And he answered and said, I BELIEVE that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”* (Acts 8:37).

Notice the absence of a creedal emphasis, or the citation of a prepared list of theological tenets. Although that approach is quite common, believing is not

Christ Jesus and what He has done.

“IF we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” The life of reference is the *“newness of life”* in which we walk following our baptism. This is not a new **way** of life, or a new **discipline** of life. It is not living according to a new set of rules, or adhering to a new set of doctrines. As valuable as all of those things may appear to be, they are totally lacking of spiritual power. Living with Christ is being in His *“yoke”* (Matt 11:29-30), walking in fellowship with Him (1 Cor 1:9), and remaining seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). If we have really *“died with Christ,”* this is exactly what we will do. There is no way to be united with Christ in His death and not come alive.

DEATH IS ONCE

“⁴⁶ Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion

over Him. ¹⁰ **For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.** Christ's death stands for all valid death – it was “once.” the Scriptures make a point of the singularity of Christ's death.

- “For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this He did **ONCE**, when He offered up himself” (Heb 7:27).
- “But now **ONCE** in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was **ONCE** offered to bear the sins of many . . . ” (Heb 9:26-28).
- “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **ONCE** for all” (Heb 10:10).

HAVING BEEN RAISED

Although death is powerful, it is no match for resurrection life! Christ's resurrection vaulted Him beyond the reach of death. Having conquered the domain and prince of death, death was rendered impotent against the Lord's Christ.

The telling point being driven home by the Holy Spirit is that when we were raised up with Christ, we were moved into a realm that is superior to death. He will prove His point by showing us the effect of Christ's resurrection.

DIES NO MORE

The NIV reads, “For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He **cannot die again.**” Notice, this is something that “we know,” and that knowledge is most powerful.

There is a Kingdom principle to be seen here. Deliverance renders impotent the one or thing which held us captive. This is confirmed in Christ Jesus. He did descend *into* “the deep” once (Rom 10:7). However, having risen from that low place, he will never again descend into it—for any reason!

These words are particularly relevant for us, since we have died with Jesus, been buried with Him, and have been raised with Him.

DEATH NO LONGER HAS DOMINION OVER HIM

The dominion death had over Jesus differs significantly from the dominion it had over us. It only dominated Jesus because He bore our sins in His body, and it only did that for only three days. Ultimately, it was not possible for the Son of God to be held in the grip of death (Acts 2:24). Even then, our Lord submitted to death. It did not take Him captive.

The poignant point being made is that resurrection is the ultimate triumph. It was so with Jesus, and it is so with those who have been joined to Him.

In view of this, our baptism has implications for the future, as well as for our past. In it, we were loosed from the power of Satan and cleansed from the defilement of sin. But that means we are no longer servants of sin. It means sin has no more power over us. As we will find in the exhortation following verse ten, that victory actually depends upon whether or not we grasp this truth by faith.

HE DIED TO SIN

Jesus did not “die to sin” in the sense of ceasing to commit it. Emphatically, He was “without sin,” though “tempted in all points “as we are” (Heb 4:15).

When God the Father “laid” upon Jesus “the iniquities of us all” (Isa 53:6), the transaction was very real. These sins were felt by Jesus as He bore them. In fact, He shuddered at the thought, and sought to have the bitter cup taken from Him (Matt 26:39-44). In bearing the sins of the world, He became personally responsible for them.

In some sense, the defilement of them was felt by Him, and unspeakable suffering resulted. The soul of Jesus had

never been touched with the contamination of sin. He had never felt the pangs of regret that accompany transgression. Nor, indeed, had He ever sought forgiveness or experienced alienation from God. But when He bore the sins of the world in His body on the tree, He entered into the most bitter experience of His life. No one will ever fully know the involvements of that death, and what it took to rescue fallen humanity.

Under the administration of the Law, many spotless and innocent victims died because of man's sin. Jesus “died to sin once.” When the temple was dedicated, Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep as “peace offerings” (1 Kgs 8:63). In Christ's case, one Lamb was

The second verse of this chapter affirmed that we died “to sin.” We are not, however, dead to its influence, for we still struggle with it, as confirmed in chapter seven. We died to sin in the sense of being freed from guilt. To the degree we see this, sin does lose its power over us.

offered one time, and it was adequate for all sin of all time. “For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all.”^{NASB} It was an effective death, and thus never again needed to be experienced. It did what was required, and thus was sufficient.

A parallel occurs when we die with Jesus to sin. It is an effective death, and thus need only be experienced once. It is the kind of death God required, and thus it too is sufficient.

The second verse of this chapter affirmed that we died “to sin.” We are not, however, dead to its influence, for we still struggle with it, as confirmed in chapter seven. We died to sin in the sense of being freed from guilt. **To the degree we see this, sin does lose its power over us.**

Christ's death to sin is in the same sense as verse two. He did not die to the power of sin, for sin never did have power over Him. He died to the guilt of sin—our guilt, which he bore.

HE LIVES TO GOD

In nature, life has a purpose, and death is merely the conclusion of that life. Death, apart from Christ, has no purpose, other than to validate the penalty for sin.

This is not the case, however, in

salvation. **The purpose of death is to allow us to enter into life.** Thus it was with Jesus. The life Jesus now lives is **“to God.”** This is not His life on earth, but His life in heaven. Further, this is Christ's life as a glorified man. His sole purpose for living now is to fulfill the will of God.

In a sense, this was also true when He was upon the earth. There were, however, some mitigating factors. When young, He was *“subject to His parents”* (Lk 2:51). In consideration of those who

received tribute money, Jesus paid tax for Himself and Peter (Matt 17:27). All of this prepared Him to make a complete and satisfactory sacrifice.

Now, Jesus is living *“to God”* in a fuller sense. He *“ever lives to make intercession”* for the saints according to the will of God (Heb 7:25). He is *“bringing many sons to glory,”* thus fulfilling the requirement of God. This is the appointed consequence of being raised from death—life toward God!

RECKONING AND HOW TO DO IT

“¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Now we come to the point of being established. It is founded upon the firm realities of Christ's death and resurrection. It confirms the truth of remission and the consequent imputation of righteousness. When we died with Jesus, were buried with Him, and raised to walk in the newness of life, a very real condition began. It is something on which we can *“reckon.”*

RECKONING

things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think (λογιζεσθε) on these things.”

In Matthew 11:31 the word is translated *“reasoned.”* In Mark 15:28 it is translated *“numbered.”* Other translations include *“despised”* (Acts 19:27), *“thinketh”* (Rom 2:3), *“counted”* (Rom 2:6), *“conclude”* (Rom 3:28), *“esteemeth”* (Rom 14:14), *“thought”* (1

read, *“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin,”* ^{NASB} *“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin,”* ^{NIV} *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin,”* ^{NRSV} *“So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin,”* ^{Douay-Rheims} *“Even so see yourselves as dead to sin,”* ^{BBE} *“In the same way, you must see yourselves as being dead to sin.”* ^{NLT}

It may appear on the surface as though this is a forced way of thinking, and does not comport with reality. But that is NOT the case! We really did die with Christ. We really were buried with Him and raised with Him. The fact that these were spiritual transactions does not mean they were not real. Their reality is in another realm.

The reason this kind of thinking—*“dead indeed to sin”*—does not seem right is because of the presence of the *“old man,”* or the Adamic nature. The vigor with which he speaks to us can lead us to believe he has more strength that he really does. **Our thinking, however, must not be driven by the awareness of our unregenerate portion, but by the “new man”—who we are in Christ Jesus.**

When we are confronted with temptation, we must reason: *“I have died with Jesus. I have been buried by baptism into Christ's death. I have been raised up by the glory of the Father to walk in the newness of life. Sin has no claim on me now, for I have been released from all guilt, and by God's grace can say “NO” to all ungodliness and unrighteousness.”* That is reasoning after a godly manner,

As you can see from this usage, reckoning involves thinking that motivates. It allows for a certain perspective of things—a specific mind-set. “Reckoning” enables a person to see things from a particular perspective.

The word *“reckon”* reflects a sort of Kingdom logic—a proper way of thinking. The word comes from λογιζεσθε (log-iz-es-the), from which our word *“logic”* comes. It reflects a WAY of thinking more that WHAT is thought. It is reasoning that proceeds from the comprehension of what God has revealed. Linguistically the word literally means *“thinking according to logical rules.”* It includes the subordinate meaning, *“to take into account, to make an account of, to count up and weigh the reasons, to gather or infer, and to consider or take into account.”* ^{Thayer}

This precise word is also used in Philippians 4:8. There it is translated *“think.”* *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever*

Cor 13:11), *“suppose”* (2 Cor 11:5), and *“charge”* (2 Tim 4:16).

As you can see from this usage, reckoning involves thinking that motivates. It allows for a certain perspective of things—a specific mind-set. *“Reckoning”* enables a person to see things from a particular perspective.

Our text will instruct us on how to think—how to approach living in *“this present evil world.”* This manner of thinking will be based upon reality.

DEAD INDEED TO SIN

“ . . . reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin . . . ” Other versions

and in strict harmony with the truth. When you reason in this way, faith rises to its full strength, laying hold of Divine power and being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Notice, you are to reason that you are *“dead INDEED to sin.”* The word *“indeed”* means *“surely, truly, and certainly.”*^{Strong’s} Our death to sin is as real and effective as the death of Jesus, in which you have participated. The truth of this will be confirmed to you through your faith. When it is confirmed, you will be able to reason, or *“reckon”* upon the basis of truth.

ALIVE TO GOD

“...reckon yourselves... alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” To be *“alive to God”* means that you are **able** to live for His glory, and do so with joy and satisfaction. Regeneration sensitizes the heart to God. It really does! Because of Christ, God has effected a very real change in us. Our stony hearts have been removed, and we have been given hearts of flesh—hearts that are malleable and can

be enlarged (Psa 119:32).

Being alive to God is living in concert with our new heart. It involves walking in the Spirit and living by faith (Gal 5:16,25; Heb 10:38). It is walking in the light and looking unto Jesus (1 John 1:7; Heb 12:1-2). It is being led by the Spirit and being taught by Jesus (Rom 8:13; Eph 4:20). It is putting off the old man and putting on the new man (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).

All of this, however, does not take place automatically. I have often heard men preach and teach that bearing fruit takes no effort. They say you never hear a fruit tree groaning in an effort to bring forth fruit. It all may have a pleasant ring to it, but it is utterly false. Spiritual life cannot be maintained without extensive effort by the redeemed.

Not Mere Self-Effort

This effort is not mere self-effort, but is joined by the mighty power of God. One of our chief involvements is that of reckoning—of reasoning from the proper

perspective. Having Kingdom logic, so to speak, is anything but simplistic. Ponder how often you have been distorted in your thinking, and the effects that were resulted from that thinking. You had to employ spiritual weaponry to cast down those imaginations, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:4-5). What person is willing to say that is easy, and requires no effort?

Reckoning in harmony with the truth of God is an intensive activity, and is vigorously opposed by the devil. It requires constant exposure to the Gospel, a strong faith, and an alert spirit. Accept the Spirit’s challenge to *“reckon.”*

IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD

Our *aliveness* to God is strictly owing to our affiliation with Jesus. Being united with Him in death, burial, and resurrection has brought the life upon which we are to reckon. In view of this, our reasoning will be sound and effective only if we remain in conscious fellowship with Christ Jesus. There is no way to reason properly apart from Jesus.

DO NOT LET SIN REIGN

“¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” The manner in which the Spirit reasons is unusually powerful. When your heart is able to receive and delight in these words, their impact will be most effective. Again, it should be observed that this kind of talk differs significantly from what is regularly served up to many believers.

By saying *“Therefore,”* the Spirit builds upon the truth that has just been affirmed. It is as though He said, *“In view of the fact that we are dead to sin and alive to God . . . ”*

DO NOT LET SIN REIGN

Other versions read, *“do not let sin exercise dominion,”*^{NRSV} *“Do not let sin be ruling,”*^{BBE} *“Do not let sin control the way you live,”*^{NLT} *“you must not allow sin to reign.”*^{NJB}

We learn from this that **it is sin’s nature to rule, or dominate.** It refuses to be subordinate, demanding to sit upon

the throne of our lives. Prior to being in Christ, sin did exercise control over us. But that situation has been changed by our unity with Christ. Now we can reject sin’s demand for dominion. One man has said, *“Since grace in you, sin should not.”*^{John Gill}

This exhortation is not based upon a moral requirement, but a spiritual condition. We are not told to

into which we have been placed encourage us to do it. Our unity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection demands that we do it!

If sin reigns over those in Christ, it is not out of any necessity. Nothing about life in Christ encourages sin or gives it permission to rule over us. Everything about salvation discourages sin and

This exhortation is not based upon a moral requirement, but a spiritual condition. We are not told to refuse to allow sin to reign because it is a requirement, but because it can be done. The remission of our sins enables us to do this! The imputation of the righteousness of God to us empowers us to do it.

refuse to allow sin to reign because it is a requirement, but because it **can** be done. The remission of our sins enables us to do this! The imputation of the righteousness of God to us empowers us to do it. The gift of the Holy Spirit provides the direction and power to do it. The heavenly places

provides for dominion over it.

YOUR MORTAL BODY

The Spirit is very specific here. He does not say not to allow sin to reign in our minds, but in our **mortal bodies.** This is the part of us that is temporal, and

will pass away. It has been consigned to “dust,” and is the vehicle through which sin is expressed. The challenge of the Spirit makes the matter doable.

We are to stop sin from erupting in

man,” or “flesh,” from us, its remnants remain in our bodies. Do not imagine that “remnant” means assertiveness is not possible, or that “the flesh” is not a formidable foe. Such a thought will surely provide a place where Satan can work.

kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph 5:3-5).

This commission is much like that given to Israel – driving out the unwanted inhabitants of the land. *“But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell”* (Num 33:55).

Keeping sin from expressing itself in our bodies is particularly important. Our bodies have been “bought with a price,” and do not belong to us (1 Cor 6:15-20). Thus sins of the body are not to be named among believers. The eruption of sin in our bodies brings unusual defilement.

So it is with those in Christ Jesus. If they do not refuse to allow sin to reign in their “mortal bodies,” they are in for a difficult time, and eventual defeat. It may even mean their condemnation. Christians who fall into transgression have allowed sin to reign in their bodies. They have not reckoned, or reasoned, correctly, and thus have sinned.

us—that is our first responsibility. James put it this way, *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness”* (James 1:21). The word “superfluity” means “overflow,” ^{NKJV} “rank growth,” ^{NRSV} “abounding of wickedness,” ^{Darby} “overweight of evil,” ^{BBE} and “superabundance of evil.” ^{Young’s}

Keeping sin from expressing itself in our bodies is particularly important. Our bodies have been “bought with a price,” and do not belong to us (1 Cor 6:15-20). Thus sins of the body are not to be named among believers. The eruption of sin in our bodies brings unusual defilement. It is written, *“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the*

There is no need to attempt to explain the eruption of sin. It is best to confess it quickly, and get back to the business of not allowing sin to control our bodies. There is grace to do this, but it **does** have to be appropriated by the believer. It requires earnestness and diligence. It is possible, however, because we have been united with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The idea is that the remnant of sin remaining in us breaks out in expression. Several versions convey this thought. *“All that remains of wickedness,”* ^{NASB} *“all that remains of wickedness,”* ^{RWB} and *“remnants of evil.”* ^{NJB} Remember, although Jesus has circumcised the “old

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR MEMBERS

“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.” We are custodians of all of our faculties or “members”—the means through which we express ourselves. Other versions read, *“the members of your body,”* ^{NASB} *“the parts of your body,”* ^{NIV} *“your members,”* ^{NRSV} and *any part of your body.* ^{NLT}

Every part of our persons can be employed in either good or evil, righteousness of unrighteousness, for God or for the devil. Internally our minds, emotion, and will are involved. Our temperament, attitude, loves, and hates, are involved. Thoughts, purposes, desires, and intentions are included. Think of outward faculties. Our eyes, ears, and

mouths, or tongues, are involved. There are hands, feet, and the whole body itself. All of these are a stewardship, and are to be controlled by the “new man.”

DO NOT GIVE YOUR MEMBERS TO SIN

Your various faculties are not to become “instruments of unrighteousness to sin.” Other versions read *“to sin, as instruments of wickedness,”* ^{NIV} *“as instruments of iniquity unto sin,”* ^{Douay-Rheims} *“to sin as the instruments of wrongdoing,”* ^{BBE} *“become a tool of wickedness,”* ^{NLT} *“to sin to be used as instruments of evil.”* ^{NJB}

While men are prone to excuse their actions, the Spirit solemnly admonishes us not allow our faculties to promote iniquity and commit sin. Since we have died with Jesus, been buried with Him, and raised with Him, such concessions

are inexcusable.

GIVE YOUR MEMBERS TO GOD

“... but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Notice the comparison. Presenting our “members” to sin is compared with presenting them “to God.” God can use our thoughts, words, and deeds. He can use our hearing, our wills, and our objectives. He can use our eyes, ears, and mouth. But they must be “presented” to Him.

This is the very thing described in the twelfth chapter of Romans. *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the*

renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Rom 12:1-2). Here we see that spiritual progress and comprehension depend upon the presentation of our faculties to God.

This is the reason for subduing the rise of sin in our members--that we might give ourselves fully to the Lord.

The word "instruments" means

instruments of war, or weapons. The word comes from *ὄπλα* and means "arms used for warfare, weapons," and are of an offensive or aggressive nature. This word is translated "armor" in Romans 13:12 and "weapons" in 2 Corinthians 10:4).

Think of it: your various "members" are actually weapons to be used against sin and for righteousness, or against righteousness and for sin. Those who engage in unrighteous acts are engaged in

a war against the truth of God. Their unrighteousness actually "holds back" or suppresses the truth (Rom 1:18). There is a militant posture assumed in unbelief.

On the other hand, those who use their "members" as instruments of righteousness are fighting against iniquity. Their expressions have a suppressing effect upon sin as well as promoting truth. What a stewardship have been given!

THE IMPACT OF GRACE UPON SINNING

¹⁴ **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.** "What a wonderful sound to the ears of the elect! *"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace,"* NASB *"For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace,"* NIV *"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace,"* NRSV and *"Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace."* NLT

Settle it in your mind that this is a precise statement of the case. It is said with our unity with Jesus in mind: in His death, burial, and resurrection. Our situation in Christ is real, and therefore so are the effects of being in Him. If this single statement of truth were fully embraced by the religious multitudes, there would be such a dramatic and noticeable change in their behavior

SIN WILL NOT DOMINATE

What a powerful affirmation! It is declared within the context of presenting our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. This will not happen automatically, for we have already been admonished to **not** let sin reign in our mortal bodies. If we exert ourselves in response to the Word, this will happen: **sin will not have dominion over us.**

The Real Situation

This word brings great comfort to the believer--the one who is trusting in

Christ and presenting his members to God. Because the remnants of sin remain in us, we walk in a sort of halting way--much like Jacob after he was blessed. In order for the patriarch to be blessed, his thigh was dislocated (Gen 32:24-26). The result was *"he limped on his hip"* NKJV

The presence of the "old man" is like having a hip out of joint! If I would do good, "evil is present with me" (Rom 7:21). The flesh lusts against the Spirit, causing us to limp like Jacob

because of the muscle that shrank (v 31).

So it is with us! **The presence of the "old man" is like having a hip out of joint!** If I would do good, *"evil is present with me"* (Rom 7:21). The flesh lusts against the Spirit, causing us to limp like Jacob (Gal 5:17). Thus, when we read this word, *"Sin shall not have dominion over you,"* our hearts leap, with joy. This is the Word of the Lord--what the Spirit is saying to the churches. It can be heartily embraced without any fear of being disappointed.

It is to be understood that this promise is contingent upon faith, which alone can take hold of Divine commitments (Heb 6:12; 11:33).

YOU ARE NOT UNDER LAW

One of the reasons cited for sin

failing to dominate us is that we are *"not under law."* This expression does not mean we are *"without law,"* or are under no obligation to our Creator and Savior.

We are not under a covenant of works: i.e., *"For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them"* (Rom 10:5). To be *"under law"* is to be governed by such an arrangement. Sin results from this because the demands of the law exceed the capabilities of men. Because of this, sin gains the dominance.

We are not under the yoke of the Law. That is, we are not rebels against God, being controlled by a law that contradicts our nature. We are not under the letter of the law, which kills because of its contradiction to our nature (2 Cor 3:6). Where this circumstance exists bondage to sin ensues, for *"the strength of sin is the law"* (1 Cor 15:56). Because the law cannot change our affection or nature, it vigorously opposes all who are not born again. It is like a great fan that causes the lusts and wicked desires to flame up in expression (Rom 7:8,11).

When, however, we are identified with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection, our nature is so changed that the Law becomes our friend, not our ruler. We love to ponder it, hide it in our heart, and meditate upon it night and day. That very law is written upon our hearts and put into our minds (Heb 10:16).

YOU ARE UNDER GRACE

The other reason cited for the failure of sin to dominate us is that we are “*under grace*.” In this situation, God is “*for us*,” not against us (Rom 8:31). We are under a covenant of blessing, first promised to Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18), then confirmed in Jesus (Acts 3:26).

Being “*under grace*” is being in a state of reconciliation to God (2 Cor 5:18-

20), having access to God (Rom 5:2), and being accepted by God (Eph 1:6). Sins have been remitted, your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life, and “*the gift of righteousness*” has been received (Rom 5:17). That is involved in being “*under grace*.”

Here, “*under grace*,” we have a Divine commitment. “*I will never leave*

thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). Let there be no timorous souls among us! Throw yourself into the holy work of yielding your members as instruments of righteousness. Give yourself to God! Refuse to yield them as instruments of unrighteousness to sin. You are not under law, but have died to the sin which sin reveals. You are under grace, and thus can triumph over sin.

CONCLUSION

When the Holy Spirit traces our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ to our baptism, He puts the truth well within our reach. He also confirms

the utter absurdity of looking at baptism as though it was a purely human work, unrelated to salvation. This view of baptism is to be preached with power to

the people of God. It is a great booster to confidence, as well as a solid exhortation to holiness, presented on a firm foundation.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 20



FROM SERVING SIN TO SERVING GOD

6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 6:15-23 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

The revelations of this section of Scripture are some of the most arresting in all of Scripture. Throughout history, few believers have been able to apprehend them. There have even been lengthy periods of time where they have been almost totally obscured. It is evident that Satan has done his utmost to remove these proclamations from man's consideration.

However, whenever the focus of believers has been placed on these things, renewal has taken place, and vast bastions of false thought have been cast down. The power of the Reformation Movement, for example, is seen in the way in which it toppled false theology that had dominated

the Christian world for over 1,000 years. **When men can see the truth of the Gospel, Satan can no longer hold them.** The Gospel proclaims deliverance to the captives and the setting at liberty of those who are bruised (Lk 4:18). There is no bondage as fierce and unrelenting as religious bondage, and no bruise so grievous as that inflicted by spurious religion. Throughout history, only the faithful and powerful proclamation of the Gospel has been able to bring freedom to such souls.

A BRIEF SUMMARY

Because of the strength of this section of Scripture, I want to labor to keep before you the wonderful revelations

contained in it. Our faith will be as solid as our apprehension of these realities.

- RIGHTEOUSNESS ANNOUNCED.** The announcement of a righteousness from God is made by the Gospel of Christ (1:16-17).
- NEED DECLARED.** The need for this righteousness is proclaimed in 1:19-3:20.
- MEANS PROCLAIMED.** The means of appropriating this righteousness is faith, as affirmed in 3:21-4:25.
- EFFECTS DECLARED.** The effects of righteousness are powerfully delineated in 5:1-11.
- THE SOURCE IS AFFIRMED.** Righteousness, just as sin and death,

In Regeneration, the Entirety of Life is changed as we become willing Servants of God--by Given O. Blakely

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. SHALL WE SIN? (6:15)
- II. DO YOU NOT KNOW? (6:16)
- III. GOD BE THANKED! (6:17)
- IV. SET FREE TO BECOME SLAVES (6:18)
- V. SPEAKING ACCOMMODATINGLY (6:19)
- VI. WHEN WE WERE FREE FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS (6:20)
- VII. WHAT FRUIT DID YOU HAVE THEN? (6:21)
- VIII. NOW THAT YOU HAVE FRUIT (6:22)
- IX. WAGES AND THE GIFT (6:23)

came through one—the Man Christ Jesus (5:12-19).

- ❑ **THE ROLE OF THE LAW.** The Law entered that *“sin might increase,”* confirming the absolute need of the remission of sin and the possession of a righteousness from God (5:20).
- ❑ **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GRACE.** Counteracting the devastating effects of Adam’s

transgression, the grace that comes through Jesus Christ reigns *“through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (5:21).

- ❑ **SIN NOT ENCOURAGED BY GRACE.** The grace of God does not encourage, excuse, or condone sin in any way (6:1-2).
- ❑ **DEATH TO SIN.** A death to sin occurred when we were baptized into Christ’s death (6:3-14). We began life in Christ with our *“old man”* crucified, owing it nothing, and no longer under the dominion of the sinful nature.

Because men tend to speculate and philosophize about grace rather than embrace it, the Spirit will now teach us extensively about its effects. His teaching will assist in freeing us from the shackles of impersonal and impractical theology, which are blights of our time.

These corruptions have been popularized in our time by an emphasis on academic approaches to the things of God. A significant percentage of the church is being held captive by professed scholars

and analysts. Their hold, however, can be broken by apprehending the message before us.

There will be no question about the effectiveness of grace to enable the believer to live triumphantly. **Grace must be ignored and despised in order to sin.** It will become apparent that God hates sin. It is contrary to His nature, and He cannot abide it. He has gone to an unimaginable extent to free us of the guilt and power of sin. His provisions are effective against sin.

The thought that men would seek to justify or excuse their involvement in sin is unthinkable. Yet, men have even created theologies that permit sin to continue in them. The Spirit will now strike down their spurious reasoning with Divine power. He will powerfully confirm that not being *“under the Law”* makes absolutely no provision for sin in any form. **Salvation gets rid of sin, and makes no allowance for it to remain.** The knowledge of this brings comfort to us. It also empowers us to fight the good fight of faith.

SHALL WE SIN?

“ 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” It is the nature of *“flesh”* to justify sin. If it can do so at the expense of the grace of God, it is so much the better for it. Under the seductive influence of demons and their doctrines (1 Tim 4:1), men actually justify their sin by their theology. This is a reprehensible practice. Thus men view God as so loving, He tolerates the indulgence of His children. He is seen to be One who loves men in spite of their insolence and disobedience, even though no such representation is found in Scripture. Also, God is understood to never reject those whom He has accepted, even though there are numerous examples in Scripture that sharply conflict with that delusion: i.e., Esau (Heb 12:16-17), Saul (1 Sam 16:1), Israel (Psa 106:40), Judas (Acts 1:17-22), and etc.

The above cases represent sins of commission—of doing what was wrong.

There are others who simply do not do what is right. They fail to put on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-18), be sober and vigilant (1 Pet 5:8-9), and set their affection on things above (Col 3:1-3). Their lukewarmness is of little concern to them, because they entertain the notion that God is pleased enough with their profession. Their neglect is also sin, and is an attempt to exploit the grace of God, whether they are aware of it or not.

WHAT THEN?

The words *“What then”* mean *“What is the implication?”* The NLT reads, *“So since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does this mean we can go on sinning?”* Remember, the Spirit has affirmed, *“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”* Does this imply there is more of a tolerance of sin under grace than under Law? Are we free from any obligation to the Law. Does the fact that nothing is able to separate believers from

the love of God (Rom 9:37-39) mean that sin is no longer of any consequence?

Does personal iniquity no longer have the power to separate men from God (Isa 59:2)? Some doctrines teach this is true. However, the Spirit will now show us this is NOT true. First, the Spirit will declare that sin is totally unreasonable. Second, He will confirm it is not necessary. Third, He will reveal that those who live in sin **are** the servants of sin, just as surely as those who do not live in sin are servants of righteousness. **What we do reveals what we are and whom we serve!**

Again, the Spirit forbids us to entertain the thought that grace will allow for, or encourage, sin: *“God forbid!”* **The redemption that is in Christ Jesus makes no room for sin, only for the removal of sin!** What is even more, when sin is removed, or forgiven, we are also *“cleansed from all unrighteousness”* by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:9). That

deals with the matter of our character, and further conformity to the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29). Grace will not allow the entrance of what is removed.

SHALL WE SIN BECAUSE WE ARE NOT UNDER LAW?

Precisely in what sense are we "NOT under the law?" Does this mean we are no longer responsible to Divine law? Does it mean we have no interest in it, or that the Law has, so to speak, died? Indeed not! **WE are the ones who have died, not the Law!** We have become "dead to the Law through the body of Christ" (7:4). As already declared in this chapter, we are "dead with Christ," having been buried into His death through baptism (6:8).

In our death with Christ, we were moved into the realm of the Spirit. The Law that once condemned us was written upon our hearts and put into our minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16). We were brought into harmony with the Law because of the separation of the "body of sin" from us (6:6). In Christ our BASIC nature is that of the "new man" (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). That is why we are "not under the law." The Law has no jurisdiction in the realm of the New Creation, for sin has no place there.

We are not under the "letter" of the Law, which kills, and gives no life (2 Cor 3:6). That is, the Law, by its spiritual and accurate code, cannot change the individual. It cannot get rid of sin or the

desire to sin. To put it another way, man cannot be changed by means of a Law he carries out in his own strength. Therefore, we become a new creation in Christ, with the "body of sin" being cut away from us through the "circumcision of Christ" (Col 2:11-12). That condition has removed us from the administration of the Law.

As our text will show, we have become slaves of Another, and He makes no provision for continuance in sin.

It is foolish to excuse sin by saying we are "not under the Law," for we ARE under the Lord Jesus Himself, who came to "magnify the Law and make it honorable" (Isa 42:21). The One who gave

We are not under the "letter" of the Law, which kills, and gives no life (2 Cor 3:6). That is, the Law, by its spiritual and accurate code, cannot change the individual. It cannot get rid of sin or the desire to sin. To put it another way, man cannot be changed by means of a Law he carries out in his own strength.

We are **not**, however, **without law**. We are now subject to a higher law that is powerful against sin, as well as condemning of it. This is the condition to which Paul refers in First Corinthians 9:21: "... though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ." Under Christ we hate what the law condemns and love what is commends.

Himself for our sins will not overlook continuance in sin. If we thought the Law was demanding, what shall we say of the Lord Jesus, who is leading us to glory. He is bringing us to the realm where sin CANNOT exist, and total purity and holiness are found. Shall He abide indulgences in sin among His people along the way? Indeed, He will not!

Those in Christ Jesus are subject to Him, and obliged to obey Him. No anarchy is allowed in His Kingdom, and sin IS anarchy and rebellion. Thus, "not under the Law" does not mean without Law, or without responsibility to another.

The following verses will show the utter stupidity of such a notion. Sin will not in any way be condoned by Jesus. The entirety of His salvation is set against sin, determined to utterly destroy it. Those to come to Jesus come away from sin!

DO YOU NOT KNOW?

"¹⁶ *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?*" Now we come to the crux of the matter. Neither sin nor righteousness can issue from the Christian without the individual presenting himself to obey it. Both sin and righteousness demand that we **yield** to them. **Life in Christ** does not provide for either sin or righteousness to overpower us, or be imposed upon us against our will. We must "yield" to one or the other.

DO YOU NOT KNOW?

The expression beginning this line of reasoning is in the third verse: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" By saying, "Do you not know," the Spirit is showing how unreasonable it is to continue in sin. It requires a sort of spiritual insanity to sin after we have been forgiven of it and delivered from its power. This is not to say such a condition never arises, for provision has been made for the forgiveness of those who are already in Christ (1 John 1:7,9; 2:1). **Yet, when sin takes place, delusion and distorted thought preceded it.** It was

an act of foolishness, and must therefore be acknowledged and confessed before the Lord.

"Between the yoke of Christ and that of sin there is so much contrariety, that no one can bear them both; if we sin, we give ourselves up to the service of sin; but the faithful, on the contrary have been redeemed from the tyranny of sin, that they may serve Christ: it is therefore impossible for them to be remain bound to sin."
- John Calvin

This is not a mere technicality. Sin is not allowed in the presence of the Lord. Those who insist on clinging to it will be excluded from His presence. Either their

sin goes, or they will do! Thus, by saying, *“Do you not know,”* the Spirit is reminding us of what our *“inner man”* already knows. He is gently leading us back to the only acceptable manner of thought. At the same time, He is answering the foolish reasoning of men who continue to delight in sin, yet choose to be identified with Christ.

Living by faith will **NEVER** lead a person to sin (Rom 1:17)! Fellowship with Christ will **NEVER** lead a person to sin (1 Cor 1:9). Walking in the Spirit will **NEVER** lead a person to sin (Gal 5:17). Walking in the light will **NEVER** lead a person to sin (1 John 1:7). Being led by the Spirit will **NEVER** lead to sin (Rom 8:14). Men sin when they are *“drawn away”* by their own *“lust, and enticed,”* and yield to that enticement (James 1:14). They sin when they cease to walk by faith. They sin when they turn from fellowship with Christ. They sin when they are not walking in the Spirit. They sin when they are not walking in the light.

It is no wonder we are admonished, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Far be it for anyone to imagine that life in Christ reserves a place for transgression, and for involvement in the very thing from which Jesus frees us.

The Spirit will now reason with us about this matter. He will be forthright with us so that we may gain confidence to resist the devil on every quarter.

PRESENTING OURSELVES

“... to whom you present yourselves.” Here, the picture of being a slave differs from the ordinary perception. Slavery is here perceived as something that is willing—something preferred. To *“present yourselves”* is to choose the one to whom you prefer to be a slave. It is to step forward and say to the chosen master, *“What do you want me to do?”*

Willing Submission

Presenting ourselves is an act of willing submission. This is a unique view of those who are in Christ Jesus—they are free to pick their master! This is **NOT**

true of those outside of Christ. They are not free, but are in *“bondage”* (Gal 4:3,9,25). Thus, prior to our baptism into Christ’s death, we were *“slaves of sin”* (6:20). While technically we chose sin, from another viewpoint we had no choice, for we were *“by nature children of wrath”* (Eph 2:1). We had to be alerted by the call of the Gospel before we could even desire accord with our Creator and Redeemer.

SLAVES TO OBEY

The point being made is simply this: **our conduct reveals which master we are under.** That is a startling thought, to be sure. But it will serve to awaken lethargic souls who are, like Eve, being deceived by the wicked one.

In a sense, all of life is really presenting ourselves to do the will of another. It is stepping forward to our chosen master and saying, *“What wilt thou have me to do?”* Like it or not, *“you are slaves to the one whom you obey.”*^{NIV} The NLT reads, *“whatever you choose to obey becomes your master?”* The NJB reads, *“you are the slave of him you obey.”* The BBE extends the thought, *“you are the servants of him to whom you give yourselves to do his desire.”*

Slavery to the master is contingent on presenting ourselves to him. It occurs when we make allowance to do the will of that master, whoever or whatever it is. In other words, we WILL become obedient to the one to whom we subject ourselves.

Notice the wording of this text. It serves to alert us to the seriousness of sin, yet not crush the tender heart. Slavery to the master is contingent on **presenting ourselves** to him. It occurs when we make allowance to do the will of that master, whoever or whatever it is. In other words, **we WILL become obedient to the one to whom we**

subject ourselves. We are the slaves of the one whose work we do, and whose cause we promote. Those who do the devil’s will are not God’s servants! Conversely, those who do the Father’s will are not Satan’s servants.

This is a rather technical point, but it must be grasped by faith. Men tend to overestimate their ability, thinking they can extricate themselves from the effects of bad decisions through the exercise of their will. But this is not at all the case! **The will of man is impacted by the one to whom he presents himself.** When we make ourselves available to either Satan or God, certain results will follow. Neither God nor Satan will ignore our willingness to be subject to them.

When we present ourselves to the Lord as *“a living sacrifice”* (Rom 12:1-2), this proves to be a great blessing. However, when we make place for the devil (Eph 4:27), we bring upon ourselves a most grievous situation.

No Guarantee

Scripture offers no guarantee that we can recover from such foolishness. It is true, God can give such poor and ignorant souls repentance, but it is a *“perhaps,”* or *“perchance”* matter (Acts 8:22; 2 Tim 2:25). **Men cannot flirt with sin without paying the consequences!**

Viewed retrospectively, this is yet another way of saying, *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit”* (Matt 7:16-18).

This is to be common knowledge among us: i.e., *“Do you not know?”* It is not only wrong to be ignorant of this reality, it out of harmony with the nature of the New Covenant. Keep in mind, *“No man can serve two masters”* (Matt 6:24).

SIN LEADING TO DEATH

“. . . whether of sin leading to death . . .” Other versions read, *“sin resulting in death,”*^{NASB} *“sin, which leads*

to death,^{NIV} “if to sin, the end being death.”^{BBE}

There is an outcome to all action! If men choose to sin—and sin must be chosen—they must know that sin leads to, or results in, death. Other versions read, “sin leading to death,”^{NKJV} “sin resulting in death.”^{NASB}

The Seriousness of Sin

Sin thrusts one into “the sleep of death” (Psa 13:3). It dulls the heart, putting it to sleep, and sears the conscience so that the individual no longer desires the things of God. Sin is like a bludgeon that pounds the heart into a state of unconsciousness. The will is weakened by sin, and spiritual understanding begins to wane. It is not long until the things of God are not loved or sought, and soon they are forgotten. Because of this, sin drives a wedge between the individual and God.

Men must not allow themselves to embrace a theology that rejects this Divine utterance. If “sin leads to death,” it is certainly not inconsequential. The degree of death is not the point here, as though there was no hope for the child of God who sins. The point is that sin **always** leads to death. Death is unavoidable unless men cease to serve sin. How, then, can anyone treat lightly the matter of transgression? Who can justify a light regard for sin, or a casual approach to it? Sin surely leads to death!

OBEDIENCE LEADING TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

“... or of obedience leading to righteousness.” This is a most powerful affirmation, revealing the true nature of life in Christ Jesus. Other versions read, “obedience resulting in righteousness,”^{NASB} “obedience, which leads to righteousness,”^{NIV} “to do the desire of God, the end being righteousness,”^{BBE} “you can choose to obey God and receive his approval.”^{NLT}

Here is an expression that conflicts with some theology. It may at first appear self-contradictory, for righteousness has been declared as “imputed” and “without the law” (4:6-8, 11, 22-24). **If**

righteousness is imputed to us upon the basis of our faith, how is it that obedience leads to righteousness?

Different Expressions

Notice the difference in the expressions concerning sin and obedience. Sin leads to “death,” but obedience leads to “righteousness.” It might appear that obedience should lead to “life,” as compared to sin leading to “death.” There are two critical matters to be considered. How we view them impacts on this text.

- The type of obedience.** This is not obedience as viewed under the Law.

Sin thrusts one into “the sleep of death” (Psa 13:3). It dulls the heart, putting it to sleep, and sears the conscience so that the individual no longer desires the things of God. Sin is like a bludgeon that pounds the heart into a state of unconsciousness. The will is weakened by sin, and spiritual understanding begins to wane.

The Spirit has already identified obedience with faith: “obedience to the faith,”^{NKJV} “the obedience of faith,”^{NASB} or “the obedience that comes from faith”^{NIV} (1:5). This is the obedience that springs from faith—obedience from the heart (6:17).

- What leads to spiritual life.** Life does not come from obedience, but is “the gift of God” (6:23). Therefore, with care, the Spirit does not affirm that obedience leads to life, but that it leads to righteousness.

The “righteousness” that results from the obedience coming from faith is a godly life. This is the “righteousness” to which believers are to awaken, and is the opposite of sinning. As it is written, “Awake to righteousness, and sin” (1 Cor 15:34). It is the “righteousness” which is **DONE** by the person born of God (1 John

2:29). Here, in the matter of righteous living, is where the children of God are manifested, or made known. As it is written, “Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous . . . By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother”^{NASB} (1 John 3:7,10).

Conduct Is Important

This passage is emphasizing the importance of our personal acts, or behavior. **The Spirit will not permit the truth to be divorced from conduct.** We daily face contradicting influences which we cannot ignore. In fact, we will invariably yield to one of the other. We cannot remain neutral, imagining that we are governing our own lives. There really is no condition in which we are the masters. We are always under the mastery of another. That is how we have been created. **Our text affirms our master is the one to whom we yield.**

There are only two manners in which yielding is evidenced: **sin or obedience.** That is a remarkable statement of the case, and conducive to sobriety and profitable thought. The person who sins has already yielded to his master. Conversely, the one who obeys has also yielded previously to his Master.

The character of every person is bent toward death or toward righteousness. It is attracted primarily to either good or evil. In this regard, disobedience is anything in which God is **not** served—any condition in which we do not yield ourselves to obey God. Disobedience can be a **manner of life** as well as a particular thought or deed. It always is the result of failing to yield to God, and choosing to yield to the devil. Disobedience is never inadvertent.

Faulty thinking

Here, we also come to grips with the faulty thinking of the natural man. Flesh views obedience to God as depriving one of the enjoyment of some benefit. It is seen

as primarily restrictive, with no real profit realized for the individual.

There is not a grain of truth to all of these imaginations. You see, however, how successful Satan was in deceiving Eve on this very matter. He reasoned with her, *“For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Gen 3:5). When *“the woman saw that the*

tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise” (Gen 3:6), she did not see the tree as it really was, but through the filter of Satan’s words. Her disobedience, together with that of Adam, led to death, just as our text affirms.

Obedience is Best

Obedience, on the other hand, yields a righteous life, characterized by holiness,

and filled with *“all joy and peace in believing”* (Rom 14:17). All the children of God can *“yield,”* or *“present”* themselves as slaves to obedience. This is made possible when righteousness is imputed to us because of our faith. It only remains for those who receive this righteousness to be stirred up by the truth of it, and walk by faith. Then practical righteousness will be found in them as they eagerly seek to do the will of their Lord.

GOD BE THANKED!

“¹⁷But 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.” With comforting power, the Holy Spirit assesses the condition of those in Christ Jesus. He has already declared their baptism to have effectively united them with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Now He will further comment on their baptism, showing it to be a pivotal expression of their faith, and the point at which they participated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

GOD BE THANKED!

God is thanked for things in which He Himself is perceived as being active. The Lord is present in every aspect of salvation, and He is to be thanked and praised for that circumstance.

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Active in Every Aspect of Regeneration

The Father gave the Son *“power over all flesh,”* so the Son could *“give eternal life”* to *“as many as”* the Father gave to Him (John 17:2).

- Jesus *“found”* us when we were lost (Lk 19:10).
- We were drawn to Jesus by the Father (John 6:44,65).
- God gave us *“ministers by whom we believed”* (1 Cor 3:5).
- The Gospel was preached to us *“with the Holy Spirit send down from heaven”* (1 Pet 1:12).
- The Holy Spirit convicted us of *“sin, righteousness, and judgment”* (John 16:8-11).
- God opened our hearts so we could respond to the Gospel (Acts 16:14).
- We *“believed through grace”* (Acts 18:27).
- God the Father and the exalted Christ gave us repentance (Acts 11:18; 5:31).
- The Father revealed Jesus was His son, thereby provoking our confession of Him (Matt 16:16-17).
- We confessed Jesus was Lord by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).
- By one Spirit, we were baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13).
- Our hearts were circumcised by Jesus (Col 2:11-12).
- God made us alive when we were *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Eph 2:1).
- We were raised up from baptism by faith in the *“operation of God”* (Col 2:12).
- We were raised up *“by the glory of the Father”* (Rom 6:4).
- Our *“old man”* was *“crucified”* for us when we died with Jesus (Rom 6:6).
- We were *“born of the Spirit”* (John

- 3:8).
- God the Father has *“begotten us again to a lively hope”* (1 Pet 1:3).
- God, of His own will, *“begat He us with the word of truth”* (James 1:18).
- The Lord removed our stony heart (Ezek 11:9).
- We were given a new heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26).
- We are God’s *“workmanship,”* created in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10).
- God has put His laws into our hearts and written them upon our minds (Heb 10:16).
- We were *“added to the church”* by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47).
- Our sins were personally remitted by God, who *“forgave us all trespasses”* (Col 2:13).

You can no doubt think of many more Divine involvements in our regeneration. I have just listed twenty-six of them. These only have to do with our **initial** conversion. The work continues to an even greater degree once we are in Christ and living by faith.

Deity continues to be prominent in our lives as we advance to glory. There is no point in spiritual life where Divine involvement is not required. A mere sampling of such activity will confirm its prominence.

- God the Father** is working in us to will and to do (Phil 2:13), teaching us to love one another (1 Thess 4:9), sending *“every good and perfect gift”* (James 1;17), and giving us the *“spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”* (Eph 1:17).
- Jesus the Son** is teaching us (Eph

4:20), interceding for us (Heb 7:25) bringing us to glory (Heb 2:10), and manifesting Himself to us (John 14:23).

□ **The Holy Spirit** is changing us from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18), strengthening our inner man (Eph 3:15-17), leading us (Rom 8:13), and making intercession for us (Rom 8:26).

The proclamation of Divine involvement in every aspect of salvation is so unmistakably clear throughout Scripture, one wonders how it can be missed. In my judgment, the conspicuous absence of these realities in much of the preaching of our day reveals a most serious condition.

When the Apostle cries out **"GOD BE THANKED!"** it is with all of this, and more, in mind. It is tragic beyond description that multitudes of believers rarely hear of these realities. They are brought to associate their conversion with their own decisions. This circumstance is one of the reasons for the text before us. In it, the Holy Spirit rips from our thinking any view that would minimize sin, or move us to excuse it. **The presence of sin is evidence of the absence of God.** To the degree that sin dominates us, God is not with us.

THOUGH YOU WERE SLAVES

Here is a vivid description of our former lives: "slaves," or "servants," of sin!" **Sin ruled us!** We "obeyed" its dictates, and were shackled to it. The word "slaves" or "servants"^{KJV} describes a servile or subservient condition. It is a state where the purpose of another is being served—in the case of our former lives, it is Satan. A synonym is "bondman," which emphasizes a twofold condition. First, the individual is formally enslaved, and is not free to serve another. Second, there is shackling or restraint, so that the person is forced to serve the one to whom he is bound.

When we were "slaves to sin," we were "children of disobedience," and the "prince of the power of the air" worked in us (Eph 2:2). We were "taken captive" by him "to do his will" (2 Tim 2:26). This was a helpless state from which we could not

extricate ourselves. We had to have a Savior, One who would deliver us from the devil and from sin.

The glory of our text is that we "**WERE slaves to sin**"—it is a state that formerly existed, but does not now! This is much like the expression describing the Corinthian believers: "And such **were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God**" (1 Cor 6:10).

An Important Point

Although I have said this before, I am constrained to say it again. Our preaching and teaching must assist people

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in seeing who they **WERE** outside of Christ and who they **ARE** in Him. They are not to be addressed as though they were still servants of sin. Nor, indeed, are they to be approached as though they never were slaves to sin. If men and women are to gain the victory in life, they must be made acutely aware of the greatness of their deliverance from servitude to sin. They must be convinced their very conversion is evidence of the powerful working of God Almighty.

OBEDIENCE FROM THE HEART

"... you obeyed from the heart." Other versions read, "you became obedient from the heart,"^{NASB} "you wholeheartedly obeyed,"^{NIV} "you have obeyed with all your heart,"^{NLT} "You have given whole-hearted obedience."^{NJB}

Obedience Under the Law

A lot is involved in obedience from

the heart. This obedience is compared with submission under the Law. In that case, men were motivated by fear and dread, for the Law held constant threats over their heads. The thundercloud of death hovered over the people: "*the soul that sinneth, it shall die*" (Ezek 18:4,20).

Thus Jesus came to "*free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death*" (Heb 2:15). Even though men failed in their efforts to perfectly keep the Law, yet these words sounded in their ears: "*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*" (Gal 3:10; Deut 27:26; Jer 11:3).

Obedience under the Law was not wholehearted. This was largely owing to the fact that the people did not have a new heart, and thus could only be moved by fear. It was a slavish obedience that thought more of the reappraisals of disobeying than the advantages of obedience.

A New Kind of Obedience

How different obedience is in the New Covenant. The prophets declared a day was coming when men would be forward to obey God, and would not need to be threatened. "*And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God*" (Ezek 11:19-20). "*And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them*" (Ezek 36:27). "*And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them*" (Ezek 37:24).

Obeying "from the heart" is being motivated by a "new heart" rather than an old law. It is having a preference for the will of God, and being aggressive to seek it out and conform to it. This is the very thing Moses promised would happen. How strange it must have sounded to Israel of old, yet how it must have captured the attention of those who

believed. *“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live”* (Deut 30:6). Those promises are fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

Willing Obedience

Throughout the book of Acts, the result of a stony heart being removed is revealed. Upon hearing the word of the Gospel, people became aggressive to do the will of God. Do you not remember some of their expressions? *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). *“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”* (Acts 8:36). *“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”* (Acts 9:6). *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:31).

Obedience Motivated by Faith

This is obedience motivated by the belief of the Gospel of Christ. People become *“willing in the day”* of God’s power (Psa 110:3), something rarely found during the administration of the Old Covenant. Faith exercises a powerful constraint upon the soul. As it is written, *“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12). *“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized”* (Acts 18:8). *“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”* (Acts 19:5).

It is not our business to talk people into being baptized, using arguments from language or threats of future condemnation. It IS our business to preach the Gospel with power, that men may be constrained to believe. Then they will obey! Ponder how blessed the Gospel is. *“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 2:38). *“God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every*

one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). *“And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses”* (Acts 13:39). In the wake of such powerful proclamations, people can become willing!

Gladly Obeying

Obedying from the heart involves a certain gladness. Obedience is cheerfully rendered to God because His Gospel is perceived and believed. Thus it is written, *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized”* (Acts 2:41). *“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. . . . And there was great joy in that city”* (Acts 8:6-8). *“And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”* (Acts 13:48).

What About Our Day?

When the Lord is working, a jailor can believe in the midst of an earthquake aftermath, while about to take his life with a sword. Gentiles can rejoice and believe while subjected to the opposition of Jewish leaders. An Ethiopian eunuch can believe in the middle of a desert.

It is possible for obedience to be joyfully rendered in this day! This is, after all, *“the day of salvation”* (2 Cor 6:2), and we ought to expect obedience to be *“from the heart.”* The current prevalence of psychological preaching, “seeker-friendly” environments, and marketing the Gospel with carnal salesmanship, are anything but admirable. It is all too artificial, and the responses produced by these circumstances are anything but commendable.

When the Lord is working, a jailor can believe in the midst of an earthquake

aftermath, while about to take his life with a sword. Gentiles can rejoice and believe while subjected to the opposition of Jewish leaders. An Ethiopian eunuch can believe in the middle of a desert. Surroundings and methods are not the appointed means of producing heartfelt obedience. It is the proclamation of the Gospel, which is God’s unique *“power unto salvation”* (1:16).

The believers in Rome had heard that *“glorious Gospel”* (2 Cor 4:4; 1 Tim 1:11), believed it with joy, and eagerly obeyed from their hearts.

THE FORM OF THE DOCTRINE

“. . . you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.” ^(doctrine) ^{NASB} Obedience has a beginning point—i.e., *“you BECAME obedient.”* In Scripture, that beginning point is identified with our baptism into Christ; i.e., *“buried with Him through baptism into death”* (6:4). Thus responses to the Gospel are expressed as follows: *“when they believed . . . they were baptized.”* Other references are provided under *“Willing Obedience.”*

Our initial obedience was not a mere formality, like fulfilling a technical requirement. It was motivated by a heart that had been *“purified by faith”* (Acts 15:9). That obedience also involved the *“form of the doctrine,”* which was baptism itself. This sacred ordinance, much disputed in the Christian community, is the only ordinance given to men that can be called *“the FORM of the doctrine.”* In this case, the doctrine is the Gospel. In its essence, or at its foundation, the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, as affirmed in First Corinthians 15:1-4. In our baptism we die, are buried, and are raised with Jesus. We were baptized **“into His death,”** **“buried with Him,”** and *“raised”* to walk in the newness of life (6:3-4).

This was a very real participation in the Gospel of Christ, in which we were united with Jesus in every aspect of the Gospel. We became dead to sin, put away the old man, and were given new life. Is it not uplifting to ponder our union with Jesus in death, burial, and resurrection?

There should be no question about the manner in which we are baptized. If baptism is the *“form of the doctrine,”* its appearance must agree with the doctrine of which is it the *“form,”* or likeness. Thus, we go down into the water, and are raised up out of the water.

WHICH WAS DELIVERED YOU

what was delivered, but the believers. **They were delivered to the doctrine.** Both the *“doctrine”* (the Gospel of Christ) and the *“form of the doctrine”* (baptism) are teachers. Believers are delivered, or handed over, to them in confidence they will be effectively taught by them.

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In this case, the doctrine is not what was delivered, but the believers. They were delivered to the doctrine. Both the “doctrine” (the Gospel of Christ) and the “form of the doctrine” (baptism) are teachers. Believers are delivered, or handed over, to them in confidence they will be effectively taught by them.

The wording of the text is peculiar: *“that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”*^{KJV} Other versions read, *“that form of doctrine to which you were delivered,”*^{NKJV} *“that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered,”*^{ASV} *“that form of teaching to which you were committed,”*^{NASB} *“the form of teaching to which you were entrusted,”*^{NIV} and *“the form of teaching into which ye were instructed.”*^{BBE}

Men Delivered to Doctrine

Ordinarily, one would think of the doctrine as being delivered to men. **Here, however, men are delivered to the doctrine.** In this case, the doctrine is not

“schoolmaster” to prepare us for Christ (Gal 3:24), **how much more will the Gospel illuminate us concerning God’s great salvation?** If the *“copy and shadow of heavenly things”* found under the Law (Heb 8:5; 10:1) was instructive concerning what was coming, **how much more will the “form” of the Gospel open great things to us.**

In this text, the Spirit is affirming the powerful effects of both the Gospel and our baptism into Christ. By God’s grace, we have been handed over to them both, to learn from them and be instructed more perfectly in the ways of the Lord.

Our Baptism Confirmed This

Our baptism into Christ confirmed this to be true. It was the result of the effective working of the Gospel within us: the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. In a very real sense, true Gospel preachers deliver the people who hear them into the care of the powerful glad tidings of Christ.

Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that Gospel will work within the people, effectively teaching and leading them. There is a remarkable liberty to be realized in believing that. Hearers can be handed over to the Gospel of Christ with great confidence. This is no doubt involved in the following texts: *“having confidence in you all . . . I have confidence in you . . . the great confidence which I have in you . . . I have confidence in you through the Lord . . . we have confidence in the Lord touching you . . . Having confidence in thy obedience”* (2 Cor 2:3; 7:16; 8:22; Gal 5:10; 2 Thess 3:4; Phile 1:21).

It is comforting to associate your obedience in being baptized with the powerful effects of the Gospel of Christ. It was no coincidence that the good news of Christ worked effectually within your heart. In a very real sense, you were **led** into obedience, escorted, as it were, out of the realm of darkness and into God’s marvelous light. Your obedience confirmed Divine working.

SET FREE TO BECOME SLAVES

“¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” Notice the confidence with which this announcement is made. There is **no** Sinaitic tone here; i.e., you **SHOULD** have been set free, and you **SHOULD** have become slaves to righteousness. All too often, words like this are shouted at believers as though nothing really happened to them when they were *“baptized into Christ.”* How differently the Spirit speaks to us.

HAVING BEEN SET FREE

The point of reference is our baptism. It is not our feeling, not our theological persuasion, but our baptism

into Christ. We were identified with Jesus’ death *“BY baptism”* (6:3-4). There is where we were *“planted together in the likeness of His death”* (6:5). There is where our *“old man”* was *“crucified”* with Jesus (6:6).

Upon the basis of these realities, the affirmation was made, *“For he who has died has been freed from sin”* (6:7). In view of this believers are told, *“reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin”* (6:11). The glad announcement is then made, *“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace”* (6:14). In Christ there is strength to have our thinking

conformed to these proclamations.

Those in Christ have **“been set free from sin.”** While it is true we have been freed from the guilt of sin in justification, that is **not** the sense of this verse. This verses declares those in Christ have been freed from the **DOMINION** of sin! Sin can no longer rule them as a tyrant, dragging them down into perdition!

Let me be more precise. This text does not affirm we are free from the influence of sin, but from the **domination** of sin. We have not been freed from the sinful nature, which

remains with us. We do have to struggle with sin, but we are no longer slaves to it. The glory of this is seen when we remember we **WERE** slaves to sin (6:17), but now we are no longer.

We have been “*delivered from the power of darkness*” (Col 1:13), which can no longer hold us against our will. Under the teaching of the grace of God, we can “*say ‘NO’ to ungodliness and worldly passions*”^{NIV} (Tit 2:12).

This is the “*freedom*” declared in Galatians 5:1. “*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*”^{NASB} The phrase “*Christ set us free*” equates to the words “*having been set free*” in our text.

In view of this, not only is it right for us to turn away from sin, it is gloriously possible! However, if the saints are deprived of this understanding, Satan will more easily deceive them, bringing them into bondage once again. For this reason, the Spirit nails this truth into our conscience, convincing us of what really happened when we were “*baptized into Jesus Christ.*”

YOU BECAME SLAVES

Here, we rise higher than the flesh or natural mind can reach. **We were set free in order to become slaves!** Unless a person is convinced of the graciousness of God and the gentleness of Christ, this does not sound good. But it IS good, for men have no choice but to be slaves to someone. Before we were in Jesus, we were “*slaves to sin.*” How much better it is to now be serving righteousness.

What does it mean to be a “*servant of righteousness?*” It should be obvious this does not mean we are unwilling slaves of righteousness, forced by Divine coercion to do what is right. **This refers**

to the manner of the new creation. It is the condition described in Ephesians 2:10. “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*”^{NASB} These

pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently” (Ex 21:5-6).

This precise passage is applied to Jesus in the fortieth Psalm. There the Savior is pictured as delighting to do

In view of this, not only is it right for us to turn away from sin, it is gloriously possible! However, if the saints are deprived of this understanding, Satan will more easily deceive them, bringing them into bondage once again.

“*ordained*”^{KJV} works are the expressions of righteousness, which is served by believers. Not only were these works “*prepared in advance for us to do,*”^{NIV} the new creation is wonderfully adapted for, and inclined to, those works. Thus, it is written, “*put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*” (Eph 4:24). This is the result of having a “*clean heart*” created within us and a “*right spirit*” renewed within (Psa 51:10). When “*all things become new*” (2 Cor 5:17), righteousness becomes our preference, and we eagerly and willingly serve it.

Slaves Like Jesus

We are “*slaves to righteousness*” like Jesus was the “*Servant*” of God (Isa 42:1). He chose to be a servant, as typified under the Law. The law specified that a freed slave had the option of remaining with his master. If that slave had acquired a wife and children while serving his master, he could opt to remain with them and be a permanent servant. The Law made this provision in these words. “*But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall*

God’s will in offering Himself for the sins of the world. The words of the pre-incarnate Word are found in verses six through eight. “*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but my ears you have pierced ; burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not require. Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come-- it is written about Me in the scroll. I desire to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart.*”^{NIV} The tenth chapter of Hebrews makes clear that this Psalm applies to Jesus (Heb 10:5-10).

The parallel is seen in our own freedom from the tyranny of sin. Having been freed by the Lord Jesus, we joyfully declared we would serve none but Him. We then put our ears to the post of the door, so to speak, and received the confirming mark of willing servitude to God.

In a very real sense, this occurred at our baptism. It was there that we publically acknowledged our allegiance to God, rising from the waters to “*walk in the newness of life.*” Servitude to sin can only take place in a *Christian* when this truth is forgotten. Sin cannot dominate us while we hold this truth by faith, looking to the Author and Finisher of our faith.

SPEAKING ACCOMMODATINGLY

“¹⁹I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more

lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.”

There is a significant point being

made by the Spirit here, and it is being made with careful deliberation. He is showing us the utter unreasonableness of sin, and the seriousness of trying to justify its presence. This is particularly true

when men use the grace of God as an excuse to sin, or as a means of making sin less serious than it really is.

Ponder how utterly preposterous it is to affirm that the liberty we have in Christ is actually LESS influential over men than the slavery they experienced to sin. Notwithstanding the apparent absurdity of such a postulate, it should not surprise you that throughout the centuries professed believers have sought to use grace as a soothing salve for sin rather than a Divine remedy for it. This tendency continues to this very day, making the passage before us of utmost relevance. It is the manner of the flesh to find an excuse for sin in the very grace provided by the God against whom sin is committed.

I SPEAK IN HUMAN TERMS

“I speak in human terms . . .” Other versions read, *“I speak after the manner of men,”*^{KJV} *“I am putting it in human terms.”*^{NJB} On the surface, this may appear to contradict what Paul says elsewhere. *“Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”*^{NASB} (1 Cor 2:13).

The language of the text is unique. The expression *“after the manner of men,”* or *“in human terms”* comes from the Greek words *ἀνθρώπινον λέγω*. Literally, the phrase would read, *“I speak humanly,”* or *“I speak as a man would speak.”* In a sense, this is a form of apology, not because of any wrongness found in his words, but because the language used does not strictly describe our servitude to God. It is like he is saying, *“In saying we are slaves to righteousness, I am using limiting speech that does not fully describe our relationship to Christ.”* This he says because there is a sense in which we are NOT in bondage now, but have been liberated.

In my judgment, *“the manner of men”* is not the way the Romans would speak, but the manner in which the Law addressed the matter of serving (Ex 21:1-6). The language and manner of men does not allow for bondage and liberty to occur

simultaneously. In the flesh, these are antithetical words. Yet, in the Spirit we are slaves and free at the same time – precisely as described in the twenty-first chapter of Exodus, already referenced.

One further observation on this text. Since the salvation of God is for men, and not for angels, it is couched in terms that can be best understood by men. In this, God condescends, so to speak, in order to bring the truth within our reach.

Additionally, we should note that the reality of spiritual liberty is too large to be contained in the language of men. Yet enough of it can be seen to induce men to seek heartily after it.

Additionally, we should note that the reality of spiritual liberty is too large to be contained in the language of men. Yet enough of it can be seen to induce men to seek heartily after it.

THE WEAKNESS OF YOUR FLESH

“ . . . because of the weakness of your flesh.” Other versions read, *“because of the infirmity of your flesh,”*^{KJV} *“because you are weak in your natural selves,”*^{NIV} *“because of your natural limitations,”*^{NRSV} *“on account of the weakness of your flesh,”*^{DARBY} *“because your flesh is feeble,”*^{BBE} *“because you are still weak human beings.”*^{NJB}

Our freedom in Christ is, in a sense, neutralized by our presence *“in the body.”* Having this *“treasure in earthen vessels”* requires a certain accommodation. This very situation is designed to emphasis that salvation is of God–i.e., through His power and grace. *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from*

ourselves” (2 Cor 4:7).

Yet, this humiliating situation--of having a treasure in a weak and frail vessel--does not mean we cannot know much about it. This is why Paul speaks *“after the manner of men,”* in order to bring the truth of our situation as close to us as is possible. He will not chide us about our situation, but will seek to penetrate through it as deeply as is possible.

JUST AS YOU PRESENTED

“For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” Once again, the matter of our *“members”* is brought up. Verse thirteen admonished us to *“present”* our *“members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”* Our *“members”* involve our abilities of expression. They are also the means by which we make ourselves available for service to another. This includes the faculties of our soul (intellect, emotion, and will), and the parts of our bodies as well (eyes, ears, tongues, hands, feet, etc.).

Our Former Lives

Formerly, these capacities were given over to *“uncleanness,”* or impurity--things that defile and make one unsuitable to be in the presence of God. Under the Law, God tutored men concerning uncleanness, showing them there were involvements that excluded them from His presence (Lev 15:31; 16:16,19; 22:3,5-7). Prior to being in Christ, therefore, our entire lives were devoted to things that disqualified us from coming into the presence of the Lord.

The activities of reference may not have had an appearance of being *“lawlessness leading to more lawlessness.”* But we must not view our former lives according to appearance (John 7:24). The fact is that outside of Christ a steady declination takes place. Men become the more enslaved to godless living, so that they think nothing of purposing and working without the Lord in their minds. He is excluded from their purposes, and

they engage in no conscious effort to serve Him. Their primary interest is themselves, and thus they plummet downward in the cauldron of iniquity.

Our former lives are vividly described in Titus 3:3. *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”*^{NKJV} Our desires before we were in Christ are

This is not a mere technical point. We cannot be *“laborers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9) unless we are devoted to His cause! If we have not presented our bodies *“a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”* (Rom 12:1), we will not be profitably employed in His Kingdom.

While this may appear rather simplistic, there is a remarkable absence of this type of mentality in the professed church. Men have even developed

who craves the things that are above. The new must be sought with great zeal!

All of this involves a promptness, zeal, and a willingness to do *“the will of God from the heart”* (Eph 6:6). Those who are not advancing in the committal of themselves to the Lord have **not** presented themselves to Him. You may be sure, God will not turn away any who are eager to be utilized in His work!

THE REASONING USED

The reasoning employed in this passage is most powerful. We have been freed from bondage to sin, and transferred into the Kingdom of a beneficent and loving Lord. How, then, can anyone justify continuance in sin? What form of reasoning can be presented to justify lukewarmness or a lack of commitment to the Lord. We were not released from the dominion of sin to occupy a spiritual vacuum, living a life with no purpose or commitment. We have been called into activity—a work of faith. We have been re-created with capacities for that appointed work, and placed into an area where they may be done.

In view of this, sin becomes utterly absurd. When we stumble and sin, it causes shame, and thus it should. With dispatch we are to run to the Savior, appropriating forgiveness and experiencing cleansing (1 John 1:9). We will find that availing ourselves of these provisions will be conducive to a walk *“in the light, as He is in the light.”* That ever-increasing walk will bring glory to God and satisfaction to the soul.

The promise of God will be realized by those who wait upon the Lord—those who are eagerly looking to Him, to do His will. *“But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint”* (Isa 40:31). Yield your members to God and see if this is not the case. You will find His Word to be true, and will be the stronger for it.

Deliverance from sin presumes commitment to a more noble cause—the purpose of God. Freedom in Christ presumes being liberated to do something in service to the One who liberated us.

described as *“the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance”* (1 Pet 1:14). Our lives were marked by a certain eagerness to fulfill our corrupt appetites, and continue living with our own desires upon the throne of our hearts.

What About Now?

Now that we are in Christ, should we live with less commitment than when we were in sin? **Is it comely for Jesus to be given less of our persons that Satan received?** Indeed, it is not! It is not appropriate to serve the Lord with less energy than we served sin.

Just as sin led steadily downward, so true righteousness leads inexorably upward. The condition of *“lawlessness to lawlessness,”* is now replaced by presenting your members in *“slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.”*^{NIV} **The idea is that we become usable to God when we are devoted to righteousness.** Only then can we be entrusted with heavenly goods.

religious structures that allow for uncommitted people to seemingly serve God, while entertaining a fundamental desire for the things of this world. They labor in vain!

Practical Observations

Deliverance from sin presumes commitment to a more noble cause—the purpose of God. Freedom in Christ presumes being liberated to do something in service to the One who liberated us.

If ones eyes have been given to reading the things of this world, in Christ they are to be devoted to the reading of Scripture and things pertaining to life and godliness. If the individual was a person of appetite, giving himself over to wine, liquor, or some other form of stimulant or narcotic, all the more should he be devoted to being *“filled with the Spirit,”* and energized with the life of God. The one who eagerly sought to satisfy immoral fleshly desires, should more aggressively seek the gratification of the *“new man,”*

WHEN WE WERE FREE FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS

“²⁰ For when you were slaves of righteousness.” The Spirit will not condition in which the Lord found us. The recollection of that condition will assist us

In Regeneration, the Entirety of Life is changed as we become willing Servants of God--by Given O. Blakely

to recall with joy the great deliverance we have experienced. Motivated by that recollection, we will give ourselves more heartily to the pursuit of holy things.

A VIVID PICTURE

The fact that we were slaves to sin proved we were unrighteousness, and sorely stood in need of a righteousness from God. To put it yet another way, the fact that we lived without due regard for pleasing God confirmed that we were under the domination of sin—slaves to it.

Our circumstance was much like that of Israel of old. *“As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ . . . when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood”* (Ezek 16:6,20).

The picture is that of being born with a sinful nature—wed to the world, and of the lineage of Adam. From a human point of view, it was a hopeless situation. Had the Lord not sought us out and quickened us, we would have been shut out from His presence forever.

But He did not leave us as He found us! He said *“LIVE!”* He quickened us, or made us alive. As it is written, *“And you*

hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). *“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ”* (Eph 2:5). *“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath*

He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col 2:13). Now, the Spirit will reason with us about our former lives.

FREE FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS

The flesh is not willing to concede it has no goodness and profits nothing (Rom 3:12; John 6:63). When pressed, it will admit life outside of Christ was not the best possible. Notwithstanding that humiliating circumstance, flesh will not acknowledge the total absence of righteousness.

Because this is not a peripheral matter, and because much hinges upon the acknowledgment of this truth, the Spirit will press this issue. He has already affirmed *“there is none righteous”* (Rom 3:10). The Gospel of Christ has also been declared as the vehicle through which a righteousness from God is made known. As though the devotion of sixty verses to the proof of a NEED for righteousness was not enough (1:20-3:18), the Spirit now clearly affirms our state regarding righteousness when we were without

Christ.

We were *“free in regard to righteousness.”* The KJV reads, *“free from righteousness.”* Other versions seem to muddy the waters by reading, *“free from the control of righteousness.”*^{NIV,NIB} *“You weren’t concerned with doing what was right,”*^{NLT} and *“you felt no obligation to uprightness.”*^{NJB} The expression contains more than conventional words can convey. **The idea is that we lived independently of righteousness, and thus were totally unaffected by it.** It is another way of saying we were unrighteous, or without any righteousness of our own.

The text is reasoning from effect back to cause. **The fact that we were slaves to sin proved we were unrighteousness,** and sorely stood in need of a righteousness from God. To put it yet another way, the fact that we lived without due regard for pleasing God confirmed that we were under the domination of sin—slaves to it. Righteousness can have no control over such individuals.

To put it another way, the promises of Romans 5:17 and 21 CANNOT be fulfilled in those who are *“free from righteousness.”* Behold what a different circumstance those promises represent. *“Those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ . . . even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Servitude to sin would be brought to a grinding halt in Christ Jesus!

WHAT FRUIT DID YOU HAVE THEN?

“ 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” Because the truth of God conforms to and promotes sound reasoning, the Spirit will call upon us to assess our former lives. Not only were we *“free from righteousness,”* living for self and with no regard for our Creator, our former lives are now a source of shame to us. It is with grief that we recall our former ignorance and manner of life.

WHAT FRUIT DID YOU HAVE?

What a telling question! *“What fruit did you have then in the things?”* Other versions read, *“Therefore what benefit were you then deriving?”*^{NASB} *“What benefit did you reap at that time?”*^{NIV} *“So what advantage did you then get?”*^{NRSV} *“But then what return did you get?”*^{RSV} *“and what did you gain from living like that?”*^{NJB}

Such strong reasoning is designed to

show us the lunacy of continuing in sin. No matter how reasonable temptation makes sin appear, we must ask ourselves this question: *“What kind of return did sin yield when we were under its control?”* What did it do for us? What was the harvest it produced?

Our ancient parents died *“in the day”* they gave themselves to sin! Cain received a mark from God that made him miserable the rest of his life. The world of

Noah's day reaped utter destruction. The people at Babel were confused in their language and dispersed throughout the world. Pharaoh and his armies drowned in the very sea crossed by the Israelites, whom they pursued. Achan and his entire family were stoned and burned because of his sin. The Israelites who failed to believe God, could not enter the promised land. Israel tasted the fruit of the Babylonian captivity for their sin in disregarding the land-sabbaths. These are some of the more conspicuous harvests of sin. They are sufficient to alert us to sin's harvest.

Sin has never yielded a good crop. It has never given a person the real advantage. Even "the pleasures of sin" are but "for a season" (Heb 11:25). Whatever may have appeared an advantage was found to be but an illusion.

Moses

There came a time in Moses' life when he had to acknowledge life in Egypt was not to his advantage. Thus it is written, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb 11:24-27).

Moses did not see that portion of his life (no less than one third of his 120 years) as productive, or having fruit. Once he left Egypt, you never again hear him referring to that time of his life. He never mentioned his life in the palace, or any benefits he may have received in the capacity of "the son of Pharaoh's daughter." This man of God never wrote of any education he received in Egypt, or any riches accumulated there. He "forsook Egypt," and never returned to it until God sent him there to lead His people out of that nation. You never get the idea Moses missed what he had in Egypt.

Our former lives were like living in Egypt. It yielded no lasting fruit. Like

Moses we have to come to the point where we refused identity with the world at any cost, and gave our allegiance to the Lord.

Paul

Paul frequently mentioned his former life. From the fleshly point of view, like the life of Moses, it was a productive one. He acknowledged he was a Jew, a member of the only ethnic group every preferred by God. He was born in Tarsus, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a respected Jewish teacher. He was taught according to the "perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward

were an advantage to him, and gives a perspective of them all. "Yea doubtless, and I count **all things but loss** for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do **count them but dung**, that I may win Christ" (Phil 3:8).

That is a very pungent confirmation of the power of our text. If there was NO fruit in the prior lives of Moses and Paul, who is the fool who will affirm there was an advantage in his life before being baptized into Christ's death.

Spiritual Caution

Caution must be taken not to say more than our text is saying. It is not saying the Lord was not leading and directing our paths in such a way as to bring us ultimately to Himself. **The question is whether we had fruit at the time we were out of Christ.** The answer is emphatically NO! Any advantage came AFTER we were in Christ.

YOU ARE NOW ASHAMED

Rather than being a source of glory, or a time of advantage, our former lives are a source of shame. Well into his Apostleship, Paul acknowledged, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I **am** chief" (1 Tim 1:15). His former life continued to be a source of shame, and not of glory.

There is a tendency in our time to glorify the past life of professed believers. Myriad books have been marketed about what well known Christians WERE, with little being said about what they ARE. It does not appear that contemporary religion promotes a sense of shame for life apart from Christ. Notwithstanding that condition, our former lives ARE a source of shame. We are ashamed we ever attempted to live without due regard for God and His great salvation. We are ashamed that we moved ahead with our own agenda, with a total disregard for the will of God.

THE END OF THOSE THINGS

As if it was not strong enough to point put the futility of our former lives, and the fact that they are a source of shame, the Spirit drives home one more pungent point. "For the end of those

Sin has never yielded a good crop. It has never given a person the real advantage. Even "the pleasures of sin" are but "for a season" (Heb 11:25). Whatever may have appeared an advantage was found to be but an illusion.

God" (Acts 22:3).

Paul also said he was "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil 3:5-6).

During that seemingly advantageous time, Paul "persecuted" the "Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women." He also stood by at the stoning of Stephen, "consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him" (Acts 22:20).

When accessing his former life, Paul did not give thanks that he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, or that he had the advantage of being among the Pharisees. He sited no superiority gained in an education in Tarsus. He did, however, give his assessment of that former life, and it reflects the truth of our text. He takes all of the best things, so to speak, things that

things is death.” Other versions read, “For the outcome of those things is death,” ^{NASB} “Those things result in death!,” ^{NIV} “things that end in eternal doom,” ^{NLT} “that sort of behavior ends in death.” ^{NJB} The death was as real as the sin that led to it. Sin is no myth, and neither is the death resulting from it. The latter always comes from the former.

This is death from every vantage. It is moral death, where discernment of right and wrong is lost. It is spiritual death, where the soul is separated from God. Sin also results in the death of the body, when the human spirit is separated from it. This death is appointed to every person (Heb 9:27), and is a consequence of the entrance of sin into the world..

Death in all of its facets is the result of sinning—the effect of DOING things of which we are now ashamed. It is good for us to frequently consider these things. Due consideration of them will serve to make sin utterly unreasonable, and thus we will be able to avoid it. It is most difficult to continue doing what is hated, and proves painful to the soul.

NOW YOU DO HAVE FRUIT

“ ²² **But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.**” The language of this passage is arresting. It is so unlike the Christian jargon that is being spewed out by the contemporary church. The thought of being “free from sin” is rarely expressed. When did anyone last hear the phrase “slaves of God?” How about “your fruit unto holiness?” Or, “everlasting life” being associated with “your fruit” which leads to “holiness?”

FREE FROM SIN, SLAVES OF GOD

The repetition of our change underscores the importance of taking hold of this truth. **No person will be able to live an acceptable and satisfying life for God if this reality is not comprehended to a measurable degree.**

Suffice it to say, freedom from sin is in order to serving the Lord. If the word “slave” seems too harsh for the flesh, ponder the expression of Jesus Himself: “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk 22:42). That is the posture of a slave of God! It is willing servitude that is prompted by thanksgiving and sustained by faith. **There is no higher activity than serving God!** But it cannot be done without being freed from sin!

FRUIT UNTO HOLINESS

“Fruit,” in this case, is the benefit, or result, of being “enslaved to God.” ^{NASB} Other versions read, “you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification,” ^{NASB} “the benefit you reap leads to holiness,” ^{NIV} “the advantage you get is

sanctification,” ^{NRSV} “the return you get is sanctification,” ^{RSV} and “your gain will be sanctification.” ^{NJB}

Holiness Is Not an Option

There is an important truth to be

The repetition of our change underscores the importance of taking hold of this truth. No person will be able to live an acceptable and satisfying life for God if this reality is not comprehended to a measurable degree.

seen here. Holiness, or sanctification is not an option in the Kingdom of God. Solemnly we are admonished, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). The word used is the same as in our text. Other versions also use the word “sanctification” ^{NASB} This word is like a threefold cord that includes purity, belonging to God, and upright behavior. As you can see, holiness is not nonobligatory. Unholy people will not dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Not Achieved in the Flesh

A person can pursue holiness by human effort alone, struggling in the energy of the flesh to be acceptable to God. Such efforts, honorable though they may appear, will not make one holy, or suitable for Divine use.

The Secret

Our text gives the secret to holiness, or purity of life. It is found in being “free from sin and servants to God.” ^{KJV} **When we do not serve sin, but consent to serve the Lord, we will become holy!** Holiness is the fruit, or result, of such a life. The Holy Spirit is free to work in such persons, producing Divine qualities within them.

Our text is speaking of the spiritual maturity that comes when we live for the Lord. It is expressed in Second Corinthians 7:1. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness** in the fear of God.” God has called us to such a life, and will not receive those who continue to live in sin. That is the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4:4 and 7. “*That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in **sanctification** and honor . . . For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto **holiness**.*”

None can effectively argue that this requirement is beyond their capability. God has re-created us with the capacity to be holy. As it is written, “*And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in **righteousness and true holiness***” (Eph 4:24). But this cannot happen if we do not present ourselves as servants to God!

Those who live primarily for themselves, with no regard for God, have put themselves beyond the reach of holiness, without which they cannot see God. That is a most sober consideration!

THE END, EVERLASTING LIFE

The outcome of sanctification, or holiness, is *“everlasting life.”* Again, this does not comport with some theology. Some would argue that everlasting life in no way depends upon us being holy. But the Spirit says it is the outcome of *“fruit unto holiness.”* Fruit that yields the harvest of holiness is the result of freedom from sin. Eternal life is the result of that holiness—*“the end”* of it.

There is a progressive nature to spiritual life. As we yield to God, holiness

begins to grow within us. As holiness advances, eternal life is more fully realized, for eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). That knowledge is not static, but is one of vitality and advancement. It is marvelous to see how this all grows out of being freed from sin and becoming servants, or willing slaves, to God.

There is an especially pungent word concerning this text I would like to share with you—one expressed over 400 years

ago. “These things, unless we are beyond measure stupid, ought to generate in our minds, a hatred and horror for sin, and also a love and desire for righteousness.” JOHN CALVIN

It is enough to say, there is no salvation without holiness, and no holiness without willing servitude to God. Let us devote ourselves heartily and expectantly to the service of our Lord! It will prove to be a most joyous pursuit, and will prepare us for employment in the eternal purpose of God.

WAGES AND THE GIFT

“²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Here is the final explanation of the case. The Spirit here summarizes the rationale He has presented. In these words He shows us why sin is altogether unreasonable, and righteousness is absolutely logical. It is always insane to yield our members to sin, and it is always the highest and most flawless form of logic to yield our whole person to God.

THE WAGES OF SIN

Sin is here personified, as though it were a great monarch who rewards those who serve it. It is the nature of this dark monarch to give death to those who serve him. The imagery, in my understanding, presents death as the natural consequence of sin—something that cannot be avoided. Men do not sin in order that they may gain these wages. **Mortals do not think of the consequences of sin when they yield to it.** Rather, they are seduced into thinking of the momentary pleasure they may gain from it. However, they gain the wages of sin because they commit sin, whether they want them or not. **Sin hires us so it can kill us!**

The word *“wages”* comes from the Greek word *μισθόνια*, and refers to military wages, or the allotment received to buy food and subsistence. It is the same word used by John the Baptist in his counsel to the soldiers. They asked him, *“And what*

shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (Lk 3:14). The other place the word is used also refers to military wages. It is First Corinthians 9:7. *“Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges [expense]?”*

Sin is here personified, as though it were a great monarch who rewards those who serve it. It is the nature of this dark monarch to give death to those who serve him. The imagery, in my understanding, presents death as the natural consequence of sin—something that cannot be avoided.

The imagery is not that of an abundant salary, to be spent on luxurious living. Rather, it is of a soldier given a meager allowance for the bare necessities of life. And what does sin pay those who serve it—yea, those who are enslaved and shackled by it? It gives them death: separation from God in outer darkness, without ray of hope or a drop of comfort to assuage eternal grief. God is greatly to be praised for delivering us from such wages!

THE GIFT OF GOD

How differently the Spirit speaks of our lot in Christ Jesus. God has brought us to a most pleasant place!

A Sense in which we Receive Wages

There is a sense in which we receive wages. Jesus said, *“And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.”* NKJV (John 4:36). The wages in this case are more eating the first fruits than receiving a salary—like the ox that treads out the corn (1 Cor 9:9-10). As the Spirit says elsewhere, *“The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops”* NASB (2 Tim 2:8). What gracious wages are found in these tastes!

Everlasting life, however, is in a different category, and thus it is referred to in a different manner.

“Eternal life” is *“the gift of God.”* Some versions, capturing the full sense of the word, say *“FREE gift of God.”* NASB The New Jerusalem Bible reads, *“the gift freely given by God is eternal life.”* Unlike *“wages,”* eternal life is not a temporary provision to be expended according to the fleshly appetites of those receiving it. It is not given to us because of what we have done, but *“through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* It is **His** toil that has brought us the gift! It is granted in **His** behalf, and on account of **His** labors.

Notice, He does **not** say, “The wages

of sin is death, but the wages of righteousness is eternal **life**.” The comparison is between death and righteousness, not death and life. Wages are a just due, but a gift is freely granted

(John 3:36; 6:47). Gracious words have been written to us that we might “*know*” we “**have eternal life**” (1 John 5:13). But this is “*ETERNAL life*,” and thus cannot be fully received while we occupy these

It is a gift, to be sure, but gifts must be received—particularly the gift of eternal life!

Knowing God does not result from academic study. It is a gift from God, and is realized by all who believe on His Son. That life is realized to the degree that we present ourselves and our “members” as instruments of righteousness. In the crucible of that presentation we come to know the Lord.

All of this becomes more clear when we realize “*eternal life*” is an intimate relation with God rather than an impersonal possession. To have eternal life is to “*know*” the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). That is not a right you earn, but a gift you receive THROUGH Jesus Christ our Lord.

by one who has a heart for us. The ultimate promise is eternal life, and thus it is the ultimate comparison (1 John 2:25).

frail bodies. There is more to come.

Eternal life is an exceedingly large gift. Mortals are totally incapable of entertaining an adequate conception of this marvelous gift. It begins now, while we are yet in the body, for “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life*”

Jesus spoke of “*inheriting*” eternal life (Matt 19:29). He said those who abandoned all for Him (thus becoming willing slaves to God) would be compensated “*a hundredfold now in this time*.” But in “*the world to come*,” they would receive “*eternal life*” (Mk 10:30). Until we receive the fulness of it, we are to “*lay hold on eternal life*,” ensuring that we have a firm grasp upon it (1 Tim 6:12).

Knowing God is not the result of mere academic study. It is a gift from God, and is realized by all who believe on His Son. That life is realized to the degree that we present ourselves and our “*members*” as instruments of righteousness. **In the crucible of that presentation we come to know the Lord.** Those who so live know the blessedness of this gift! It is never vain to serve the Lord, but always productive, invigorating, and joyous. Truly, our labor is not vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).

CONCLUSION

We have been confronted with some of the most profound reasoning in all of Scripture. It is spiritual reasoning, and totally unlike the manner of men. The Holy Spirit throws down carnal reasoning as though it were nothing more than a frail barrier of paper. He takes the very arguments that have shackled men to sin, and dashes them into pieces.

us there is no place for sin in Jesus. Grace will not permit its presence. Wherever sin is found, it must be remitted, forgiven, and washed away, else the person cannot come into the Lord’s presence. To every principle of thought that seeks to justify sin, the Spirit answers with a resounding “*God forbid!*”

it. On the other hand, if we yield ourselves to God, we will be graciously governed by Him. He is a good Master, and will employ us in His vineyard, providing, leading, and teaching us along the way.

This reasoning is profound in the sense of being incontrovertible, not in the sense of being beyond our grasp. Concerning the attempt to justify sin, there is no aspect of flawed thought that is not addressed and conquered in this text. He does not wait for flesh to raise its objections, but anticipates what it will say, and shows their utter foolishness.

The Law of God does not allow sin, and grace does not either. The fact that we are not “*under the Law*” does not make provision for some sin, or for a relaxed attitude toward it. In fact, grace is a far greater disciplinarian than Law. Under grace we die to sin. Under grace, our old nature is cut away from us and crucified with Christ. How can sin be justified under such a circumstance? The answer is that it cannot, and those who attempt to do so only reveal their servitude to sin.

The power of the Gospel is confirmed in the conferment of righteousness upon those believing in Jesus. That righteousness impacts upon the heart and mind of the individual, producing a revulsion for sin and a love of righteousness. It accomplishes what the Law could not do. As that righteousness is maintained by faith, it cultures a life of holiness, out of which a precious acquaintance with God is developed. When men receive a righteousness from God, it is effective in accomplishing the will of God. This is no lifeless imputation.

The Spirit has dealt a devastating blow to the reasoning of the flesh, and well He should. Men continue to concoct teachings that permit them to sin with impunity. They continue to go to great extent to justify continuing to sin. But the Spirit will have none of it. He has shown

I am greatly impressed with the powerful effects of yielding – making ourselves available. If we make ourselves available to sin, we will be dominated by

Once again, ponder the affirmations made in this passage. They reveal the greatness of salvation as well as its nature. They are all as certain as God Himself, and can be trusted to buttress sound and spiritual frame of mind. Those

who embrace them will surely triumph! They serve to clarify the nature of spiritual life, the importance of the good fight of faith, and the surety of our hope.

- We are not under law, but under grace (6:15).
- We are servants to the one to whom we yield to obey (6:16).
- We WERE the servants of sin (6:17a).
- We obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine to which we were delivered (6:17b).
- We were made free from sin (6:18a).
- We became the servants of righteousness (6:18b).

- We once yielded our members as slaves to uncleanness, and lawlessness that led to more lawlessness (6:19).
- When we were the servants of sin, we were free from righteousness (6:20).
- The end of the things we once did was death (6:21).
- We have been made free from sin (6:22a).
- We have become servants to God (6:22b).
- We have fruit unto holiness, and the end of everlasting life (6:22c).
- The wages of sin is death (6:23a).
- The gift of God is life everlasting (6:23b).

These are the pillars of sound spiritual reasoning, and we are to reckon upon the truth of them. They are not suggestions but affirmations: declarations of the way things really are. As we approach life with them in our hearts and minds, we will be strengthened to do what is right and good.

If you are ever prone to minimize sin, or speak accommodatingly of it, remember what it did to you when you were dead in it—when the Lord found you. Remember how utterly fruitless life was then, and how it produced shame as you stood before God. Sin is still that way!

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 21



LIBERATED FROM THE LAW

7:1-6 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? 2 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. 3 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. 4 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. 5 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. 6 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. – Romans 7:1-6 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit has introduced the subject of the Law – the Divinely given standard of moral conduct. It was given specifically to Israel as a covenant. It also had a specific relationship to the entire world. The Law was more than a mere code, or moral standard. It revealed key aspects of the very nature of God. Although it did not unfold all of His Being, it did reveal enough to lead men to the conclusion they were coming short of His glory (3:23).

□ We have read of sinning “without the

Law,” and sinning “in the Law” (2:12).

- Again, the Spirit spoke of the “hearers of the Law” and the “doers of the Law” (2:13).
- The Gentiles are said to “have not the Law” (2:14a).
- The consideration of Gentiles doing “by nature the things contained in the Law” is brought before us (2:14b).
- By being inclined toward things written in the law, the Gentiles are said to “show the work of the Law

written in their hearts” (2:15).

- The Jews “wrested in the Law” (2:17).
- The Jews boasted that they were “instructed out of the Law” (2:18).
- The Law has a “form of knowledge and of the truth” (2:20).
- The Jews made their “boast in the Law” (2:23a).
- The Jews broke the Law (2:23b).
- Circumcision was of profit only if the Law was kept (2:25).
- The Spirit refers to “the righteousness of the Law” (2:26).

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE DOMINATING TENDENCY OF THE LAW (7:1)
- II. THE NECESSITY OF A DEATH ILLUSTRATED (7:2-3)
- III. DEAD THROUGH THE BODY OF CHRIST (7:4a)
- IV. THE PURPOSE OF OUR DEATH (7:4b)
- V. WHEN WE WERE IN THE FLESH (7:5)
- VI. NOW WE ARE DELIVERED FROM THE LAW (7:6a)
- VII. THE REASON FOR THAT DELIVERANCE (7:6b)

- ❑ We are asked to consider if the uncircumcision *"fulfil the Law"* (2:27a).
- ❑ There is the *"transgression of the Law"* (2:27b).
- ❑ The Law speaks to those who are *"under the Law"* (3:19a).
- ❑ The Law speaks that *"every mouth might be stopped and all the world become guilty before God"* (3:19b).
- ❑ By the *"deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified"* (3:20a).
- ❑ *"By the Law is the knowledge of sin"* (3:20b).
- ❑ The *"righteousness of God without the Law is manifested"* (3:21a).
- ❑ The righteousness of God is *"witnessed by the law and the prophets"* (3:21b).
- ❑ We *"conclude that a man is justified without the deeds of the law"* (3:18).
- ❑ Through faith we *"establish the Law"* (3:31).
- ❑ The promise that Abraham would be the *"heir of the world"* was not given *"through the Law"* (4:13).
- ❑ If those who are *"of the Law, be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect"* (4:14).
- ❑ *"The Law works wrath"* (4:15a).
- ❑ *"Where there is no Law, there is no transgression"* (4:15b).
- ❑ The *"promise"* is not only to those who are *"of the Law,"* but to those who are *"of the faith of Abraham"* (4:16).
- ❑ *"Until the Law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed where there is no Law"* (5:13).
- ❑ The *"Law entered, that the offense*

might abound" (5:20).

- ❑ Sin will not have dominion over believers, for they *"are not under the Law, but under grace"* (6:14).
- ❑ God forbid that we should sin *"because we are not under the law, but under grace"* (6:15).

Thus far, there have been thirty-one references to *"the Law"* in this book (2:12 thru 6:15). That is a most remarkable circumstance! It confirms that our confident understanding of justification requires some grasp of *"the Law."* Its true role in the redemption of humanity must be perceived, else deliverance from it will matter little to us.

MAN'S PENCHANT FOR LAW

Man has an unfortunate penchant, or tendency, toward being governed by law. While on the surface this appears to be the most strict way of governing man, it is not at all. Government by law presumes waywardness within those it governs. That is, of course, the reason for law: to restrain the outbreak of lawlessness. If man was not basically and fundamentally sinful, there would be no need for Law.

While the Jews rested in *"the Law,"* making their boast in it, the Gentile church has promoted a dependency upon its own man-made laws. Whether it is a list of denominational requirements, or solicitation to be under a certain routine

aware of their consistent shortcomings. This is accented by the fact that the Law offers no strength, provides no grace, and never bends to accommodate those who are weak. It is not lenient with sinners, and makes no provision for release from guilt or the cleansing of the conscience.

THE TEXT BEFORE US

The Spirit will now elaborate on the fact that we are *"not under Law."* This condition was not accomplished by a Divine mandate. Rather, it is the result of a Divine **work**. Believers have actually been moved beyond the reach of a condemning Law.

The point is not that we are beyond rules, requirements, or Divine commands. Rather, we can no longer be condemned by the Law, even though imperfection can still be found within us. This is a critical matter, and must be comprehended. Those who are under a system of Law, even if they are conscientious in their devotion to God, will never be confident before Him. Their lack of assurance will actually become the occasion for their fall.

Because this matter of not being *"under the Law"* is the basis for much contention among professed believers, the Spirit will not leave us in a state of ignorance. The Law of God is not at fault, and we are to maintain the utmost respect for it. The Law *"was weak through the*

The Spirit will now elaborate on the fact that we are *"not under Law."* This condition was not accomplished by a Divine mandate. Rather, it is the result of a Divine work. Believers have actually been moved beyond the reach of a condemning Law.

or discipline of life, the principle of law is being advanced. This is largely a heartless approach, and encourages men to live mechanically, and without real commitment to the Living God. Such living is more related to the Old Covenant than he New one.

Those who take God's Law seriously are convinced its demands are greater than their ability. They have the utmost respect for the Law, but are painfully

flesh," and not because of anything that was in it (Rom 8:3). It could not change those who were under it. It could not remove their past or give them a fresh start. All it could do was point to their miserable flaws. However, God made a way of escape for us.

The passage before us will show us precisely how this was accomplished. It will also prepare us to understand the involvements of new life.

THE DOMINATING TENDENCY OF THE LAW

"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?" Once people are added to the church (Acts 2:47), born again (John 3:7), or baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27), they need to know what really took place at that time. All too often, energy is put into bringing people TO Christ, without due regard being given to teaching them IN Christ. Although men are often prone to place the emphasis on conversion, the Scriptural stress is clearly placed upon nurture and edification. Conversion is necessary for deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. Growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is essential for being found in Christ at His appearing.

Beginning Is Not Enough!

Although numerous doctrines have been invented by men that cause them to feel secure in merely beginning the race, there is no promise of good to those who do not finish it. Grace is never promised to those who do not keep the faith! There is no such thing as a justified person who does not live by faith (Heb 10:38-39). It is not possible to maintain the fellowship of Christ, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9), if we do not walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). There is not a single blessing pronounced upon those who quench or grieve the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30). Try as you may, you will not be able to find a solitary word from God that commends or promises to sustain those who do not *"go to perfection"* (Heb 6:1-6).

Although these things are commonly known among the faithful, yet they must be affirmed, lest we forget them. We are living in an era and place when *Christians* are subjected to doctrines that lead them to think as though these things were not true. A remarkable lack of interest in the things of God exists among professing believers. They insist on infrequency of gatherings and brevity in Scriptural presentations when they do gather. All of this clashes sharply with both the text and nature of Scripture.

This Is Not Pointless

It may appear as though all of this has little to do with our text, but that is not the case. In this section of Romans, the Spirit is reasoning with us concerning the unreasonableness of sin. He is showing us that we died to it when we were baptized into Christ's death. For the believer, sin is not merely committing certain wicked and reprehensible acts. It is returning to the old manner of life – living as though there was no God: i.e., returning to a vain life. It is *"drawing back,"* or failing to live by faith (Heb 10:39). It is NOT going on to perfection (Heb 6:1), refusing to press toward the mark (Phil 3:14), and NOT growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). It is NOT laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12), and NOT running with

from the power of darkness, they were *"translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son"* (Col 1:13). Not only were they released from guilt and condemnation, they were called to obtain *"an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"* (Acts 20:32).

When failure to grow in Christ occurs, it is because of the dominance of sin. Whether men admit it or not, when professed believers are not growing, they are sinning. When they are not advancing to glory, they are drawing back to perdition. If they are not pressing toward the mark, they are living in the flesh. That is the way it is, and our hearts must embrace that truth, and live in an acute awareness of it.

Grace is never promised to those who do not keep the faith! There is no such thing as a justified person who does not live by faith. It is not possible to maintain the fellowship of Christ, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9), if we do not walk in the light as He is in the light.

These conditions have dictated the reason for our text. This is not merely religious philosophy, or the development of a lifeless creed. The Spirit is showing us WHY we have been accepted by God. He is unveiling the true nature of spiritual life. We have no obligation to sin! In Christ we are freed from both its guilt and power. While we do have to contend with it, if we are overcome by it, it is because we yielded ourselves to it.

In order to assist us to triumph over sin consistently, the Spirit will now show us precisely how we were delivered from the Law. In doing this, He will encourage and equip our hearts to be determined to fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, and finish the course appointed to us.

DO YOU NOT KNOW?

This is the third time this expression has been used (6:3,16; 7:1). Although I have said this before, it bears repeating. The phrase *"Do you not know?"* means *"Are you ignorant?"* This introduces the Kingdom manner of thought. It is the way faith directs us to think. When the grace of God is received, it encourages this kind of knowledge. **It is wrong to think in contradiction of what follows this expression.** When the Spirit says, *"Do you not know,"* He means **salvation makes no provision to think in any**

patience, or endurance, the race set before us (Heb 12:1-2). While these conditions are common in the professed church, they are not acceptable to God. Unless they are corrected, they will be the cause of condemnation, for they are clear and unmistakable evidence of a rejection of the life and grace of God.

In order to correct these things, people must be made aware of the real nature of spiritual life. It is imperative that their conscience be trained, or exercised, concerning what happened when they came into Christ. They were not only delivered from darkness, they were brought into God's *"marvelous light"* (1 Pet 2:9). They were not only delivered

other way. This IS the manner of the Kingdom, and it is our business to see to it that it is our way of thinking and living.

The new creation is endowed with the capability of thinking in this manner, and a lack of ability to think in any other way. In speaking in this manner, the Spirit clearly addresses the “new man,” thus encouraging the readers to put on that “new man,” in order to understand, and make progress in, life in Christ Jesus. By saying “Do you not know,” the Spirit is

or engine, of the Law. The various statutes that surrounded the Law dealt with its implications, spelling out how it was to be applied. The summation of the Law consisted of two commandments. *“The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor*

Law in any form, as it relates to mankind, presumes recalcitrance, waywardness, and the inclination to do what is wrong. Law also presumes some degree of ignorance and insensitivity. If these conditions did not exist, there would be no requirement for law.

shining a light on the truth, showing it to be the only acceptable context of thought.

THOSE WHO KNOW THE LAW

Here the Spirit makes a special appeal to those who have an understanding of the Law. This is the law of Moses, not the law of nature. There are at least two reasons for speaking in this manner. First, a special appeal is being made to those with more advanced understanding of the principle of Law. Second, those who lack this understanding will be exposed to needed understanding, thereby enabling them to expand their perception of the Kingdom.

The Premier Example of Law

The Law of Moses is the premier example of the principle of Law. The term “law,” in this case, relates to a means of becoming just before God. It has to do with measuring up to a moral code—a revealed standard of right and wrong. The Ten Commandments were the heart,

as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these”(Mark 12:29-31; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:13).

When, therefore, we read of “*the Law*,” the reference is not to civil law, natural law, or other laws that are not directly related to being accepted by God.

Law In Any Form

Law in any form, as it relates to mankind, presumes recalcitrance, waywardness, and the inclination to do what is wrong. Law also presumes some degree of ignorance and insensitivity. If these conditions did not exist, there would be no requirement for law.

For the sake of clarity, this is moral law, or principles relating to the identity and enforcement of right and wrong. It has to do with regulating human conduct, which by nature is lawless. Therefore, it is written, “*the law is for the lawless*” (1 Tim 1:9).

Scriptural Use of “Law”

In Scripture, particularly in Romans and Galatians, “*law*” is compared with grace (Rom 4:16; 5:20; 6:14,15; Gal 2:21; 5:4), and “*works*” are men’s efforts to keep the law (Rom 9:32; 11:6; Gal 2:16; 3:2,5,10). “*Law*” is, therefore, a means of gaining God’s approval and “*works*” are the attempts of men to measure up to the requirements of the Law. With great care, the Spirit has confirmed to us that righteousness and Divine approval cannot come by the Law. All efforts to keep the Law failed, as attested by the Divine affirmation, “*There is none righteous, no not one*” (3:10).

When Paul says he speaks to those who “*know the law*,” therefore, he is not referring to a mere technical acquaintance with the precepts of the Law. Rather, he speaks to those who are acquainted with the PRINCIPLE of law as revealed in the Law of Moses, or the First Covenant.

DOMINION WHILE THEY LIVE

“Know ye not . . . how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?” Here is an important principle upon which profound teaching will be built. The Law pertains ONLY to life in this present world. It exclusively addresses life in the flesh. The Law has no relevance whatsoever in the tomb, where the dead body lies. It also has no pertinence in the unseen world where those separated from their bodies reside. It will have no application in the glory, when we will ever be with the Lord.

The Law is for men “*in the flesh*,” and in the world. It is for those who are alienated from God and are under the dominion of sin. As soon as an individual dies, he is no longer under the Law. His state is fixed, and thus he is no longer subject to the Law. Using these principles, the Spirit will unfold the blessed state we now enjoy in Christ Jesus. There is every reason for the believer to be confident in the good fight of faith.

THE NECESSITY OF A DEATH ILLUSTRATED

“²For 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.³ 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

Our death with Christ has yielded Liberation from the Tyranny and Condemnation of the Law--by Given O. Blakely

law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.” The Spirit now sites an illustration of the case before us. It deals with marriage at its root, and not with the various complications and exceptions with which the Scriptures deal.

In view of our Western culture, and the infamy into which marriage has sunk, our text will sound unusually strong. But we must not balk at the language employed by the Spirit. This is the Word of the Lord, and consequently the thought is expressed in “pure” language (Psa 119:140; Prov 30:5). It is not intended to deal exhaustively with the subject of marriage. It does, however, approach marriage from the ideal viewpoint. It represents it as God intended for it to be.

In keeping with the subject before us, the **remarriage** of the woman will be the point. The Spirit will affirm that death must occur before remarriage can take place. Once again, the teaching of the text does not pertain specifically to marriage, but to our union with Christ Jesus. That is the point of bringing up this illustration.

A BRIEF DIGRESSION

Because of the deterioration of marriage in our society, and within the professed church itself, it is necessary to briefly deal with marriage and remarriage. Men have become too loose in their views on this subject. Divorce has become so common in our time and culture that one out of three marriages are severed by divorce. The rate is slightly higher among those who all themselves “Christian.” Divorce is sought for the most foolish of reasons, and the whole matter of marriage has been greatly obscured because of this circumstance.

The reason for bringing up this matter, is that our text recognizes death as the only thing that frees the woman from her husband. I have already said this is viewing marriage from the ideal perspective, and not from the view of exceptions and unusual circumstances that may occur. It is not intended to be an overview of marriage in its entirety.

Divorce Under the Law

The law was comparatively lenient on the matter of divorce. This, Jesus affirmed, was because of the “hardness” of men’s hearts (Matt 19:8).

A “certificate [or ‘bill’] of divorce” was allowed if a husband found some form of indecency in his wife. The woman given such a certificate was free to marry another man (Deut 24:1-2). If her second husband also put her away, her first husband could not remarry her. It is

In keeping with the subject before us, the remarriage of the woman will be the point. The Spirit will affirm that death must occur before remarriage can take place. The teaching of the text does not pertain specifically to marriage, but to our union with Christ Jesus. That is the point of bringing up this illustration.

written, “her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD” (Deut 24:3-4).

If an Israelite man saw a woman among the captives of a nation they defeated, and desired her, he could take her to be his wife. Certain rules were to be followed in bringing the woman into accord with the customs of Israel. If the man was not pleased with the woman, he could let her go her wherever she desired when she left him (Deut 21:10-14).

Even under the Law, however, God spoke clearly concerning how He felt about divorce: “I hate divorce!” [“putting away,” ^{KJV}] (Mal 2:16). It was never His intention for marriage to be dissolved. His tolerance of both multiple wives and divorce was not owing to any acceptance of those circumstances. Until Jesus, sin

had such a grip upon the human race that things were permitted that were of themselves not acceptable. Without God’s longsuffering in these matters, He would have been moved to destroy the whole of our race. He therefore “winked” at, or “overlooked” these conditions in prospect of the coming Savior. But He no longer overlooks them. As it is written, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked [‘winked at,’ ^{KJV}], but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

Jesus Spoke of Divorce

As you might expect, the professed experts of the Law questioned Jesus about the matter of divorce. They seemed to sense He was more gracious toward some circumstances than they were, and more strict concerning others.

The Sermon on the Mount

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus drew a sharp distinction between the tradition of the elders and the truth of God’s word. He introduced these comparisons with the words, “But I say unto you” (Matt 5:22,28,32,34,44).

One such saying concerned the matter of divorce. “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matt 5:31-32).

Here an exception is made—fornication, or marital unfaithfulness. Under this condition divorce and remarriage are approved.

The Pharisee’s Question

Revealing how they read the Law, the Pharisees once came to Jesus asking, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” Jesus appeared to totally ignore their question, going

straight to the heart of the matter. *“Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”* **These men had asked the wrong question!** In the origin of marriage, God had made no provision for the dissolution of it. Men were not to separate what God had joined together—something that occurs when husband and wife become *“one flesh.”*

The Pharisees were not satisfied with the answer. Seeking to snare the Savior, they responded, *“Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?”* In his answer, Jesus revealed they had missed the spirit of the Law, viewing it as a lifeless code. *“Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”* ^{NKJV} The provision of Moses, therefore, was a concession to protect the woman and keep God from destroying the men. It was not an ideal provision at all, for God has never intended such things: i.e., *“from the beginning it has not been this way.”* ^{NASB}

Jesus then rose to magnify the law and make it honorable, thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 42:21). *“And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”* Other versions read *“except for sexual immorality,”* ^{NKJV} *“except for immorality,”* ^{NASB} *“except for marital unfaithfulness,”* ^{NIV} and *“except for unchastity.”* ^{NRSV}

The words were as startling to Christ’s disciples as they are to some in our day. Knowing that handing out bills of divorce had become popular, they responded, *“If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”* ^{NASB} They certainly had caught

the drift of our Lord’s words. Marriage was serious business with Him! His answer has caused much discussion among professed believers. *“Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it”* ^{NASB} (Matt 19:7-12).

The *“statement,”* or *“saying,”* ^{KJV} to which Jesus refers is not the one He had just made concerning unlawful divorce causing one to commit adultery when remarriage. Rather, it is the statement made by His disciples: *“It is better not to marry.”* That is the statement that is not adapted to everyone. Some people were *“given”* the ability to refrain from marriage, but such abstinence was not intended to be the standard for men. Some were born with no desire for marriage. Some had the condition forced

In Romans, the Spirit is not basing an argument upon the marriage with all of its involvements, but with marriage in its ideal form. It would not be comely to base a truth calculated to produce confidence on a shifting circumstance. That would be counter-productive.

upon them by others, such as those taken captive by Babylon (2 Kgs 20:18). Still others chose this manner of life to give themselves to the work of the Lord, like Paul (1 Cor 7:7). Only such individuals could embrace that it was *“better not to marry.”* For all others, as with Adam, it was **not** good *“for man to be alone”* (Gen 2:18).

The point is that Jesus appears to be

in conflict with our text. Romans 7:2 states a woman can only remarry if her husband dies. Jesus allowed for an exception: fornication, or marital infidelity. In Romans, the Spirit is not basing an argument upon the marriage with all of its involvements, but with marriage in its ideal form. It would not be comely to base a truth calculated to produce confidence on a shifting circumstance. That would be counter-productive. Rather than resulting in assurance, such an approach would cause even more confusion.

God Is Divorced

It may sound a bit crude, but God Himself has given a bill of divorcement to Israel, putting them away because of their unfaithfulness to Him. Here is what the Scriptures say. *“This is what the LORD says: ‘Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce with which I sent her away?’”* (Isa 50:1). He refers to Israel’s *“mother”* because He had rejected a generation of Israelites, and not all the seed of Abraham. And again, *“I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries”* (Jer 3:8). He says *“faithless Israel”* because He did not put the whole nation away—only those who were unfaithful to Him. There is still *“a remnant, according to the election of grace”* (Rom 11:5).

Paul Speaks on Divorce

Paul gives some extensive teaching on marriage and divorce in the seventh chapter of First Corinthians. He speaks in view of the conditions at Corinth. There were apparently numerous homes where one mate had turned to the Lord and the other had not. Some were hasty to dissolve the marriage at once, not desiring to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

His counsel to the people is straightforward. *“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.”* That was the general rule, and strictly comports with our Lord’s words concerning marriage. The wife who

insists on leaving, however, is told to remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. All of this is to be considered in light of what Jesus said about separations that allowed for remarriage.

The Apostle then addresses those who are unequally yoked with unbelievers. Whether it is a believing husband and an unbelieving wife, or a believing wife and an unbelieving husband, the admonition is the same. If the unbeliever is *“willing to live”*^{NIV} with the believer he/she is not to be put away. The marriage and the children are *“sanctified”* through the believer. If this was not the case, the children resulting from that marriage would be *“unclean.”*

If the unbeliever is **not** willing to remain, the believer is told, *“Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.”* I understand the *“bondage”* to refer to the marital bond. The individual loosed from that bond is free to remarry. A special condition has been introduced, and a remedy is provided that is not standard, but is accepted.

In order to encourage determination to do the best they can under unfavorable circumstances, Paul reminds believers that they may actually save their unbelieving mates. *“For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 7:10-16).

Why the Lengthy Explanation?

There is a reason for this rather lengthy, but by no means thorough, explanation. **First**, it is important that no person uses this text to bludgeon believers who have been divorced. There are some things that cannot be undone, and this is one of them. We know from Christ’s dealings with the woman at the well, that there is grace for such people. He told that woman, who had five husbands, and was living with one that was not her husband,

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:4:10).

Second, the text should be an encouragement to the unmarried to approach marriage with all solemnity. It must not be entered into with the thought that it can be quickly dissolved. It is intended to last until parted by death. A disregard for the view of marriage set forth in this text will yield disastrous and

The intention of this passage is to explain WHY we are no longer under the Law. By that, I mean we are no longer subject to its curse, for *“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* (Gal 3:10).

The Spirit has already declared that we have entered into a state of death. We *“were baptized into His (Christ’s) death”* (6:3). Verses two and three are establishing how the Law considers death. Death removes one from the dominion of

The text should be an encouragement to the unmarried to approach marriage with all solemnity. It must not be entered into with the thought that it can be quickly dissolved. It is intended to last until parted by death. A disregard for the view of marriage set forth in this text will yield disastrous and far reaching consequences.

far reaching consequences.

Third, there is a certain manner of reasoning that is inherent in the Kingdom of God. The basis of reasoning is always founded on the ideal and sure foundation of truth. Our views of Scripture must NOT be molded by circumstances that vary, such as custom and tradition. To approach the Word of God with inconsistent circumstances as our foundation can only result in confusion and the removal of confidence.

Fourth, our view of God-ordained institutions, such as marriage and government, must be shaped by Divine intention, not the customs or abuses of our times. Marriage, in this case, is to be seen from the standpoint of what God intended, not from how men have corrupted it.

THE INTENT OF THE PASSAGE

the law. That is the whole intent of the passage.

The expression *“free from the law”* applies to the wife who was bound by the law to remain with her husband. When her husband dies, she is released from that law of marriage. She is now at liberty to be married to another man without becoming an adulterous, or infracting the Law in another area. **DEATH FREES FROM THE LAW.** That is the point. It moves the individual beyond the jurisdiction of Law. The Law is made for those alive in the flesh, not those who have died.

We must take care not to press the text too far. It is a general statement, and must be so taken without attempting to impose traditions on men. It is not intended to be either a bludgeon or an elixir of delusive oil. We will find that the application of this truth appears to contradict the very illustration given.

DEAD THROUGH THE BODY OF CHRIST

“^{4a} Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law

through the body of Christ . . . ” On the surface, this does appear to be at

variance with the illustration taken from the Law. In the case adduced concerning

Our death with Christ has yielded Liberation from the Tyranny and Condemnation of the Law--by Given O. Blakely

marriage, the husband died and the woman was free to remarry. In the application before us, it is the woman who dies—the one under the law of the husband. There is a reason for this line of thought. **The Law of God cannot die!** It came from God, and it cannot succumb. We cannot be freed from the tyranny of law by it dying. It is “*holy*,” “*just*,” “*good*,” and “*spiritual*” (Rom 7:12,14; 1 Tim 1:8). It is “*light*” (Prov 6:23), bringing the “*knowledge of sin*” (Rom 3:20), and witnessing to “*the righteousness of God*” (Rom 3:21).

There is no scenario in the Law that precisely depicts what occurs to us in salvation. However, the principle that declares what must happen IS here.

It is not the Law that has died, but us! The Law did not need to be joined to someone else, we did! By saying we have “become dead,” the Spirit shows our death was a Divine accomplishment, not something we ourselves did.

Before we can be joined to the Lord, a death must occur! Once death occurs, the jurisdiction of the Law is obviated. **Until it occurs, we cannot be released from the condemnation of the Law or be joined to the Lord.**

WE ARE THE ONES WHO DIED

It is not the Law that has died, but us! The Law did not need to be joined to someone else, **we did!** By saying we have “*become dead*,” the Spirit shows our death was a Divine accomplishment, not something we ourselves did.

The Spirit reasons, “*that if One died for all, then were all dead*” (2 Cor 5:14). In Christ, **our** death is as real as His! Once we were “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph 2:1). Now we are “*dead to sin*” (Rom 6:2). Because we are “*dead*,” we

are “*freed from sin*,” and shall “*also live with Him*” (Rom 6:7-8). We are now “*dead with Christ*” (Rom 6:8), and are to reckon ourselves to be “*dead indeed unto sin*” (Rom 6:11). Again, it is written, “*For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3).

Let no one doubt the reality of this death. It is spiritual, but not metaphorical. It is our union with the death of Christ. We were “*baptized into His death*” (6:3). **If He had not died, we could not have died to the Law.**

This death occurred when our sins were remitted and the righteousness of God was imputed to us. When we came into union with His death, we came out of union with sin’s guilt. As soon as that happened, the Law had no more dominion over us. It could no longer condemn us or drive us from the presence of the Lord. The Law could not defile our conscience or accuse us before the Lawgiver. As already illustrated, the Law has no jurisdiction in the realm of death, and we **really** died!

Freedom from the Law does not mean freedom from obligation,

but **freedom from condemnation**. It does not mean freedom from the restraint of the flesh, but **freedom from condemnation**. It does not mean freedom from the responsibility to obey God, but **freedom from condemnation**. In Christ, we are out of reach of the condemnation of the Law, although we delight in it after our renewed “*inward man*” (Rom 7:25).

THROUGH THE BODY OF CHRIST

We have not become “*dead to the Law*” through any doing of our own. We have not cancelled its unbending requirement of perfect obedience by fulfilling its demands. We have not measured up to its standard so that condemnation has now been withdrawn. The law cannot retract the sentence it passes! God can repent (Gen 6:6; Ex

32:14), but Law cannot. God can forgive sin, but Law cannot. God can give repentance, but Law cannot.

A Sacrificial Body

Our death to the Law was “*through the body of Christ*.” **This is Christ’s body from the sacrificial point of view**—an offering for sin. Scripture makes much of Christ’s body from this point of view.

❑ **A PREPARED BODY.** “*Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but A BODY hast thou prepared Me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me,) to do thy will, O God*” (Heb 10:5-7). In His body, Jesus came to grips with the circumstances faced by the ones He came to redeem. His body was also the vehicle through which a pleasing sacrifice for sin would be presented to God the Father.

❑ **BORE OUR SINS.** “*Who His own self bare our sins in HIS OWN BODY on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed*” (1 Pet 2:24). The sins of the world were localized and judged in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

❑ **COMMUNION WITH.** “*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of THE BODY of Christ?*” (1 Cor 10:16). At the table of the Lord we come into fellowship with Christ’s body and the benefits that resulted from its sacrifice.

❑ **REMEMBERED.** “*And when he had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is MY BODY, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me*” (1 Cor 11:23). Christ’s body is remembered because of what was effected in His death.

❑ **RECONCILIATION.** “*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in THE BODY of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight*” (Col 1:21-22). In Christ’s death, sinners were

brought back to the God from whom they were alienated by sin.

- **SANCTIFICATION.** *“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of THE BODY of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Heb 10:10). The presentation of Jesus’ body as an offering for sin qualified us for Divine acceptance and employment.

In our baptism we were effectively united with Christ’s sacrificial body. All of the benefits that flowed from that sacrifice passed to us as we were united with Him in His vicarious death. That effective unity is what brought about our death to the Law—our release from its condemnation. It moved us beyond its jurisdiction.

CHRIST AND LAW CANNOT UNITE

It is not possible to be under the Law and united to Christ at the same time. When we are joined to the Lord, we are necessarily dead to the Law. Believers are now in covenant with Christ NOT Law. They now live for Him, not with a mind to fulfill a code or an obligation.

Some might imagine this arrangement to be less demanding than that of Law. This is a delusion. The person in covenant relation with God through Christ has more demands placed upon him than any law can place. No thought or deed can be his own. His body is not his own. He affection is to be placed on things above, and self is to be denied. With these more strenuous demands comes an abundance

of grace that we may be able to keep them with great joy and peace.

The Law as a covenant condemned us. As a means of defining sin, it helps us. Seeing this distinction brings great liberty to the soul.

Robert Haldane said of Martin Luther, “When Luther discovered the distinction between the law as a covenant and as a rule, it gave such relief to his mind, that he considered himself as at the gate of paradise.” That view is one that joyfully acknowledges we are, in Christ, *“dead to the law.”* Yet, the believer holds the Law in the highest regard, hiding it in the heart, and serving it with the mind (Psa 119:11; Rom 7:25).

THE PURPOSE FOR OUR DEATH

“^{4a} . . . that you may be married to another; to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.” There is a reason why we have become *“dead to the Law.”* In our unity with Jesus in His death, our sins were put away, and the *“flesh”* circumcised, or cut away, from our essential persons (Col 2:11-13). However, separating us from our sins was not the major objective. Rather, it was the MEANS to a large purpose.

THAT WE MIGHT LIVE TO GOD

From a Summary point of view, the purpose of our death to the Law was that we might live toward God Himself. *“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God”*^{NKJV} (Gal 2:19). To *“live to God”* is to live for Him, doing His will, and furthering His purpose on the earth. It is to be absorbed with His revealed agenda, engaged in casting down imaginations and high thoughts, and wrestling against principalities and powers. There is no purpose for dying to sin and the Law is this does not take place. Death must lead to life!

Let it be clear, until a person has died with Christ, or been *“buried into His death,”* life toward God is not possible. Prior to our death with Christ, we were *“slaves of sin,”* and had neither the will nor the capacity to live toward God. Only a death can resolve that situation.

WHY BE SUBJECT TO ORDINANCES?

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh”^{NKJV}

to sin, pass away, and everything becomes new (2 Cor 5:17). We develop a certain disdain for sin that can keep us from it if we will live by faith. Now our emphasis is doing what God pleases, not trying in the flesh avoid what He hates.

THAT YOU MAY BE MARRIED

From one point of view, we are *“betrothed”*, or *“espoused”* to Christ (2 Cor 11:2). Here a marriage between the believer and Christ is mentioned, and it is on an individual basis. Ordinarily, being

Dying with Christ moves us beyond the need to be subject to elemental ordinances. When we die with Christ we receive a new heart, a new nature, and a new spirit. Old things, such as preferring to sin, pass away, and everything becomes new (2 Cor 5:17). We develop a certain disdain for sin that can keep us from it if we will live by faith. Now our emphasis is doing what God pleases, not trying in the flesh avoid what He hates.

(Col 2:20-23).

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wedded to Christ is a collective view, taking the entire church into account, which is Christ’s *“bride”* (John 3:29; Rev 21:2,9; 22:17). How refreshing to learn it is also an individual view.

This is a further development of the

thought of being freed from the Law, which was our first husband. As long as we were under the Law, we could not be married to Christ. Our sin was still with us, and Christ cannot be joined to a person under the rule of Law and servitude to sin.

Our marriage with Christ has not taken place in its fulness, but it has, in a very real sense, started. We belong to Him as surely as Mary belonged to Joseph before their marriage had been fully culminated. "Before" they came together, she was found with child by the power of the Holy Spirit. And, "before" they came together, before Joseph knew the real situation, he was minded "to put her away *privily* (privately or secretly)" (Matt 1:19).

Raised with Christ

Marriage, in this passage, is viewed as being joined to the Lord in the first fruits

the times in which we live. Sin is altogether too prominent in the modern church. There is too much of it in its leaders, and it is allowed too much in its constituency.

Under the Law, there was a perpetual "remembrance" of sin, year after year (Heb 10:3). The Law could not get rid of sin, but only remind people of its continual presence. But in Christ, this is not the case. Now the blood of Christ purges our conscience "from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14).

UNITED WITH A RISEN CHRIST

We are united with a RISEN Christ, and share His resurrection life. We have been freed to be married "to Him who is raised from the dead." Our lives are now "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). We are presently participating in the "Divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), and made "partakers

1:11).

This "fruit" is the consequence of Christ living within us. As it is written, "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" ^{NKJV} (Gal 2:20). It is also the result of God working in us, "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). Again, this fruitage is to be viewed as God working in us "that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb 13:21).

Notice that it is "fruit unto God." He is the prominent member of the Godhead. From the very beginning, the result of believing on Christ accrues to God's glory.

- We turn from Satan "unto God" (acts 26:18).
- We are now "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:11).
- We yield our "members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom 6:13).
- We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice "unto God" (Rom 12:1).
- In Christ, we are a "sweet savor of Christ" unto God (2 Cor 2:15).
- Jesus has reconciled both Jew and Gentile "unto God" (Eph 2:15).
- We are to give diligence to show ourselves "approved unto God" (2 Tim 2:15).
- One of the benefits of the New Covenant is that we can "draw nigh unto God" (Heb 7:19).
- We "come unto God" through the Lord Jesus (Heb 7:25).
- Jesus has made us "kings and priests unto God" (Rev 1:6).
- Strong faith that does not stagger at the promises gives "glory to God" (Rom 4:20).
- Through His death, Christ has reconciled us "to God" (Rom 5:10).
- The person who serves God in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, is "acceptable to God" (Rom 14:18).
- In Christ, our sacrifices and offerings are "acceptable and well pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18).
- We have "turned to God" to serve Him (1 Thess 1:9).

This is a further development of the thought of being freed from the Law, which was our first husband. As long as we were under the Law, we could not be married to Christ. Our sin was still with us, and Christ cannot be joined to a person under the rule of Law and servitude to sin.

sense. We are, after all, "risen with Christ" (Col 3:1). Not only were we "buried with Him in baptism," we are also "risen with Him through faith in the operation of God" (Col 2:12). That experience started the "married" experience of our text.

SIN HAS NO PLACE IN THIS MARRIAGE

The person who is dead to the law is not free to sin. God does not take a tolerant view toward sin in those identified with His Son. Ananias and Sapphira confirm this to be the case (Acts 5:1-10). The infamous fornicator at Corinth also cries out to us about the total unacceptability of sin in those who have named the Son (1 Cor 5:1-4).

Let it be clear that no person who is serving sin is "dead to the Law," for the Law is, indeed, "for the lawless." This whole matter points out the seriousness of

of Christ" (Heb 3:14). Our life is resurrection life, and is moved along by the "power of His resurrection" (Phil 3:10), the power which God "wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead," exalting Him to His own right hand in the heavenly places (Eph 1:20). How radically this life differs from living under the domination of the law!

FRUIT UNTO GOD

"... that we should bring forth fruit unto God." Here is why we died to the law! Here is why we were raised with Christ and are married to Him. It was to bring forth "fruit unto God." This is the "fruit unto holiness" mentioned in 6:22. It is the fruit that glorifies God, to which Jesus alluded in John 15:8. It is the fruit of the Spirit, all of which is presented to God "in all goodness, righteousness and truth" (Eph 5:9). This is "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil

All of this is fruit – fruit “unto God.” In Christ, “much fruit” brings glory to the Father (John 15:8), and a lack of fruit results in removal from the Vine, who is Christ Himself (John 15:2).

It should be noted that all works previous to our union with Christ are “dead works,” from which our conscience must be purged (Heb 9:14). They were “dead” because they were not produced

from its condemnation and married to the risen Christ. While it is true that David loved and served the Law prior to Christ (Psa 119:48,97,113,127,159,167), he did so as a spiritual pioneer, ahead of his time. Like Abraham, he had a faith that transcended the day in which he lived.

But for those in Christ Jesus, loving and serving the Law is the standard or norm, not the exception. We have been elevated to the heavenly places in Christ,

truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:5-6).

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Note with what care the Spirit speaks on our deliverance from the Law and new life in Christ Jesus. He ever holds before us the Divine intention behind this marvelous transformation. It is that we bring forth “fruit unto God.” This is designed to put a damper on the flesh, removing any tendency to be lenient with sin, or excuse our indulgence in it.

When a person sins, regardless of the reason, he has departed from the will of God. He has ceased to bring forth fruit unto God, for such fruit cannot come from sin. In Christ, fruit is related to “holiness” (6:21,21). Being in Christ NEVER results in sin. Faith, or believing God, will never yield a harvest of sin. Walking in the Spirit cannot lead to sin. Sin always springs from unbelief and alienation. In my judgment, there is a great need to emphasize this aspect of spiritual life. We are living in an indulgent age, and amidst a transgressing society. Unless “by reason of use,” our spiritual senses are “exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14), we will find ourselves condoning what God condemns. In such a case, sin will surely express itself through us.

But for those in Christ Jesus, loving and serving the Law is the standard or norm, not the exception. We have been elevated to the heavenly places in Christ, and are capable of bringing forth consistent fruit to God in large measures. This is a most marvelous circumstance.

out of a oneness with Christ. Whether they were works of imagined goodness, or expressions of sinful lusts, they were “dead,” and were not “fruit unto God.” Our conscience must be “purged” of any trust in imagined “good works,” and any defilement caused by transgressions of the Law. All of this is involved in being freed from the Law and married to Christ.

VIEWING THE LAW

We will never be able to serve the Law with our minds until we are liberated

and are capable of bringing forth consistent fruit to God in large measures. This is a most marvelous circumstance.

The circumstance of bringing forth fruit to God is beautifully stated in the Epistle to the Colossians. Paul gave thanks for the Colossians, praying diligently upon hearing of their faith in Christ and love toward “all the saints.” This, he said, was because “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the

WHEN WE WERE IN THE FLESH

“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.”

As Paul progresses in opening spiritual life to our understanding, he masterfully weaves our past with our present, showing what a marvelous transition we have undergone. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he speaks in strict harmony with what has occurred to us in Christ Jesus. He does not judge according to appearance, but righteously, appealing to the “new man” which is “renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col 3:10). There is power in this approach because it serves to remind us of the great work God has

done in us through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit. To show us more fully how much we have been blessed, the Spirit will take us into the past, confirming our former condition. It will be precise, but it will be seen as the **past**, not the present.

WHEN WE WERE IN THE FLESH

Most of the modern translations maintain the word “flesh,” although the NIV uses the expression “sinful nature,” adding the footnote, “Or, the flesh.”

The phrase “IN the flesh” means controlled by the flesh, or the unregenerate part of our being. This is the part that came from Adam, or was “born

of the flesh” (John 3:6).

An Argument for Consistent Terminology

One of the great disservices of so many translations is the loss of consistent and meaningful terminology. The text of Scripture has become so diluted by the great variety of translations that the meaning of some key words has been significantly obscured. The word “flesh” is a case in point.

Many translators have taken the liberty of **interpreting** the word “flesh” rather than translating it. From the etymological point of view, there is no question concerning the propriety of the

word “flesh.” Taken from the word σαρκί, the word, from a translators viewpoint, is undoubtedly “flesh.” This precise word is used forty times from Romans through Second John. While various contexts do give it a slightly different significance, the meaning ALWAYS has to do with the natural, or temporal, part of us.

For those whose minds are cultured by Scripture, the word “flesh” rarely speaks of good. It is one of those terms that is undeniably related to sin and degradation. A few such uses will suffice to illustrate this point.

- ❑ “For I know that in me (that is, in my FLESH) nothing good dwells” (Rom 7:18).
- ❑ “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” (Rom 7:25).
- ❑ “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” (Rom 8:1).
- ❑ “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” (Rom 8:5).
- ❑ “So then, those who are in THE FLESH cannot please God” (Rom 8:8).
- ❑ “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to THE FLESH, to live according to THE FLESH you will die” (Rom 8:12-13a).
- ❑ “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for THE FLESH, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 13:14).
- ❑ “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of THE FLESH and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).
- ❑ “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by THE FLESH?” (Gal 3:3).
- ❑ “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” (Gal 5:13).
- ❑ “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and

you shall not fulfill the lust of THE FLESH” (Gal 5:16).

- ❑ “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” (Gal 5:17).
- ❑ “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).
- ❑ “And those who are Christ’s have crucified THE FLESH with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24).
- ❑ “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 6:8).
- ❑ “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 2:3).
- ❑ “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in THE FLESH” (Phil 3:3).
- ❑ “For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of THE FLESH, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error” (2 Pet 2:18).
- ❑ “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” (1 John 2:16).

After reading these verses, the thought of being “IN THE FLESH” should strike fear into the heart. The use

of words like “sinful nature” (NIV, NASB), “natural self” (NJB), “natural inclinations” (NJB), and “sinful passions” (ASV), have not served to clarify the concept of “flesh.” While there may be some helpful facets in these words, they have introduced a certain inconsistency in Scripture itself. That inconsistency has, in my judgment, diffused the power of the word. It is the peculiar prerogative of Apostolic doctrine to make clear that “no good thing” dwells in this part of the human makeup.

“Flesh” is what is “born of the flesh.” It is more than the chemical makeup of our bodies. There is the “will of the flesh” (John 1:13), “the things of the flesh” (Rom 8:5), “filthiness of the flesh” (2 Cor 7:1), “lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16), “works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19), and the “body of

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the sins of the flesh” (Col 2:11). There is also “fleshly wisdom” (2 Cor 1:12) and “a fleshly mind” (Col 2:18).

Make no mistake about this, no good thing can come from “the flesh.” It “profits nothing” (John 6:63), leading to death and ultimate condemnation.

“In the Flesh”

When, therefore, we were “in the flesh,” we were in a hopeless condition. We were not good. We were not righteous. We were “dead in trespasses and sins.” Sin controlled us, and we were its slaves. We were, by virtue of being dominated and controlled by the flesh, alienated from God and shut out from heaven. Earlier, in chapter six, the Spirit said we were “free from righteousness” at that time (6:20). It was a hopeless condition.

Now, this is the condition from which we have been liberated as a result of being baptized into Christ's death. Although we are "in the body," we are no longer "in the flesh." Later, the Spirit will affirm, "But ye are **not** in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom 8:9).

THE MOTIONS OF SINS

When we were "in the flesh," or in a state of nature, dominated by the temporal and enslaved to sin, there were certain activities within us. The KJV calls it "motions of sins." Other versions read, "sinful passions,"^{NKJV,NIV,NRSV} "passions of sins,"^{DARBY} "evil passions,"^{BBE} and "sinful desires."^{NLT}

The "motions of sins" are sin working within the individual, pulling him downward into the spiral of indulgence. Sin is not dormant. It has "motions," or passions and emotions that refuse to keep quiet. When we were "in the flesh," sin was like a bubbling volcano, erupting at every opportunity, and defiling everything about us. It certainly is not a lovely picture, but that is how it was when we were "in the flesh." We were governed by sin, which worked within us through lusts, or godless desires.

PASSIONS AROUSED BY THE LAW

Herein is a most marvelous circumstance. These sinful "motions," or

the Law,"^{ASV} "which came into being through the Law,"^{BBE} and "the law aroused these evil desires."^{NLT} The New Century Version gives an unusually strong reading. "The law made us want to do sinful things." The Children's International Bible reads the same way. God's Word, a 1998 version of Scripture, says sin was "Stirred up by Moses' laws."

Whatever one may think about this verse, there is a resounding unanimity in all of the versions of Scripture. Care must be taken, however, not to ascribe fault to the holy Law of God. The text does not say the Law MADE us sin, but that it aroused the passions, or "motions," of sin. It is as though it awakened lusts, causing them to spring into action, and thereby defiling us. **The Law excited, provoked, or inflamed sinful passions.** It did not do this because it was evil, but because natural man is evil.

This is why the Scriptures affirm, "the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor 15:56). As this will be developed at length in verses 7-14, I will reserve further comments for our coverage of those verses.

Do you wonder about the sinfulness of man? Are you confused about how far man fell when sin and death entered into the world? Ponder that God's holy Law aroused sin, causing it to express itself

which I am familiar. For the most part, the people in those sectarian precincts are woefully ignorant of the nature and power of sin. It is a most tragic circumstance.

FRUIT UNTO DEATH

And what was the result of the awakening of the sin principle within us? How were we affected by it? The "motions of sins" worked in our "members to bring forth fruit unto death." Mind you, this is a condition that existed when we were married to the Law—when it was our master, and we were responsible to it.

All of our faculties were impacted by the motions, or emotions, of sin. Sin proliferated through our entire beings, infecting our thoughts, desires, ambitions, judgments, and perceptions. All of this happened while we were wed to the Law, and we could not extricate ourselves from the dilemma! There was not a single part of our complex persons that was not tainted by these lusts. They "worked in our members," driving us further from God and deeper into sin and transgression.

Those who can see these things have reason to thank God we have died to the Law in order that we might be married to another. That death to the Law was the prelude to living unto God. The new life we receive in Christ Jesus is aroused by the Gospel, and fueled by the promises. It has no propensity to sin, but is a more precise image of God than ever born by even Adam, the "first man."

Our marriage to Christ has brought power to us that can never be realized through the principle of law. Life in Him is superior in every way. Now, praise the Lord, we can "awake unto righteousness and sin not" (1 Cor 15:34), rather than have sinful passions awakened and inflamed by the holy Law of God. Now God works in us to will and do of His own good pleasure. What a "great salvation" has been brought to us! Let us see to it we do not neglect it in any way (Heb 2:3).

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evil passions, "were aroused by the law." The KJV reads, "which were BY the law." Other versions read, "which were through

and dominate us. That is what this passage teaches. It is a truth that is rarely, if ever, heard in the circles with

NOW WE ARE DELIVERED FROM THE LAW

"^{6a} But now we have been delivered from the Law, having died to what we were held by . . ." Never forget this: we have to be "delivered from the Law!" Whatever you may think of the human will and man's power of

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analysis, they were wholly inadequate to remove men from the dominion of the condemning Law! In my judgment, there has been far too much emphasis placed on the “you can do it” approach to salvation. The truth of the matter is that we could NOT do it. We could not get rid of our sin or the inclination to sin. We were impotent to come out from under the dominion of the Law. We could not stop it from condemning us. In fact, when it spoke to us, sin broke out the more, expressing itself in all of our capacities.

Our condition apart from Christ was one of death (Eph 2:5), alienation (Col 1:21), captivity (2 Tim 2:26), servitude to sin (Rom 6:17), darkness (Eph 5:8), and hopelessness (Eph 2:12). We had hard and stony hearts (Ezek 11:19), were blind (Eph 4:18), and our ears were uncircumcised (Acts 7:51).

DELIVERED FROM THE LAW

Let it be clear that all who are NOT delivered from the Law ARE condemned by it. It was given that *“every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God”* (Rom 3:19). The fact that people run quickly to sin does not mean they are not under the Law. Because sinful souls do not feel the restraint of Law does not mean they are not ruled by it. Their involvement in sin is only accruing wrath for them. In the words of Scripture, *“But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath”* (Job 36:13). Again, *“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath”* (Rom 2:5).

Verse fourteen of the sixth chapter said, *“for you are not under Law.”* Now the Spirit tells us **why** we are not under the domination of law. It is certainly not because we have fulfilled it. It is not, as some imagine, because the Law has passed away, or been erased. We have been **“DELIVERED from the Law,”** or **“released”**^{NASB,NIV} from its domination.

Not only were we *“delivered from the power of darkness”* (Col 1:13) and *“the wrath to come”* (1 Thess 1:10), we were also *“delivered”* from the Law that condemned us. In both cases, we were helpless to change our situation. We could

not break loose from the powers of darkness, and we could not reverse the sentence of the Law.

The accomplishment of Christ’s mission is pictured this way in the second chapter of Hebrews. *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the*

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same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (2:14-15).

The *“fear of death”* was induced by the Law, which declared *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezek 18:4,20; Rom 6:23; Gal 3:13). In fact, this was the very first curse pronounced by God—and it had to do with breaking Law. *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Gen 2:17). Like a ruthless master, the Law stood over us, refusing to let us go, all the while calling for our well-deserved execution. If we were ever to experience freedom from its condemnation, we would have to be delivered.

Now We Are Delivered

Whatever our former condition, *“now we are delivered from the Law!”* God delivered us through Christ and by the Holy Spirit. He did it, as will be confirmed, with inscrutable wisdom. No mortal could ever have conceived of this means of deliverance.

WE DIED TO WHAT HELD US

We died to what held us! Other versions read as follows. *“Having died to what we were held by,”*^{NKJV} *“having died to that by which we were bound,”*^{NASB} *“by dying to what once bound,”*^{NIV} *“dead to that which held us captive,”*^{NRSV} *“having been made dead to that which had power over us,”*^{BBE} *“having died to what was binding us.”*^{NJB}

Did We Die, or Did the Law Die?

Some versions read as though the Law is what died. *“That being dead wherein we were held,”*^{KJV} *“That being dead by which we were held,”*^{WEBSTERS} *“that being dead by which we were held,”*^{REVISEDWEBSTERS} *“that being dead in which we were held,”*^{YOUNGS LITERAL}

While these readings may appear to say the Law died, none of these translations actually say that. If we apply the word *“that”* to the Law, the text appears to justify the conclusion that the Law died. On the other hand, if read the word *“that”* in the sense of *“in order that,”* the death applies to believers. That is the sense of the text.

If the language does not appear to justify this conclusion, the doctrine will. Beginning with Romans 6:2, the death of believers is the emphasis. *“We that are dead to sin”* (6:2), *“baptized into His death”* (6:3), *“buried with Him by baptism into death”* (6:4), *“in the likeness of His death”* (6:5), *“our old man is crucified”* (6:6), *“he that is dead is freed from sin”* (6:7), *“reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin”* (6:11) *“those who are alive from the dead”* (6:13). As if this was not enough, the statement is nailed down firmly in 7:4. *“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.”*

It is difficult to conceive of the Spirit declaring then matter with any more clarity. The notion that the Law has somehow died is an absurdity unworthy of embrace. If that was the case, we would not need to be delivered, for a dead Law

could not hold us! Further, if the law itself had died, or had been abrogated, it could neither condemn or have dominion over anyone, sinner or not. But this is not the case, for the Law is still “for the lawless” (1 Tim 1:9). It still is a “schoolmaster” to bring men to Christ. Men are not released

way. The NRSV reads, “erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands.” It was the Law’s CLAIM against us that was cancelled and nailed to the cross.

EPHESIANS 2:15. Here again, the

delivered from what “held us,” or “what we were held by.” Other versions read, “by which we were bound,”^{NASB} “what once bound us,”^{NIV} “that which held us captive,”^{NRSV} “that wherein we were held,”^{ASV} “wherein we were detained,”^{DARBYS} “that which had power over us,”^{BBE} and “what was binding us.”^{NJB}

The Law will not let a guilty man go! It holds him fast, even defiling his conscience after he has offered sacrifice after sacrifice (Heb 10:1-4). Whenever the Law makes a demand upon the sinner, even if those demands are seemingly fulfilled with a most exacting precision, the law shouts “GUILTY” in the face of the transgressor.

But when we become “dead to the Law through the body of Christ,” the Law condemns us no longer. By being joined to Christ, we have died to the order over which the Law presides. It cannot condemn us, for the God who spoke the Law has Himself justified us (Rom 8:33). The Law, therefore, very much alive and speaking, looks at the person who has died with Christ, and condemns him not. He is in the heavenly places, and his sin has been washed away. The part of him that is in fellowship with Christ is clean and pure, and is the dominant part.

What is even more, the Law of God, far from being abrogated, has been written upon the heart of the believer and put into his mind. Now, the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled by the believer (Rom 8:1,4), something that would be utterly impossible if the Law had died or been abolished.

It is absurd to think that God would write a law upon a heart that had been abolished. Or, that He would put into our minds a Law that had been nailed to the cross. Further, to affirm that the righteousness of a law that had been abrogated is fulfilled in those who are in Christ Jesus is, indeed, stretching our imagination.

It appears to me that men have attributed their own ignorance to God, representing as acting not only in contradiction of His word, but also in violation of His Divine nature. That is particularly reprehensible when you consider we partake of that nature.

If we have died to the law in order to be freed from its dominion and condemnation, and in order to serve God in the newness of Spirit, let us once and for all have done with everything that is lifeless and unproductive! Such things are out of place in the Lord’s service.

from that “schoolmaster” until “faith comes” (Gal 3:24-25).

Wasn’t The law Nailed to the Cross?

Some will respond by saying the Law was nailed to the cross, removed and taken out of the way once and for all. It is written, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col 2:14). And again, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace” (Eph 2:15). And again, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4).

In each of these verses painstaking precision can be seen. None of them say the Law was abolished, abrogated, or removed. **It was not the Law that was judged in the cross, but the transgressions of the Law.** Sin could not be removed by destroying the Law, for it was in the world before there was a law (Rom 5:13).

COLOSSIANS 2:14. The point here is not that the Law itself was nailed to the cross, but the indebtedness that was created by violating its precepts. The NASB therefore reads, “having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us.” The Law in its condemning capacity was taken out of the

Spirit carefully states the case. He does not say the commandments were “abolished,” but “the commandments contained in ordinances or regulations.” These were not the Ten Commandments, the platform of the Law, but the commandments pertaining to the ceremonial Law. These commandments forced men to deal with their sin, offering various and frequent sacrifices. It also imposed washings and other formalities upon the constituents of the Old Covenant that were required because of their sin. However, when Christ removed our sin, that brought an abrupt end to the “ordinances” of the law, for sin is what required them all.

ROMANS 10:4. Again, the case is stated most precisely. The Law was ended as a means to righteousness, and not as a moral standard: “the end of the Law FOR righteousness.” Because faith is the exclusive means of appropriating righteousness, and because the death of Christ has opened the door for faith to be given to men, the Law has been terminated as the way to become righteous.

Law Has No Claim Over the Dead

Apart from these several observations, the whole point of the text is that the Law has no claim over the dead—and we have died with Christ!

WE WERE HELD CAPTIVE

Our text affirms that we have been

THE REASON FOR THAT DELIVERANCE

^{6b} . . . so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” Why is it that we have died with Jesus? For what purpose have we been raised to walk in newness of life? What is the reason for being released from the Law by our death with Jesus? All of this has been done that we might serve the Lord “in newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” Right here we will come to grips with some of the major deficiencies in modern religion, particularly in the Western world.

NEWNESS OF SPIRIT

Pet 3:13). Under such marvelous conditions, it is utterly unreasonable to attempt to serve God in old and lifeless routines.

Serving God in “newness of Spirit” is serving Him in the energy, and under the direction, of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit has been “poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior”^{NASB} (Tit 3:5). In addition, the Lord Jesus Himself is appropriately described as a “life-giving Spirit”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 15:45).

Serving God “in newness of Spirit,” is ministering to Him in the power of the

is NOT an enviable position.

“Newness of Spirit” is not fleshly hype. It is driven by spiritual insight, godly joy, and faith that sees Him who is invisible. Where “newness of Spirit” is not found, God is not being served, and His will is not being done. It makes little difference how elaborate the institution or appearance may be.

OLDNESS OF LETTER

Attempting to serve God in the “oldness of letter” is Old Covenant religion. It is trying to serve God without the Spirit of God. It is following procedures instead of Jesus. It is a liturgy instead of a living sacrifice. “Oldness of letter” involves the heartless observance of rules and procedures. It has no spiritual life in it, does not perceive God, or have a heart for His great salvation.

Before we were in Christ, “oldness of letter” was all that was available to us. Most of us did not even follow that. But whether we did or not, life was vain and pointless—even religious life. Now we have been delivered from lifeless religious procedures—serving God in “the oldness of the letter.” That kind of service allows you to keep a hard heart and a defiled conscience, yet go through a religious routine. Such things are altogether too common in our world.

If we have died to the law in order to be freed from its dominion and condemnation, and in order to serve God in the newness of Spirit, let us once and for all have done with everything that is lifeless and unproductive! Such things are out of place in the Lord’s service, and damaging to our hearts and minds.

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Newness is essential to the service of God. Old manners are not acceptable. We have been given “new life” (Rom 6:4), a “new heart,” and a “new spirit” (Ezek 36:26). We have even been given a “new covenant” (Heb 12:24), and are ourselves a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). We have been given a “new man” that is to be “put on” (Eph 4:24), and come to God by “a new and a living way” (Heb 10:20). We are “newborn babes” (1 Pet 2:2), and are even looking for “a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (2

new creation. It is living under the domination of the “new man,” while subordinating the “old man,” not allowing him to govern our lives.

But none of this could happen until we died to sin and the Law, and were made alive to God through Jesus Christ. Until we die with Jesus, and are buried with Him, and raised with Him, we are shut up to lifeless and unacceptable service to God—if, indeed, there is any effort to serve Him at all. It should be apparent that this

CONCLUSION

In Christ Jesus we have been brought to the end of lifeless formalities. Having been raised from death in trespasses and sins, and buried with Jesus into death to sin, we are now “children of light” (Eph 5:8), possessing “the light of life” (John 8:12). However, all of this is to no avail if we are ignorant of what has happened to us in Christ Jesus. Many of God’s people are regularly served doses of law and do-

goodism. They are told what they ought to do, with little regard to what has happened to them, and what they possess, in Christ Jesus. Too often they are addressed as though they were still enemies of God, and with a near-total disregard for the fact that they have been reconciled to Him.

These unfortunate conditions have

compelled multitudes to devote themselves to temporary pursuits, perceiving the service of God to be futile and without genuine benefit. They are completely unaware of the “much more” (Rom 5:9,10,15,17) aspect of spiritual life and the “do you not know” (Rom 6:3,16; 7:1; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:2-3) approach to living.

In Christ both death and life are

Our death with Christ has yielded Liberation from the Tyranny and Condemnation of the Law--by Given O. Blakely

experienced, and both are a blessing. We are dead to sin and alive to God. We are dead to the Law and married to Jesus. Our situation has been reversed by the grace of God, and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We were once dead to God and alive to sin. Now we are dead to sin and alive to God. Once we are barren and now

we bear fruit.

If there is one thing that should come across to our hearts in this text, it is the marvelous advantage that we have in Christ Jesus. Our sin has been forgiven, and the Law cannot condemn us. We have died to what cursed us, and are alive to

the One who blesses us. All of this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Psa 118:23). The Law cannot condemn us, and the flesh has been robbed of its power. In Christ, you are united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. WYou have every reason to rejoice and be glad!

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 22



SIN GAINS THE ADVANTAGE THROUGH THE LAW

7:7-14 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." ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. ⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰ And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. ¹² Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. – Romans 7:7-14 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

The nature of spiritual life can easily elude us. It is a life in which **conflict** with sin is realized, even though sin does not have dominion over us. We confront sin, though we are not dominated by it. Some have imagined that when we are born again, every part of the sinful nature is removed from us. This is taught prominently in many conservative circles. The notion is founded upon the sixth chapter of Romans, which states the following: *"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"* (verse 6). The NIV reads, *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."*

DESTROYED DOES NOT EQUAL NON-EXISTENT

The phrase *"body of sin might be destroyed,"* or *"done away with,"* is not to be equated with *"no longer existent."* The latter part of the seventh chapter will strongly confirm this to be the case. The action that takes place when the *"body of sin"* is *"destroyed"* is twofold. **First**, it is cut away from our essential persons by means of the *"circumcision of Christ"* (Col 2:11-12). It has, therefore, no part whatsoever with the *"new man"* (Col 3:10), or the *"new creation"* (2 Cor 5:17) that is experienced in the new birth. Just as the Canaanites and other godless nations were not part of Israel, even though they dwelt in the same land for a season, so the *"body of sin"* is not part of

the *"new creation,"* even though it is found in the same house of clay.

Second, the *"body of sin"* is destroyed in the sense of losing its dominance. It is impotent against faith. In this sense, it has been *"destroyed"* just as Satan was destroyed in the death of Christ (Heb 2:14). He exists, yet is powerless when the believer walks in the Spirit and by faith. Sin, therefore, has no power over us when we walk in the Spirit. As it is written, *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh"* (Gal 5:16).

NOT A SIMPLISTIC CIRCUMSTANCE

The matter of our deliverance from sin and the Law, therefore, is not a

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHAT SHALL WE SAY? (7:7)
- II. WHEN SIN TOOK OPPORTUNITY (7:8)
- III. I WAS ALIVE, BUT I DIED (7:9)
- IV. THE COMMANDMENT BROUGHT DEATH (7:10)
- V. WHEN SIN DECEIVED ME (7:11)
- VI. THE LAW IS HOLY (7:12)
- VII. DID WHAT WAS GOOD BECOME DEATH? (7:13)
- VIII. THE LAW AND ME (7:14)

simplistic circumstance. It is not to be viewed as though we were already out of this world and in the presence of the Lord. We remain in the body, and while there, we are, in a very specific sense, *“absent from the Lord”* (2 Cor 5:6). While *“in the body”* (Heb 13:3), we have to contend with sin, even though it has been dethroned.

David had to contend with his wayward son Absalom, who, though not actually king, sought to dethrone David and usurp his throne (2 Sam 15-17). Moses had to contend with Korah and his cohorts, who sought to displace him, even though they were not the true leaders (Num 16). Joshua had to contend with at least thirteen hostile kings in the very land given to Israel by God (Josh 9-10). It should not surprise us that we still struggle against sin, even though we have been forgiven all trespasses and sin has lost its dominion over us. Just as entering Canaan did not mean struggle was over, so entering into Christ does not mean our struggles cease. In fact, this chapter will confirm our rebirth has actually initiated a struggle of epochal, and often confusing, proportions.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

All of this has very much relevance to the matter before us. Because we still

have to contend with sin, we are obliged to know more fully of our relationship to the Law. This is required lest we be drawn back to a system of law, imagining it is sufficient to make us righteous.

Not only does sin no longer have dominion over us, it has lost its mastery over us because we *“are not under the law, but under grace”* (Rom 6:14). There is no grace under Law, no leniency, no kindness toward the transgressor. Rather than offering a remedy for sin, the Law actually accentuates sin. It not only points out the guilt of sin, but aggravates and inflames it: *i.e., “sinful passions aroused by the law”*^{NIV} (verse 5).

To be *“delivered from the law,”* therefore, involves being emancipated from the condition produced by Law—God’s Law: *i.e., “the sinful passions aroused by the law.”*^{NIB} **Now, rather than God’s Word inflaming sinful passions, it feeds the soul, nourishes the spirit, and enlightens the heart.** This marvelous condition has come to pass because of our unity with Christ’s death. In that unity, we died to the Law in order that we might be married to Jesus.

LEST WE THINK WRONGLY

Now, lest we begin to think wrongly about the Law, the Spirit will confirm there was no fault in the Law. Sinful passions were not awakened in us because of any flaw or deficiency in the Law of God. Rather, it pointed out our sinful condition in order that we might see the need of salvation, for the worse sin gets, the more we need a Savior.

The Law Did Not Cause Sin

With great care, the Spirit shows how we cannot blame the Law for our condition. If there were not sinful passions in us, they could not have been aroused by the Law. If sin did not dwell in us, the Law could not have been its *“strength”* (1 Cor 15:56). God has already proved that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, are sinners by nature. Now He will show us it is no fault of the Law.

The Law did not cause sin, but was its *“strength.”* It did not make us sinners, but aroused the sinful passions that resided in the human nature. Men were sinners before the Law, not because of the Law. Under Law sin dominated us because it persistently pointed out we had sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Protection Against Returning

If we take seriously the teaching that follows, we will see the utter absurdity of returning to a system of Law. If we seek to be regulated by Law—even God’s Law—sin will only gain the dominancy over us once again. This is because we still have a fallen nature—*“the flesh.”* Even though it has been cut away from our essential persons by the *“circumcision of Christ,”* yet it lives in these bodies with us. Should we choose to serve God under a system of Law, it will arouse the passions of that *“old man”* that is still with us (Eph 4:22).

The teaching before us is most vital. Though rarely heard in the modern church this is a precious elixir of soul-healing ointment from heaven! It reveals the magnitude of our deliverance from both sin and the Law.

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WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

“7:7 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.’” When speaking to us, the Lord frequently demands a response. Divine communication is not intended to

merely convey information, or increase our knowledge of facts. There is such a thing as *“walking in the truth”* (3 John 3), a condition where the human spirit is brought into the *“communion of the Holy Spirit”* (2 Cor 13:14). By saying *“What shall we say then?”* the Spirit is drawing us into a more profound and effective consideration of the truth. This is necessary because there is more to what has been said than can be comprehended in a cursory or surface consideration. **The spiritual roots of those who linger on the surface of truth will not grow deep.** Shallow thought is an enemy to those who live by faith because it is too close to the world, and too far from God. One of the great tragedies of our time and culture is its commitment to shallow thought and surface considerations. Extended thought, like meditation (Psa 19:14; 104:34), cogitation (Dan 7:28), and musing (Psa 39:3), are not common among professed believers. The desire for appearance, entertainment, and brevity, have yielded shallow and unproductive thoughts and weak faith.

Knowing this proclivity among religious people, and the devil’s aggressiveness to promote shallowness, the Spirit demands our involvement. *“What shall we say then?”*

IS THE LAW SIN?

The question is a most intriguing one! One might imagine it would better be asked, *“Does the Law promote sin?”* Rather, we are asked if the Law itself *“IS sin.”* Every translation, with the exception of the New Living Translation, reads the same way. That exception reads, *“am I suggesting that the law of God is evil?”*

I understand the question to mean, *“Can we credit the Law with our sin? Does the role of the law in the matter of sin relieve us of the responsibility for our sin?”* Just as flesh produces flesh and spirit produces spirit (John 3:6), so only sin can produce sin. If the Law caused us to sin, it would itself be sin. But that is not the case. Sin came from the principle of sin that dwells, by nature, within the flesh. Therefore, the Spirit forbids us to think of the Law as itself sin: *“God forbid.”* May it never be!

Those who are reconciled to God hold the highest respect for the Law of God. They do not demean it because it is holy, being spoken by the Almighty Himself. When put to the test, they will come to the defense of the Law, siding with Jesus who magnified the Law and made it *“honorable”* (Isa 42:21). The motions, or passions, of sin were aroused *“by the Law.”* However, the *“motions”* or *“passions”* were not created by the Law. They were *“aroused”* or *“inflamed”* by it.

There is a principle here that must be seen. When there is enmity between God and man, Divine Law accentuates that enmity, but can by no means resolve it. Outside of Christ, sin so dominates man that the righteous demands of the Lord’s Law only make him worse.

A Principle

There is a principle here that must be seen. When there is enmity between God and man, Divine Law accentuates that enmity, but can by no means resolve it. Outside of Christ, sin so dominates man that the righteous demands of the Lord’s Law only make him worse. To make Law the means of righteousness more firmly entrenches men in sin. This, of course, is why we have died with Christ, that we might be delivered from the Law.

I WOULD NOT HAVE KNOWN SIN

“Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.” ^{NIV} Notice, Paul does not say *“I would not have sinned,”* but *“I would not have KNOWN sin.”* Outside of Christ, the reality of sin is **not** the question, but the acknowledge and acknowledgment of it.

Personal Sin

This is not the knowledge of sin in general, although the law did define sin in a general sense. This is the knowledge of personal sin—the awareness that I am a sinner. This is the most precise meaning of the statement made earlier: *“for by the*

law is the knowledge of sin” (3:20). This is not an academic definition, but a **consciousness** of sin. In fact, that is how the NIV reads: *“through the law we become **conscious** of sin.”* This is a matter of conviction, not factual knowledge for the intellect.

This, then, refers to the knowledge of personal sin—particular infractions of the Law. It is as though he said, *“I would not have been aware of my own involvement in sin except through the Law.”* We must zealously seek deliverance from academic, or pedantic, approaches to spiritual life. These are lifeless approaches that have no personal relevance. They leave the individual pointing at the sins of others, and unaware of his own.

A proper understanding of the Law reveals our **personal** transgressions. It is not designed to give us a merely theoretical grasp of the definition of sin. Rather, it convinces its students of their transgression, and consequently of their need for a Savior. It is in this way that the law was *“our*

schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). Thus, when he said *“I had not known sin, but by the law,”* Paul states that apart from the Law he would not have realized he was guilty of sin. The New Living Translation says it very well: *“but it was the law that showed me **my** sin.”*

What Sin Was Made Known to Paul?

God convicted Cain of murder (Gen 4:10-11). He convicted David of adultery (2 Sam 12:7-10). Of what sin did the Law convince Paul?

Elsewhere Paul testifies to his outward and sincere piety. His words are found in Philippians 3:6: *“as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”* Before a condemning Jewish council Paul confessed, *“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day”* (Acts 23:1). Even in his persecution of the household of faith, his deeds were done *“in ignorance and unbelief,”* thinking he was serving God in opposing those who believed on Jesus Christ (1 Tim 1:13; Acts 26:9). Prior to his calling, Saul of Tarsus was not an indulgent man, feeding his fleshly appetites, and going after the

things of the world. The Law did not cut him down with the conviction of baser sins, or with the neglect of the Sabbath day, or a lack of zeal for the Lord of hosts. Outwardly, Paul kept the law and walked orderly.

Unlawful Desires

The Word of the Lord is a “a

accommodating. It does not allow for a single wayward thought, but forthrightly condemns it.

Lust Is Deeper Than The Will

I understand “*lust*” and coveting to be deeper in man than the will. Lust provokes the will, but is not synonymous with it. “*Lust*” is the means by which we

rejection of the “*lust*,” with the individual refusing to dwell upon it or fulfill it. This was the case of Paul before he was in Christ. We know he did not fulfill the lusts, for he was “*blameless*” concerning the righteousness of the Law (Phil 3:6).

However, under the Law, the subordination of lust has no merit. The **presence** of lust, even if it is not cultured or fulfilled, is condemned by the Law. Even if it does not work itself out into external expressions, and is subdued by the mind, yet the Law condemns it.

This is a critical distinction, and will be developed throughout the remainder of this chapter. It will confirm how marvelous and indispensable it is to be “*delivered from the Law*,” and have the old nature cut away, or “*circumcised*” from us. Keep in mind, regeneration does not change “*the flesh*.” It remains the same in its nature and bent. Before and after the new birth, “*no good thing*” can be found in the flesh (Rom 7:18).

THE LAW BROUGHT THE KNOWLEDGE

Through the Law, particularly the last of the ten commandments (“*Thou shalt not covet*”), Paul came to see that sin was at the very root of the fallen nature. If there was no other commandment but the tenth one, the entirety of the human race would have still been condemned.

Although man was created to desire and fellowship with God, the entrance of sin into the world so corrupted him that he desired and sought after self gratification only. The spiritual **appetite** of men became corrupted. Even though God “*determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live*,” in order that they might “*seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him*” (Acts 17:26), yet this did not occur. Men did NOT seek after God.

We know this is the case because the Spirit has already affirmed, “*there is none that seeketh after God*” (Rom 3:11). The explanation for this condition is found in this single word: “*lust*.” “*Lust*” is the cause behind every overt act of sin. It is the mother of all willing involvement in transgression.

I understand “*lust*” and coveting to be deeper in man than the will. Lust provokes the will, but is not synonymous with it. “*Lust*” is the means by which we are drawn into sin. “*Lust*,” or unlawful desire, is resident in the flesh, and is part and parcel of it.

discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). It probes human motives and hidden desires. It uncovers unlawful desires, or “*lusts*,” showing them to be purely in the interest of self, with no regard for God. Thus Paul says, “*for I had not known **lust**, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*” Later versions use the word “*covetousness*.” This, in my judgment, is too weak. The word translated “*lust*” is ἐπιθυμίαν, and is unusually strong. It is often translated “*concupiscence*” (Rom 7:8; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:5). It refers to a strong longing for what is forbidden, and can have a wide range of objects.

The point of the text is that such lusts were covered in the commandment, “*Thou shalt not covet.*” I would venture to say that very few people have made that association. But Paul, formerly Saul, was an astute thinker in the Law. In his pondering, it came home to him that while he may not had coveted his neighbors house, wife, or possessions (Ex 20:17), he had desired things that were not right.

It is vital to see the point being made. Men do not think lusting is sinful. Some have even said, “*You can’t go to hell for what you are thinking*,” a stupid saying from past days. Another popular song in the 1950’s heralded youthful innocence with the words, “*Standing on the corner, watching all the girls go by.*” By nature, men do not look upon the secret and unexpressed desires of the heart as being sinful. But the Law is not so

are drawn into sin. “*Lust*,” or unlawful desire, is resident in the flesh, and is part and parcel of it. Thus it is written, “*put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*” (Eph 4:22). These “*lusts*,” or “*deceitful desires*”^{NIV} are part of the fallen nature. They parallel the “*spirit of your mind*” that is found in the “*new man*,” or regenerated nature (Eph 4:23). Just as the spiritual mind (Rom 8:6) is drawn to heaven, so the “*lust*” resident in the flesh is drawn toward earth.

The Old Testament word that parallels this idea of “*lust*” is “*imagination*,” as used in the following texts (Jer 3:17; 9:13; 16:12; 18:12). Most contemporary versions translate the word “*stubbornness*,” or “*stubbornly*.” Others read with more focus rendering the word “*perversity*,”^{DARBY} and “*wicked inclinations*.”^{NJB} It is the bent, or frame, of the heart—the way it leans, so to speak. Thus the above texts refer to an “*evil heart*.” The unregenerate heart does not crave the right thing, but the wrong thing. Thus Jeremiah wrote, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” (Jer 17:9).

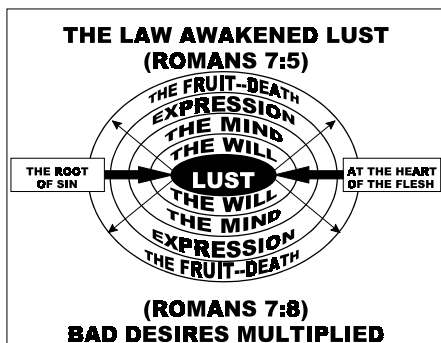
“*Lusts*” speak of the corruption of the natural man. They are inherent appetites for what the law forbids. They provoke the individual to want the wrong thing. These are awakened by the law, not created by it. They are part of human nature, and only need provocation to rise up in dominating vigor. There may be a

WHEN SIN TOOK OPPORTUNITY

“But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.” “Sin,” in this case, equates to the sinful nature (for want of a better term). **It is the principle, or law, of sin that is resident in unregenerate man.** Later Paul will make much of this use of the word “sin” (verses 9,11,13,17,20,23,25). Here, “sin” is not the same as transgression, or a specific act or deed. **Rather, it is the cause of transgression, disobedience, and iniquity.**

The passage before us is scarcely known by those with whom I have been identified. It is as though it was altogether cut out of their theology. For far too many people, what they have heard preached all of their lives would not have been affected one whit if this passage had been removed from the Bible.

But this text has not been removed. Rather, through the inspiration of the Holy spirit, it has been inserted in Scripture. That fact alone proves how critical it is, for “all Scripture” is intended to make the man of God “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). Even the higher critics of Scripture, with all of their literary butchery, have not managed to explain or take the text away.



There is not person, apart from Jesus Christ, who has not sinned. Thus it is written, “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23; 5:12). Yet, even if no actual expression of sin had taken place, the principle of sin is still found within the natural man. It is even in the innocent infant, who has not yet come to distinguish good and evil.

David correctly assessed the situation when he said, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”^{NIV} (Psa 51:5). He did not mean he had committed transgressions from birth, but that the sin-principle was resident in him from birth. That is the sense in which “sin” is used in this verse.

Elsewhere, the wicked are said to “go astray” from the womb (Psa 58:3). Following the flood, the Lord said “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination (“imagination”^{KJV}) of his heart is evil from childhood”^{NIV} (Gen 8:21). Even in Job’s spiritually primitive day, those with only a cursory acquaintance with God knew man was fundamentally “unclean” (Job 14:4), and drinks iniquity “like water” (Job 15:14-16).

These words are not in the Bible as mere historical dialog, to be ruled out by contextual or historical considerations. These are in Scripture according to Divine intent, and represent man as he is apart from Christ, or in an unregenerate state.

Paul will now tell us the effect the Law had upon corrupted human nature. He has already said its “sinful passions” were “aroused by the Law” (7:5). Now he elaborates on the effects of that arousal.

TAKING OPPORTUNITY BY THE COMMANDMENT

“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment.”^{NIV} If ever the natural corruption of man can be proved, it is in this statement! If men doubt whether or not the new birth is imperative, here is a verse to ponder. If there was a spark of natural goodness in man, a holy and just Law would have awakened it. If man was fundamentally, or primarily, good, God’s spiritual Law would have brought that goodness to the surface. Men may argue about the extent to which the Divine image was effaced by sin, but they cannot argue about the effect of the Law upon those who are not born again. This is a matter of revelation, not conjecture. The sin principle in men actually sees the holy law of God as an occasion, or opportunity to express itself. It seizes upon that opportunity.

We have before us one of the premier members of the human race. Prior to being in Christ, he was a member of the chosen people. He was also a member of the “strictest sect” of that revealed religion (Acts 26:5), even excelling above his equals in that rigid group (Gal 1:14). He maintained a good conscience toward God, refusing to violate it (Acts 23:1). Concerning outward piety, or the righteousness of the Law, he was “blameless” (Phil 3:6). His persecution of the church of God was not prompted by political considerations, or a desire for personal glory. He thought he was serving God in that aggressive opposition. That, of course, is precisely why he was forgiven that grievous sin—because he did it “in ignorance and unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

How will “the commandment” effect a man like that?—one whose life is devoted to fulfilling the Law after the most strict manner?

When “sin” heard the commandment, it “sized the opportunity” to work within Saul, or took “occasion by the commandment.”^{KJV} One man has said that, in the Law, sin found “a starting place from which to rush into acts of sin.”^{Robertson} Martin Luther once likened sin seizing an opportunity by the Law to the properties of lime. He said lime had heat in it, but that heat was not known until water was poured upon it. The water did not cause the lime to have heat, but brought out the fact that it was there. So it is with the Law. It did not cause sin, but brought out the fact that it was resident in fallen men.

A Premier Example Seen in Israel

In Israel we have a classic example of the truth affirmed in this text. When they were slaves in Egypt, we read not one word about them being given over to immorality or baser expressions of sin. They certainly had not risen above sin, but were not noted for transgression. Much of this is probable owing to the rigor with which they were made to serve the Egyptians.

Upon arriving at Sinai, sin was brought to its peak among these people. They heard the Law of God for the first

time. It was spoken audibly, and under the most fearful of circumstances. It was such a frightening occasion that the Israelites said to Moses, *“Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Ex 20:19). Under such circumstances, you would think sin would be far from the mind of the people.

After Moses had been in the holy mount for some time *“the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’”*

Pressured by their aggression, Aaron had them remove the golden earrings from their wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to him. He then formed a mold, and from it fashioned a golden calf, telling the people *“This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”* The next day, the people got up early and *“offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings.”* After that, the people *“sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry,”*^{NIV} or *“gave themselves to pleasure.”*^{BBE}

God said of that occasion, the people *“have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them . . . behold, it is a stiffnecked people”* (Ex 32:1-9). Why had they so reacted? They did not do this on the night of the exodus. Every Israelite came out of Egypt, with not a hoof left behind (Ex 10:26). They *“all”* passed through the Red Sea, with not a disobedient one among them (1 Cor 10:1-2). What happened to them at Sinai?

Their nature did not change. They did not become different people. Rather, the principle of sin, that was within them, took occasion by the commandment. Consequently, the *“motions of sin”* were aroused by the Law.

The principle stated in this verse can also be seen in little children, although it is not limited to them. While their conscience is yet unformed, and they lack understanding, sin does not break forth in

them. Yet, when they become subjects of the Law, able to hear and understand what it says, wrong desires, stubbornness, and transgression break forth in them like a floodtide. **The innocency of youth cannot be maintained one second beyond the time of youth.**

INWARD PRODUCTION

“But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.” Sin, seizing upon the opportunity afforded by the law, erupted like a inner volcano, producing *“all manner of evil desire.”*^{NKJV} Because of the associations men make with covetousness,

What Paul is saying is this. “Because of my relation to Adam, sin was imbedded in my very nature. Yet, I was not aware of its extensive pervasion into my being. But when the commandment forbidding covetousness came home to me, I had to contend with a barrage of evil desires I never realized were within me. The lusts were divers and many, and I could not stop them from erupting in my mind.”^{GOB}

this appears a rather weak expression. When, however, *“Thou shalt not covet”* is correctly understood, the power of the expression is more clearly seen.

It is as though unregenerate, but devoutly religious, Saul was bombarded with evil desires. What Paul is saying is this. *“Because of my relation to Adam, sin was imbedded in my very nature. Yet, I was not aware of its extensive pervasion into my being. But when the commandment forbidding covetousness came home to me, I had to contend with a barrage of evil desires I never realized were within me. The lusts were divers and many, and I could not stop them from erupting in my mind.”*^{GOB}

The Nature of Sin

Sin is personified in this section of Scripture. It is pictured as a ruthless murderer dwelling within us, looking for an opportunity to slay us. It *“wars against the mind”* (7:23), *“wars against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:11), *“easily besets us”* (Heb 12:1), and, apart from Christ, dominates us (Rom 6:12). Sin is like a mighty armed adversary against whom we *“strive”* (Heb 12:4).

In this text, *“sin,”* is not referring to specific transgressions, but to the principle, or law of sin. It is a law resident in the flesh, and that cannot be separated from it.

What Summoned up Sin?

It is important to take note HOW this statement is made. Paul does not say the Law produced every kind of evil desire, but that SIN produced it. **It was not the nature of the Law that summoned up these despicable lusts, but the sinful nature of man!** Men must learn that sin is more diverse than they are prone to think. Resident in the fallen nature, there are capacities and desires that far transcend our imaginative capacities.

Once again, these erupting desires were not welcomed by Saul of Tarsus, and eagerly fulfilled, as they were among *“sinners of the Gentiles”* (Gal 2:15; 1 Thess 4:4-5; Eph 4:17-19). He could not have maintained a good conscience if this were the case. He was not reconciled to God, and, like others, was *“dead in trespasses and sins.”* Yet, he managed to subdue the outbreak, overflowing, or *“superfluity”* of sin (James 1:21). Even then, however, he was all the while contending with evil desires which came in copious numbers and kinds.

The Point of the Text

We must keep before us the point of the text, lest we get bogged down in its details. In Jesus, we have died to sin and to the Law. This has resulted in our deliverance from the Law, which was our accuser, judge, and executioner.

Throughout the seventh chapter of Romans, Paul is dealing with **the**

principle of sin, and not with overt expressions of it (i.e., fornication, murder, theft, etc.). Deliverance from the Law is critical in this consideration. That is because the Law does not allow for deviate thoughts, whether they are fulfilled or not. They are summarily condemned, wanted or not.

If, therefore, we are not delivered from the Law, we will be condemned by it, whether we outwardly broke a commandment or not (although no such person can be found). **The Law condemns the principle of sin within, even if it is not welcomed or fulfilled on any noticeable scale.**

WHEN SIN WAS DEAD

“For without the law sin was dead.” Other versions read *“sin IS dead.”*^{NASB,NIV} The New Living Translation reads, *“sin would not have that power,”* which does appear to be the sense of the text. This verse does **not** mean sin did not exist prior to the law, or that it could not work within us. We know this is the case, because the Spirit affirmed earlier, *“for before the law was given, sin was in the world”*^{NIV} (5:13). **While the existence of sin, therefore, does not depend upon the Law, its apparency and dominance is occasioned by the Law.** To put it another way, sin exists without the Law, but a personal conviction of it does not. Salvation from sin cannot come until the awareness of sin comes.

Further, the phrase *“without the Law”* does not refer to that period of history before God gave the Law through Moses. This is an expression describing the condition of a heart that does not SEE or perceive the law. On the lower end of the spectrum, this principle applies to infants and little children who have no consciousness of the Law. On the higher end, it applies to those who are of age, yet

the Law,” but that the **knowledge** of it was not possessed. Further, this applies to life outside of Christ, and before the new birth. In that state, Paul imagined he was righteous, even though he was not.

It is also important to note that this passage is not a mere personal testimony. This is common in all believers, and is buttressed by Paul’s own experience.

If, therefore, we are not delivered from the Law, we will be condemned by it, whether we outwardly broke a commandment or not (although no such person can be found). The Law condemns the principle of sin within, even if it is not welcomed or fulfilled on any noticeable scale.

have not been thoroughly tutored by the Law because of their failure to see its real intent. Paul is citing himself, prior to be regenerated, as an example of the latter

The words of verse eight mean that the knowledge, or awareness, of sin was, as it were, buried without the Law. The idea is that Paul, as long as the true sense of the law was unknown, imagined he was free from sin—free from its dominion, and free from its guilt. Thus, Paul does not mean that sin was non-existent *“without*

Through him, the Spirit is teaching men about sin, the Law, and our deliverance from them both. This is not a biography of Paul, although he tells us what he personally experienced. He is presenting himself as an example because he has seen the truth. Now, in an expert manner he is tracing it out for us through his own life. He is showing the development of a consciousness of sin, and of the consequent unfolding of a need for a Savior who delivers from sin. In this, he is an example of all believers.

I WAS ALIVE, BUT I DIED

“⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” It is important to understand Paul is NOT referring to a time when the Law did not exist, but to the time of His life when he did not get the message of the Law—when he did not see its real intent. The New Living Translation captures this sense of the text: *“I felt fine when I did not understand what the law demanded.”* He was not the first or last person who was subjected to the Law, yet failed to grasp what it was saying. The Ten Commandments still are placed and read in public places where their message is not grasped. There are still people who

affirm they “keep the Ten Commandments.” There are still inquirers like the rich young ruler, who, after hearing the commandments, declared, *“All these things have I kept from my youth up”* (Matt 19:20). In the sense of our text, all such people are *“alive.”*

Once again, while this does, in a rudimentary way, apply to the period of infancy, it is not limited to it. In a fuller sense, it applies to the time when our senses were dulled to the shattering message of the Law, which condemned us.

I WAS ALIVE ONCE

The phrase *“I was alive”* does **not** mean *“alive unto God,”* as in 6:11: *“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but **alive unto God** through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Again, this is not a reference to the time of Paul’s infancy, as many theologians imagine. Such a view robs the text of its power, and encourages the adoption of juvenile and damaging beliefs. Paul is referring to his adult life, when he was a Pharisee, brought up and tutored in the strictest manner in the Law (Acts 26:5). This is when Paul only associated the Law with outward actions. He had ordered his life in such a manner as to be

“blameless” concerning the righteousness of the law—at least, as he perceived it (Phil 3:6). For this reason, his conscience did not condemn him (Acts 23:1), and he fancied he was qualified to even stamp out the name of Jesus among the people (Acts 26:9-11). He was, in this sense, “alive,” imagining himself to have been accepted by God.

During that time when Paul persecuted the church, he had the Jewish attitude described in chapter two. *“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law”*

^{NKJV} (2:17-20). At least until the time of the stoning of Stephen, he lived without the slightest twinge of conscience. The message of the Law had not yet come through to his conscience—he was “alive.”

I again want to emphasize this is not a reference to infancy. I do this because of a significant number of theologians that have taught this. An infant is “alive” only in the very elementary sense. As I understand it, a conscience has not yet been developed in the infant, nor a rational sense of well being. Whatever knowledge is possessed is purely intuitive, i.e., knowing its mother, desiring food, etc. This type of existence does not qualify to be included in the “alive” of this text. Here, “alive” does not mean merely existing, but thinking the demands of the Law have been met. Being “alive,” in this sense, was the assessment of Saul of Tarsus, not a mere physical circumstance.

Contemporary Application

It seems to me the circumstance of our text exists in our time. There are people upon whom the message of the Law has never really registered. They fancy themselves to be “alive” because they are think they are keeping the commandments. In many cases, they are not even the commandments of God, but the paltry tenets of some institution. Such people imagine they are accepted by

God, but only because they have been deluded. They are not living by faith or walking in the Spirit (Gal 3:11; Gal 5:17,25). They are not pressing toward the mark, mortifying their members that are upon the earth, or placing their affection on things above (Phil 3:14; Col 3:5; Col 3:1-2). They are not in fellowship with Christ, are not being led by the Spirit, or laying hold on eternal life (1 Cor 1:9; Rom 8:13; 1 Tim 6:12).

Churches are literally filled with this kind of people. They open their mouths and sing what they call praise, yet in their minds they are alienated from the life of God. They have no appetite for the things of God, and can go for long seasons without the slightest exposure to the Word of the Lord. Yet, they call themselves after Christ, wearing His

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name and identifying themselves with His church. They are a contemporary example of what it means to be “alive” without the Law. They have a sense of well being, even though they are treading over the bottomless pit.

It may seem harsh to speak in this manner, but it is necessary to do so, else we will not get the sense of this text. Paul, prior to being in Christ, was scrupulously diligent in his service to God. He excelled above his equals, and was zealous for the “tradition” of his fathers (Gal 1:14). Yet, he was dominated by sin, even though he did not know it. He only **thought** he was alive! Now, the Law will prove the kind of condition he was really in. It will do so with great effectiveness.

WHEN THE COMMANDMENT CAME

“ . . . but when the commandment came ” And when did the commandment come? Some imagine this refers to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Others think it pertains to the awakening of the conscience in youth. Both of these views, in my judgment, are incorrect.

A Specific Commandment

First, the reference is not to the Law in its entirety, but to a commandment. I understand that some believe the word “commandment” refers to the totality of the Law. While there are times when the Spirit uses “the commandment” in this way (Mk 7:9; Rom 7:12-13), this is not one of them. This refers to “the commandment” that convinced Saul of Tarsus of sin: “*Thou shalt not covet*” (verse 7).

The “commandment came” when it was comprehended, or came home to the heart, that the Law outlawed the desire of anything that Law prohibited. When the letter of that was understood with the intellect, it registered no conviction upon the heart. The commandment did not “come” in the sense of bringing its deeper message home to the heart.

Until “the commandment” came home in its fulness, the root of sin was not perceived as resident in the human nature itself. That “root” is “lust” or “concupiscence.” It is what compels men to commit transgression, and is characteristic of the human nature. It does not speak of something that is actually done, but of the law, or principle that causes men to commit sin.

At what point the commandment in all of its awful implications “came” to Saul, we do not know. But when he realized that “the commandment” was forbidding something that was resident in his very personality or soul, it “came” to him in condemning power. **The commandment actually condemned what he was as well as what he did!** It is then that one realizes he is a sinner by nature, an enemy of God, and utterly “without strength” (5:6). He cannot recover himself from sin, for the

principle of sin is within him by nature, sitting upon the throne and dominating him. Apart from faith in Christ, men are shut up to this condition.

A Travesty of Our Time

There is a travesty that has occurred in our time that is most serious. It is the undue emphasis that has been placed upon the ability and wisdom of man. Great confidence is being placed in natural abilities and disciplines. The current emphasis on formal education, earthly credentials, and various forms of human knowledge is most dangerous. It has caused men to overestimate their power. As a result, they do not sense their deep need of a Savior and His grace. The fact that the very root of sin is resident in

desires, or move the person to earnestly seek a Savior and the remission of sin.

Instead, when *“the commandment came, SIN REVIVED.”* Like a sleeping monster it *“sprang to life”*^{NIV} or *“became alive.”*^{NASB} This is not sin in its various forms, but sin as a governing principle—the *“law of sin”* that is resident within us by nature, or by virtue of our relation to Adam (Rom 7:23,25). The New Jerusalem Bible reads, *“sin came to life.”*

The picture is one of sin easily dominating the individual because of a lack of conviction. It is as though the principle, or law, of sin so dominated us by nature that it could slumber within us while we drank iniquity like water (Job

As this will be developed more fully later in this chapter, these comments will suffice for this time.

I DIED

“ . . . I died.” This is a very vivid expression, captured well in the Basic Bible English Version: *“sin came to life and put me to death.”* The meaning is, *“The life I thought I had was wrenched from me. I became conscious of my basic sinfulness. I was dead before, but did not know it. Now the realization that I was, in fact, ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ registered upon me. I could no longer speak well of myself, or claim that I was righteous.”*^{GOB} He *“died”* in every spiritual sense. Hope died. Confidence died. Self-worth died. Boasting died. Perceived goodness died. Then he learned what he later taught with such power, *“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident”* (Gal 3:11).

Another Kind of Death

Here is yet another kind of death. Already we have read of several different deaths.

- There is the death of Jesus (5:10).
- There is the death *“passed upon all men”* because of sin (Rom 5:12).
- There is death IN sin (Eph 2:1).
- We also read of death TO sin (Rom 6:2).
- There is death WITH Christ (Rom 6:4)
- There is death TO the Law (Rom 7:6).

Now there is the death of all reliance upon the flesh—an awareness that there is nothing about self that can be salvaged. The totality of self is governed by *“the law of sin.”* That is the compelling reason why we must be *“born again”* (John 3:7).

Examples of “I Died”

By saying *“I died,”* Paul means his heart and conscience could no longer sustain him. The commandment came, **filling the heart with condemnation.**

This is what happened on the day of Pentecost when Christ’s murderers cried out, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do!”* (Acts 2:37). They could no longer cry out *“crucify Him,”* thereby seeking to justify themselves.

This was also the experience Isaiah had when, becoming aware of the Living God, he cried out, *“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean*

Having been discovered, the “law of sin” began to work tirelessly, penetrating every thought. It was like a water dam that breaks, flooding the countryside with water than had been pent up. This sin principle, or “law of sin,” began to be more productive and more dominating.

the natural man is altogether obscured. Men speak as though they were more capable than they really are. They conduct their lives as though there was no sinful principle within them—no root that is condemned by God. The commandment has not come home to them, and thus they live as though their intellect and will were the superior parts of their persons.

The impact of this upon religion has been devastating. It has ushered in an era of a *“form of godliness”* that *“denies the power thereof.”* These are the *“perilous times”* of which the Spirit spoke (2 Tim 3:5). They are times in which *“the commandment,”* with all of its power, has **not** come to the conscience of the people.

SIN REVIVED

“ . . . sin revived . . . ” When *“the commandment came,”* it did not bring a blessing. It did not gently lift the sinner and tend to his wounds, pouring in mollifying ointment, so sorely needed. It spoke no word of comfort. It brought no word of cheer, pointing to good things to come. It did not awaken good and holy

15:16). But when *“the commandment came”* home to the conscience, sin woke up, infuriated by Divine demands. Now sin became *“exceedingly sinful”* (Rom 7:13). The human, or fleshly, nature, once thought to be fundamentally good was now seen in all of its repulsiveness. There was an engine that was driving the flesh that was like a grotesque monster. It was *“sin”* in its essence—*“the law of sin.”* From the standpoint of our text, it was *“lust,”* or corrupted desire—the root from which all transgression springs. Now, with sin, as it were, awakened, the defilement in the recesses of the heart became evident.

Having been discovered, the *“law of sin”* began to work tirelessly, penetrating every thought. It was like a water dam that breaks, flooding the countryside with water than had been pent up. This sin principle, or *“law of sin,”* began to be more productive and more dominating. All of this was occasioned when *“the commandment came”*—when *“thou shalt not covet”* was comprehended in its deeper meaning. Many a religious soul has never had such an experience.

lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:5). Suddenly no desire seemed appropriate,

that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be

what I will call, a theology of the letter. It is an approach to religion that looks at the text of Scripture as an outline for human conduct. It perceives in Scripture neither the nature of God nor the nature of man. Such an approach to religion does not produce humility in its constituents. A lively sense of the grace of God and the need for it are virtually unknown where "the letter" dominates. That is why the Holy Spirit witnesses, "for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor 3:6). When there is no life in the individual, the Law becomes a "letter" that kills and condemns. It bludgeons the sinner, contaminating his conscience.

The danger of a theology of the letter is that it only affects the mind, never the heart. It leaves the individual thinking there is more in him than there really is. The need for Christ and the Holy Spirit is not seen. A necessity of an Intercessor in heaven and one within the individual is not perceived. In such a relationship, the commandment never comes home to the people. They never see what they are.

and all words were out of order. No deeds could be cited that would count one worthy of God.

In this expression ("I died"), the real ministry of the Old Covenant is confirmed. Its job was to verify that the people were in a state of death and condemnation. Thus it is written, "But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so

even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory"(2 Cor 3:7-9). When "the commandment came" to Saul of Tarsus, he saw he was dead and condemned. It was then that he "died," and all self-confidence was dissipated.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE LETTER

I personally have a background in,

The danger of a theology of the letter is that it only affects the mind, never the heart. It leaves the individual thinking there is more in him than there really is. The need for Christ and the Holy Spirit is not seen. A necessity of an Intercessor in heaven and one within the individual is not perceived. In such a relationship, the commandment never comes home to the people. They never see what they are, and thus rarely seek after the Lord.

THE COMMANDMENT BROUGHT DEATH

⁴⁰ **And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.**" It is with great care that I enter into a discussion of this passage. We must not allow any disrespect for the holy Law of God to be found in us. The fact that it brought death to us was not owing to any fault in the Law. The Law itself is not hostile, but brings out man's natural hostility toward God. In a sense, "the commandment" is a litmus test which reveals the corruption of human nature.

WHICH WAS TO BRING LIFE

The Law did offer life to the one who kept it flawlessly, and what was true of the Law is true of the individual commandment. Let us hear the Law and its offer of life. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD" (Lev 18:5). "And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them" (Ezek 20:11). Later in Romans, the Spirit makes a special

point of this. "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom 10:5). Distinguishing the Law from faith, Galatians 3:12 affirms, "And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them."

Paul is referring to this promise of the law when he refers to the commandment, "which was to bring life." From another viewpoint, however, the Law was never intended to bring life, but to point out that men could really not live up to its righteous demands.

It is clear from our text that prior to being in Christ, Paul felt he had lived up to God's Law. He was "alive," and confident in his standing with God. At that time, he did not see the real message or intent of the holy Law, even though he had extended academic knowledge of it.

THE COMANDMENT BROUGHT

DEATH

And what of this commandment "which was to bring life?" As soon as it "came," or was comprehended, it brought death! It discovered consistent and enormous sin in the one toward whom it was directed, even though that person thought his obedience was satisfactory.

Now that a fuller understanding of "the commandment" was attained, surely the individual will be able to enter into the work of keeping it more fully! But this was not the result. Instead of becoming better, the sinner became worse. Unable to stem the tide of lust, it broke over the boundaries, flooding the mind and drowning men, pushing them beneath the floodtide of sin. Rather than being an occasion for celebrating life, it became the occasion for the singing of a funeral dirge. Sin was deeper than man thought. The infection was more pervasive than he imagined. He was nearer to condemnation than he ever dreamed possible. He found himself capable of more great sin.

"The commandment" did not bring blessing. If did not bring life, and it surely did not bring exceeding great and precious promises. It was a light that exposed the real nature of fallen man. It confirmed to those who understand it that they were separated from God and in a state of spiritual death.

DO NOT FORGET!

This is a retrospective look. Paul is speaking of his own past, but he also is speaking for all who are in Christ Jesus. He is showing us how the Law was our schoolmaster. It was not a tutor in the sense of proclaiming factual data. Rather, as illuminated by the Spirit of God, it uncovered our corruption, offering no

remedy for it and no hope for us.

We were not able to extricate ourselves from the condemnation and death brought upon us through the law. If God did not deliver us, we should have expired in that state, forever cut off from God. But the point of our text is that we have been *"delivered from the Law,"* having become *"dead"* to it *"through the body of Christ."*

This passage is showing us how precious that deliverance from the Law is. It is also confirming how blessed is our marriage to Christ, for we were delivered from the Law, becoming dead to it, that we might be married to another, even to

Him who is risen from the dead.

In view of these things, those who promote a system of Law as a means to justification have rendered an unspeakable handicap to men. Thinking themselves to have brought the means to life to men, they have actually become the promoters of death. They are shutting people out from God, not bringing them to Him. They are giving strength to sin, not making it weaker.

If Jesus died to deliver us from the Law, then those who magnify Law above faith are working against Christ and are enemies of His cross. They hurt believers, and do not help them.

WHEN SIN DECEIVED ME

⁴¹ ***For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.*** Other versions read, *"For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death."*^{NIV} *"Sin took advantage of the law and fooled me; it took the good law and used it to make me guilty of death."*

^{NLT} This language is precise and powerful. It paints a vivid picture of the dilemma from which we have been marvelously delivered. This is no small thing, not a mere theological technicality. Ponder the strength of the words: *"seizing . . . deceived me . . . killed me."*

SIN

Keep in mind, when the text says *"sin,"* it does not mean a specific deed or expression. This is the *"law of sin"* that is in our members. In particular, it is what I have called the root, or fountainhead, from which all transgression springs. Without being too redundant, it is the *"lust"* introduced in verse seven. This is the natural trait within man that compels him to seek self-interests. The compelling effects of those interests range from failing to seek and serve God, to striving to gratify the baser *"desires of the flesh and of the mind"* (Eph 2:3). The extent of sinfulness may vary, but its presence will not.

Care must be taken not to view *"the law of sin"* as a mere philosophical and lifeless term. The remainder of this verse will confirm the importance of this law.

TAKING OCCASION

The words *"taking occasion"* ^{KJV,NKJV} may lead one to think this is a gentle and

incentive] from the commandment . . . "

The Spirit is taking care here not to make the Law the cause of our transgression. The Law is the *"strength of sin,"* not its cause. That *"strength"* is seen in the increase of our guilt, the contamination of our conscience, and the awakening of the hostility resident in the fallen human nature.

Keep in mind, when the text says *"sin,"* it does not mean a specific deed or expression. This is the *"law of sin"* that is in our members. In particular, it is what I have called the root, or fountainhead, from which all transgression springs.

It is something like this: when the natural man, with its propensity to sin, hears the commandment, it immediately suggests disobedience. It concludes the commandment is restrictive, taking all good from us. It reasons in accord with the "lusts" of its father Satan (John 8:44): *"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Gen 3:5). **SATAN SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY**

AFFORDED BY THE COMMANDMENT.

Just as Satan himself seized an opportunity in the Divine commandment, so the sinful nature, now resident in man, hears the commandment of God and takes it as an occasion to transgress. That very thing occurred at Mount Sinai. As soon as the commandments were heard, the *"law of sin"* seized upon the opportunity to

relatively unthreatening expression. But this is not at all the case. The word translated *"taking"* comes from the Greek word *λαβουσα*, which means take hold of, take advantage, take into possession, and seize. It is an aggressive word that reveals the power and swiftness with which the principle of sin works within us. The Amplified Bible captures this sense of the word. *"For sin, seizing the opportunity and getting a hold on me [by taking its*

commit iniquity. The Israelites requested of Aaron, “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us” (Ex 32:1). That single request broke the first three commandments, and the tenth as well. **SIN SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY AFFORDED BY THE COMMANDMENT.**

The Law Reveals Man’s Condition

The carnal mind will reason, “If sin seized an opportunity when it hears the commandment, then it is better not to hear the Law of God, or be subjected to His commandment. Then sin will not break forth in us.” But this is flawed reasoning. The Law did not make us sin, it **discovered** the sinful nature within us. Expressions of sin existed before the coming of the commandment. They were **accentuated** by the perception of the commandment, not created by it.

Man cannot be accepted by God until his nature is changed—until he becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. The fact that an individual may not have committed transgression in variety and quantity brings him no closer to God. It is his **nature** that condemns him! As it is written, we “were by **nature** children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). If anyone doubts that is the case, consider that the nature within man used the holy law of God as an occasion to sin! **To say it another way, man is not a sinner because he sins, but sins because he is a sinner.**

DECEIVED ME

Once again, the personification of sin is pointing us to the “law of sin” that is resident in “the flesh,” of sinful nature. That sinful principle, Paul says, “deceived me.” Other translations read, “beguiled me,” ^{ASV} “seduced me,” ^{DARBY} “I was tricked,” ^{BBE} and “fooled me.” ^{NLT} That confirms our fundamental ignorance.

But how did sin deceive Saul of Tarsus, and all others who are unregenerate? There are several areas of

deception fostered by the “law of sin.”

- ❑ It blinds men to the full intent of the law, constraining a surface view of it.
- ❑ It leads men to believe they can fulfill the law in their own energy.
- ❑ By promising satisfaction in “other things,” unrelated to God.
- ❑ By suggesting there are no real penalties for transgression.
- ❑ By suggesting that the sins already committed were not too serious.
- ❑ That the standard set forth in the Law is only a suggestion, and is not to be taken seriously.

It is as though the principle of sin used the very Law Saul thought he could keep, to condemn him. Where once it awakened all manner of unlawful desires within him, now it bludgeoned him with a guilty conscience. All confidence was destroyed, and the very commandment in which life was sought became the occasion for devastating death. To put it another way, the commandment which Saul thought was leading to life, actually led him into death. It did so because it discovered in him a principle that would not go away, and could not be subdued. As a result, his conscience was defiled, his confidence destroyed, and his hope shattered.

Man cannot be accepted by God until his nature is changed—until he becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. The fact that an individual may not have committed transgression in variety and quantity brings him no closer to God. It is his nature that condemns him!

On a practical basis, the outcome of the deception was that sin was minimized and self strength and worth were magnified. Although the “pleasures of sin” are only for a “season,” the deceived person stumbles on in transgression, oblivious of the destruction that awaits him. Yet, our text provides an additional view. The result of deception is not described as one of momentary pleasure, but of death.

KILLED ME

“ . . . and by it [the commandment] killed me.” This equates to be driven out from the presence of the Lord, in which Saul of Tarsus imagined he was welcome. This is another way of saying the conscience became defiled, forbidding the person to stand in the presence of the One who desires to save Him.

All of this because of the “law of sin!” It was awakened and aroused by the Law. Because of the hostility that it had against the holy Law, it worked more vigorously to provoke sinful indulgences. It caused all manner of wayward desires to erupt within—things Saul knew were not right. As a result, his conscience became a goad that prodded him, convicting him, and contaminating all of his thoughts. All of the exalted thoughts Saul had of himself were swept away in the deluge of condemnation. He had trusted in the Law to save him, and to give him life. However, in the end, it condemned him, causing his death. He was stripped of all delusion that he was good. Sin deceived and killed him. It is utterly hopeless for a person in that condition to save himself—and that is the condition we all were in.

THE LAW IS HOLY

“¹² **Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.**” Here is classic example of spiritual reasoning and sound mindedness! He has

just finished saying that the sin principle used the Law of God to deceive him and kill him. Now, looking back on the occasion, Paul says that circumstance

proves “the Law is holy, and what it commands is holy and upright and good.” ^{NJB} The “strength of sin is the Law,” yet it is “holy.” The Law was given that “every

mouth might be stopped and all the world become guilty before God," but it is "just," or righteous. The Law aroused the sin principle resident within fallen man, yet it is "good."

AN EXPRESSION FROM DAVID

This verse is to be considered against the background of a statement made by David. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Psa 19:12-13).

Because of his faith, David sensed sin was more dominant in him than he was

The very fact of David's prayer reveals he had come to exactly the same conclusion as Paul. The failure of their lives to measure up to the Law of God moved them to fault themselves, not God's Law. They did not complain that the law was too demanding.

able to detect or even understand. That is why he exclaimed, "But who can detect their errors?"^{NRSV} He knew he had hidden propensities, but knew neither their number or what they were. Thus he cried out, "Forgive my hidden faults."^{NIV}

Why did he speak in this manner? Why did he not excuse his errors as faults, saying he was "just human?" It was because of the holy Law of God that had defined sin for him, and made him acutely aware of the "law of sin" within him. He knew any seeming goodness in men was only a veneer, and did not reveal their real persons. Thus he prayed, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me." Presumptuous sins are sins coming from pride; sins of insolence and arrogance. If the human nature is not basically sinful, such a prayer is a foolish absurdity.

The very fact of David's prayer reveals he had come to exactly the same conclusion as Paul. The failure of their lives to measure up to the Law of God moved them to fault themselves, not God's Law. They did not complain that the law was too demanding, or that it asked impossible things of us—even though it does.

THE NATURE OF THE LAW

Our society, as well as the professed church itself, could do with a good dose of this perspective. The Law of God is "holy and just and good." Keep in mind, this conclusion is drawn from the fact of man's basic sinfulness, not from a Divine statement describing the character of the Law. **Man's impurity has underscored the law's virtue!**

The Law is holy because it reflects the character of God. "Holy" means blameless, without fault. It is pure and without mixture. There are no hidden agendas in it, no directions that are ungodly. The law of God always tells the truth and properly represents God's will.

The Law is just because there is no inequity in it. It precisely

declares the truth, and that without respect of persons. It aims to glorify God, and perfectly reflects His mind on things of which it speaks. It is ethically proper and right. It is not unfair in its demands upon those who are made in the image of God.

The Law is good because it helps us to discover what was latent within the flesh. It leads us to realize our sinful condition, and to see our need of a Savior. It is useful, beneficial, and sound in every part. What it commands is holy. What it requires is just. What it demands is good.

Why Men Recoil from the Law

Why do men recoil from the Law of God? Why do they want it removed from their public places, houses of government, and public schools? It is because they do not believe it is holy! It is because they

have not been persuaded that it is just! It is because they are convinced it is not good! It is too threatening to their conduct, and exposes their ways and persons as unacceptable to God.

They may cite political or social reasons for their opposition to the law, but they are deceived in doing so. The Law scrapes against their sinful nature. It is like a scouring pad upon their corrupt natures. While they seek to lay the blame on the Law itself, the fault is found in their very nature.

Paul confessed the Law did all of the things to him that people of our day complain it does to them. But he did not ask that the Law be removed. Rather, he allowed the law to bring him to Christ, that He might be delivered from condemnation.

LIFE PRIOR TO BEING IN CHRIST

We must ever keep before us that this is a picture of the Law's ministration BEFORE we were in Christ. It did not change our condition, but revealed it. Because of this, it could not justify us, but could only condemn us. We possessed within us a principle that is not allowed in heaven—"the law of sin." We had a nature that is not allowed in the courts of the Lord, and the Law exposed it.

GOD IS JUSTIFIED IN HIS SAYING

This passage glorifies God because it upholds what He has said, even if it condemns man. This confirms what was said earlier—a word taken from David. "Let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That Thou mightest be justified in Thy sayings, and mightest overcome when Thou art judged" (Rom 3:4; Psa 51:4).

While sinful men seek to justify themselves, the person living by faith insists that anyone speaking in contradiction of God is a "liar." That person desires God to be openly "justified" or vindicated in everything He has said. The person living by faith knows man has judged God when he violates His commandments, then seeks to justify himself in doing so. The believer wants God to "overcome" in all such situations. For He alone is righteous. That person knows the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good.

DID WHAT WAS GOOD BECOME DEATH?

⁴¹³ *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.*”The Holy Spirit is careful and zealous to protect the glory and righteousness of God. He teaches us in such a manner as leaves us bowing at the feet of our Lord, and holding up His Law as honorable and above all reproach. We are not “under the Law,” but we love and respect it! We have been “delivered from the Law,” yet we find no fault in it, confessing that its weakness was owing exclusively to us. As it is written, “*The Law was weak through the flesh* . . . ”(Rom 8:3).

DID THE LAW CAUSE OUR DEATH?

There is good reason for asking this question. We have been told that the Law aroused the sin principle within us. Sin worked through it to deceive us, and finally remove any hope of life we were deceived into thinking we had. The NASB reads, “*Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me?*”

If this is true, then what is good proved to be as dangerous as what is evil. Sin and the Law are then occupants of the same room, and are engaged in the same ministry.

Is it not written that the Law, or First Covenant, was the “*ministration of death*” (2 Cor 3:7)? Does it not follow, therefore, that is caused our death? “*God forbid!*” Neither the Word nor the character of God will allow for such a conclusion!

SIN PRODUCED DEATH

It was SIN that produced death in us, not the holy Law of God! Until the Law, or until the “*commandment came,*” sin did not appear as sin. It did not wear the tag of “*transgression,*” or represent itself as being unlawful. It came under the guise of “It is my right to do so.” It hid its true nature by deceiving men into thinking, “Everyone has a right to their opinion,” or “I can do as I please.”

The **philosopher** looked at sin and concluded the very appetites condemned by God were born in us, and therefore should be gratified. The **psychiatrist** pondered sin and concluded it was the result of some birth defect, disease, or bitter experience. The **sociologist** thought upon sin and determined it was the unavoidable effect of ones environment. The **idolater** considered sin and made a god out of it, deifying his own lust. The **educator** looked at sin and deduced that more information was needed. The **politician** ponders it and concludes that laws should be passed that allow for its expression. The favored of this world refuse to see sin as it is!

Remember, this is the sin nature—what compels the individual to commit transgression and violate specific laws of God. It is the NATURE of sin that is being exposed by the holy Law! It is elsewhere called “the flesh.”

But sin is known by the trail of tragedy it leaves behind. It is so corrupt, so diabolical, that it produced death in us “*through what was good.*” That is what the root of human nature did! Had it not been for the Law, men would have tended even more to listen to the world’s foolish wise men.

This is a day when the perspective of this text is sorely needed. It is vital that sin be seen as “*sin,*” and not as a mistake, disease, or maladjustment. It must “*appear* [as] *sin,*” not as an infirmity. It is not an addiction, but a character, a nature, an inner law or principle.

EXCEEDINGLY SINFUL

Through the commandment of God, sin became “*exceedingly sinful.*” Other versions read, “*utterly sinful,*”^{NASB} “*sinful beyond measure,*”^{NRSV} “*much more evil,*”^{BBE} “*how terrible sin really is,*”^{NLT} and “*unbounded sinful power.*”^{NJB}

The wickedness of sin cannot be measured. It has no boundaries. There are no depths to which it will not sink. There is no extent to which it will not go to justify its presence. If Cain sees his brother offer a more acceptable sacrifice than his own, he will murder him. If Joseph’s brothers are offended by his dreams and favored status, they will think nothing of selling him into slavery. If the Jewish council does not like the words of Stephen, they will stone him. If the Jews at Lystra are offended by the powerful preaching of Paul, they will drag him out of the city and stone him.

There is no boundary to sin, no limits to its depravity and innate wickedness! If Haman does not like Mordecai’s refusal to do obeisance to him, he will seek his death. If the three Hebrew children will not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol, he will have them thrown into a furnace of fire. There are no depths to which sin will not descend!

The Sin Principle

Remember, this is the sin nature—what compels the individual to commit transgression and violate specific laws of God. **It is the NATURE of sin that is being exposed by the holy Law!** It is elsewhere called “*the flesh.*”

There is a Divine strategy revealed in the giving of the Law. **Sin had to work death in us in order for us to see its true nature.** The Law was given to make this happen. Men greatly error when they summon the psychologist to scenes of human tragedy, to explain the what and the why of brutality and violence. In vain men ask the philosophers and sociologists for an explanation of deviate conduct that is outside of the bounds of both reason and propriety. It is the sin-nature that causes these things to happen.

A time must come when men are brought to realize the problem is in human nature! Every person out of Christ is dominated by *“the law of sin”* that is resident in their nature, or basic constitution. The fact that it does not break forth in deluges of violence or deviate indulgence in all people does not mean such a thing is not possible. Given the opportunity, together with the removal of Divine restraint, the darling Absalom can try to wrench the Kingdom from his own father David, even seeking to kill him.

When the Spirit refers to sin BECOMING exceedingly sinful, He does not mean that the nature of sin becomes worse and worse. Rather, it is PERCEIVED as being *“exceedingly*

sinful.” The fact that it worked death in men through a holy, just, and good commandment proves that to be the case.

HUMAN DEPRAVITY

While some theologians argue against the notion that man is depraved, or utterly corrupt, they cannot make their argument from this passage! If the human nature is not utterly fallen, what need is there for a Savior (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14)? Why must man be given both repentance and remission (Acts 5:31)? How is it that Divine grace in abundance is needed if there remains a single vestige of goodness in the natural man (Rom 5:17)? Why must we be drawn to Christ (John 6:44)? Why is deliverance necessary (Heb 2:15)? Of what purpose is the enlightening of the eyes of the

understanding if man is not sinful at the core (Eph 1:18-20)?

Again, I must remind you that we are speaking of the principle of sin, not of individual transgressions. This is the law that, as an engine, drives the transgression. It is embodied in the word *“lust,”* and is awakened by the holy Law of God, as though an intruder had entered its house.

The awfulness of the sinful nature would never have been correctly known if it was not for the holy Law of God. The Law provoked that wicked nature to arise from seeming slumber and work prodigiously to produce sin and death in us. For the sensitive, the volume of sin that was within was stunning.

THE LAW AND ME

“¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Here is a grand summary statement, and an introduction to the marvelous section that follows. You see at once that this is a profoundly strong statement. It is also in the present tense, where verses seven through thirteen are all in the past tense: *“had not known sin. . . had not known lust . . . wrought in me . . . sin was dead . . . I was alive . . . the commandment came . . . sin revived . . . I died . . . I found to be unto death . . . taking occasion by the commandment . . . deceived me . . . slew me.”*

The Spirit will now draw some conclusions upon the basis of what He has taught us. He will bring things together, and that in a most marvelous way. Paul appeals to our comprehension, acknowledging that he has received the point, and expecting that we have done the same: *“WE KNOW.”* This is knowledge common to the household of faith. It is not philosophical knowledge, but something that has been realized in the inner recesses of our hearts. We know it to such an extent that we will immediately recognize the truth of what is said. The statements that follow are not for information, but for

confirmation.

THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL

This is a profound statement, as becomes abundantly evident when you try to explain it. *“Spiritual,”* in this case, is

The Law was unsuitable as a means to justification, but it “is spiritual.” It brought no power or mercy to us, but it “is spiritual.” We died to it in Jesus, but it “is spiritual.” It is not of faith, but it “is spiritual.” We were delivered from the law in order that we might be married to the risen Jesus, but the Law “is spiritual.”

used in its highest sense. There is such a thing as *“spiritual wickedness”* (precisely the same word—Eph 6:12). That is wickedness of an unseen and dominating order. We do combat with it in a higher realm—above the order of flesh and blood.

But our text means more than that. He is not saying the Law is *“spiritual”* merely in the sense of being of a higher order, or from an unseen realm.

First, this is the Law of God—the Law that stopped every mouth and caused the world to become guilty before God (3:19). It is the Law which brought *“the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20). It is summarized on tables of stone, and called *“the words of the covenant, the ten commandments”* (Ex 34:28). That Law is *“spiritual.”* It is the Law that convinced Paul of his sin, and it is that Law that brings us to Christ (Gal 3:24). As a covenant, it was temporary, and characterized by fading glory (2 Cor 3:7-11). However, by nature, it *“is spiritual.”*

The Law was unsuitable as a means to justification, but it *“is spiritual.”* It brought no power or mercy to us, but it *“is spiritual.”* We died to it in Jesus, but it *“is spiritual.”* It is not of faith, but it *“is spiritual.”* We were delivered from the law in order that we might be married to the risen Jesus, but the Law *“is spiritual.”*

Given by God. The law *“is spiritual,”* because it was given by God Himself. *“All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God,”* (2 Tim 3:16), and the Law was *“given”* and *“written.”* The breath of the Holy Spirit is upon the Law, empowering it for its assigned work.

Harmonious with the Divine nature. The Law *“is spiritual”* because it is in harmony with the Divine nature. It is at variance with nature of fallen man, but not with the nature of God. It articulates His mind, and carries His perspective.

Characterized by heavenly rationality. The Law *“is spiritual”* because it possesses a heavenly form of rationality. It is not ethereal, but appeals to the mind, provoking thoughts and profound considerations.

It deals with spiritual matters.

The Law *“is spiritual”* because it deals with spiritual matters—things that have to do with the real issues of life. It defines the proper direction of inner life.

It reaches into the spirit of man.

The Law *“is spiritual”* because it reaches into the inner part of man—into his spirit. Like a sharp two edged sword, it discovers and delineates between the soul and the spirit of man. It uncovers sin at its root—in the human spirit.

Because the Law *“is spiritual,”* we have the utmost regard for it. It originated with God and brings glory to Him. It does God’s work and prepares men to receive Christ. Let there be no disdain for the Law of God among us.

I AM CARNAL

At this point we begin to see more clearly why man must be justified. When Paul says, *“I am carnal,”* he speaks for all of us. He is not writing a biography, but unveiling the reason why we have been delivered from the Law. Other versions read, *“I am of the flesh,”*^{NASB} *“I am unspiritual,”*^{NIV} and *“I am fleshly.”*^{DARBY}

When Paul says *“I,”* he is referring to his natural self—how he is without Christ and apart from justification. No person in Christ can be described in the words of this verse. In fact, the Spirit will tell us later, *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you”* (8:9). *“Flesh,”* or carnality, is a state of nature, not of grace!

It is possible to refer to a part of a

person as though it were the whole of the person. Thus, when Lazarus died, Jesus asked, *“Where have you laid him?”* (John 11:34). The same terminology is used of the burial of Jesus: *“And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre”* (Acts 13:29). Technically, in both cases, they only buried the body, not the soul or the spirit. Yet the body is spoken of as though it were the whole person. This is because the

The Law *“is spiritual”* because it reaches into the inner part of man—into his spirit. Like a sharp two edged sword, it discovers and delineates between the soul and the spirit of man. It uncovers sin at its root—in the human spirit.

body was a part of the person, though not the whole of him.

Thus Paul could refer to the part of himself called *“the flesh”* as though it were he himself. While here he admits to owning that part (*“I am carnal”*), the latter part of this chapter will find him disowning this part. For now, he speaks in this way to bring to our attention the sharp contrast between the natural man and the spiritual law of God.

Carnal Christians?

Some might object, saying there are *“carnal Christians,”* even though no such combination of words is found in Scripture. And, if such words are not found in the word of God, they can hardly connote a Scriptural meaning!

Immediately, some flee to the third chapter of First Corinthians, pointing out Paul’s indictment of the Corinthians for being *“carnal.”* And, indeed, he did charge them with carnality. *“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now*

are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?” (3:1-3).

Were these Christian traits? Are they the marks of those who are in Christ? The point of the text is that they were conducting their lives as though they were not even in Christ. They had allowed the sinful nature to again assert itself. As a result, they were not able to be addressed as spiritual people. There was envying, strife, and divisions among them. They were walking like unregenerate men, even calling themselves after men. Anyone who imagines this passage sanctions the presence of carnal people in Christ’s church needs to rethink their foolish position. These people were soundly rebuked for being in that state. Later in the chapter he speaks of those mingled in the church who were *“wood, hay, and stubble”* that could not withstand the sure judgment of God (1 Cor 3:10-13). With great solemnity, he went on to say, *“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are”* (verse 17).

When Paul says, *“I am carnal,”* he was not saying he was like the Corinthians. He was not confessing to being envious, fomenting strife among believers, and being the cause of ungodly division. Rather, he was speaking of his person apart from Jesus – the part that was crucified with Christ, and cut away from his essential person by the *“circumcision of Christ.”*

While he will disown this part of himself later in this chapter, referring to it as *“not I”* (7:16,17,20), he says here it is *“I.”* He means it is still with him, though separate from him. If it was possible for Rebekah to have children with contrary natures within her womb, it should not surprise us that those in Christ have contrary natures within their bodies.

It is as though Paul speaks for the natural part of himself, knowing it will not acknowledge its true nature itself: *“I am carnal.”*

What Does It Mean to be Carnal?

In the sense of our text, what does it mean to be “carnal?” First, this is a condition that is opposite of the spiritual Law of God. To be “carnal” is to be the opposite of God’s holy law, and hostile toward it. Carnality involves minding earthly things, which constitutes one an “*enemy of the cross of Christ*” (Phil 3:18).

To be “carnal” is to be fleshly, with appetites that are anchored to the earth. This is the “*natural man*” which “*cannot receive*” or know “*the things of the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 2:14). To be “carnal” is to be locked into the state of nature, which God has condemned.

By confessing “*I am carnal*,” Paul was doing two things. First, he was acknowledging that the Law was spiritual, and had successfully uncovered the sin principle that was resident in himself. Second, he was affirming his need of Christ Jesus and his refusal to trust in the flesh. This is what he was of himself and apart from the Lord Jesus.

In the ultimate sense, Paul is showing us why men cannot be justified by the law. In their natural state, they are everything that the Law condemns, and nothing that it commends. This is precisely why we had to die to the law, being delivered from it.

SOLD UNDER SIN

Here again the Spirit moves Paul to use most powerful words. Other versions read, “*sold in bondage to sin*,”^{NASB} “*sold as a slave to sin*,”^{NIV} “*given into the power of sin*,”^{BBE} and “*I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master*.”^{NLT} It is not possible to miss the strength of this language. It is most arresting, indeed.

I must emphasize that Paul is showing why it is imperative that we be delivered from the Law as a means to justification. The requirement for remission, justification, and a Savior to effect both, is absolutely essential. By nature we are enslaved to sin, unable to remove its

shackles from us. Apart from Christ we are not capable of righteousness. Sin is our master, and we do its bidding eagerly. When the Law makes demands of the flesh, it only rushes with more eagerness headlong into sin. Robertson says of this phrase (“*sold under sin*”) “Sin has closed the mortgage and owns its slave.”

In the beginning chapters the Spirit confirmed there was “*none righteous, no not one*” (3:10). Now he is telling us **why**. It is because there is nothing good about the flesh—about the natural man, or the person without Christ within. Such people do not merely have “*the law of sin*” within

upon the sons of disobedience”^{NKJV} (Col 3:5-6). “*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*”^{NKJV} (Rom 8:13). “*And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*” (Gal 5:24-25).

Such exhortations would not be necessary if the flesh was recoverable. But it is not. It is “*carnal, given into the power of sin*.”

FLESHLY RELIGION

By nature we are enslaved to sin, unable to remove its shackles from us. Apart from Christ we are not capable of righteousness. Sin is our master, and we do its bidding eagerly. When the Law makes demands of the flesh, it only rushes with more eagerness headlong into sin.

them, they are **ruled** by it. Sin is their uncontested master, and they are not able to do anything about it. They are “*sold under sin*.”

THE FLESH HAS NOT CHANGED

When we are born again, “*the flesh*” does not change. It is reduced to obsolescence, now being called the “*old man*” (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). With energy, he is to be “*put off*” and denied expression. He has not changed, he is still “*sold under [the dominion of] sin*.” The flesh is not included in the phrase “*all things are become new*” (2 Cor 5:17). Our perspective of it has “*become new*,” but its nature has not changed. Blessed is the person who sees it.

The seriousness of this matter is seen in various exhortations to believers. “*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming*

The danger of a religion that centers in the flesh and its corrupted appetites ought to be evident. It is a sin grievous beyond description to make a religious appeal to the flesh—the fallen part of man. It is not capable of doing what is right, and has been rejected in its totality by the Living God.

No one whose lineage can only be traced to Adam will dwell forever in the house of the Lord. Those who lived in spiritually primitive times, before the coming of Christ and the declaration of the Gospel, will be righteously judged upon the basis of their longing for and anticipation of a Savior.

In regeneration, our old nature is not made good, but a good nature is created within us. This is done by virtue of our connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. That blessed affiliation frees us from the condemnation of the Law, and from the power of the flesh as well. That blessed circumstance needs to be proclaimed.

CONCLUSION

When you ponder the rarity of a message like this in our day, it becomes

even more precious. God is greatly to be praised for unfolding the magnitude of

His great salvation. I have often said this, but must do so once again. There are at

least two things that have eluded the modern church. First, the depth to which sin has taken man. Second, the extent to which God has gone to save us. Both of these realities have been expounded with power in this text.

Sin took us to depths from which we could not recover ourselves. We had to be delivered by another, even Jesus Christ. Not only did sin send us to a moral bottom, the “*law of sin*” penetrated every part of our person. The root of sin was found in us, and we could not pull it out. In our dealings with sin, it is important that we do not limit ourselves to the expose of particular and reprehensible transgressions. While they must be exposed and condemned, men must also hear of the root, or cause, of sin.

The principle of sin is resident in the flesh, and men must know it. It is only as this is seen to a measurable degree that the grace of God and a Savior from sin will be properly seen. Half-heartedness and inconsistency are the direct result of NOT seeing that “*no good thing*” dwells

in the flesh.

In my judgment, contemporary problem-solvers fail to take this into consideration. They deal too much with surface issues, and do not come to grips with the root of the problem. That root is the sin nature that is part of the flesh, or our natural being. As long as we deal with on the surface, we will be shut up to a law-system. The irony of that whole approach is that the Law arouses the sin principle, causing it to be more active than it ever was before.

The thoroughness of salvation is exhilarating to consider. First, it deals with the transgressions we have committed, forgiving us all trespasses. Our account is settled, and our iniquities are blotted out like a thick cloud. The conscience is purged, thereby allowing the believer to come into the very presence of God, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

In regeneration, the corrupt nature, tied to our flesh, is cut away from our

essential persons and put upon the cross. Thereby the sin principle is put to a disadvantage. We are then buried with Christ into a state of death to both sin and the Law. We die to sin in the sense of it no longer dominating us. We die to the Law in the sense of it no longer being able to condemn us.

In being joined to Christ, we come into an area of unspeakable advantage and provision. Not only did Jesus deliver us from sin, the law, and the devil, He is leading us to glory. His intercession and mediation assure that we will always have what is required to make it safely from earth to glory.

All of this, and more, is opened to us in a marvelous Gospel, that is itself “*the power of God unto salvation*.” There is no reason why any believer should ever be dominated by sin. God has made provision for us to abstain from fleshly lusts, put to death the part of us that gravitates to sin, and resist the devil. These provisions are for all who are in Christ Jesus. Our text has strongly affirmed these realities.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 23



INWARD STRUGGLE CONFIRMS JUSTIFICATION

7:15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 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. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 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. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 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. – Romans 7:15-25 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

When believers become preoccupied with Law, or a regimented and lifeless approach to God, the real nature of spiritual life is obscured. Everything related to life and godliness are thrown out of focus when men address life as though they were merely measuring up to a moral standard. In such a case, they set their objectives too low, and think too small, coming under great restriction.

Make no mistake about this, the saints of God ARE being conformed to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29), and they ARE being changed from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). That change,

however, is facilitated through faith, not works. Those who walk by faith and live in the Spirit have an intense regard for HOW they live. Like Paul they confess, *“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”* ^{NKJV} (Gal 2:20). Armed with spiritual weaponry, they engage the powers of darkness, striving with all that is within them to *“stand against the wiles of the devil”* (Eph 6:10-18). Faith constrains us to *“abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:11), and the grace of God

teaches us how to do it (Tit 2:11-12).

In the process of this type of living, tremendous outbreaks of unwanted thoughts occur within. These are the eruptions of *“the flesh,”* which remains linked to our earthly bodies. There is no limit as to how vile these thoughts can be, or how frequently we may have to contend with them. They may “pop” into our minds when we are engaged in the most focused spiritual activities, and when we least want them to show themselves.

The *“good fight of faith”* (1 Tim 6:12) involves dealing with these wayward

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. SPIRITUAL FRUSTRATION (7:15)
- II. I AGREE WITH THE LAW (7:16)
- III. IT IS NOT REALLY ME (7:17)
- IV. I KNOW ABOUT THE FLESH (7:18a)
- V. THE FRUSTRATING CIRCUMSTANCE (7:18b-19)
- VI. SOUND SPIRITUAL THINKING (7:20-21)
- VII. THE RECONCILED WAY OF THINKING (7:22)
- VIII. A CONTRARY PRINCIPLE WITHIN (7:23)
- IX. YEARNING FOR DELIVERANCE (7:24)
- X. DUAL NATURES, DUAL SERVITUDE (7:25)

and unwanted thoughts. Spiritual weaponry has been provided in Christ that can be used to throw down these thoughts, refusing to allow them to dominate our minds, even though they enter into them. The Spirit says this of these weapons. *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor 10:4-5). These weapons, however, cannot **stop** the thoughts from occurring.

This situation is a source of consternation to the believer. You will sense this in the text we are to consider. If there is no understanding of what is actually occurring, the child of God may conclude he is surely condemned, or has not even been born again. Many a fainting soul has interpreted the eruption of the “old man” as a personal decline in spirituality.

AFTER NEW LIFE, NOT BEFORE

Theologians, as men are wont to call them, have argued for centuries over this text. Some insist that it is the perspective of Paul BEFORE he was in Christ—a sort of lament of one who is under the Law. Others insist that it is the contemporary experience of believers. If we do not have the proper view of the text, it will only minister confusion.

The Theme of the Chapter

The theme of this chapter, as well as that of the sixth chapter, is life IN Christ, not out of Christ. Ponder the statements that have been made—statements that form the inspired context of the seventh chapter.

- We are “dead to sin” (6:2).
- We were baptized into Christ’s death (6:3).
- We also should walk in newness of life (6:4).
- We have been planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ death (6:5).
- Our “old man” is crucified with Christ (6:6a).
- Henceforth we should not serve sin (6:6b).
- He that is dead is freed from sin (6:6).
- We are to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (6:11a).
- We are to reckon ourselves as alive unto God through Jesus Christ (6:11b).
- We are not to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies (6:12).
- We are not to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness (6:13a).
- We are to yield ourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead (6:13b).
- We are to yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God (6:13c).
- Sin will not have dominion over us because we are not under law, but under grace (6:14).
- Salvation makes no provision for continuance in sin (6:15).
- We obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to us (6:17).
- Made free from sin, we have become servants of righteousness (6:18).
- Now we are to yield our members as servants of righteousness (6:19).
- We are free from sin and are servants to God (6:22).
- We have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ (7:4a).
- Our death to the Law in order that we might be married to Christ (7:4b).
- We have been delivered from the Law, becoming dead to it (7:6a).
- Our lives are now lived in service to God in the newness of spirit, not in the oldness of letter (7:6b).

It should be apparent that the perspective being presented is that of one

IN Christ, not one outside of Christ. The foundation of our acceptance in Christ is proclaimed in chapters four and five. The extended commentary on our past is found 1:20-3:20.

References to the Past

In the sixth and seventh chapters of Romans there are references to our past, but not in an extended way. A few comparisons are made to accent the glorious benefits that are realized in Christ Jesus.

- We **were** the servants of sin (6:17).
- We **did** yield our members as servants to iniquity and uncleanness (6:19).
- When we **were** the servants of sin, we **were** free from righteousness (6:20).
- We bore no fruit in our past, and are now ashamed of it (6:21).
- When we **were** in the flesh, the motions, or passions, of sin, were aroused by the Law (7:5a).
- In the flesh, our passions worked in us to bring forth fruit unto death (7:5b).
- Under the law, sin awakened, and we died, losing any sense of acceptance before God (7:8-9).
- The commandment of God produced death in us, not life (7:10).
- Sin worked through the commandment of God to deceive and slay us (7:11).
- Sin worked death in us through the good commandment of God, showing sin to be exceedingly sinful (7:13).

None of these statements are the central theme. They are all mentioned within the greater context of salvation, and what the believer experiences in Christ Jesus. The remainder of this chapter is a continuation of the Spirit’s exposition of our experience in Christ.

ONLY PRESENT TENSE WORDS

Previous to this passage, there were occasional references to the past: *“were baptized. . . were baptized. . . have been planted . . . were the servants of sin . . . have obeyed from the heart . . . ye have yielded. . . were the servants of sin . . . were free from righteousness . . . were in the flesh . . . motions of sin did work. . . I was alive once without the law . . . sin revived and I died . . . I found to be unto death . . . sin deceived me and slew me.”*

How dramatically the passage before us differs. There is NO reference to the

past. It is all in the present, and speaks of a present experience. *"I do . . . allow not . . . I would . . . do I not . . . what I hate . . . that do I . . . I do that . . . I would not . . . I consent . . . it is good . . . It is no more . . . sin that dwelleth . . . I know . . . dwelleth no good thing . . . to will is present . . . that which is good . . . I find not . . . I would . . . I do not . . . which I would not . . . that I do . . . I would . . . I do not . . . I would not . . . when I would . . . do good . . . evil is present . . . I delight . . . I see . . . in my members . . . warring against . . . bringing me . . . which is in . . . man that I am."*

There is no a single reference to the past. It takes an extraordinary amount of imagination to view this passage as a commentary on life when we were dead in sin. Such an approach would clash with

the entirety of the passage. Having made these observations, the meaning and weight of the passage will be very apparent to you. Here is an experience common to all believers, yet little understood by great segments of them. You will find yourself entering into this text as it shines Divine light upon your life. The nature of life in Christ will be clarified, and you will find great delight and revelation in that clarification.

THE SUBJECT IS THOUGHT, NOT DEED

It is important to see that thoughts are the subject of this text, not deeds. Remember, Paul has already said that the Law caused him to recognize lust, or unlawful desire, at the very core of his being. Lust is inherent in the flesh—it is part and parcel of it, and cannot be

separated from it. It would be absurd to introduce a lengthy dialog on outward deeds after elaborating so extensively on the matter of "lust."

When Paul says "doing" or "do," he is not referring to an outward act, but to activities of the mind, which is the battleground. He has already told us that the Law forthrightly condemned "lust," which is an inward thing. In order to confirm how great our deliverance from the law is, he will now confirm that we cannot stop the flesh from lusting. It will throw its thoughts into our minds whether we want them or not. While the Law condemns those desires because they found a way into our thoughts, we are not condemned for them in Christ Jesus. That is because they conflict with what we really want, or will to do.

SPIRITUAL FRUSTRATION

"7:15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." People that are driven by Law, and seeking to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3), cannot make such a statement. First, they are not inclined to do so. Second, it is too incriminating and condemning for them. *Christians* who are serious, yet uninformed about the nature of the Kingdom, consider the condition described in this verse as an evidence they are wicked. They ponder the possibility of being unacceptable to God, and think maybe they were never really "converted" (Acts 3:19). The prevalence of the tenets of psychology in the professed church has only served to further obscure the significance of this experience. Approaching the various aspects of the believer's life from the standpoint of the human psyche as perceived by psychology, brings no advantage to those in Christ.

The Holy Spirit never approaches the inner-experience of the believer from the earthly point of view. Because there *"is neither Jew nor Greek . . . bond nor free . . . male nor female . . . in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:28), **those distinctions are**

never presented as the basis for the analysis of life. If you are familiar with current religious trends, there is a

We have before us a classic example of true spiritual reasoning. The Spirit will analyze inner turmoil and the frustration that proceeds from it. He will not introduce a single word concerning racial, gender, or social considerations—not a syllable. Rather, He will go beneath the surface into the realm where human spirits have no such distinctions.

phenomenal amount of such examinations in the Christian community. People are taught to view their emotional and intellectual lives from their status as men or women, ethnic origin, of other social distinctions. This is neither innocent nor inconsequential. Such approaches throw sand into the eyes of God's people, and are to be rejected.

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analyze inner turmoil and the frustration that proceeds from it. He will not introduce a single word concerning racial, gender, or social considerations—not a syllable. Rather, He will go beneath the surface into the realm where human spirits have no such distinctions.

Inner struggle within the child of God will be viewed as a consequence of salvation. It will be set forth within the context of justification by faith and the imputation of righteousness. Our baptism into the death of Christ initiated this struggle, and our release from the body of flesh and blood will loose us from it. In the meantime, because it is not the basis for condemnation, the nature of it must be understood, even though the experience itself goes beyond our understanding.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND
"For what I am doing, I do not understand." Here is a most remarkable expression! Other versions read as follows. *"For that which I do I allow not."*^{KJV} *"I do not understand what I do."*^{NIV} *"I do not understand my own actions."*^{NRSV} *"For that which I do I know not."*^{ASV} *"And I have no clear knowledge of*

what I am doing." ^{BBE} **"I don't understand myself at all."** ^{NLT}

Several preliminary observations are in order. First, Paul is declaring a present circumstance, not a past one: *"I AM doing . . . I DO not . . ."* Second, this is a circumstance that goes beyond human understanding: *"I do NOT understand."* Third, he knows WHAT is happening, and later will affirm he knows WHY it is happening (v 23). Yet, that knowledge brings no satisfaction to him. How could wicked thoughts come to him unbidden and unwanted? The KJV reads *"allow not,"* emphasizing he had made no provision for such thoughts. He did not willingly go into areas that nurtured such thoughts. He had not sought them out. Yet they came to him.

We conclude from these things that **faith is superior to knowledge.** It brings a higher form of understanding than is possible in nature. If this were not the case, the experience that is now described would prove to be the total undoing of the tender hearted. With care, the Spirit moves Paul to open up a fact of spiritual life that is common to all believers.

By faith Paul is speaking of the unwanted expressions of the sinful nature. He is not confessing sin or transgression, but a grievous condition.

What I Am Doing

Remember, this is an expression of a sensitive heart. Those with calloused hearts will have no idea what he is talking about. *"What I am doing"* does not refer to the thrust of life, but to unwanted intrusions into the thought life. Further, it does not refer to an outward deed, although what is described can cause outward expressions. He is not speaking of an immoral deed he committed again and again. This is describing the battle between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal 5:17).

By saying *"I do not understand,"* or *"I allow not,"* Paul is saying **he did not fully understand the corruption of his own human nature.** It is as though he was stunned by the depth of the wickedness found in the *"old man."* It is

one thing to know theologically that man is corrupt by nature. It is quite another to experience the outbreak of that corruption in our thoughts.

The use of the word *"actions"* in some translations tends to confuse the text, leading some to believe the reference is to an outward deed. This is not the case.

The thrust of Paul's life was Godward. He had turned his back on the past, renounced the things that had separated him from God, and was pressing toward the mark with unrelenting zeal (Phil 3:7-14). Outwardly, he lived *"holily, justly, and unblameably"* (1 Thess 2:10). But there were inconsistencies within. He was not struggling with his will—that was consistent, and he confesses that to be the case. **But his will was not able to stop the eruptions of the "old man."** He wanted no unacceptable thoughts in his mind, and yet they were found there

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anyway.

In this case, the phrase *"I do"* refers to any thoughts Paul did not want to have. By saying *"I do not understand,"* he means that he was unable to stop them. There were times when he was broadsided, so to speak, by defiled thoughts and lusts that exceeded what he thought was possible. He actually had to grapple with unwanted and intruding imaginations. He had to cast them down violently, even though he had made no place for them in his mind. That was the frustrating part of it all.

In using the word *"frustrating,"* I do

not mean the undoing of the believer, or his utter defeat. Rather, I am referring to discouragement, being humbled, and being baffled. The earnest desire to be utterly without spot NOW, is thwarted. The tender desire to be pleasing to the Lord in every part of our being is blasted by the entrance of things displeasing to us, to say nothing of our Lord.

WHAT I WILL TO DO

"For what I will to do, that I do not practice." Paul will now show us that the human will, even when sanctified, is not the seat of our power. Through his will, as sanctified by faith, he was able to stop persecuting the church. After he believed on Christ, his will never again allowed him to consent to the stoning of a believer in Christ. There are things the will CAN do, and do well. It can move you to want to be absent from the body and present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). It can provoke you to give beyond your means (2 Cor 8:3,12). The will can move a rich believer to share his wealth with others (1 Tim 6:18). It can constrain us to *"live honestly"* (Heb 13:18). **However, there is an area where the will is powerless!** It is in the matter of stopping unwanted thoughts and lusts from entering the mind!

Other versions translate this expression as follows. *"For what I would, that do I not."* ^{KJV} *"For what I want to do I do not do."* ^{NIV} *"For I do not do what I want"* ^{NRSV} *"For not what I would, that do I do, I do not"* ^{BBE} *"For I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it."* ^{NLT}

This is an arresting word! It reveals a heart that has been sensitized by grace. Here is a condition in which the individual is acutely aware of the nature of everything that courses through the mind. **"I DO NOT DO WHAT I WANT!"** And what is it that Paul wanted? What was his will on the matter being considered?

At this point, we must rise above the details of life. *"What I want"* refers to the fervent desire for total purity before the Lord, with not a single deviation. **Speaking through Paul, the Spirit here throws down the notion that man can please the Lord in the**

energy of self strength, without the help of the Lord. Even when the will is strengthened by the Spirit, and the affection is set on things above, it cannot close the gate of the mind tight enough to forbid the entrance of profane thoughts. *"I do not do what I want!"*

It is as though he said, "I do not want my flesh to lust against the Spirit, but it does anyway. I want no part of my thinking to be unacceptable, yet I find such a part." Do not think for one moment that when Paul acknowledged he was not *"already perfect"* (Phil 3:12), it was a casual statement. He fervently desired to be *"absent from the body and present with the Lord"* (2 Cor 5:8), but he was not. His presence in the body, and current absence from the Lord, produced all manner of things he did not want. There were deviate thoughts so close to him they had to be taken captive and made to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

"What I want," then, refers to a perfectly consistent life for the Lord, with no interruptions or inconsistencies—particularly in the mind. However, Paul was not able to achieve such a condition because of the presence of the flesh, or sinful nature.

WHAT I HATE TO DO

"... but what I hate, that I do." It requires an honest and informed soul to make such a confession. This is not the acknowledgment of a murderer like Cain! It is not the acknowledgment of a covetous man like Achan. It is not the admission of a profane person like Esau. It is not even the confession of a godly person who sinned like David. This is the admission of a person who lived holily, justly, and blamelessly. If he had not told us of this, we would never have known it.

Other versions read as follows. *"But what I hate, that do I."*^{KJV} *"But what I hate I do."*^{NIV} *"But I do the very thing I hate."*^{NRSV} *"But what I have hate for, that I do."*^{BBE}

Again, this is the statement of a sensitive soul. He hated more than the outward show of sin, or the baser sort of transgressions. Some people who wear the name of Jesus do not *"hate iniquity"* as fully as they should (Psa 97:10). Romans 12:9). They are too calloused toward things that are hated by God, and are an

abomination unto Him. For this reason, they cannot comprehend why Paul speaks as he does.

It is important to see that Paul is not speaking as a sort of spiritual superman. His analysis is the result of living in the energy of the new creation—a privilege vouchsafed to every person in Christ Jesus. This is the experience of those who live by faith, walk in the Spirit, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The conditions declared in this passage were not sought, but were the result of living in the fellowship of Jesus (1 Cor 1:9) and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

I am sure Paul did **not** seek *"despair of life,"* but there was a time when he wrestled with it (2 Cor 1:8). He would rather have **not** experienced *"sorrow,"* but he did (Phil 2:27). I know he would **not** have preferred *"fears"* to come into his mind, but they did (2 Cor 7:5). These are the better part of unacceptable thoughts. There are also *"imagination"* that must be thrown down (2 Cor 10:5).

DOES THIS APPLY TO WORDS AND DEEDS?

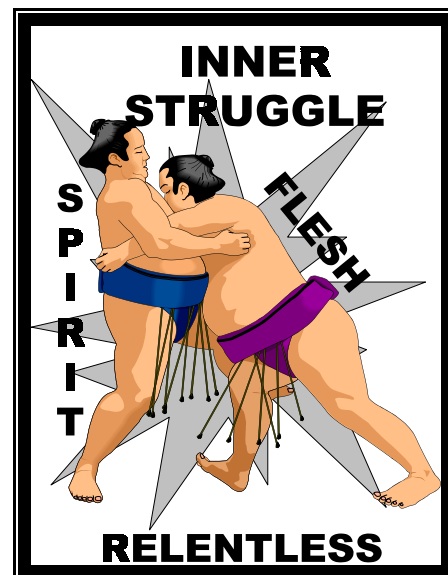
Some might ask if doing what is hated applies to words and deeds. There is certainly a senses in which we can say or do things we actually hate. But that is not the sense of our text. There is a critical difference, however, when we say or do things that we ourselves loath, and when unwanted lusts and thoughts invade our minds. We must confess ill-spoken words and contrary deeds as sin, and procure forgiveness for them. God is *"ready to forgive"* (Psa 86:5) these faults, and to *"cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). We DID them, and we must be forgiven of them.

However, this is not the situation in the text before us. Unwanted lusts and thoughts are not credited to us as sin, and are not to be confessed as sin. This is the whole point of this text. Paul will establish with unusual strength that such expressions do not belong to us. If we do not respond to them by entertaining and fulfilling them, they are not credited to us as personal transgression. This will now be developed more fully.

The New King James Version renders the word *"do"* as *"practice."* This is based on the use of the word in the Greek (ποιῶ). However, "practice," as used in ordinary speech, does not reflect the intent of this verse. As ordinarily comprehended, the word *"practice"* speaks of voluntary and willing expressions. Indeed, this word is often used in Scripture to denote this type of action—a willing and preferable word or deed (Matt 21:24; John 4:34; 1 Cor 9:23; 2 Cor 11:12). But that is NOT the meaning of the word in this passage.

Two Natures

As this text will develop, there are two distinct natures resident in the believer: the *"old man"* and the *"new man."* Like Jacob and Esau before they were born, they reside in the same domain, and struggle with each other (Gen 25:22).



Each nature has a distinct personality, mind, and will. Each is ruled by a different master, and motivated by different principles, or laws. Both are powerful, and aggressively seek their own way. One is good, and one is evil. One is from Christ, one is from Adam. One is earth-centered, the other is oriented for heaven. The devil works in one, and the Holy Spirit in the other.

The phrases *"what I hate, that I DO,"* and *"I DO what I will not to do,"* refer to the DOING, or expressions, of the *"old man."* They are **internal**, not external, acts. Paul refers the word **"I"** because they occur within him. They are part of

his total makeup, but are NOT part of his essential person. They are foreign to his identity in Christ, and contrary to His new heart and spirit. They challenge him like Goliath, and taunt him like Sennacherib. Yet, they are not him!

I AGREE WITH THE LAW

“¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.” This is the first of a series of conclusions—conclusions drawn by faith, not by human knowledge or wisdom. The point under consideration is **doing** what is really hated: *“but what I hate, that do I.”* Once again, this is speaking of the intrusion of corrupt imaginations and thoughts. The perspective now put before us is that of a person who is in fellowship with Christ Jesus. This is NOT the view or utterance of a person alienated from God, and *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Eph 2:1).

While it should not be necessary to say this repeatedly, a veil of ignorance has been thrown over this passage by those who lack spiritual understanding. The result is that a very essential aspect of the Kingdom has been obscured to the people of God. They have been left to struggle with the corruption of the *“old man,”* thinking they are dealing with their basic self. As a result, some have doubted whether or not they are really saved. Others consider their baptism to have been invalid. Still others are persuaded they waffle in and out of God’s favor because of uncomely thoughts and imaginations within. These can extend into the area of dreams, which are often troubling to those who are tenderhearted.

The Spirit will now show us how to reason upon these things. When involuntary imaginations overtake us, intruding into our thoughts, here is how the believer is to reason about the situation.

DOING WHAT I WILL NOT

First, the believer is to acknowledge these are unsought and unwanted. The phrase, *“If, then, I do what I will not to do”* means this. If something occurs in me that is against my will – something I have neither sought nor cultured. The eruption is something I actually hate and despise. It is like a robber that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. It is as much out

of order as a Philistine in Israel, a heathen in the Holy of Holies, or the devil in heaven. It does not represent my preference. It is not what I muse and meditate upon. It is contrary to who I really am and where I am really going.

Erroneous Teaching

Those who insist this passage is referring to Paul prior to his life in Christ have revealed their failure to comprehend the nature of salvation. It makes little difference how they bend the words of the

evil, precisely what is the difference between that person and the saved? How is it that a sinner can eat the fruit of redemption, without having access to its tree of life?

Emphatically, this passage refers to those with a new will, a new heart, and a new spirit! That newness is precisely what has produced this experience. It is not one of rote, but one flowing from the heart. *“What I will not”* is what I do not will, or want, to do, and it applies to THOUGHTS, not deeds.

A novice may very well imagine that a sinner, under the domination of the Law, does not really want to murder, or steal, or commit adultery. That is, from one point of view, conceivable. But what about coveting, lusting, or desiring—for that is the matter now being discussed? Where is the person outside of Christ that is alarmed when they want something that displeases God?

If the matter still seems too distant, think of wanting to be secure in this world, as opposed to desiring to be with the Lord (2 Cor 5:1-8). Ponder fearing death (Heb 2:15), or being occupied with thoughts of what we will eat, or what we will wear (Matt 6:25). What of the love of money, or an inordinate attachment to mother, father, brother, and sister (Lk 14:26). What of a failure to WANT to crucify the flesh, together with its affections and lusts (Gal 5:24). What about wanting to stay in this world, and not being *“willing to depart”* (Phil 1:23). Such conditions DOMINATE the sinner, even though they are covered with the veneer of culture. They show that sin is really not hated, even though some more heinous expressions may be repulsive.

Sin Hated in its Totality

The words *“I do what I do not want to do,”* ^{NIV} refer to the outbreak of the old nature in any sinful thought. They do not speak of a certain class of sin, but of sin in

There is not a person outside of Christ who does not prefer to sin. That sin may take a mild form that is not offensive to an insensitive society, but it is enough to bring the wrath of God upon the sinner.

text, or attempt to correlate what is being said with other texts of Scripture. In their teaching, they have affirmed those outside of Christ, (in their very best state noted for *“ignorance and unbelief”* – 1 Tim 1:13) have no preference for sin. Rather, they hate it, and have no desire to do it. What is more, if these pretentious teachers are right, the alienated sinner is not even guilty of sin at all, as will be affirmed later in this chapter.

There is not a person outside of Christ who does not **prefer** to sin. That sin may take a mild form that is not offensive to an insensitive society, but it is enough to bring the wrath of God upon the sinner. If *“A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin”* (Prov 21:4), how can goodness be ascribed to such people? And, it is good to love righteousness and hate iniquity, a trait of Jesus Himself (Heb 1:9).

If the sinner, or the person under the Law, prefers to do good and hates to do

its totality. The intrusions may take the form of questioning the reality heaven, or the validity of Scripture. They may include imagining God has abandoned us, or that there is no need to fight the good fight of faith. They may take the form of discouragement, fear, or hopelessness. They may be the intrusion of mysterious dreams that are so contrary to our nature in Christ that they cause confusion within the believer.

These sinful intrusions include all manner of evil lusts, but are not limited to them. The temptation to commit adultery, for example, may take the form prostituting our affection for Christ. We may be tempted to seek counsel or solace from men. We may be tempted to steal time and money from God, with never a thought of taking them from men.

The closer one is to the Lord, the

profitable to the individual. It is seen as precious, needful, honorable, and comforting. All of that is inherent in the word "good."

The Law IS good, whether men see it that way or not. There is no flaw in it, and no disadvantage in its statutes. It reflects the nature of God, and is therefore good. It defines sin, and is therefore good. However, when someone **acknowledges**, consents to, or agrees that it is good, a milestone of life has been reached.

Not Heartless Agreement

This is no mechanical or academic agreement! It is not agreeing with your back, so to speak, pinned against the wall, as though you were forced to agree. This is the expression of the heart. The affection consents. The will consents. Even the intellect consents. No part of the essential person—the "new creation in

keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart" (Psa 119:34).

- "So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever"* (Psa 119:44).
- "I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law"* (Psa 119:55).
- "I have not forgotten thy law"* (Psa 119:61).
- "I delight in thy law"* (Psa 119:70).
- "Thy law is my delight"* (Psa 119:77).
- "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction"* (Psa 119:92).
- "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day"* (Psa 119:97).
- "My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law"* (Psa 119:109).
- "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love"* (Psa 119:113).
- "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love"* (Psa 119:163).
- "I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight"* (Psa 119:174).

Consenting that the Law is good involves delighting in it, preferring it, not forgetting it, and meditating upon it. David's expressions were preparatory for what would be realized in Christ. Paul is acknowledging participation in the salvation for which David longed (Psa 119:81,123, 160,174).

THE STRUGGLE IS THE EVIDENCE

The invasion of his mind with unwanted passions and desires were Paul's evidence that he agreed with the Law. He made no attempt to justify such thoughts, but acknowledged that he hated them. That hatred was only possible because he consented to the goodness of God's holy Law.

But the word "consent" also carries the idea of verbalization, or confession. Coming from the word *σύμφημι*, "consent," or "agree with," means to affirm or confess. It is as though the intrusion of unlawful desires into his mind caused him to shout out, "THY LAW IS GOOD!" It was good by contrast as well as nature.

The closer one is to the Lord, the broader the range of sinful expression. Just as surely as there will be more the person WILLS to do, there will be more he WILLS NOT to do.

broader the range of sinful expression. Just as surely as there will be more the person WILLS to do, there will be more he WILLS NOT to do.

AGREEING WITH THE LAW

"I agree with the law that it is good." Here is a most blessed conclusion, comforting to the heart and strengthening to the spirit. Make no mistake about this! God Almighty places a high value on agreeing with His Law! Those who are at variance with it in their wills, are headed for disaster!

Other versions read, *"I consent unto the law that it is good,"* ^{KJV} *"I am in agreement with the law that the law is good,"* ^{BBE} *"I still acknowledge the Law as good."* ^{NJB} Notice, the heart does not admit the Law is right, but agrees that it is GOOD. "Good" means flawless by nature and perceived as desirable and

Christ Jesus—disagrees with the good Law of God!

Much before his time, David, the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam 23:1), put this "consent" or "agreement" into words. Although he lived and died under the Old Covenant, his faith took him beyond the perimeter of the Law. In his measure, he was able to speak in harmony with the New Covenant, even though it was not enacted until nearly 1,000 years after his death. That is a most remarkable circumstance! Read some of David's expressions and see if they do not reflect the nature of the New Covenant.

- "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"* (Psa 119:18).
- "For thy judgments are good"* (Psa 119:39).
- "Give me understanding, and I shall*

IT IS NOT REALLY ME

¹⁷ *But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* Here

we come to grips with the heart of this passage. This is the second conclusion

drawn from the intrusion of foreign desires and thoughts—expressions of the

“old man.” Without controversy this is one of the most liberating practical proclamations of Scripture. I use the word “practical” because the affirmation is associated with human experience. Foundational freedom is based upon the belief of the Gospel and consequent identity with Jesus. That aspect of liberty was powerfully declared in the sixth chapter. We were freed from sin: liberated from guilt, and emancipated from an obligation to the flesh. It is essential that this liberty be grasped by the heart. It is not enough to only know it theoretically.

BUT NOW

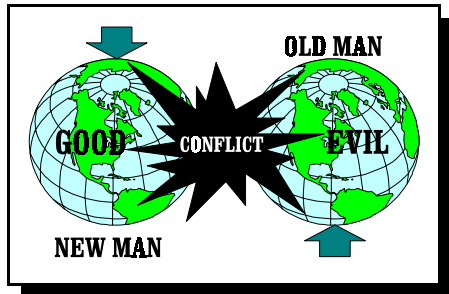
The words “But now” refer to our status in Christ Jesus. This is the life that has resulted from our burial, death, and resurrection with Christ. It is equivalent to saying, “But now that I am in Christ,” or “Now that I am justified,” or “Now that I have received the righteousness of God.” It is the same as saying, “Now that the body of the sins of the flesh has been removed,” or “Now that I am risen with Christ.”

Here is something vital to see. This is not the result of perception, but of identity with Jesus. This is true whether the believer sees it or not. It obtains power when it is seen, but it exists as soon as a person is “joined to the Lord.” If you are in Christ, what follows is true of you, whether you have ever seen it or not. **The role of this passage is to show us the condition of the saved, not their potential!**

IT IS NO LONGER I

On the surface, this may appear to contradict what Paul has just confessed. First he says, “For what I hate, I do” (verse 15). Then he says, “I do what I will not to do” (verse 16). Now he says, “It is no longer I who do it.”

Among other things, this shows the complexity of life in Christ Jesus. Too often there is an oversimplification of life in Christ. Actually, the believer is a microcosm of world conflict—a sort of miniature world in which both good and evil reside, temporal and eternal, earth and heaven. Within the child of God two worlds collide! One is favorable and one is unfavorable. One promotes destruction and the other promotes life. One is tainted, and one is pure.



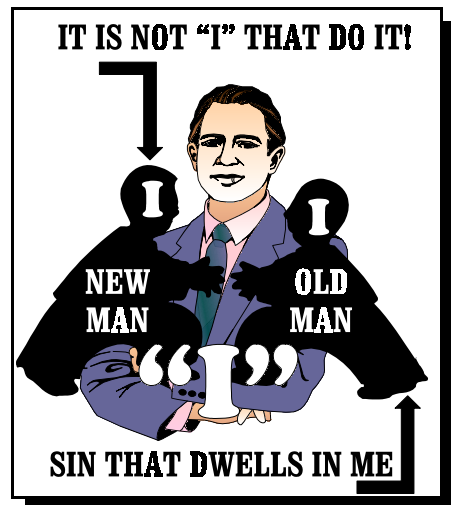
In Christ we receive a new identity. “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”^{NASB} (2 Cor 5:17). The “old things” have “passed away” in several ways.

- They are no longer the center of our attention.
- They no longer have dominion over us.
- They no longer condemn us.
- They are no longer an integral part of us.
- Our view of them has changed.

“Old things,” however, have not become extinct, or non-existent. We still have to contend with them, even though they cannot exercise total control of us. We are required to mortify, or put to death, our “members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col 3:5-8). In the place of “your members that are upon the earth,” the NIV reads, “whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” That is the sense of the text. The members properly belong to our body and the Adamic nature, or what we are by natural birth. They are a part of our human constitution, even though they have been circumcised from our regenerated self, or the “new man.”

IT IS NO LONGER I because these eruptions do not come from my “new man,” or identity in Christ Jesus. The part of me that is in fellowship with Christ has nothing to do with them, and in that sense, “It is not I.” That part is real, not merely theoretical.

It is important to understand this is not a mere excuse or alibi, as the wicked are wont to make. It is not a “devil-made-me-do-it” explanation for transgression. There is no transgression here. Paul is not admitting to having fallen into immortality. Something was done, but it was not overt or external. He is speaking of the expressions of old nature that remains in him, tied, as it was, to his tabernacle of clay.



It was not him because he did not WANT what was expressed. His will was against it. His heart was not in accord with it. That is why he did not allow it to foam out through his words and deeds.

IT IS SIN THAT DWELLS IN ME

If “I do” it, yet “I” do not do it, then who is it that really does it? It may sound like a lot of double-talk, but it is not. The guilty party is that part that has been circumcised from the regenerated part. It is the “law of sin,” or sin principle, that remains in me, and expresses itself exclusively through the “old man.”

This is a powerful example of the meaning of Titus 2:11-13. There “the grace of God” is said to effectively teach us “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

This **denial** is not pretending the

“*ungodliness and worldly lusts*” do not exist, or saying they are not in us. Rather, it is denying they are an expression of our will and preference. It is also a refusal to allow them to sit upon the throne of our heart and mind. It is as though we rejected their appeals, rejecting them through the energy and direction of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13).

Being made “*kings and priests unto God*” (Rev 1:5-6), we rule over the

petitions of our lower and sinful nature. We can reject their appeals in the power of the Holy Spirit. When they say “*follow me,*” we say “**NO!**” They are like Sanballot and Tobiah were to Nehemiah. They are in the place where we are. They shout at us as though they belonged to us, but they do not. They are enemies, living within the borders of our personality, but separate from our real persons. Whatever they say to us, and whatever suggestions they make, we say, “*It is not I! That kis*

not the expression of my true desires!”

In a sense, it is a humbling experience to find that we have “*sin*” dwelling in us, cohabiting with us in the same vessel. But it is a temporary situation from which we will be delivered. Until that deliverance comes, learn to capitalize on the truth revealed in this text. You are not responsible for what the sinful nature suggests! That is a privilege vouchsafed to you by the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

I KNOW ABOUT FLESH

^{18a} ***For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells . . .***” The dichotomy of our experience is frustrating, but we are not totally ignorant concerning the situation. When

Ignorance is lethal for the child of God. As soon as understanding eludes us, sin deceives us. What Paul here confesses must be the aim for every believer. Otherwise, Satan will gain the advantage over them through his craftiness and shrewd devices.

Here, the word “*know*” is unusually strong. Unlike many other uses of the word “*know,*” this does not come from the Greek word γινώσκω, which means experiential knowledge. Here, the Greek word οἶδα is used, which refers to a different kind of knowledge. This particular word is used eighteen times in Romans (1:11; 2:2; 3:19; 5:3; 6:9,16; 7:7, 14,18; 8:22,26,27,28; 11:2,22; 13:11; 14:14; 15:29). It means perceive, discern, understand, or be skilled in a given area. This is knowledge that comes through faith, not experience. Some examples of its use will serve to illustrate the point.

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?” (6:19).

☐ *“What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not **KNOWN** sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet”* (7:7).

This does not refer to mere academic knowledge. Paul is not reciting the tenets of a discipline of life. This is something he understood. He had a grasp of the situation, and was able to reason upon it.

IN MY FLESH

It is one thing to have a sort of knowledge about the flesh itself. It is quite another to understand about your own flesh—to have insight into the nature of your natural man.

Doctrinally, the Spirit has already delineated the flesh in general. “*There is **NONE** righteous, no, **NOT ONE**: There is **NONE** that understandeth, there is **NONE** that seeketh after God. They are **ALL** gone out of the way, they are **NONE** that doeth good, no, **NOT ONE**.”* (3:10-19). That should be an end of all controversy. Yet, it is not enough to merely memorize those facts and spout them heartlessly. The sense of them must be grasped for them to have power in the individual.

Concerning the flesh, Paul had some of the most respectable flesh that has ever been on earth. Hear him speak about it. “*Though I might also have confidence in*

the later versions of Scripture read “*I do not understand what I do*” (v 15), it can be a bit misleading. This is an expression of frustration, not one of ignorance. Paul knew these unwanted intrusions were not issuing from His real self. He will now affirm he also knew that nothing good was resident in the natural self. This is now the third conclusion drawn concerning the involuntary outbreaks of the flesh within.

I KNOW ABOUT MYSELF

Ignorance is lethal for the child of God. **As soon as understanding eludes us, sin deceives us.** What Paul here confesses must be the aim for every believer. Otherwise, Satan will gain the advantage over them through his craftiness and shrewd devices.

☐ *“But we **KNOW** that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things”* (2:2).

☐ *“Now we **KNOW** that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* (3:19).

☐ *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, **KNOWING** that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope”* (5:3-4).

☐ *“**KNOWING** that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him”* (6:9).

☐ *“Do you not **KNOW** that to whom you*

the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil 3:4-6).

Mind you, this is distinction among a distinct people—a people chosen, led, and defended by God Almighty! These people had received more than any other people. They were the only people given a holy Law and a covenant with God. Paul excelled among **those** people. All of the prophets and all of the promises were directed to them. And Paul excelled among **THEM!**

NOTHING GOOD DWELLS

I am interested to hear what a man like that will say of himself. He is not hesitant to speak on the matter. *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”*^{NASB} He does not say some good is found in the flesh, but that NO good is found there. Not only is nothing good found in the flesh generally, nothing good is found in HIS flesh. This is what he comprehends about himself. He can see the truth of it.

There are professed Christian teachers who say they do not understand how Paul could say such a thing. By saying this, they only betray their own ignorance. Paul KNEW, they do not. You can rest assured if they do not understand NO good was in Paul’s flesh, they surely are not aware that no good is found in theirs.

What did Paul mean by this statement, and what compelled him to affirm it? He is speaking of his natural self, which he calls *“my flesh.”* The word *“flesh”* is used in distinction to *“spirit,”* and stands for everything that is indissolubly united with the body.

Whatever I will be freed from in death and the resurrection is *“my flesh.”* Whatever part of me cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, is *“my flesh.”* If it must be controlled and brought under subjection, it is *“my flesh.”* If it comes from Adam, it is *“my flesh.”* Everything

about me that required my new birth is *“my flesh.”*

This is *“the natural man”* that cannot receive *“the things of the Spirit of God,”* and to whom they are *“foolishness”* (1 Cor 2:16). Flesh is absolutely consistent in all of its ways.

Paul calls it *“MY flesh”* because it is resident in him, not because he is charged with its defense and protection. He preferred not to have it, but there it was with him, ever being a source of aggravation and inner contention.

Jesus Speaks

Jesus spoke to this point when He said, *“the flesh profits nothing”* (John 6:63). By this, Jesus did NOT mean the flesh was profitable in some, but not all, areas. He does NOT mean there are a few circumstances in which *“the flesh”* can yield benefit. Men may say this, but Jesus Christ does not.

Stated another way, Jesus said *“without me, you can do nothing”* – and *“the flesh”* is *“without”* Christ in every sense of the word (John 6:63). It is *“weak,”* incapable of contributing to or sustaining the *“new man”* (Matt 26:41). It cannot generate a child of God (John 1:13). It even made the law of God *“weak”* (Rom 8:3). This is the only part of you in which Satan can gain a foothold, for he cannot touch what has been born of God (1 John 5:18).

NO GOOD THING

This is not a lifeless theological statement. It is the confession of something that has been seen or perceived. In *“my flesh dwells no good thing.”* There is nothing there that will be honored in heaven, nothing that can be salvaged. Everything about *“the flesh”* must eventually be separated from me!

Knowing this, Paul could consider everything bringing gain to that part of him to be *“dung”* – worthless and to be discarded (Phil 3:8). He did not look to the flesh for spiritual support. Those who

remained in that realm could not edify him or bring heavenly benefits to him.

By nature, nothing good was found in Paul– or us! Any good must be received, for *“EVERY good gift and EVERY perfect*

Paul calls it *“MY flesh”* because it is resident in him, not because he is charged with its defense and protection. He preferred not to have it, but there it was with him, ever being a source of aggravation and inner contention.

gift is from above” (James 1:17). If nothing good is found in us by nature, then it follows that men are *“evil”* by nature, for evil is the total absence of good. This is why Jesus said to His disciples, *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?”* (Matt 7:11). By this, Jesus did not mean His disciples were the dregs of humanity, wallowing in perversion and moral corruption. Rather, he meant they were not good in the eyes of God, and thus required regeneration, or the new birth.

This is the same as *“concluding all under sin”* (Gal 3:22). Sin has leveled the playing field of humanity. The part of us that made us sinners in the first place, remains with us. Although it is not the dominant part of us, it is a part with which we must contend. What Paul now says of himself is to be applied to everyone.

This circumstance was perfectly clear to Paul, even though he did not know the depths of it, he did realize the reason for and nature of the warfare. That is precisely why he was able to stand in the heat of the conflict, keep the faith and fighting the fight. Because he knew the situation was not unique to him, he elaborates upon it. He will show he knew this by spiritual reasoning as well as by revelation. The argument is unusually powerful, bringing liberty to the soul.

THE WORD “FLESH” SHOULD STAB US AWAKE, SOUNDING THE NEED FOR SOBRIETY AND CHALLENGING US TO TAKE THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD.

THE FRUSTRATING CIRCUMSTANCE

^{18b} . . . *for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.* ¹⁹ *For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*” Again, I want to point out the present tense of every aspect of this verse: “*IS present . . . I DO not find . . . I will to DO . . . I WILL not to do . . . I PRACTICE.*” This is not an exposition of the past! **Nowhere in Scripture is the believer’s past assessed as though it was still going on.** When reference is made to our former lives, the language itself confirms it is in the PAST. “*For when we WERE yet without strength . . . while we WERE yet sinners . . . when we WERE enemies . . . ye WERE the servants of sin . . . when ye WERE the servants of sin . . . when we WERE in the flesh . . . such WERE some of you . . . who WERE dead in trespasses and sins . . . Wherein IN TIME PAST ye walked according to the course of this world . . . also we all HAD our conversation IN TIMES PAST in the lusts of our flesh . . . at that time ye WERE without Christ . . . you, that WERE sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works . . . we ourselves also WERE sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another . . . who through fear of death WERE all their lifetime subject to bondage . . . Which IN TIME PAST were not a people.*” (Rom 5:6,8,10; 6:17,20; 7:1; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 2:1,2,3,12; Col 1:21; Tit 3:3; Heb 2:15; 1 Pet 2:10).

There is a sharp line of demarcation between our lives of alienation and our reconciliation to God. There came a point in time when we were no longer in sin but in Christ, when we were no longer enemies but made friends. No good purpose can be served by speaking of those times of death, enmity, and alienation, as though they were still present. Such vernacular would only serve to further confuse believers. Those experiencing a struggle within would then be led to conclude they were NOT in Christ, and that they remained dead in

their sins. **If the erroneous assumption that this text refers to Paul’s past life, inward struggle is actually a sign that we have NOT passed from death unto life.** It is evidence of NOT being saved and reconciled to God. There is no other way to view this passage! This is Paul’s assessment of the PRESENT – of our life in Christ, and the conflict it has produced with the flesh.

Confirmed in Galatians

The very experience declared here is confirmed in the book of Galatians, leaving no doubt as to its application. “*For*

Here is the frustrating part of the faith-life. While we remain in the body, there are good things we want to do, yet cannot find a way to do them! Every believer knows this is the case. Daily we seek grace to help in these times of need, when we are, of ourselves, impotent to do what we already know is good.

the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). The NASB reads, “*For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*”

This is a brief description of the inner warfare explained more fully in the seventh chapter of Romans. The point being made in Galatians is precisely the one made in Romans. The struggle itself is not sinful, and does not condemn us. “*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*” (Gal 5:18). The leading of the Spirit is presented within the

context of a struggle with the flesh. We choose to follow the Spirit rather than the flesh. While the Law condemns the flesh, together with all of its desires, it cannot condemn us if we follow the Spirit—even though the very lusts it condemns are found in our earthly constitution. That is good news!

I WANT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT

“ . . . *for to will is present with me.*” Other versions read, “*For I have the desire to do what is good,*”^{NIV} “*I can will what is right,*”^{NRSV} With the person in Christ, it is not a matter of not wanting what is right. **Faith effects the will!**

However, while willingness is imperative, it is not omnipotent. A modicum of honesty will confirm that being willing is not the same as accomplishing the thing willed.

Paul is saying he is willing to do what the Law demands, down to the smallest detail. To state it another way, he did not want to sin, and he did want to walk perfectly before God. That was his heart. These were such consistent desires that the thoughts presented by the flesh were foreign to his thinking—unwanted intrusions into his mind.

Being “*willing in the day of His power*” (Psa 110:3) is essential, but it is not the total answer. We will yet be delivered from a state wherein we are willing, yet cannot fully do what we want.

I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO DO IT

“ . . . *but how to perform what is good I do not find.*” Other versions read, “*but I cannot carry it out,*”^{NIV} “*but I cannot do it,*”^{NRSV} “*but to accomplish that which is good, I find not,*”^{DARBY} “*I have the mind but not the power to do what is right.*”^{BBE}

Here is the frustrating part of the faith-life. While we remain in the body, there are good things we want to do, yet cannot find a way to do them! Every believer knows this is the case. Daily we seek grace to help in these times of need, when we are, of ourselves, impotent to do

what we already know is good.

The word “DO” is not a casual word, as though Paul was satisfied with some token expressions of his will. Rather, he wanted to perfectly execute his will, with no element of dissatisfaction. It is like the disciples falling asleep when they really wanted to stay awake (Matt 26:41).

THE GOOD THAT I WILL TO DO

This does not refer to obeying moral laws, civil laws, and helping our neighbor. Faith moves our will into a higher realm—one that governs the domain of external expression. “The good” of reference is consistent and uninterrupted.

The individual being led by the Spirit wants no deviate thoughts—not a single one. He wants to “attend upon the Lord without distraction” (1 Cor 7:35). The desire is for uninterrupted communion with God. “The good” that is willed is to always have the things of God fresh, always be joyful, strong, and dominated by the peace of God.

The desire is for no taint, however small, to be found upon our service to God. It is for no spot or blemish to be found upon our lives. That is what we want! But who has discovered the power to realize those desires? That is the point of our text. Faith has made us willing, but not all-wise or all-powerful.

THE EVIL I DO NOT WANT TO DO

The believer does not want to contend with waywardness in his own self. We would to God we had no part of us that had to be subordinated, for evil **does** have to be subordinated. But such a condition, however greatly it is willed or desired, is not with us!

There are thoughts that have to be “cast down.” As it is written, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5). There is a sense of aggression and strong violence in the text.

Our will is **not** to have imaginations that must be thrown down, and thoughts

that must be captured. Such things are “evil.” But who is the soul that has experienced such a state? “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean fulfill. It means something surfaced in ME that needed to be put down!

We are NOT willing to have thoughts and lusts that must be denied, or rejected. Things like this are “evil.” Yet, such things DO arise in us. We must even be taught by the grace of God to reject them, thrusting them from us. “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*”

We are NOT willing to have thoughts and lusts that must be denied, or rejected. Things like this are “evil.” Yet, such things DO arise in us. We must even be taught by the grace of God to reject them, thrusting them from us.

(Tit 2:11-12). Our wills are NOT to ever have a worldly passion to which we must say “NO!”^{NIV} But what believer has ever experienced the thorough satisfaction of that desire in this world? “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean I executed the desire. It means something came up in ME that had to be denied, or rejected!

How grand it would be, says our will, if there was nothing in us that needed to be crucified, mortified, and put to death. Things that require crucifixion and death are evil. Are such things resident in our total makeup? Indeed they are! “*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Col 3:5). These things are “evil.”

Is there any among us who dares to boast they have no “members” that need to be put to death—mortified? “*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*” (1 Pet 2:11). Who is the believer that will affirm he has not confronted “fleshly lusts” from which he had to “abstain?” “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean carry out. It means something arose in ME that

had to be put to death—something from which I had to abstain!

Our will prefers not to have anything about us that needs to be subdued or conquered. After all, we have been called to an inheritance into which nothing defiled can enter (Rev 21:27). That is the environment we want. Anything that has to be subjugated is “evil.” Ponder what Paul says of the body. “*No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize*”^{NIV} (1 Cor 9:27).

Here is an enemy you carry with you

night and day. We are painfully aware of its presence every conscious moment. It shouts its desires and preferences in our minds at the most inopportune moments. “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean I followed the dictates of my body. It means I have a body that is wayward and must be ruled!

Withheld From the Saints

It is tragic beyond description that this perspective has been largely withheld from the saints. Even though the circumstance exists in every person that is in Christ Jesus, relatively few have any understanding of it, and no one totally comprehends it.

The perception of this text is a precious key that unlocks Kingdom mysteries to us. No person who sees this will question the need for the grace of God. The demand for an indwelling Spirit will not be doubted by those who see this. The need for perseverance and an aggressive fight of faith makes perfect sense to those who identify with this text! They will not question the need for edification, meeting with kindred spirits, or ingesting the Word of God. Their understanding moves them to seek every advantage possible. They will seek all of the graces afforded them in God’s great salvation.

SOUND SPIRITUAL THINKING

“²⁰ Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.” It is not enough to merely know what is happening within us. We must be able to draw valid conclusions from our condition—conclusions that make for edification and comfort. Men have considered this passage and arrived at all manner of erroneous and dangerous conclusions. Such reasonings have brought no advantage to the saints of God, but have been like weights upon them, hindering them in the race set before them.

The degenerative effects of much of the preaching of our time it most serious. Many contemporary interpretations of Scripture are no more than the mere opinions of men. They are subtle “doctrines of demons” designed to turn men in the wrong direction. As when Peter “walked on the water to go to Jesus” (Matt 14:29), these teachings constrain men to look at the storms of life instead of the Ruler of the storms. They do not culture a proper view of self, God, Christ, salvation, or life in this world.

IF I DO WHAT I WILL NOT

Now Paul begins to reason concerning his condition. He has acknowledged his will is far ahead of his ability to fulfill it. That acknowledgment is not intended to apply only to himself. He is elaborating on our death with Jesus—death to sin and death to the Law. He is expounding the truth of deliverance from condemnation and the appropriation of righteousness.

In Christ, a new WILL is received. This is the result of having God’s holy and spiritual law put into our minds and written upon our hearts (Heb 8:10). It flows from having our conscience purged from dead works so that we may “serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). Now, the thoughts that once found a home in our minds are unwanted and repulsive. When they present themselves, we have done what we did not want to do! We have thought what we did not want to think! These intruding thought have not been summoned by our wills, but shot into our thinking like poisonous arrows from our

“old man,” or sinful nature.

How are we to reason when this grievous circumstance introduces itself? Are we to throw up our hands in despair, concluding that we must be walking at a distance from God? Are we to deduce that we have not been regenerated, or that we must be forgiven for such things even asserting themselves in our thought processes? The Spirit will now teach us how to reason on these things.

IT IS NO LONGER I

This is the fourth conclusion drawn by the Apostle. Allow me to remind you of these four conclusions drawn at this point.

- “If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good” (verse 16).
- “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (verse 17).
- “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (verse 18).
- “Now if I do that I would not, **it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me**” (verse 20).

“No More”

“It is **no more** I that do it!” “It **no longer** I who do it!”^{NIV} The same expression was used in verse seventeen: “**NO MORE** I that do it.” At this point, we need to more fully expound this expression, “no ,more,” or “no longer.” Why not say “It is not I?” Why add the words “no more,” or “no longer.” There is a reason for this manner of speaking.

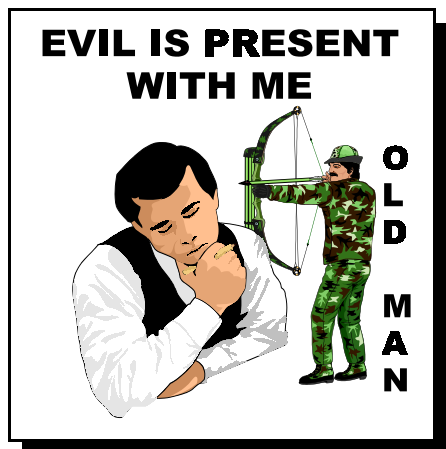
The lusts which now intrude into our minds were once welcomed by us—often the very same lusts. What is now “the old man,” or the “not I,” was once us! That self was not “old” then, but in the vigor of its youth. It is what caused us to be dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from God, and condemned. Our old self loves to remind us of our old self, and suggest to us that we return to the old ways, like a dog to its vomit, and a sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire.

But we are “no more,” or “no longer” that person. We are a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), the “sons of God” (1 John 3:1-

2), and “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). We admit those desires once felt at home in us, but “no more!” They are “no longer” an expression of our will. They are “no longer” welcome in our minds. They do not belong to our real self! What unspeakable liberty is realized by the soul who has a grasp of this reality!

I FIND LAW

“I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Other versions read, “I find then **the principle** that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good,”^{NASB} “So I find **this law at work**: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me,”^{NIV} “So I find **this rule**: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side.”^{NJB}



This law is to spiritual life what the law of gravity is to nature. Every time a person wants to go up, he confronts a law, or principle, that pulls him down! No matter how often or how high the person jumps, the law of gravity is there. He cannot get rid of it, but must learn how to live with it. He can take measures that can counteract the law of gravity, like flying, or climbing, but he cannot get rid of the law.

So it is in spiritual life. The desire to do good is always mixed with the suggestions of our old nature. This is a spiritual principle, and should not surprise us. The point is not the **source** of this law, but the **PRESENCE** of it. It is an ever present truth that the determination to do good is always neutralized by the presence

of "evil."

"Evil," in this case, refers to all inner influences that compete with the good we want to do. While they are not always evil

morally, they ARE "evil" because they draw us away from the "good" we intend to do. Good and evil are always contending within us. It is a principle that remains with us while we are in the body.

This aspect of spiritual life will be further developed in verse twenty three. It has only been introduced in this verse. But it is a vital principle, and must be seen in larger measures by the elect.

THE RECONCILED WAY OF THINKING

"²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." This is the sixth conclusion Paul draws from his perception of the turmoil within—the struggle of good and evil within the womb of the mind. I cannot overemphasize the importance of knowing how to assess our inward experiences. Many believers are at a tremendous disadvantage simply because they are ignorant of the cause and nature of inner conflict. They can imagine they are better than they really are, unaware of the "evil" that remains associated with them. They can also conclude they are worse than they really are, not understanding that the evil with which they struggle is IN them, yet is not an expression of their real persons. Thus, the high value of this passage is accentuated. Once seen, it becomes a weapon with which to do battle. It also becomes a sweet elixir to assuage the weary warrior.

DELIGHTING IN THE LAW OF GOD

The glaring absence of a delight in the Law of God is abundantly apparent in far too many assemblies. A lack of appetite for God's Word, and a studied effort to avoid being exposed to much of it, are altogether too common. This is a most serious condition, even though it is not common to so regard it.

"For I delight in the law of God." Other versions read, "I joyfully concur with the law of God,"^{NASB} "I take pleasure in the law of God,"^{BBE} "I dearly love God's law."^{NJB} How is it that Paul can conclude he delights in the Law of God, when evil has erupted within him? Does not "evil" being "present" with him suggest the law of God is not within him? Indeed not!

He knows he delights in the Law of God because he recognizes "evil" when it asserts itself. This is no academic

recognition, but one of the heart. He knows competing influences when he experiences them. Delighting in the Law of God shapes the will of the believer, causing him to want to do right things, and be repelled by the wrong things.

Rejoicing in the Law of God, and being satisfied by its message, are the results of having it written upon the heart and put into the mind (Heb 10:16). Delight includes the following conditions: approval of, preference for, and pleased with. This frame of mind is expressed by holy men of old time.

- ☐ **JOY.** "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me **the joy and rejoicing of mine heart**" (Jer 15:16).
- ☐ **VALUE.** "I have **esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food**" (Job 15:16).
- ☐ **DESIRED.** "The judgments of the **LORD are true and righteous**

*altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: **sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb***" (Psa 19:9-10).

- ☐ **NOT FORGET.** "I will **delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word**" (Psa 119:16).
- ☐ **TRUST.** "So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I **trust in thy word**" (Psa 119:42).
- ☐ **KEPT.** "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I **kept thy word**" (Psa 119:67).

- ☐ **HOPEIN.** "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have **hoped in thy word**" (Psa 119:74,81).
- ☐ **BETTER.** "The law of thy mouth is **better unto me than thousands of gold and silver**" (Psa 119:72).
- ☐ **LOVED.** "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psa 119:97).
- ☐ **PROVOKES HOLINESS.** "I have **refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word**" (Psa 119:101).
- ☐ **SATISFYING.** How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, **sweeter than honey to my mouth!**" (Psa 119:103).
- ☐ **REJOICING.** "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are **the rejoicing of my heart**" (Psa 119:111).
- ☐ **MEDITATE IN.** "Mine eyes prevent (are awake in) the night watches, that I might **meditate in thy word**" (Psa 119:148).
- ☐ **STAND IN AWE OF.** "Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart **standeth in awe of thy word**" (Psa 119:161).
- ☐ **A TREASURE.** "I rejoice at thy word, as one that **findeth great spoil**" (Psa 119:162).
- ☐ **TALK ABOUT.** "My tongue shall **speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness**" (Psalm 119:172).

While all of these are surely involved in delighting in the Law of God, yet many of them may seem distant from us when "the law of sin" erupts within. Even at that time, however grievous it may be, the very fact that we abhor the expressions of the "old man" proves we really do "delight in the Law of God." That not only is a valid conclusion, if we are to overcome sin, it is an essential one!

The Absence of Such Delight

The glaring absence of a delight in the Law of God is abundantly apparent in far

too many assemblies. A lack of appetite for God's Word, and a studied effort to avoid being exposed to much of it, are altogether too common. This is a most serious condition, even though it is not common to so regard it. Many a local congregation tailors its activities for those who have no delight in, or high regard for the law of God. Various forms of entertainment and a variety of family activities are thought to be sufficient for the people. However, Jesus did not pour out his soul as an offering for sin in order for such things to occur among His saints.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of people who lacked a delight in the Word of the Lord. Through the Spirit he defined their condition most precisely. You may rest assured, if this was true under the limited perspective of the Old Covenant, it is much more true in the "day of salvation."

Hear the prophet as he laments. People would not hear the Word, for whatever reason. As a result, they became subjects of the wrath of God. *"To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together"* (Jer 6:10-11).

An "uncircumcised ear" is the result of an unregenerate state. No good can be said about it, and there is no acceptable excuse for its presence (Acts 7:51). Such are people to whom God has not given "an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear" (Deut 29:4).

There exists in contemporary churches a completely intolerable situation. All of the vain explanations for this are unacceptable. In Christ Jesus there is forgiveness, regeneration, righteousness, the law written upon the heart and mind, and the conferment of a new nature. For people to live as though they were under the Old Covenant, with the same manners as Israel in the wilderness, is only evidence of their failure to believe the

Gospel and be born again. For such people, the seventh chapter of Romans has no comfort and no instruction.

THE INWARD MAN

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Other versions read, "in the inner man,"^{NASB} "in my inner being,"^{NIV} "in my inmost self."^{NRSV} This part of our being is associated with our hearts, or essential, persons. It is where the Law of God is written (Heb 10:16). It is where the Holy Spirit resides (Gal 4:6), and wherein we are "sealed" as God's own people (2 Cor 1:22). This is where the love of God is "shed abroad" (Rom 5:5). The heart is where the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is beamed, so that we come to know the Lord through Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). It is also where assurance is placed (1 John 3:19). The "inward man," or the heart, is the focus of edification and comfort.

An "uncircumcised ear" is the result of an unregenerate state. No good can be said about it, and there is no acceptable excuse for its presence (Acts 7:51). Such are people to whom God has not given "an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear"

The delight and pleasure in the Law of God is found in the "inward man." This is not, as already confirmed, simply the unseen part of our being. Rather, it is "the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10). This is the re-created part, where Divine strength is imparted by the Holy Spirit of God! As it is written, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16). He is an "inward," or "inner" man as compared with our bodies, which are called the "outward man."

Renewal Within

Here is where spiritual progress is

made, where we are being "conformed to the image" of God's Son (Rom 8:29). It is where ongoing spiritual change takes place, as the Holy Spirit changes us from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

In a very vivid portrayal of the "inward man," the Spirit confirms it is the focus of Divine attention and blessing. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal"^{NASB} (2 Cor 4:16-18).

An excellent example of the renewal and revitalization of the "inward man" is found in our text. There, fatiguing and frustrating inner conflict becomes the evidence of a delight in the Law of the Lord. It becomes the occasion for the discovery of a wayward law within us – a law that shoots evil into our thinking as soon as we intend to do anything good and well pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. The knowledge of our real condition strengthens us for the battle, and enabled us to say "NO!" To the suggestions of our own "sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3).

Out of Touch

The Christianity (falsely so called) of our day causes people to be more aware of the outward man, which is "perishing." You can hear the effects of this emphasis in the prayer requests of the people. It is perceived in the administrative staff of their churches. Even the means of obtaining ministerial credentials roots in the "outward man." Sermons, programs, and even literature have very little for the "inward man."

As a result, believers are not acquainted with their "new man," or "inward man." The flesh speaks louder to them that the Spirit, and their eyes and ears are more closely tuned to things that are seen than to things unseen.

There are disadvantages to this condition that have eternal ramifications.

Unless we see something of what is being expounded in this seventh chapter, Satan WILL gain the advantage over us.

However, once our real situation is seen, or comprehended, we will be more demanding about feeding and nurturing

the inner man. We will not be content with religious novelties, powerless preaching, and distorted emphases.

A CONTRARY PRINCIPLE WITHIN

“²³ 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.” This is the seventh conclusion drawn from the presence of inner conflict. One might think delighting in the Law God within the inward man is the end of the matter. Some may even think this described the totality of our experience in Christ. But that is not the case at all. Through the Spirit, Paul will now elaborate on WHY “*evil is present with me.*” He does not say evil WAS present with him, but that it IS present with him. If you are in Christ, it is also “*present*” with you. If you are not in Christ, then you are totally “*evil*” with no vestige of good within. That condition requires a new birth. Those in Christ have already been born again, but require “*spiritual understanding.*”

I SEE ANOTHER LAW

Because of the war within, Paul sees, or perceives “*another*” working principle within his total self. Other versions read, “*I see a different law in the members of my body,*”^{NASB} “*I see another law at work in the members of my body,*”^{NIV} “*But there is another law at work within me,*”^{NLT} “*but I see that acting on my body there is a different law.*”^{NJB}

This law, or principle is presently within all believers. It is a law associated with our bodies – our “*members.*” It works in a temporal environment that is dominated by both sense and time. As long as we are “*in the body,*” we must contend with this law. No amount of discipline, or even deep spirituality, can get rid of this law. When we walk in the Spirit, we neutralize its power, and are able to subdue its lusts. However, we are not able, even in that state, to get rid of it. It travels with the body, and cannot be separated from it. When we lay the body in the grave, we will lay the working of

this principle in the grave also. When our spirit flies free from this body, it also moves beyond the influence of this wayward law.

Those who argue that this section of Scripture merely refers to our former lost condition have greatly erred. In that state, and in the sense of our text, we did **not** delight in the law of God after the inward man, which has an entirely new frame of reference. It “*is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*” (Col 3:10).

Paul did not see this law by his intellect, but through his spiritual experience. This understanding was not induced by a statement of Scripture, but by participation in the Divine nature.

Paul did not see this law by his intellect, but through his spiritual experience. This understanding was not induced by a statement of Scripture, but by participation in the Divine nature. It is quite true that “*all have sinned,*” committing transgression, saying and doing things contrary to both God’s nature and Law. However, it is also true that they “*come short of the glory of God,*” having in themselves things that do not exist in God (Rom 3:23). It is not merely that they have not done everything God does, or that they have not fully measured up to His law. Rather, there exists in us a condition that does NOT reflect the glory of God. That condition involves the presence of a contrary law within—a law that is tied to the flesh, and cannot be dissolved. Even though it is cut away from us through the “*circumcision of Christ*” (Col 2:11-12), yet it exercises

influence over us. It erupts against our will, and causes us to think things we abhor.

If we remained under the law, that circumstance would condemn us. The fact that we do want the things the flesh suggests has no relevance whatsoever under the Law. That is why this contrary law must be understood.

WARRING AGAINST THE LAW OF MY MIND

This principle is not only a working one, it is an aggressive one. It wages relentless war against “*the law*” of our mind, which is the result of having the Law written upon our minds. Other versions read, “*waging war against the law of my mind,*”^{NASB} “*at war with the law of my mind,*”^{NRSV} “*fighting against the law of my mind,*”^{DARBY} “*which battles against the law in my mind.*”^{NJB}

Not A Casual Circumstance

This is not a casual circumstance, and we dare not consider it as though it was. Nor, indeed, is it an obsolete experience, formerly endured, but at last far from us. It requires stupidity and ignorance to contend no such law exists in the believer. Only those who are strangers to “*the law of my mind*” are unfamiliar with “*another law in my members.*”

Inferior, But Powerful

Although this “*law*” is an inferior one, it is nevertheless a powerful one. The Canaanites were inferior to the Israelites, even though unbelief made them appear superior. By faith, Goliath was inferior to David, even though, in the flesh, he appeared superior to him.

Those who fail to take the “*flesh,*” or sinful nature seriously, will be overcome by it. Those who nourish the flesh, always looking at things according to appearance, and speaking continually of life in the

body, have brought inner war to a feverish and dangerous level. There is a continual war going on within the believer. It may reach very high levels, or be decidedly reduced, but it is always there. Flesh and Spirit are locked in unending combat. Sin and grace are competing with one another. Faith and works are engaged in an unending contest. Good and evil are always against each other—within us.

But our text says this contrary law carries the battle against us. It forces the issue, and floods us with evil notions as soon as we determine to do good. This is not a docile principle, nor is it merciful and considerate. In times of great stress and difficulty, it will throw doubts and fears into your mind, and many wicked notions as well. It does not volunteer to cease the battle, nor does it refrain from its aggression. A departed brother from many years ago, Tzeror Hammer (early 1700's), once said, "As long as the righteous live, they are at war with the corruption of their nature. When they die, they are at rest."

The Corruption of Human Nature

Human nature is corrupt at its very foundation. It is not capable of yielding good or delighting in the Law of God. Even when it sits side-by-side with the new creation, it remains unchanged. It desires the same things it always desired, and is relentless against the "new man" and the "law of your mind."

Being evil-affected by the psychological thrust of our day, there is great resistance against this aspect of "spiritual understanding." If you are ever tempted to doubt the total corruption of human nature, consider that you must "partake" of the "Divine Nature" (2 Pet 1:4) and Jesus Christ (Heb 3:14) in order to dwell with the Lord.

If human nature could be reformed, do you not think God would be capable of doing so? Instead of a reformation program, however, through Christ God has instituted a transformation program. One in which we are born again, and created anew. That new creation is what launched the war now being described.

BRINGING ME INTO CAPTIVITY

As you can see, the expressions keep getting stronger and stronger. First, there was an acknowledgment that we did what

we did not want (v 15). Then, it was admitted that nothing good could be found in the flesh (v 18). The deficiency of the will was also declared, for Paul could find no way to do what he really wanted (v 18). It was also confessed that the good that was desired was not being done, and the evil that was abhorred was being done (v 19). There was a law resident in him that always competed with the good he wanted to do (v 21). Although he delighted in the Law of God after the inward man, there was a contrary law within that viciously attacked that holy propensity.

domination by sin, but to captivity by the law of sin. Briefly stated, he means the "flesh," or "law of sin," can assert itself whenever it desires. To put it another way, he cannot stop it from shouting out from the cross. That law cannot force him to sin, but it can force him into the position of having to deal with it.

There is a vast difference in captivity to the law of sin, and enslavement by sin, which was our former condition. Unwanted thoughts course through the mind of the believer. Often they are like floods that wash away spiritually

But our text says this contrary law carries the battle against us. It forces the issue, and floods us with evil notions as soon as we determine to do good. This is not a docile principle, nor is it merciful and considerate. In times of great stress and difficulty, it will throw doubts and fears into your mind, and many wicked notions as well.

As if that was not enough, Paul now makes one of his strongest and most arresting statements. He does not refer to the past, but to the present. This contrary and wickedly militant law, he says, is "making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." ^{NASB} The statement is equally strong in every version of Scripture.

Not to Sin, But the Law of Sin

There is an important distinction to see here. The captivity is not to sin, but to "the law of sin" that resides in our "members," or human constitution. That is, Paul does not find himself continually transgressing the law, or falling into moral failures. It is not that he does not want to lie, but finds himself continually doing so. Or, that he does not want to be a thief, but continues to steal everything he can. Improvement in that area of morality can be achieved under the law, or even by those embracing a heathen religion.

Some, driven by a shallow understanding, assume this is the description of a person alienated from God—a person "under the Law." However, Paul says this of himself. He does not speak of the past, but of the present! Further, it does not refer to total

productive thoughts, forcing the believer into the defensive mode. Of course, for the spiritually insensitive, all of this is of no consequence. Sinful thoughts are not painful for them, so they think nothing of their entrance. But for those who walk in the light and live by faith, they are most abrasive and grievous. They contradict what the new heart seeks, enjoys, and ponders.

The very wording of our text confirms the regenerated person is under consideration. To be brought into captivity shows the individual was NOT in captivity before the described experience. But that is not the case with the sinner, for they live every day of their lives enslaved to sin, as formerly described (6:17-21). That is precisely why they need a Savior (5:8-10). That is why we were "delivered from the Law" (7:6). If men could control sinful impulses, they would need no Savior, no Intercessor, no hope by which they could be saved.

PUT THE TEXT TO THE TEST

If you want to put this text to the test, make some resolves for tomorrow. I trust you can do it heartily, with the full consent of your will. Determine to carefully guard your mind, so that no sinful thought will weave its way into

your thinking. Resolve to meditate day and night upon the Word of the Lord, and to fill your mind with wholesome Kingdom realities. Decide that you will fully comply with the exhortation, *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Phil 4:8).

You have all the tools that are necessary for the realization of that

commitment. Your will is in it. You have armor to protect you. The peace of God can keep your heart and your mind. You have an Intercessor in heaven (Heb 7:25), and One in your heart as well (Rom 8:26). You have the fellowship of the Son (1 Cor 1:9), the communion of the Holy Spirit, and access to God. Surely you will be able to boast tomorrow night that your resolve has been realized!

I will tell you that the morning will not pass until you will be required to do battle. Your shield will have to be hoisted, and your sword unsheathed. You will have to call upon the name of the Lord, resist

the devil, and deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. There will be imaginations you will have to cast down, and thoughts you must take captive.

What will have happened to you? Why were you not able to perfectly do what you wholeheartedly wanted to do? It is then that you will be able to join in the confession of Paul. *“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.”*^{NKJV} Can you see this law? Can you identify with Paul’s conclusions? They are for every believer to know.

YEARNING FOR DELIVERANCE

“²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” This is the eighth conclusion provoked by the incessant struggle with the sinful nature. What a heart-wrenching cry! This is no casual word of a half-hearted church member! Here is the cry of a person with an undivided heart, but a divided nature. It pours out of a person whose inward man is growing strong, but whose outward man is weakening, and in the throes of death. This is a person with the law of God upon his heart and in his mind, and the law of sin in his earthly nature.

I AM A WRETCHED MAN

Virtually every version of the Scripture uses the word *“wretched.”* Some paraphrased translations use the words *“unhappy”*^{DARBY,BBE} and *“miserable.”*^{NLT} The word *“wretched”* means one who is enduring troubles and afflictions, and is in deep misery. It speaks of one who has been given *“the bread of affliction”* to eat (Deut 16:3; 1 Kgs 22:27). It is the kind of cry that came from Isaiah when he saw the Lord *“high and lifted up.”* *“Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips”* (Isa 6:5). To even a greater degree than Isaiah, we have reason to lament, for the remnant of our fallen nature remains in our bodies. We would long ago have escorted it from our frail tabernacles, but we have not been able to do it. It lives

where we live, and goes where we go. *“Wretched man that I am!”* It is humiliating and fatiguing to have to deal with an enemy in the land!

the pure heart desires. It is the lament of Galatians 5:17: *“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please”*^{NASB} (Gal 5:17). Blessed is the person who is able to so lament. Such a person reveals a tender heart, a determined spirit, and a sanctified will.

This is the wretchedness that comes from knowing everything that is said or done is expressed imperfectly, and not as the pure heart desires.

DELIVERANCE FERVENTLY SOUGHT

“Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Notice that the association is with the *“body,”* not the heart or a condemning conscience. That is a critical distinction. The body is our source of shame, being a *“vile body,”* weak and frail, and requiring subjugation (Phil 3:20-21; 2 Cor 4:7). This is the point of our vulnerability—a *“lowly body,”*^{NKJV} that makes for *“humiliation.”*^{NRSV}

The is not wretchedness because of the guilt of sin, as expressed by David when he sinned against Uriah the Hititte. *“I have sinned against the LORD”* (2 Sam 12:13), or when he numbered Israel: *“I have sinned greatly in that I have done”* (2 Sam 24:10). This is not penitential wretchedness! It is not the wretchedness expressed by Judas when he betrayed our Lord. *“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood”* (Matt 27:4).

Our body is called *“this body of death”* because it has no inheritance in the kingdom of God. It is a part of the order that has been cursed—given the sentence of death. From yet another view, it is dead toward God. As the Spirit says later, *“And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin”* (Rom 8:10).

This is the wretchedness that comes from knowing everything that is said or done is expressed imperfectly, and not as

If our bodies is to be employed in the service of the Lord, they must be *“quicken,”* or given life through the

Holy Spirit. As it is written, *“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you”* (Rom 8:10).

The *“deeds of the body,”* or the things it is inclined to do, must be put to death, for they have nothing to do with God. In fact, those deeds stand between us and God. If they are not mortified, they will

from temptations to persecution, come because we are in the body. It is the arena of battle in which the Spirit and the flesh converge for war. When we are liberated from our bodies, we will be done with the inward struggle, persecution, and every form of inability and restraint.

This is Groaning

The exasperating expressions of Romans seven are the groans of the eighth chapter of Romans. *“And not only*

chapter of Second Corinthians. *“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life”* (2 Cor 5:2-4).

The Reason for the Condition

There is a reason for this experience. In it, we reveal our preferences. The strength of our determination is made known in this inner conflict. Our faith is tested, and our affection examined.

The first responsibility given to us as kings and priests unto God is the subduing of our own bodies. Bringing them into subjection is the testing area. How much we receive from God will be determined by how well we do in subduing the body and bringing it under subjection.

The first responsibility given to us as kings and priests unto God is the subduing of our own bodies. Bringing them into subjection is the testing area. How much we receive from God will be determined by how well we do in subduing the body and bringing it under subjection. In the work of subduing it, we will personally experience the feelings and frustrations of the seventh chapter of Romans. Although the battle wearies us, it also produces proof that we have a new nature. It confirms we have something from God. Truly, this is a *“good fight.”*

exclude us from the everlasting kingdom. Thus it is written, *“if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (Rom 8:13).

The body is also associated with death because we can only be *“present with the Lord”* when we are *“absent from the body”* (2 Cor 5:6,8). All forms of suffering,

they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). Our spirits long for the time and the place when there will be no more struggle.

It is also the groaning of the fifth

DUAL NATURES, DUAL SERVITUDE

“²⁵ 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.” This represents the ninth and final conclusion to which the understanding of inner conflict led. Perhaps it will be well to enumerate those conclusions once again. They exemplify the godly way of assessing inner conflict.

- “If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good”* (verse 16).
- “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me”* (verse 17).
- “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing”* (verse 18).
- “Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me”* (verse 20).
- “I find then a law, that, when I would*

do good, evil is present with me” (verse 21).

- “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man”* (verse 22).
- “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”* (verse 23).
- “O wretched man that I am!”* (Verse 24).
- “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin”* (verse 25).

THANKING GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

It is not the condition itself that produces this thanksgiving, but the understanding of it. It also comes because the answer to the dilemma is seen. In answer to the question, *“Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* the

renewed heart shouts back, *“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* That is, God is going to deliver me from the source of this frustration. He will do it through Jesus Christ, when He returns for His own. As it is written, *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”* (Phil 3:20-21). Indeed, deliverance is on the way! This battle has an appointed time and place of termination.

SERVING WITH THE MIND

“So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God.” And what is the summation of all that Paul has seen—all that we can see in this battle with the flesh. We can see there is a real *“me,”* and

an imposed “me.” There is a part of me that expresses my real desires. There is also a part of me that expresses things contrary to my desires.

When it comes to the real “me,” the part that is regenerated, in which the Holy spirit dwells, and which is reconciled to God, “I myself” serve “the Law of God.” That is what the real me thinks about, ponders, loves, and desires. I live by every Word of God, delight in it, and

expresses itself.

This means that regeneration confers upon men a mind that is devoted to the Word of the Lord. Wherever this is missing, a most serious condition exists.

SERVING WITH THE FLESH

“... but with the flesh the law of sin.” “The flesh” is the natural part of us. Nothing good is found in it, as has been powerfully affirmed. The “law of sin” is

The “law of sin” is the sin principle that dwells within the flesh. It is not that the flesh CAN serve this dreadful law. This is what it does. In fact, it cannot do anything else. “The flesh” cannot serve God or the law of God. It has been corrupted and cannot be changed.

desire it more than my necessary food. My mind is devoted to the Law of God. That is not surprising, for God has put it into my mind. He has given me the same nature as possessed by the Law: holy, just, and good. He has made me “spiritual” like the Law, and able to gladly receive what God has to say. Like Jesus, I also “delight” to do His will.

I understand “my mind” to be the part that has been “illuminated,” which comprehends the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). The “mind” is not merely the part where thinking is done, for he has spent considerable time reminding us that is also the place where “the law of sin”

the sin principle that dwells within the flesh. It is not that the flesh CAN serve this dreadful law. This is what it does. In fact, it cannot do anything else. “The flesh” cannot serve God or the law of God. It has been corrupted and cannot be changed.

From time to time, novices in the faith may imagine they have made good progress in the faith. Satan will lead them to believe they are better in the flesh than they once were. As soon as they let down their guard, “the flesh” breaks forth, confirming that it consistently and without exception serves “the law of sin.”

There is a particular teaching that is making the rounds these days. It is not a new teaching, but an ancient heresy that has been revived. It states that we can be morally “perfect,” with no flaw whatsoever. Those who embrace it generally make no claim to having achieved this perfection. However, they do say it is possible here and now, while we are in the body. They reason that if Jesus told us to “be perfect” (Matt 5:48), then it surely must be possible.

This passage has devastated this false teaching. It is the testimony of one of the premier members of the human race. Among the most elite, the Apostles, this man “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10). In a remarkable text, the Holy Spirit calls Paul to the witness stand to confirm the faith of the saints. With unmistakable words he states nothing good resides in the flesh. It is the realm in which “the law of sin” resides, and is the part of us which serves that law of sin. The very presence of the flesh, together with the “law of sin” that resides in it, makes us imperfect—whether sin has been expressed externally or not.

How thankful we must be for the promised deliverance from this vile body. Then nothing about us will serve “the law of sin.” Then we will never again have to contend with that law, or confess to its presence within us. It will never raise its ugly head, for be forever removed from us. In the meantime, we will receive help from God when we are able to identify and confess our real situation. In this case, what you do not know can really hurt you! You do well to make it your aim to see the conflict within correctly.

CONCLUSION

We have briefly reviewed one of the pivotal sections of Scripture that deals with our experience. Many a soul has succumbed to the battle simply because they were unaware of what was going on within them. The warfare that has been described reveals the foolishness of those who say we should be happy all of the time, and that there is never cause for any other feeling. Perhaps such people are sadly lacking in their desire for holiness,

and a fervent desire to dwell forever with the Lord.

When heaven is in your eye, and your affection is set on things above, and not on things on the earth, it is frustrating to confront the waywardness of the flesh, and have to contend with its imaginations. To be sure, there is grace for the battle, and we can come away with the victory. But that victory will not be achieved with

a light-hearted spirit and undiscerning heart. If we do not “know” that nothing good dwells in our flesh, we may be prone to listen to it, and entertain its lusts. That inclination will either result in giving in to its desires, or concluding that we may not be in Christ at all.

We have heard a telling explanation of why deliverance from the Law is necessary. Under the Law, men are

condemned for the very presence of wayward thoughts and desires, whether they are honored or not. When the commandment "*Thou shalt not covet*" came home to Paul's understanding, that was the very thing he saw. He saw that his nature was ungodly and condemned.

If it is true that, even after we are in Christ Jesus, we cannot stop the eruptions of the flesh, we must come away from any notion that we are justified by the Law. If there is no grace, there is no hope! If there is not a new creation in Christ Jesus,

there is no hope! If we have not died to the Law, there is no hope. It will do no good to concoct a theology that says the Law has died, or that it has been abolished, or that it no longer exists. That foolish teaching does not come to grips with our situation. **Salvation is so marvelously thorough that it will sustain us while the Law remains in full vigor!** The grace of God is so sufficient that it will uphold us in the heat of an inward struggle that seems to contradict our profession of faith. It makes us equal to the battle.

The flesh has not changed! The natural man remains the same. All of the weaknesses of the flesh remain, and it still has no capacity to desire or please God. But that is not all there is to us. We are more than "*the flesh*." There is more to us than the "*old man*." The "*law of sin*" still remains within our earthly natures, but it cannot dominate us as we live by faith. You must never allow anyone or any teaching to rob you of this awareness! Now, be strong and of good courage to fight the fight of faith with confidence. You do have something from God!

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COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING PAGE CONTAINS NINE CHARTS THAT GRAPHICALLY PORTRAY SOME OF THE MATTERS COVERED IN THIS LESSON. THEY ARE SUBMITTED FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION, AND TO ASSIST YOU IN COMPREHENDING THE REALITY, NATURE, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF INNER STRUGGLE AND WARFARE.

EVIL AND CONTRADICTION

EVERYTHING EVIL IS RESIDENT IN THE FLESH

EVIL

THE ESSENCE OF EVIL IS TO CONTRADICT GOD

TO BE UNAWARE OF THE CRITICALITY OF THIS BATTLE WILL CAUSE YOU TO LOSE IT!

THE VICTORY IS YOUR FAITH

YOU ARE A MICROCOSM OF WORLD CONFLICT

UNDERSTANDING "THE FLESH"

MY FLESH

IN MY FLESH DWELLS NO GOOD THING
ROMANS 7:16

WITH THE FLESH I SERVE THE LAW OF SIN
ROMANS 7:25

THE FLESH IS WEAK
MATTHEW 26:41

THE FLESH LUSTS AGAINST THE SPIRIT
GALATIANS 5:17

THE FLESH DOES NOT PROFIT ANYTHING
JOHN 6:83

SOW TO THE FLESH AND REAP CORRUPTION
GALATIANS 6:8

THOSE IN THE FLESH CANNOT PLEASE GOD
ROMANS 8:8

FLESH CANNOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM
1 CORINTHIANS 15:50

IF YOU LIVE AFTER THE FLESH, YOU SHALL DIE - Rom 8:13

PERSONAL CONFLICT SEEN IN THE PSALMS

WITHIN

WITH THE WORLD

"WHY ART THOU CAST DOWN?" - Psalm 42:5

"I HAVE ROARED . . ." - Psalm 38:8

"MY SOUL THIRSTETH" - Psalm 42:1-2

"LET NOT THE HAND OF THE WICKED REMOVE ME" - Psalm 38:11

"HIDE ME FROM THE COUNSEL OF THE WICKED" - Psalm 64:2

CONFLICT IN A MORAL ARENA

COMPETITION

Conflict is the experience of competitive influences

TEMPORALITY

CHOICE and COMMITMENT

Conflict is the unavoidable mark of temporality

Good and evil provide an opportunity for both choice and commitment.

THE "PROMISES" ARE GIVEN IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

A SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP

THE LAW WRITTEN ON THEM MIND
Jeremiah 31:33

SERVE THE LAW WITH THE MIND
Romans 7:25

CHRIST

AFFECTION PLACED ON THINGS ABOVE
Colossians 3:2

THE SPIRIT SENT INTO OUR HEARTS
Galatians 4:6

GOD

Satan strategizes to cause disruption within.

"FIERY DARTS"
-- Ephesians 6:16 --

DELIVERANCE IS DEMANDED

OUR CONDITION DEMANDS DELIVERANCE

FIERCENESS OF THE STRUGGLE CREATES FRUSTRATION
Galatians 5:17

We are basically peacemakers, not warriors - Matt. 5:9

THE EARTH IS THE REALM OF RESTRICTION
We are cohabiting with an unacceptable occupant
Romans 7:20

THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

THE "INNER MAN" AND THE "OUTWARD MAN" ARE INCOMPATIBLE

ONE IS PERISHING, THE OTHER IS BEING RENEWED
II CORINTHIANS 4:16

OUR BODIES ARE CORRUPT, DISHONORABLE, AND WEAK
I COR. 15:42-44

WE HAVE BEEN "WROUGHT" FOR THE RESURRECTION BODY
II CORINTHIANS 5:5

OUR CONDITION REQUIRES THAT THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

LET IT BE HEARD

WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH?

O WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM!

CONFLICT

IN CHRIST, WE ARE CREATED FOR INCORRUPTION, FOR GLORY, AND FOR POWER! UNTIL OUR DELIVERANCE, WE STRUGGLE WITH CORRUPTION, DISHONOR, AND WEAKNESS!

CONFLICT

THE STRUGGLE IS NOT WRONG - IT IS RIGHT! YET, WE ARE NOT RECONCILED TO IT. WE LONG FOR DELIVERANCE! WE LAMENT OUR PRESENT CONDITION! DELIVERANCE WE NEED! AND IT IS COMING!



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 24



FREED FROM CONDEMNATION

8:1 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. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ 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. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ 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.

– Romans 8:1-11 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Just as the seventh chapter of Romans is a mountain peak of doctrine concerning the experience of the believer, so the eighth chapter is a towering peak of teaching on the completeness of salvation. When it comes to stabilizing the soul of the believer, this chapter is unexcelled. The condition of the person in Christ Jesus is described with unmatched power. On every side salvation is a bulwark for the soul, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah.

*“In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; **salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks**”* (Isa 26:1). Speaking of the day of redemption, Isaiah also said, *“But you shall call your walls **Salvation**”* ^{NKJV} (60:18). The words of David the psalmist can be applied to our position in Christ Jesus. *“Blessed be the LORD: for he hath showed me his marvelous kindness in **a strong city**”* (Psa 31:21).

It might appear strange that a strong affirmation of security follows the exposition of a fierce inner struggle. For some, the struggle of good and evil within produces fear and doubt. The Spirit, however, is strengthening our faith, confirming that God has begun a good work in us, and will perform it *“until the day of Christ”* (Phil 1:6). We have been joined to the Lord Jesus, baptized into His death, and raised with Him by the glory of

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

LESSON OUTLINE

1. THOSE WHO ARE NOT CONDEMNED (8:1)
2. TWO INEXORABLE LAWS (8:2)
3. GOD DID WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT DO (8:3)
4. THE LAW'S DEMANDS FULFILLED IN US (8:4)
5. TWO DISTINCT WAYS OF LIVING (8:5)
6. TWO DISTINCT MIND-SETS (8:6)
7. THE UNCHANGING BENT OF THE CARNAL MIND (8:7)
8. WHEN IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD (8:8)
9. THE INDISPENSABILITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (8:9)
10. THE BODY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT (8:10)
11. MORTAL BODIES ACTIVATED FOR GOD (8:11)

the Father (6:3-4). We are “dead” to sin and “alive unto God” (6:11). We have been liberated from the guilt and power of sin, and from the Law in its condemning capacity (6:18,22; 7:4).

In regeneration a new and dominant nature is given to us. It is harmonious with heaven, and in sharp contention with the world and all that is within it (1 John 2:15). If this was the only nature we had, our circumstance would be one of ease. However, this is not the case. The remnants of the old nature remain with us. They are tied, so to speak, to our bodies, and cannot be separated from them. Considered as a whole, these remnants are called “the old man” (Eph 4:22-24) “the flesh” (Rom 7:18) and “the natural man” (1 Cor 2:14). This nature, to be thrust from us when we are separated from the body, resists and wars against the “new man” that is “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). It is aggressive, hostile, and unrelenting in this warfare. Without the extensive exposition of Romans seven, this battle would be so confusing we would lose heart. However, without the proclamation of Romans eight, the intensity of the battle would soon wear us out. Aware of this, Satan has sought to hide the truth unveiled in these two chapters. He has been phenomenally successful in this endeavor.

In spite of this circumstance, it is still correct that truth believed liberates souls captivated by ignorance. Our blessed Lord said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). When you take hold on the realities proclaimed in this text, you will experience a portion of the liberty of which our Lord spoke.

The power of God is confirmed in His effectiveness to do what the Law—His Law—was not capable of doing. **In Jesus, God condemned sin without condemning the sinner—something the Law was impotent to do.** Sin HAD to be judged and condemned. It could not be excused.

The Spirit will make a sharp distinction between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit. He will affirm the total unacceptability of the flesh. He will also begin developing the indispensable ministry of the Holy Spirit.

All of this is done out of necessity. This is no dead academic lecture! God is exposing our souls to realities that will give us the advantage in the good fight of faith—realities that must be grasped by the inner man. Believers who attempt to face life and grapple with the challenges of inner warfare must know what this chapter affirms.

Although we are **not** free from the sin principle, or “law of sin,” we are free from the guilt of and enslavement to sin. As long as we are “in the body,” we do have to confront this “natural” law, but we are under no obligation to obey it. Therefore, it is written, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom 8:12). This is involved in the freedom declared in Romans 6:7: “For he that is dead is freed from sin.” While we struggle with “the law of sin,” we can confidently rejoice in our standing in Christ Jesus. The battle is only temporary, and good things are being realized because of it. We are being tutored in the nature of both the “flesh” and “the Spirit” (Gal 5:17), “the natural man” and “the spiritual man,” (1 Cor 2;14), the “old man” and “the new man” (Col 3:9-10). The teaching of this section confirms both the liabilities of the flesh

and the advantages of the Spirit.

THE ENTIRE GODHEAD IS INVOLVED

Every member of the Godhead is extensively involved in our salvation. In the passage before us (8:1-11), “God” is referred to eight times in four verses (vs 3,7,8,9,11). Jesus is referred to nine times in five verses (vs 1,2,3,10,11), and the Holy Spirit is pointed out twelve times in seven verses (vs 1,2,4,5,9,10,11). This is a remarkable circumstance! **In eleven verses there are no less than twenty-nine references to Deity—and they ALL have to do with OUR salvation.**

- “Them that are in **CHRIST** . . .” (v 1).
- “Then that are in . . . **JESUS**” (v 1).
- “Who walk . . . after **THE SPIRIT**” (v 1).
- “The Law of **THE SPIRIT**” (v 2).
- “Life in **CHRIST** . . .” (v 2).
- “Life in . . . **JESUS**” (v 2).
- “**GOD** sending His own” (v 3).
- “**HIS** own . . .” (v 3).
- “. . . own **SON**” (v 3).
- “Who walk after **THE SPIRIT**” (v 4).
- “They that are after **THE SPIRIT**” (5).
- “The things of **THE SPIRIT**” (v 5).
- “Enmity against **GOD**” (v 7).
- “The Law of **GOD**” (v 7).
- “Cannot please **God**” (v 8).
- “But ye are . . . in **THE SPIRIT**” (v 9).
- “**THE SPIRIT** of . . .” (v 9).
- “**Spirit of GOD** dwell in you” (v 9).
- “**THE SPIRIT**” (v 9).
- “**THE SPIRIT** . . .” (v 9).
- “. . . of **CHRIST**” (v 9).
- “If **CHRIST** be in you” (v 10).
- “**THE SPIRIT** is life” (v 10).
- “**THE SPIRIT** of . . .” (v 11).
- “**HIM** that raised up Jesus” (v 11).
- “Raised up **JESUS** from the dead” (v 11).
- “**HE** that raised up . . .” (v 11).
- “Raised up **CHRIST**” (v 11).
- “**HIS SPIRIT** that dwelleth in you” (v 11).

Salvation is a Divine enterprise in which men participate – not a human initiative in which God participates. The failure to embrace this critical distinction occasions the development of all manner of erroneous doctrines and emphases. If we are going to build the confidence of the people of God, they must hear of His working, His presence, and His commitment to their salvation. If they are

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

to have a proper view of the liabilities of their natural persons, they must be told that at every point “flesh” rises to prominence, salvation is placed on a shaky foundation.

The passage before us will affirm the truth of salvation with unquestionable power. It will give no countenance to the flesh, nor will it allow anyone to remain comfortable that relies upon it. The Spirit will speak emphatically to us. There will be no ambiguity or vagueness in His words.

POWERFUL AFFIRMATIONS

We will read powerful affirmations of the truth – affirmations addressed to your faith. They are to be believed and heartily embraced.

- “There IS therefore NOW.
- Hath MADE me free .
- What the Law could NOT do.

- Condemned sin.*
- They that are after the flesh DO mind the things of the flesh.*
- They that are after the Spirit [DO mind] the things of the Spirit.*
- To be carnally minded IS death.*
- To be spiritually minded IS life and peace.*
- The carnal mind IS enmity against.*
- It IS NOT subject to the Law of God.*
- Neither indeed CAN be .*
- They that are in the flesh CANNOT please God.*
- You are NOT in the flesh.*
- If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is NONE of His.*
- The body IS dead because of sin.*
- The Spirit IS life because of righteousness.*
- He . . . shall also quick your mortal bodies .*
- The Spirit that DWELLETH in you.”*

If you are not accustomed to this type

of language, it will sound strange to you. We are living in a time when preaching and teaching, together with much religious writing, is philosophical. Relatively little is affirmed or declared, and a lack of confidence spouts from the pulpit like Mount Vesuvius.

All such preaching is powerless, and unworthy of falling upon the ears of believers. If ever we are to make progress to glory, our thoughts must be established, not placed upon the flimsy foundation of human wisdom and theological speculation. Solomon once wrote, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established” (Prov 16:3).

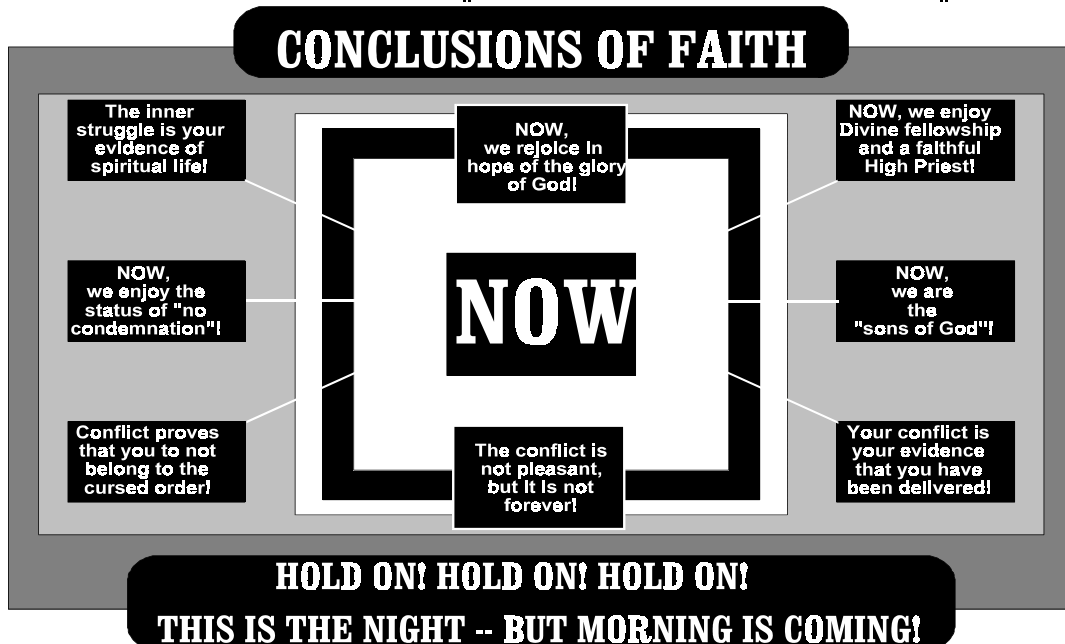
There is no better way to commit our works unto the Lord than to have our hearts and minds filled with Divine affirmations. The Spirit will now give us such provision.

THOSE WHO ARE NOT CONDEMNED

^{8:1} *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.*” The seventh chapter closed with a powerful exclamation of

assurance and confidence: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” This is the shout of faith, and it is the result of “spiritual understanding.” It confirms those who make such a declaration are in “heavenly places,” surrounded with

realities that make for “the full assurance of hope” (Heb 6:11). It also confirms that the avoidance of condemnation is on the heart of every person who believes in Jesus. Faith moves the individual to do whatever is required to avoid being condemned by God almighty!



THEREFORE

This is a conclusion—a spiritually logical conclusion. It is the judgment of faith, and it is based upon perception. And what has led Paul to this grand conclusion—this inspired deduction? To be sure, he has written it through the inspiration of God (2 Tim 3:16). However, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has blended with the experience wrought by faith. Thus, Paul’s statement is not only truth, it is truth experienced. That means what is here declared is common to all believers, for no Scripture came by, or was limited to, the interpretation or experience of

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

the Prophet (2 Pet 1:20-21).

“Therefore” means, in view of what has been affirmed before. It refers to the inner struggle that was delineated in the seventh chapter—the frustrating warfare that takes place within the saved. Lest we forget the magnitude of that warfare, ponder again some of the statements that described it.

- ❑ **FRUSTRATION.** “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.” (7:15)
- ❑ **POWERLESS.** “For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. (7:18)
- ❑ **CIRCUMVENTED.** “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” (7:19)
- ❑ **COMPETITION.** “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” (7:21)
- ❑ **AGGRESSIVE OPPOSITION.** “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.” (7:23)
- ❑ **WRETCHEDNESS.** “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (7:24)
- ❑ **TWO MANNERS OF LIFE.** “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” (7:25)

Confirming this cannot have reference to inner conflict prior to being in Christ, Paul now concludes something that cannot possibly be said of anyone except the person who is in Christ Jesus. He takes the very thing that has driven many to conclude they are unacceptable, and affirms that it proves acceptance. In view

of the inner warfare – in view of the incessant struggle with sin – here is the inspired conclusion.

THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION!

“There is therefore **now** no condemnation . . .” What a wonderful statement! This is the description of the person who has been described in chapters six and seven.

- ❑ The one baptized into Christ’s death is not condemned (6:3).
- ❑ The one who is walking in the newness of life is not condemned (6:4).
- ❑ When the “old man” is crucified, we are no longer condemned (6:6).
- ❑ When we reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God, we are not condemned (6:11).
- ❑ When we are not under the law, but under grace, there is no condemnation (6:14).
- ❑ When we have obeyed the form of the doctrine delivered to us, we are not condemned (6:17).
- ❑ When we find ourselves unable to implement what we desire in our hearts, we are not condemned (7:15).
- ❑ When we consent that the Law is good, even though there is a part of us that struggles against it, we are not condemned (7:15-16).
- ❑ When we see that in our flesh nothing good resides, there is no condemnation (7:18).
- ❑ When we find a law within us that produces evil when we desire to do good, we are not condemned (7:21).
- ❑ When we find a law within us, warring against the law of our minds, and even captivating us, there still is no condemnation (7:23).
- ❑ When we feel our own wretchedness, there is no condemnation (7:24).

- ❑ When our minds serve the Law of God, while our flesh serves the law of sin, we are not condemned (7:25).

This is the meaning of this text. The glory of it is accented by our deliverance from the Law, which soundly condemns the very condition described.

This is too strong for some, for they imagine this gives license to sin. But that is a miserable delusion, foisted upon the simple by the prince of the power of the air. The point is that regeneration has made sin repulsive. It is hated and loathed at its source—in the thought processes. **No person, however disciplined, can hate iniquity who has not been delivered from it!** It is deliverance from sin that has provoked a hatred of it, and a love for the law of God!

Jesus said the person who does not believe on Him is “condemned already.” Our text affirms the opposite condition, where “no condemnation” exists “**now**.” Is that not a wonderful sound?

“Now”

It is essential to know the present status of the people of God—those who have believed the report of the Gospel, and are living in the vitality of their faith. The book of Romans frequently reminds us of the “**now**.” For those outside of Christ, alienation and condemnation describe their present condition. But that is not the case with those who are “*in Christ Jesus*.”

- ❑ **FULLY EXONERATED FROM SIN.** The state of the children of God is described as “*being NOW justified by his blood*” (5:9).
- ❑ **RECONCILED TO GOD.** Through Jesus, “*we have NOW received the atonement,*” or reconciliation (5:11).
- ❑ **RELEASED FROM SIN.** “**NOW**,” we have been “*made free from sin*” (6:22).
- ❑ **FREE FROM THE TYRANNY OF A CONDEMNING LAW.** “**NOW**, we are delivered from the law” (7:6).
- ❑ **UNWANTED DESIRES NOT IMPUTED TO US.** Concerning the struggle within, the child of God can say, “**NOW** then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (7:17).

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Let there be no drawing back from the strength of the Spirit's affirmation. **The unrelenting contest within the child of God confirms he is NOT condemned!** Even though we are assaulted by the "law of sin" within us, there is "no condemnation!" Jesus declared the very same thing when He said, "He that believeth on him is **not condemned**" (John 3:18). In another place Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and **shall not come into condemnation**; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

"No condemnation!" That means we can boldly approach the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:14-16). **"No condemnation!"** That means we can confidently draw near with a true heart, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:22). **"No condemnation!"** That means Divine power is devoted to us—power that makes us adequate for any Divine assignment, and superior to any foe aligned against us. **"No condemnation!"** That means we can have the "full assurance of faith," the "full assurance of hope," and the "full assurance of understanding" (Heb 10:22; 6:11; Col 2:2). **"No condemnation!"** That means we have an Intercessor in heaven (Heb 7:25), and One within our hearts (Rom 8:26). **"No condemnation!"** That means our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). **"No condemnation!"** That means no one can effectively lay anything to our charge (Rom 8:33). **"No condemnation!"** That means we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil 4:13).

No person who has been joined to the Lord can afford to be without this knowledge. They must see that the Father has received them because they have received His Son. Their acceptance of the reconciliation He wrought out in their behalf, is reason enough for God to justly receive them. Rather than condemning them, His eye is upon them, and His ear is open to their cries (1 Pet 3:12). Even

though they struggle with the law of sin that is resident in their members, he does not condemn them. Even though thoughts and desires rise in them against their will, often draining their resources, He does not condemn them. They are in His Son by virtue of their faith, and He will not condemn such a soul, regardless of the seemingly contradictory struggles they may endure.

No Warrant for Sin

It should not be necessary to say so, but this condition does not justify sin.

If salvation is from sin, then how is it that God would be able to tolerate it after one comes into Christ? Does spiritual life sanctify sin? Does the Lord Jesus, in whom is no sin, overlook and even condone what is contrary to the Divine nature?

Because of the pervasiveness of demonic doctrines, some are led to believe the expression of sin is of no consequence in Christ Jesus. But this is not so, and reveals a reprobate heart and mind. If salvation is from sin, then how is it that God would be able to tolerate it after one comes into Christ? Does spiritual life sanctify sin? Does the Lord Jesus, in whom is no sin, overlook and even condone what is contrary to the Divine nature? If sin is repulsive to the believer, as is declared in the seventh chapter, how must it appear to the One who has saved us from it? Sin is never right, and it is never excused. If it is not forgiven, and if we are not freed from its guilt and power, it will be the cause of our condemnation. Further, if the reality of this does not register upon the human spirit, no acceptable level of effort will be expended in the good fight of faith.

THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS

Throughout the seventh chapter, Paul spoke of his personal fight of faith.

However, he was not speaking only of himself, but as a representative of the household of faith. We know this is the case because of the confident note that is sounded in this verse. In view of the described conflict, "There is therefore now no condemnation to **THOSE** who are in Christ Jesus."

There are no eternal benefits outside of Jesus Christ. God has hinged everything relating to life and godliness to His Son. Further, redemptive benefits can only be ministered to those who are "in Christ Jesus."

The immediate context of this statement, however, relates to being "under the Law." From the standpoint of a covenant, only the Jews were "under the Law." Yet, considering the spiritual status of humanity, everyone outside of Christ is condemned by the Law. After all, it was given that "every mouth might be stopped and all the world become guilty before God" (3:19). By saying, therefore, "those who are in Christ Jesus,"^{NASB} the Spirit means those who are no longer under the condemnation of the Law. Our release from the Law and its consequent condemnation was in order to our marriage to Jesus. As it is written, "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, **that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God**" (7:4).

God cannot deal favorably with us unless we are NOT condemned. Further, we cannot be in that condition unless we are free from the Law and in Christ Jesus. However we may imagine that God loves us, He cannot bestow His intended favor upon us unless we are "dead to the Law" and "in Christ Jesus." Redemption is "in Christ Jesus" (3:24). We are "alive to God in Christ Jesus"^{NASB} (6:11). In all of its remarkable facets, salvation is ministered to us "THROUGH" Jesus Christ. The benefits come to us BECAUSE of Him. They are also administered BY Him, as the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24). Additionally, the Son of God ministers these benefits ONLY to those who are "IN" Him. It is God Himself who

puts us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), thereby qualifying us for the state now described: *“NO condemnation.”*

Although generally neglected by the Christian world, the Spirit has said considerable concerning being *“in Christ.”* He has left no doubt about the point at which this occurred. We were *“baptized into Christ,”* being *“baptized into His death”* (6:3). We were *“buried WITH HIM by baptism into death”* (6:4), and are therefore *“dead with Christ”* (6:8). While this may appear a technical point, we are not in Christ Jesus because we were baptized, as though that were the reward for obeying *“the form of the doctrine”* (6:17). It was THROUGH our baptism that we were brought into Christ Jesus. It was the passage way through which this was accomplished.

To be *“in Christ Jesus”* is to be *“joined”* to Him—made *“one”* with Him (1 Cor 6:17). It is not simply that Jesus is with us, but we are *“IN Him.”* In a telling expression of this circumstance, the Scriptures say *“we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones”* (Eph 5:30). Being *“in Christ”* involves all of the benefits that are in Him passing to us.

When we are *“in Christ.”* all that is in Him becomes ours. A brief representation of these benefits follows.

- Redemption is in Christ Jesus (3:24).
- Sanctification is in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:2).
- We are caused to triumph in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 2:14).
- In Christ we become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).
- We have liberty in Christ (Gal 2:4).
- True unity is found in Him (Gal 3:28).
- All blessings are in Him (Eph 1:3).
- We are brought near to God in Christ (Eph 2:13).
- The objective of God’s calling is realized in Him (Phil 3:14).
- The promise of life is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:1).
- True faith and love are in Him (2 Tim 1:13).
- The grace of God is appropriated in

Christ (2 Tim 2:1).

- Salvation in its entirety is in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Tim 2:10).

Now our text boldly announces there is *“no condemnation”* to those who are in Christ Jesus. God does not condemn them. The Law of God does not condemn them. They are NOT condemned, even though they struggle with the law of sin that is resident in their flesh (7:23). They are not condemned even though they are not able to fully do what they desire (7:18). The struggle induced by faith is the personal proof those in Christ are not condemned.

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WHO WALK NOT AFTER THE FLESH

Later versions of Scripture eliminate the latter part of verse one: *“who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”* All versions, however, do include the words in verse four, the latter part of which reads the same way. I shall take them as proper words that reflect the intent of this passage. As will be confirmed later, this phrase does not describe the CAUSE of condemnation being lifted, but the EVIDENCE of it.

Eleven times *“the flesh”* is mentioned in this chapter. It stands for everything about us that is unregenerate. It is the natural part of our persons, that is traced back to Adam. We have already been apprized there is *“no good thing”* in the

flesh (7:18)—nothing that God will receive. Notwithstanding, the flesh aggressively seeks to direct the manner in which we live. To *“walk in the flesh”* is to live according to natural drives and impulses. It is to live as though this world was the main world, and heaven was of no importance. Those who walk *“after the flesh”* think like men. They reason with this world at the center of their thoughts, and are driven by time and circumstance.

Those who are not condemned, do not yield to the impulses of the flesh, allowing it to manage their lives. They may struggle with *“the law of sin,”* but they do not yield to it. The direction of their life is heavenward, not earthward (Phil 3:20). Their manner of life is their confirmation they are NOT condemned.

WHO WALK AFTER THE SPIRIT

Walking after the Spirit is being *“led”* by Him in the mortifying of the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). It is the opposite of quenching or grieving Him (1 Thess 5:18; Eph 4:30). The ONLY way to live *“not after the flesh”* is to walk after the Spirit. This is living in the *“communion of the Holy Spirit”* (2 Cor 13:14) and the *“fellowship of the Spirit”* (Phil 2:1). It is when life is lived in willing harmony with the revealed purpose of God. Approached from the perspective of the seventh chapter, those who do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit are those who:

- Hate the very suggestion to do evil (7:15).
- Willingly and heartily consent that the Law is good (7:16).
- Discern and confess that nothing good resides in the *“flesh”* (7:18).
- Recognize the competing law within their members, and refuse to yield to it (7:23).
- Delight in the Law of God after the *“inward man”* (7:22).
- Sense the wretchedness of their natural condition, anticipating their deliverance from it (7:24-25a).
- Serve the Law of God with their mind (7:25).

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Those expressions are the result of refusing to follow the dictates of the flesh. They are something of what is involved in walking in the Spirit. To such, *“There is therefore now no condemnation.”* The

fact that there is a struggle with sin and not concession to it, proves this is true. Because this aspect of spiritual life is again addressed in verse 4, I will reserve further comments for later. Remember,

this is evidence of justification. The inner war, fierce though it may be, confirms that a new principle of life has been introduced! That life is more powerful than death—vastly superior to it.

TWO INEXORABLE LAWS

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” This verse is an extension of the thought introduced in the opening of the first verse: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* The **evidence** of this condition, as I have already stated, is found in the manner in which saints live, obediently following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Now the Spirit will declare the **reason** for their removal from condemnation: **“FOR.”** This reason is carefully traced back to the working of God, not the manner of life we are living.

This is a critical distinction, and must be seen with the *“eyes of our understanding.”* As long as men imagine that release from condemnation is caused by what they do, they will, at the very best, come short of the joy and peace that comes from believing (Rom 15:13). In salvation, valid DOING is always a response. It constitutes evidence of Divine working, as we will now see.

THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

Here is a principle, or law, employed by the Holy Spirit. He is the One who makes this law effective, for it does not operate on its own, or independently of Divine power. This is nothing less than a description of the manner in which the Holy Spirit works—*“the LAW of the Spirit.”* It describes how we were freed from the power and consequences of sin.

This freedom has already been announced to us: *“he that is dead is FREED from sin”* (6:7), *“being made FREE from sin”* (6:18,22). Prior to this freedom, we were *“servants of sin”* (6:17,20) and *“slaves to impurity”* (6:19^{NASB}). In this chapter, freedom from enslavement to sin will be traced to being led by the Holy Spirit (8:13). Only the inexorable law, or principle, through

which He works can free us from bondage to sin.

There are principles, or laws, at work in spiritual life with which we must be familiar. Our spiritual acquaintance with

persons that aggressively opposes the new creation in Christ Jesus. This is contrasted with the *“law of my mind.”*

- ❑ **The Law of the Spirit of life** (8:2). This is the working principle by which the Holy Spirit brings spiritual life

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them will give us an advantage in the good fight faith. If we are ignorant of them, we are thrust into disadvantage.

- ❑ **The Law of God** (7:12,14,16,22,25). This is the Law through which the knowledge of sin comes. It is summarized in the Ten Commandments, and was given as a covenant to Israel. This contrasts with *“the law of sin.”*
- ❑ **The Law of the mind** (7:23). This is the result of having God’s law put into our minds and written upon our hearts. This is contrasted with *“another law in my members.”*
- ❑ **The law of sin** (7:23,25; 8:2). This is the principle of sin that is resident in the human nature. This law is also referred to in verse 21: *“When I would do good, evil is present with me.”* This is contrasted with *“the law of God.”*
- ❑ **Another law in our members that wars against the law of our mind, and brings us into captivity to the law of sin** (7:23). This describes the bent of human nature. There is a principle at work in our natural

and liberty to us. This law will be contrasted with *“the law of sin and death.”* Here we see one of the vital aspects of spiritual life—liberating us from the tyranny of sin.

“The Spirit of Life”

This is a reference to the Holy Spirit, who is the immediate Author of spiritual life. That is why we are said to be *“born of the Spirit”* (John 3:8). Throughout the life of faith, it is ever true: *“the Spirit gives life”* (2 Cor 3:6). In Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones, it was the Spirit that enabled the reassembled and enlivened bones to stand on their feet, *“an exceeding great army”* (Ezek 37:10).

- ❑ The Spirit leads us to *“mortify the deeds of the body,”* which is an aspect of life (Rom 8:13).
- ❑ It is *“through the Spirit”* that we *“wait for the hope of righteousness,”* another facet of true life (Gal 5:5).
- ❑ The people of God are *“built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit”* (Eph 2:22).
- ❑ The presence of Divine qualities

within the saints is nothing less than *“the fruit of the Spirit”* (Gal 5:).

- ❑ Obeying the truth, the initial and consistent indication of life, is accomplished *“through the Spirit”* (1 Pet 1:22).
- ❑ Our washing, sanctification, and justification, were all accomplished *“by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor 6:11).
- ❑ Those in Christ are presently being changed *“from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Cor 3:18).

direct contradiction to *“the law of sin and death.”* This is an enlarged view of *“the law of sin,”* or the sin principle, that is irrevocably associated with our bodies (7:23,25). Not only does this principle gravitate to sin, it also leads to death—separation from God. Thus, it is called *“the law of sin and death,”* for these two things cannot be separated. Sin leads to death (6:23) death is the result of sin (5:12).

Once again, this is a *“law”* associated with our earthly nature, which centers in the body. As long as we are in the body, we will contend with this law. No amount of theological reasoning will rid us of contention with the flesh! After all of the fanciful and conflicting arguments concerning the meaning of this passage, every honest believer in this world knows that contention with the flesh is anything but over!

FREEDOM

Here some believe a serious difficulty is introduced. On the one hand, Paul has [for all believers] acknowledged we are brought *“into captivity to the law of sin”* that is in our *“members,”* or earthly constitution (7:23). How is it that we can be brought into captivity to the *“law of sin,”* yet also be freed from it?

To resolve this seeming dilemma, some have said the reference in 7:23 pertains to our lives prior to being in Christ, while 8:2 refers to life in Christ. This seems to relieve them of any difficulties with the text. However, this cannot be, for both are in the present tense. Also, if this explanation is true, then those outside of Christ are not really guilty of sin at all (7:17,20), have a delight in the law of God (7:22), thank God through Jesus Christ their Lord (7:5a), and are serving the law of God with their minds (7:25b). And who is the person who would care to affirm such representations apply to those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-2), and alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18)? Such a conclusion betrays spiritual ignorance.

In What Sense Are We Free?

The Spirit has already declared this freedom. We are not obliged to sin. Although we contend with the *“law of sin,”* we are under no obligation to obey it.

- ❑ Those who are dead to sin live no longer in it (6:2).
- ❑ Being raised up with Christ, we walk in newness of life (6:4).
- ❑ Our old man is crucified with Christ that should no longer serve sin (6:6).
- ❑ The person who is dead with Christ is freed from sin (6:7).
- ❑ We are to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God (6:11).
- ❑ We can refuse to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies (6:12).
- ❑ We are admonished not to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness (6:13a).
- ❑ We are to yield our members as instruments of righteousness to God (6:13b).
- ❑ Sin shall not have dominion over us because we are not under law, but under grace (6:14).
- ❑ Being made free from isn, we became the servants of righteousness (6:18).
- ❑ Now we are to yield our members as instruments of righteousness, with the result being holiness (6:19).
- ❑ Now being free from sin, and become servants to God, we have fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life (6:22).

All of these statements postulate conflict. There can be no such thing as YIELDING if there are no contrary impulses. It is absurd to think that being under grace is necessary if we are once and for all rid of the sinful nature. Those who imagine such a thing simply are not honest.

Our freedom consists of release from servitude to sin. We are free to *“deny ungodliness and worldly lusts”* (Tit 2:12), which would not be necessary if they did not exist. Further, ungodliness and worldly lusts can ONLY exist where the law of sin and death exists. Once we are, by death or the change that will occur when Jesus comes, liberated from this body, we will never again struggle against *“the law of sin and death.”* Until then, we are free from the domination of that law. It need not rule us. In fact, if we will walk

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- ❑ It is *“through the power of the Holy Spirit”* that we are enabled to *“abound in hope”* (Rom 15:13).
- ❑ It is the Holy Spirit that brings us to obedience and the cleansing and sanctifying blood of Jesus (1 Pet 1:2).

All of these, and more, are accomplished through the Holy Spirit who works in strict accordance with heavens laws, or principles. **The Holy Spirit does not employ fleshly means to accomplish spiritual results!** This is, of course, devastating to much of the spurious Christianity that abounds in our time. It is no wonder church members are often found in bondage to sin. They are being subjected to a Gospel (falsely so called) that employs earthly means to obtain heavenly results. It simply does not work. If the Holy Spirit does not employ a certain principle, you may be certain God will not honor it if men choose to use it!

THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

The Holy Spirit works powerfully in

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in the Spirit, it CANNOT rule is (Gal 5:16).

Believers who feel trapped and condemned by the flesh can rise higher! The Holy Spirit is working within them to free them from the domination of sin and death. When the sinful nature erupts within, spewing thoughts and desires into our minds, we can resist them, casting them down with the effective weaponry we have been given (2 Cor 10:5-6). *“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”*

“Life”

This freedom from the domination of sin and the rule of death is accomplished

within the framework of *“LIFE.”* This refers to our involvement with the living God, for we are *“alive”* only to the degree we have fellowship with the Father and with the Son (1 John 1:3). Eternal life, which is nothing less than spiritual life, or life administered by the Holy Spirit, is *“knowing”* God, *“and Jesus Christ”* whom He has sent (John 17:3). It is the peculiar prerogative of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this fellowship between God and the redeemed. Elsewhere, it is depicted as the Spirit changing us from one degree of glory into another—making us more and more like the Lord (2 Cor 3:18).

Freedom from the law of sin and death is legally accomplished the moment we

become one with Jesus Christ. All of the heavenly resources required to resist this law are then made available to us. However, the practicality and consistency of that victory is accomplished only within the context of a vibrant fellowship with God and Christ.

The subordination of the flesh cannot occur while a person is walking at a distance from God! There can be no advancement in the faith while living under the domination of the flesh. This second verse is affirming that everything is made accessible to us when we come into Christ. It then becomes a matter of appropriating the victory through faith. It is not automatic, as the remainder of text will confirm.

GOD DID WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT DO

“³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.” The Spirit will not let us forget that salvation is traced back to God, and God alone. It is not the result of a joint effort between God and man, however desirable that may appear. In Christ, we are truly *“workers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9). However, that is a post-reconciliation posture. It is NOT the way we are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13).

Prior to being in Christ, we were *“under the Law.”* For we Gentiles, it was not given to us as a covenant, but was the means of defining our condition. It *“stopped”* every mouth, rendering all the world *“guilty before God”* (3:19).

The Spirit will now show us what the Law could NOT do. His words are of relevance to both Jew and Gentile. The Jew was given the Law in a codified form, and the Gentiles had it imprinted upon their conscience (2:15). Whether we are speaking of *“the Law”* in a covenantal sense, or as a means of alerting the

conscience to good and evil, the words that follow apply. This will declare the weakness of a law-system.

WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT DO

There were things the Law COULD do. It could define sin (3:20). It could pronounce **“GUILTY”** upon the entire

The Law was an administration for the flesh, not the spirit. As a covenant, it was fleshly, temporal, and impotent to accomplish the ultimate will of God. However, it was not inherently weak; i.e., it had no weakness of its own.

human race (3:19a). It could contaminate the conscience, stopping every mouth, while shutting the door to the throne of all grace.

But there was something the Law (any Law) could *“NOT do.”* It could not forgive sin or purge the conscience. It could not take sin away from the face of the Lord, or constrain Him to be gracious

to sinners. In order for people to be saved, sin had to be dealt with; it could not be ignored or passed over as though it did not exist. The requirements of the Law could not be put aside, permitting God to receive those who had transgressed it.

WEAK THROUGH THE FLESH

The Law was an administration for the flesh, not the spirit. As a covenant, it was fleshly, temporal, and impotent to accomplish the ultimate will of God. However, it was not inherently weak; i.e., it had no weakness of its own. The inability of the Law was *“the flesh,”* or the constitution of the ones to whom it was addressed.

The Law demanded more than *“the flesh”* was capable of giving. Its weakness was found in the ones attempting to fulfill its requirements. Although addressed to those in the flesh, the Law placed necessities before them that were beyond their reach. The very purpose of the Law was to make this evident, so that men might see the need of a Savior. As long as men see no need for a Savior, they will not seek one. The Good News of a Savior means nothing to a person convinced of their own goodness, or their ability to achieve goodness. This accounts for the general lack of interest in Christ Jesus.

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

The failure of the contemporary church to aggressively seek the benefits of the Gospel, and its amazing penchant for brevity and spiritual shallowness, are directly owing to its failure to perceive a need for the salvation of God. It does not see God as demanding more than they can give of themselves, and thus is not assertive in its demands for the Gospel.

A Modern Likeness

The weakness of the law can be likened to the use of steam in a steam engine. In bygone days, steam-driven locomotives were the iron horses of the railway system. The larger part of these locomotives was a massive metal boiler. Water was heated by means of a coal furnace, forming steam in this large boiler. Then, as the steam was released by controlled valves, it would drive the wheels of the great iron horse, moving it down the track. The steam was the means of generating the power of the engine.

If one attempted to construct one of those boilers out of cardboard, the power of the steam would dissipate at once. It would burst the cardboard, disintegrating it quickly. In such a case, the steam would be *weak through the cardboard*. There would be nothing wrong with the steam itself, or with the means through which it was produced. The weakness was in the container of the steam.

That was the situation with the Law. The flesh could not contain it. It was to the law what cardboard is to steam. It simply cannot harness the power of the Law. For *“the flesh,”* or the natural part of man, to keep the Law would be tantamount to people in an ICU ward of the local hospital running a brisk marathon race. Just as the demands of the race would exceed their ability, so the demands of the Law exceed the ability of men without Christ. It is *“weak through the flesh.”*

Because of this condition, God undertook the responsibilities inculcated by the Law Himself. He would not simply do away with the Law, but would see to it that its demands were met. The just

penalty for infracting the Law would be paid by means of an appropriate sacrifice.

THE LIKENESS OF SINFUL FLESH

“ . . . God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin . . . ” Other versions read as follows. (1) *“God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin.”*^{NKJV} (2) *“God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin.”*^{NASB} (3) *“God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.”*^{NIV} (4) *“By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin.”*^{NRSV} (5) *“God, sending his Son in the image of the evil flesh, and as an offering for sin.”*^{BBE} (6) *“But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin’s*

that were unlike the ones for whom they were offered, both in appearance and nature. They were not in the image of God, as was man. Neither, indeed, were they rational or moral. That is precisely why *“it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”* (Heb 10:4).

Thus God, in preparing an effective sacrifice, sent His Son *“in the likeness of sinful flesh.”* Although He had no sin of His own, He was clothed in a frame precisely like that of those He came to save—*“the likeness of sinful flesh.”* He did not come in *“sinful flesh,”* but in its *“likeness.”* He took upon Himself the *“form of a servant”* (Phil 2:7). Scripture makes much of this circumstance. The sacrifice offered for the sins of humanity must be offered by one who was made like the one’s to be saved.

The Deliverer Was Like the Delivered

It is written, *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”*^{NKJV} (Heb 2:14-15). Here, the successful defeat of Satan had to be accomplished by one who bore the image of the ones Satan had defeated. The means of Satan’s overthrow would be death itself. In this way, those who had been held in bondage through the fear of death could be righteously released from that servitude.

Under Law, the sacrifice bore no essential likeness of the ones for whom it was made. A lamb, a bull, a heifer, a goat—they were all animals that were unlike the ones for whom they were offered, both in appearance and nature. They were not in the image of God, as was man.

“control over us.”^{NLT} (7) *“God did, sending his own Son in the same human nature as any sinner to be a sacrifice for sin.”*^{NJB}

A Precise Offering

The offering presented by God differed from that demanded by the Law. While the offering of Christ, and the offerings made under the Law, were both substitutionary, there was a significant difference in them. Under Law, the sacrifice bore no essential likeness of the ones for whom it was made. A lamb, a bull, a heifer, a goat—they were all animals

This may seem to be too technical. We already know Satan can be defeated by angelic hosts. It is said of Michael and his angels, *“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him”* (Rev 12:7-9). If it was simply a matter of Satan being

defeated, why not choose Michael and his angels for the job?

It is because such a victory could not be accomplished the release of sinners. The experience of Satan being thrust out of his former place could not bring benefit to those bearing another image. The angels were different in nature, and thus their victory could not be imputed to men.

His Heavenly Ministry Demanded He Be Like the Ones He Saved

More was involved in the Lord's death than the remission of our sins. Once our sins were forgiven, we needed to be sustained by a heavenly minister who knew what we required—knew by experience. We needed a High Priest who

His tenure in the flesh would uniquely qualify Him to sustain those who were tempted—assaulted by the evil one. Now we have a High Priest who can be *"touched with the feeling of our infirmities"* (Heb 4:15-16). This is possible because He is the Son of man. Because He is the Son of God, He is able to do something about our situation.

Because of Sin

The solitary reason for Christ's entrance into this world was *"for sin."* The presence of sin is what necessitated His coming! *"In the likeness of sinful flesh and FOR SIN."* The sin problem HAD to be addressed, and only the *"Second Man"* from heaven could do it (1 Cor 15:47). Jesus offered *"one sacrifice FOR sins*

Jesus Christ must come to grips with the matter of sin. That is why the Father sent Him into the world—to deal with sin: OUR sin!

CONDEMNED SIN IN THE FLESH

Sin had to be effectively condemned before we could be made free. This is something that should certainly be seen more clearly by the average Christian. Not only did sin have to be judged and condemned, it had to be judged and condemned *"in the flesh,"* or in a person bearing the likeness of the transgressors. God could not condemn sin in the animal sacrifices. He could not condemn it by the law, but only identify it.

The wrath of God had to be expended against sin—enfleshed sin! Thus He condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus, His only begotten Son. Thus it is written, *"He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Cor 5:21). Having *"laid upon Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isa 53:6), the Father *"cursed"* the Son (Gal 3:13), thereby condemning sin *"in the flesh."*

If you ever ponder how God feels about sin in one of His children, think what He did to His *"only begotten Son"* when He *"bore our sins in His body on the tree"* (1 Pet 2:24). Those who do not avail themselves of the sacrifice of Christ will themselves taste of the wrath and curse of the Almighty God! That is a result that cannot be avoided if unbelief persists. God is serious about the matter of sin—serious enough to curse His Son when He bore our sins. If men choose not to receive that atonement, they will suffer the vengeance of God, and that without remedy.

More was involved in the Lord's death than the remission of our sins. Once our sins were forgiven, we needed to be sustained by a heavenly minister who knew what we required—knew by experience. We needed a High Priest who was sympathetic with our situation.

was sympathetic with our situation. Thus it is written, *"Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted"* (Heb 2:17-18). Thus Jesus was sent into this world *"in the likeness of sinful flesh,"* bearing the image of the ones He came to save.

forever" (Heb 10:12). It is true, *"Christ SUFFERED FOR SINS, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God"* (1 Pet 3:18). Again it is written, *"Christ DIED FOR OUR SINS, according to the Scriptures"* (1 Cor 15:3). Galatians 1:4 reads, *"Who gave Himself FOR OUR SINS, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."*

Those who seek to gain benefit from

THE LAW'S DEMANDS FULFILLED IN US

"⁴That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." It was not enough to simply remove sin. There had to be a realization of true righteousness, for the lack of which we were condemned outside of Christ. The reason for the forgiveness of sin was our need for righteousness.

THE RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENT OF THE LAW

In summary, the *"righteousness requirement of the Law"* involves loving the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:37-39). Because we were *"delivered from the Law"* does not mean that requirement has been dropped! Because we have been forgiven *"all*

trespasses" does not mean those requirements have been obviated, and are of no concern to us. There are countless people who wear the name of Jesus who have no regard whatsoever for *"the righteous requirement of the Law."* They conduct their lives as though God had little interest in this matter. What the Law *"could not do"* did not remove the necessity of the righteousness it

demanded. God's nature still required that spotless and unimpeachable righteousness!

FULFILLED IN US

Essentially, the righteousness of the Law is realized in the remission of sins. Thus it is written, *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin"* (Rom 4:7-8). That cleansing is so thorough, that no vestige of guilt can be found in the person joined to the Lord. Upon the basis

of Christ's atoning death, God righteously remitted our sins.

The Confirming Walk

The fulfillment of the righteous requirement of the Law, however, does not end in remission. That forgiveness is confirmed in a godly walk: *"who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*^{NKJV} The Spirit will make clear to us that remission is not divorced from our conduct of life. While righteous conduct did not cause remission, it does evidence remission. Those who walk in

accord with the sinful nature are not in fellowship with God, and have no evidence their sins are forgiven. While this is not a matter on which we are to become judges of others, it is a factor to be considered in examining ourselves, *"whether we be in the faith"* (2 Cor 13:5).

The spirit will now elaborate on what it means to *"not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*^{NKJV} The seriousness of the considerations will become apparent in the strength of the various statements that are made.

TWO DISTINCT WAYS OF LIVING

"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." There are only two ways in which life can be lived. They are summarized as *"according to the flesh,"* and *"according to the Spirit."* These two manners cannot be lived out simultaneously. Other versions read, *"they that are after the flesh"* and *"they that are after the Spirit,"*^{KJV} *"Those who live according to the sinful nature"* and *"those who live in accordance with the Spirit,"*^{NIV} and *"Those who are dominated by the sinful nature,"* and *"those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit."*^{NLT} Let it be clear, there are no other types of living! Every person is living in one of these two ways: *"according to the flesh,"* or *"according to the Spirit."*

fellowship with the body of Christ. This is a manner of life that can easily associate with the world, adopting its manners and preferences.

Living *"according to the flesh"* can appear respectable. However, it opens the

whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things" (Phil 3:18-19). Notice the strength of these words.

- They are not simply enemies, but *"THE enemies of the cross of Christ."*
- They will be destroyed.
- Their god is their earthly appetites.
- The source of their boasting is really the source of shame.
- They *"set their mind on earthly things."*

Living *"according to the flesh"* can appear respectable. However, it opens the door to Satan because it closes the door to the Lord. Earthly appetites are primary, and temporal things are the objects of the individual's quest.

Let me be clear about this matter. There is not the slightest chance that such people will go to heaven. Any religious affiliation they claim is spurious, for God has no children of this type. If these traits exist, they must be forthrightly abandoned, and that with great zeal.

LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

This is a life driven by natural impulses. It may not be a life of gross immorality, but it is a life without God. The dictates of *"the natural man,"* which cannot receive the things of God (1 Cor 2:14), are honored and pursued.

This world is the center of a life lived according to the flesh. Time outweighs eternity, and thus heavenly things are of little or no consequence. Living *"according to the flesh"* does not require the Word of God. Therefore, those so living can go long seasons without the slightest exposure to Scripture. Such a life also sees no need for

door to Satan because it closes the door to the Lord. Earthly appetites are primary, and temporal things are the objects of the individual's quest.

Notice how the Spirit states this condition: *"those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh."* Their thoughts gravitate to the earth, and their minds are preoccupied with natural things. Elsewhere the Spirit says such individuals are opponents of Christ's cross. *"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and*

This is the kind of mind-set Jesus described when He once said to Peter, *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men"* (Matt 16:23). I have no doubt but that Jesus repeats these words regularly in many respectable assemblies! There is altogether too much talk about the views and things of men, and too little about the *"wonderful works of God"* and His *"exceeding great and precious promises."* Such people are walking *"as mere men"*^{NASB} (1 Cor 3:3). Their minds do not get off of the earth, but remain nailed there like Sisera's head.

LIVING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

Living according to the Spirit is being moved along by the influence of the Holy Spirit. He is not quenched or grieved, and the “things of the Spirit of God” are desired (1 Cor 2:14). The heart eagerly hears “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). These are “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14), being easily directed in the way of life.

Those who live “according to the Spirit” set their minds on “the things of the Spirit.” This does not mean they seek to know more things about the Spirit

Himself, merely seeking to obtain more information about the Spirit. Rather, they devote themselves to the things He reveals and ministers. They “set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth,” and “seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1-2). They set their mind to “be filled with the Spirit,” and to let “the Word of Christ dwell” in them “richly” (Eph 5:19; 1 Col 3:16). They are preoccupied with another world, and repulsed by this present evil world.

The “things of the Spirit” are the realities He reveals, and the blessings that He ministers. This includes the marvelous “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9). The abounding hope He ministers is in this category (Rom 15:13). There is the pervading “joy of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6). These, and kindred matters, are the subjects of thought in those who live “according to the Spirit.” They are engrossed with the things with which the Spirit is occupied. His agenda has not become theirs, and they find great delight in the presence and will of God.

TWO DISTINCT MIND-SETS

“⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Because of the devastating effects of modern religion, there is little concern about minding the things of the flesh. Spiritual mindedness is actually scoffed at in many churches. Not a few of God’s people have been chided for being so heavenly minded they are of no conceivable earthly good. I cannot begin to tell you how often some stunted Christian has admonished me to “lighten up,” and become more casual in my stance of life. Serious and sober believers are at a premium these days. The institutional gurus have dulled the senses of the people, so they scarcely have thought upon the expressions of this text. Indeed, I should not be surprised if vast multitudes have never even heard this text, even though it has a most alarming tone and arresting message.

TO BE CARNALLY MINDED

Other versions read as follows. “For the mind **set on** the flesh is death,”^{NASB} “The mind of sinful man is death,”^{NIV} “**To set** the mind on the flesh is death,”^{NRSV} “For the mind of the flesh **is** death,”^{ASV} “For the **wisdom** of the flesh is death,”^{DARBYS} “If your sinful nature **controls your mind**, there is death,”^{NLT} and “And **human nature** has nothing to look forward to but death.”^{NJB} There should be no need to affirm the seriousness of the text. It breathes of sobriety and solemnity.

Carnally Minded

There is no possible way to derive the meaning of this phrase from the original language. This is a classic example of the manner in which the Holy Spirit teaches us. He uses words, but often assigns to them His own unique meaning. The word translated “carnally,” or “according to the flesh,” is σαρκός, which primarily means the muscular part that covers the bones of

It should not surprise us to find this kind of mind dominating the religious scene. The world is actually being consulted by religious men as though it contained the reservoir of wisdom. Its academic approval is eagerly sought, and its values embraced. Just how serious is a condition like this?

It Is Death!

The Spirit registers Divine disapproval of all carnal, or fleshly, mindedness. No person dominated by “the fashion of this world” (1 Cor 7:31) can walk with God! To be “carnally minded IS death!” By this, the Spirit means such a mind separates the individual from God. It removes sensitivity and tenderness toward God, and renders it impossible to hear Him who is “speaking from heaven” (Heb 12:25).

As soon as people begin to think in harmony with “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), they begin to die toward God. A distance forms between the soul and God, as the one with a carnal mind moves into the domain dominated by Satan himself.

a human or animal body, the physical body as a whole body. However, in this text, “carnal,” or “fleshly,” is applied to the mind.

This is a mind placed on life in the body-life in this world. As long as men pursue the path of nature, governed by what they see and feel, they are actually falling headlong into death. Chiefly, this has to do with the “wisdom of this world” (1 Cor 1:20) and the “wisdom of men” (1 Cor 2:5). It involves having the world’s sense of values, and maintaining its priorities.

As soon as people begin to think in harmony with “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), they begin to die toward God. A distance forms between the soul and God, as the one with a carnal mind moves into the domain dominated by Satan himself. Such a mind is impervious to Divine wooing, and thus incapable of receiving from the Lord.

Mark this well! When you are among people whose mind is ruled by the flesh—people who “mind earthly things”—the things of God will suddenly appear out of place. Such people are

repulsed by a heavenly emphasis, or conversation that is governed by the consideration of heavenly things.

The point of our text is that salvation delivers people from such a condition. To be found in that circumstance, therefore, betrays a lost state. Those who ignorantly defend what they call “carnal Christians” need to give heed to this verse—if, indeed, they are capable of doing so. If “*death*” is the state of those who are “*carnally minded*,” then such a mind is a sinful mind, for “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom 6:23). Note, carnal mindedness does not lead to death, but IS death! It is

anything that appealed to the flesh. There was not a syllable of His powerful words that appealed to those having no fundamental interest in eternal things and a vibrant fellowship with the Living God.

Faith cannot reside in a carnal mind, nor can hope and peace. Such a mind repels the Spirit and invites Satan and the hosts of darkness to take control.

TO BE SPIRITUALLY MINDED

What a remarkable contrast! “*But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*” Other versions read, “*the mind set on the*

mind that has been “*illuminated*” (Heb 10:32) and “*enlightened*” (Heb 6:4). Spiritually minded people live by every word of God. They savor the things of God, talk about them, and hunger for them. They are their happiest when the things of God are clear to them. They live for the world that is to come, and anticipate dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.

Life and Peace

Every version reads the same way: “*life and peace.*” This is the result of being “*spiritually minded*”—of having a mind that is “*controlled by the Spirit.*” “*Life*” involves reciprocity to God. It is thriving in the presence of the Lord, knowing Him, and delighting in Him. This is “*eternal life*,” and is the ultimate objective realized in Christ Jesus. As it is written, “*And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life*” (1 John 2:25). This is why Jesus is come, to give “*us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life*” (1 John 5:20).

Faith cannot reside in a carnal mind, nor can hope and peace. Such a mind repels the Spirit and invites Satan and the hosts of darkness to take control.

separation from God! It does not merely cause, or lead to, separation, but evidences that the separation has already taken place. That is precisely what the text says. “*To be carnally minded IS death.*”

A Practical Consideration

There is a current practice of catering to the “*carnal mind*” as though this was a valid means of reaching the lost. In some circles, “seeker friendly” services and small informal “cell groups” are in vogue. While there may be some commendable aspects to these approaches, it appears to me they represent more of a compromise than a godly initiative.

If “*to be carnally minded IS death*,” then God’s people do well to exercise themselves to avoid any encouragement for the entrance of such a mind. Neither our formal nor our informal studies should leave the door ajar for the entrance of the flesh. If you will consider the words of Jesus, you will note the total absence of

Spirit is life and peace,”^{NASB} “*the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace,*”^{NIV} “*to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace,*”^{NRSV} “*But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.*”^{NLT}

If this verse is true, and it surely is, then spiritually minded people are the ONLY people who are alive to God! These have minds “*controlled by the Spirit*,” a thought some cannot embrace. Yet, such a mind has been yielded to the Holy Spirit, submitted for faith, strength, and Divine tutelage. The influences of the Spirit have not been quenched, and His gracious leading has not been resisted. The Spirit can “control” the pure in heart without imposing His will upon them.

The “*spiritual mind*” is the mind in which Divine fellowship can be realized. It is where the Law of God can be written, and “*the spirit of wisdom and revelation*” can be experienced (Eph 1:17). This is the

This life is not conferred independently of spiritual mindedness. Those whose minds are riveted to the earth need not tell us how they have eternal life. If being spiritually minded IS life, and being carnally minded IS death, then those whose minds dwell upon the earth are not alive to God. It makes no difference what profession they make.

The spiritually minded person possesses a peace that “*passes all understanding*” (Phil 4:7). It undergirds the soul and keeps the individual from wavering (Phil 4:7). This is a peace that can actually “*rule in your hearts*” (Col 3:15), bringing personal stability in an unstable world. These two qualities flow out from being spiritually minded.

THE UNCHANGING BENT OF THE CARNAL MIND

“⁷ *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*” The Spirit will now elaborate on WHY the “*carnal mind*” is death. He

knows men will attempt to justify their carnal mindedness, but will have none of their feeble attempts to do so. He will speak candidly with us, unveiling the nature of “*flesh*,” the “*carnal mind*,” and

the “*natural man.*” There will be no provision for such a mind among God’s people—or anyone else, for that matter. It is condemned by God because of its nature, and what it compels men to do.

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

In keeping with the struggle introduced in the seventh chapter, the “*carnal mind*” is the expression of the “*old man*,” or “*the flesh*,” in which dwells “*no good thing*” (7:18). To be “*carnally minded*” is to be dominated by that “*old*,” and totally unacceptable, nature.

In order to confirm why “*no condemnation*” can only exist in Christ Jesus, the Spirit will reveal three aspects of “*the carnal mind*.” Remember, this is the mind that is not “*controlled by the Spirit*.” It is the mind that functions without regard to the God of heaven.

THE CARNAL MIND IS ENMITY AGAINST GOD

Here is an unusually strong affirmation. Other versions read, “*the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God*,”^{NASB} “*the sinful mind is hostile to God*,”^{NIV} “*the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God*,”^{DARBYS} “*the mind of the flesh is opposite to God*,”^{BBE} “*the sinful nature is always hostile to God*,”^{NLT} and “*the outlook of disordered human nature is opposed to God*.”^{NJB}

This is the mind that is NOT motivated by the Holy Spirit—the opposite of a spiritual mind. It is the mind that perceives and thinks without God at the center. It is the mind set of the “*old man*,” which is crucified with Christ.

Such a mind is hostile, warlike, and belligerent against God. It contends with God, refusing to accept His ways, and fights aggressively against them.

The word “*enmity*” comes from the Greek word *ἐχθρα*, and means hatred, animosity, and discord. Thayer’s lexicon defines it as “*the CAUSE of enmity*.” This is the mind that actually alienates a person from God, causing him to become God’s enemy. This mind reasons against God, and is against His being. It is the mind that seeks to get rid of God by pushing Him away from all considerations. When the Word or will of God is affirmed, “*the carnal mind*” aggressively fights against it. It finds a reason to denounce God and His Word. It will question the Scripture, deny its authenticity, and find a reason to negate what it says. It will do this in the name of

self-preference, or what it conceives to be the best course. It will even appeal to scholarship, higher learning, and expediency. But in the last analysis, its objections flow from its nature. The “*carnal mind*” is antagonism against God.

This mind will quarrel with God’s judgments, even getting angry when God does something that is not conceived as right. It hates what God loves and loves what God hates.

THE CARNAL MIND IS NOT SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF GOD

Here is a recalcitrant mind, one that does not bow to the will of God. Other versions read, “*for it does not subject itself to the law of God*,”^{NASB} and “*It does not submit to God’s law*.”^{NIV} Wherever the Word of God is not honored, preferred, and obeyed, “*the carnal mind*” is in control. This mind does not merely admit it has failed to surrender to God’s law, it refuses to do so. This is the nature of “*the carnal mind*.”

THE CARNAL MIND CANNOT BE SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF GOD

The Spirit now shows us why we must be born again—why a “*new heart*” must be received. You cannot train “*the carnal mind*” to be submissive to God and His Law. **It CANNOT be subject to the Law of God!** If men walk in the flesh, they, by that very circumstance, CANNOT love and obey God! The “*carnal mind*,” or “*mind of the flesh*,” “**IS NOT EVEN ABLE**” to be subject to the Divine will.^{NASB} It not only will not, it CANNOT—“*it cannot do so*.”^{NIV} ! It is not only steeled against the Lord, but zealously fights against Him.

If God does not write His law upon the hearts of men and put it into their minds, they CANNOT obey Him, or render acceptable service to Him. It is important to note this writing is done on the “*new heart*,” given to us in rebirth. If men who

profess Christ choose to live by the impulses of the old nature, they make themselves incapable of loving and submitting to God’s Law.

All who are outside of Christ are in an impossible situation! They, by their very nature, are hostile against God. If they do not appear to be so, it is only because they have not yet confronted God. Even when “*the carnal mind*” is cultured by Divine ordinances, and surrounded by countless benefits, it will go so far as to kill the Son of God! It will not balk at beating the Apostles, stoning Stephen, or driving Paul from the city. You cannot make the things of God attractive to the

The carnal mind will quarrel with God’s judgments, even getting angry when God does something that is not conceived as right. It hates what God loves and loves what God hates.

carnal mind. Only the Holy Spirit, working through the marvelous Gospel of Christ, can convince alienated people they are precisely that—alienated—and in need of a Savior. Wherever there is a genuine inclination toward God, the Holy Spirit has been at work.

This solemn warning is necessary because believers still contend with “*the carnal mind*.” That is the mind that controls the lower nature, and to which Satan has access. The contention is fierce and consistent. Lest we attach little significance to the warfare within, the Spirit shows us the results of yielding to the flesh. It puts us at odds with God, and brings us into war with Him.

WHEN IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD

⁸ ***So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*** Here is the spiritually logical conclusion to the facts that have been adduced. Do not forget how powerfully the case has been stated.

- ❑ Those living after the flesh set their minds on the flesh (v 5).
- ❑ To be carnally minded is death (v 6).
- ❑ The carnal mind is enmity against God (v 7a).
- ❑ The carnal mind is not subject to the Law of God (v 7b).
- ❑ It is not possible for the carnal mind to be subject to God's law (v 7c).

Other versions read, *"Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God,"* ^{NIV} *"So that those who are in the flesh are not able to give pleasure to God,"* ^{BBE} *"those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God,"* ^{NLT} and *"those who live by their natural inclinations can never be pleasing to God."* ^{NJB}

THOSE WHO ARE IN THE FLESH

Those who are *"in the flesh"* are those who are directed by natural appetites, not spiritual ones. Rather than abstaining from *"fleshly lusts that war against the soul"* (1 Pet 2:11), they culture those appetites. They follow the dictates of nature, and are **not** being led by the Holy Spirit.

Not Limited to Those Out of Christ

While this verse does apply to those outside of Christ, it is not limited to them. Indeed, that is not the emphasis of this verse. Paul has already acknowledged that nothing good can be found in the flesh (7:18)—even the *"flesh,"* or sinful nature, of the one who is reconciled to God. We have been exposed to the reality of inner warfare—the struggle of the flesh and the Spirit (Gal 5:17). If it was impossible for the redeemed to succumb to the flesh, it would not be possible to struggle against it. **Wherever there is struggle, there is vulnerability.**

The strong admonitions to reckon

ourselves as alive to God (6:11), and yield ourselves to God and our members as instruments of righteousness (6:13,16,19) confirm spirituality is not an automatic process. In the context before us, *"those who are in the flesh"* are the professed believers who **do not** reckon themselves to be dead to sin and alive to God. These are the ones who **do not** yield themselves to God, or yield their faculties as servants of righteousness. These **do not** take seriously the war within, **do not** put on the whole armor of God, and thus **do not** stand against the wiles of the devil. What can be said of such people?

Those who yield to the flesh, indulging its appetites time after time, must be told this. They must be apprized of the fact God will receive nothing from them, nor can He be pleased with them. Even their imagined "righteousness" is nothing more than "filthy rags" before the God of heaven

CANNOT PLEASE GOD

Those who are *"controlled by the sinful nature CANNOT please God."* ^{NIV} It simply is not possible for them to do so! Those who yield to the flesh, indulging its appetites time after time, must be told this. They must be apprized of the fact God will receive nothing from them, nor can He be pleased with them. Even their imagined *"righteousness"* is nothing more than *"filthy rags"* before the God of heaven (Isa 64:6).

Everyone Yielding to the Flesh

All who yield themselves to the flesh, obeying its lusts, make themselves reprehensible to God. They can make no claim to grace, for the grace of God teaches us to *"deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,"* living *"soberly, righteously, and godly in this present*

world" (Tit 2:12). ***Those who are in the flesh" are those who are NOT denying those lusts, and are NOT living godly in this world.*** All such people *"cannot please God."*

If we should be tempted to think pleasing God is not a critical matter, we must remember we are told we *"ought to walk and to please God"* (1 Thess 4:1). In fact, we are to *"walk worthy of the Lord unto ALL pleasing."* The very power of God is devoted to enabling us to do this very thing (Col 1:10-11). However, Divine power or not, should we choose to follow the dictates of the flesh, we will not be able to please God. It should be apparent that no one displeasing to the Lord should imagine they will be gathered to the Lord in that state.

This is yet another way of saying, *"without faith, it is impossible to please God"* (Heb 11:6).

An Example of the Effects

The alienating effects of being controlled by the flesh is seen in our Lord's remark to the Jews, who were set against Him. *"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?"* (John 5:44). **Their preference for the honor of men rendered them incapable of believing on Christ!** In that state, they could not please God in the fundamental matter of believing on His Son. Only when they were freed from that condition would they be able to believe!

Thus the real nature of *"the flesh"* has been set before us. This is what we are without Christ, related only to Adam. It is what we are on our own. If this were suddenly to be perceived by the professed church, there would be such a jarring revival it would boggle the minds of the beholders! How vital it is to see this.

ONE MORE THING

It should be noted that the inability of those in the flesh to please God does not exclude them from the responsibility to do

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

so. No person should imagine their natural incapacity for pleasing God means they are to be content with their state. God has provided a means through which we can please God, doing things that are even *“well pleasing”* in his sight.

This inability to please God can be overcome by believing and obeying the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit will aid us in these efforts. Salvation provides an effective remedy for the situation. Further, God will not hold him guiltless

that refuses this remedy, choosing to depend upon his natural resources. If God has provided a solution to sin, woe to the person who chooses to refuse it! God will not hold him guiltless! His salvation is too great to excuse those who reject it.

THE INDISPENSABILITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“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.” Having duly warned us of the wretchedness of *“the flesh,”* the Spirit now returns to the matter of our salvation, regeneration, or being made righteous. He will confirm the essential difference in us in not owing to what we do, but what we possess. There is something very different about those who are in Christ Jesus.

YOU ARE NOT IN THE FLESH

“But you are not in the flesh.” This is a Divine commentary on the statement, *“But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me,”* and *“Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me”* (7:17,20). It is one thing for a variant law to be found in us (7:23), it is quite another for us to be *“in the flesh.”* It is one thing to acknowledge nothing good dwells in our flesh (7:18), it is something else to be *“in the flesh.”*

To be *“in the flesh”* is not the same as being *“in the body”* (2 Cor 5:6; Heb 13:3). It is not simply being in a house of clay (2 Cor 4:7). We know this is the case because the Spirit has just said, *“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (8:8). To be *“in the flesh,”* in this sense, is to be under the domination of the unregenerate part—our natural self.

Other versions read, *“however, are controlled not by the sinful nature,”* ^{NIV} and *“You, however, live not by your natural inclinations.”* ^{NJB} As confirmed by the sixth chapter, in Christ we have been liberated from servitude to the flesh (6:18,22). We have also been *“delivered from the Law”* which held us prisoners

until faith came (7:6; Gal 3:23).

The flesh is no longer the domain in which we live. We have been raised up with Christ to occupy higher and more profitable realms. We have a body, but are *“not in the flesh.”* We wrestle with sinful inclinations, but are *“not in the flesh.”* God does not behold or receive us *“in the flesh.”* There is a higher domain.

Being “in the Spirit,” able to resist the demands of the flesh, is evidence that the Spirit does dwell within us. Where that evidence is lacking, there can be no claim of possessing the Holy Spirit. You cannot have the effects without first possessing the appointed cause.

IN THE SPIRIT

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.” Ordinarily, the Holy Spirit is said to be *“in”* us. (8:11; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 3:16). But here, we are said to be *“in the Spirit.”*

Elsewhere it is written that we have *“begun in the Spirit”* (Gal 3:3). If we *“walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh”* (Gal 6:16). We *“live in the Spirit,”* and are to also *“walk in the Spirit”* (Gal 5:25). Prayer is to be made *“in the Spirit”* (Eph 6:18), and we love the brethren *“in the Spirit”* (Col 1:8). You will recall that John, on the Isle of Patmos, was *“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”* (Rev 1:10). What does it mean to be *“in the Spirit?”*

This is synonymous with being *“controlled by the Spirit”* (8:6, NIV).

From a more general perspective, it is the same as being *“in Christ Jesus”* (8:1). To put it another way, those who are *“in the flesh”* are attached to the earth, while those who are *“in the Spirit”* are attached to heaven. To be *“in the Spirit”* is to gather your resources from Him and be directed by Him. It is to have the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly (Col 3:16) and enjoy communion with Him (2 Cor 13:14).

The state of being *“in the Spirit”* was initiated by God Himself. When we were raised up to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places, we were put into the Spirit (Eph 2:6). This is what brought life to us—being put into the Spirit. Our life continues as we walk in the Spirit. Thus it is written, *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”* (Gal 5:25).

THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU

“... if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.” We are not *“in the Spirit”* merely by profession. Nor, indeed, is our standing to be considered the result of a Divine decree, as though there was nothing personal about it. Our text does not take being *“in the Spirit”* for granted, and neither should we. We are NOT in the flesh, but ARE in the Spirit *“if in fact the Spirit of God dwells”* in us. ^{RSV} Being *“in the Spirit,”* able to resist the demands of the flesh, is evidence that the Spirit **does** dwell within us. Where that evidence is lacking, there can be no claim of possessing the Holy Spirit. You cannot have the effects without first possessing the appointed cause.

The Indwelling Spirit

Carefully note HOW the circumstance is represented. He does not say we are *“in*

the Spirit” if we have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nor, indeed, does He say we are “*in the Spirit*” if we have been immersed. He does not say we are “*in the Spirit*” if we are members of the right church. The blessing of being “*in the Spirit*” is conditioned upon the Holy Spirit DWELLING in us. Alternate versions read, “*if the Spirit of God lives in you,*”^{NIV} “*since the Spirit of God has made a home in you.*”^{NJB}

The word “*dwelt*” comes from a word used to describe a husband and wife living together. It refers to a relationship, not a mere presence. **The individual in whom the Spirit dwells is not quenching, grieving, or resisting that Holy Spirit.**

All such people, and ONLY such

Personhood. The second (“*Spirit of God*”) reveals His Person and work are related to the purpose of God. The third (“*Spirit of Christ*”) confirms the indissoluble affiliation of the Spirit with the Son of God. The Holy Spirit, therefore, must never be thought of as independent from God’s “*eternal purpose*” or Christ’s redemptive work. Further, the Spirit personally dwells within believers, but is not devoted to their agenda.

Some who do not believe the Holy Spirit dwells within those who are in Christ say “*the Spirit of Christ*” is the attitude or character of Christ, and not the Spirit Himself. “*The Spirit*” is mentioned nineteen times in the eighth chapter of Romans. It is beyond all question that they have reference to the Holy Spirit Himself. He joins the Father

bodies by HIS SPIRIT that dwelleth in you” (8:11).

- ❑ “. . . but if ye through **THE SPIRIT** do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (8:13).
- ❑ “For as many as are led by **THE SPIRIT** of God, they are the sons of God” (8:14).
- ❑ “. . . but ye have received **THE SPIRIT** of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (8:15).
- ❑ “**THE SPIRIT** itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (8:16).
- ❑ “. . . ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of **THE SPIRIT**” (8:23).
- ❑ “Likewise **THE SPIRIT** also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but **THE SPIRIT** itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (8:26).
- ❑ “And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of **THE SPIRIT**, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (8:27).

Only those motivated and directed by the Holy Spirit are actually pleasing God. The unhindered, unquenched, and active presence of the Holy Spirit is essential to pleasing God. If He is not working in the individual, the flesh, by default, assumes the control of the individual.

It should require nothing more than the exposure of our minds to the text to confirm the Person of the Spirit is the subject. If men are unable to see that, it is because their hearts are hard and their minds are blinded.

The postulate of the text is that walking “*according to the Spirit*” (v 4), setting our minds on “*the things of the Spirit*” (v 5), and being “*in the Spirit*” (v 9), require the PRESENCE of the Spirit within. All of these activities are too aggressive and extensive for the “*flesh*,” or the “*natural man*.” Nature simply is not equal to heaven’s demands.

Again, this affirmation is significant. “*But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*” This will be developed at length in the remainder of this chapter. It is enough to say here that believers must not be casual in their acceptance of this affirmation.

people, are NOT in the flesh. Those in whom the Holy Spirit is not dwelling ARE in the flesh, and consequently unacceptable to God. Only those motivated and directed by the Holy Spirit are actually pleasing God. The unhindered, unquenched, and active presence of the Holy Spirit is essential to pleasing God. If He is not working in the individual, the flesh, by default, assumes the control of the individual.

HAVING NOT THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

“*Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*” In this verse, there are three separate references to the Holy Spirit: “*Spirit*,” “*Spirit of God*,” and “*Spirit of Christ*.” The first (“*Spirit*”) accentuates His Divine

and the Son in salvation.

- ❑ “. . . who walk not after the flesh, but after **THE SPIRIT**” (8:1).
- ❑ “. . . **THE SPIRIT** of life in Christ Jesus” (8:2).
- ❑ “. . . who walk not after the flesh, but after **THE SPIRIT**” (8:4).
- ❑ “. . . they that are after **THE SPIRIT** the things of **THE SPIRIT**” (8:5).
- ❑ “*But ye are not in the flesh, but in THE SPIRIT, if so be that THE SPIRIT of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not THE SPIRIT of Christ, he is none of His*” (8:9).
- ❑ “. . . **THE SPIRIT** is life because of righteousness” (8:10).
- ❑ “*But if THE SPIRIT of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal*

THE BODY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

“¹⁰ *And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the*

Spirit is life because of righteousness.” To this point, our

bodies have been identified as the seat of the “*flesh*,” or sinful nature. They are the

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

visible evidence that our regeneration is not yet complete. Further, the body is something that must be subjected—made subordinate to the will of the Lord (1 Cor 9:27). It is essential, therefore, that we have a proper view of our bodies.

IF CHRIST IS IN YOU

The previous verse refers to the “*Spirit of God*” dwelling in us. Now we read of Christ Himself being in us. Essentially, both references refer to the same thing. Like God, Christ is in us “*through the Spirit*” (Eph 2:22). The Holy Spirit is called “*the Spirit of Christ*” because through His ministry we realize the indwelling Christ. Elsewhere it is said that God strengthens us “*with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*”^{NKJV} (Eph 3:16-17). It is understood, therefore, that Christ “*is in you*” through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this indwelling is realized through Jesus manifesting, or revealing Himself to us (John 14:23).

The Holy Spirit does not assume Christ is in us. He presents this teaching in such a manner as to provoke personal examination. This perfectly corresponds with the exhortation found in Second Corinthians 13:5. “*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*”^{NIV}

THE BODY IS DEAD

If Christ is, in fact, “*in you*,” what is the result? “*THE BODY IS DEAD BECAUSE OF SIN.*” This is **not** the “*body of sin*” mentioned earlier (6:6). That referred to the whole of the sinful nature. This refers to our fleshly bodies in which the “*law of sin*” resides. The affirmation: they are “**dead**.” They have been purchased, and do not belong to us (1 Cor 6:19). Because of this, they are called “*the members of Christ*” (1 Cor 6:15). But this is in prospect of the resurrection, the time when Christ will “*change*” our “*vile bodies*,” that they might be fashioned like unto His glorious body (Phil 3:20-21). Only then will our bodies be acceptable in glory.

The body is “*dead because of sin.*” Although our consciences have been purged (Heb 9:14), and our hearts and souls purified (Acts 15:9; 1 Pet 1:22), that is not the case with our bodies. The remnants of sin have not been removed from them, and they have not yet been purified. The Lord can, at His discretion, heal the body, but it remains a “*vile body*,” healed or not. They have been “*washed with pure water*” (Heb 10:22), but are not themselves pure.

The body is “*dead*” in at least two

The remnants of sin have not been removed from our bodies, and they have not yet been purified. The Lord can, at His discretion, heal the body, but it remains a “vile body,” healed or not. They have been “washed with pure water,” but are not themselves pure.

ways. First, it has no immediate association with God. Second, it has been assigned to death; i.e., we will eventually be separated from it, either in death or by transformation at the coming of the Lord. Until then, it is appropriately called “*the body of this death*” (7:24). It is a frail “*earthen vessel*” (2 Cor 4:7), and cannot enter into the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50).

The point of this teaching is that the body, together with its appetites, cannot be the center of our lives. God is alive, and is the “*God of the living.*” Those who follow the dictates of the flesh give more glory to the body than is appropriate. For them, the visible transcends the invisible, and the unseen is forfeited in favor of the seen. On the other hand, the person who lives by the Spirit is described in these words. “*Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and*

eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:16-18). That is a spiritual confession that “*the body is dead because of sin.*” It is unworthy of emphasis, and cannot be the source of glory.

THE SPIRIT IS LIFE

“*... but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*” The source of our real life is not within ourselves, but in the Holy Spirit. Some translations do ascribe “*spirit*” to the human spirit. “*yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness,*”^{NASB} and “*yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness,*”^{NIV} “*your spirits are alive because of righteousness.*”^{RSV} However, even in this case, the life has been caused by the “*Spirit of life*,” which was affirmed in verse two.

Jesus said, “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing*” (John 6:63). That is the sense of our text. Whereas sin had rendered the body “*dead*,” the Holy Spirit had brought life to the human spirit. This transaction has been accomplished “*because of righteousness.*”

This is a most marvelous declaration. The imputation of righteousness is the very subject that is being expounded. It is that righteousness, imputed to us because of our faith, that brings life to us. That is what brings Divine recognition and sustenance to the individual. Without that righteousness, the human spirit remains “*dead in trespasses and sins.*”

This correlates with the rest of Scripture which consistently associates life with the Holy Spirit. “*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 6:8). “*And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them*” (Rev 11:11). “*Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*” (2 Cor 3:3).

The perspective of the text is this: **Sin brought about our death in trespasses and sins, but the Holy Spirit defeated that death, bringing**

us life that is honored in heaven. Life triumphed over death in our spirits. That life was inaugurated when the righteousness of God was imputed, or

credited, to us. It was at that point that death was overturned, and we were made accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6). The Holy Spirit administered that life.

MORTAL BODIES ACTIVATED FOR GOD

“¹¹ 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.” The Spirit will now show us how salvation addresses the matter of the body, which is *“dead because of sin.”* Although it cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, and is consigned to the grave, yet the Spirit will not allow us to ignore it. It must be brought into the matter of our salvation. The manner in which this is done is glorious.

IF THE SPIRIT DWELLS IN YOU

Here the Holy Spirit is identified once again with God: *“the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead.”* This confirms that the Holy Spirit, and not the human spirit, is the subject of verse ten. It also corroborates that the Holy Spirit, and not the attitude of Jesus, is the reference of verse nine.

Again, the reference is not merely to a temporary presence of the Holy Spirit, or some sort of epochal experience that is here proclaimed. We are speaking of God’s Spirit *“dwelling,”* or taking up residence, in the child of God. Because we are sons, *“God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father”* (Gal 4:6).

The life that He will minister is nothing less than the resurrection life of Jesus. That is why He is referred to as *“the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead.”* That is fortified by the continued exposition, *“He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life. . .”*

This is nothing less than *“the power of His resurrection,”* eagerly sought by insightful believers (Phil 3:10). It is also the very power that is *“toward those who believe”* (Eph 1:20-23).

GOD WILL GIVE LIFE TO YOUR MORTAL BODIES

These are the bodies that are *“dead*

them (1 Cor 6:19-20). Even though the body is *“vile”* and a source of constant humiliation, yet it is *“for the Lord,”* to be used in His service (1 Cor 6:13).

By quickening our *“mortal bodies,”* the Holy Spirit brings them into spiritual life. They are to us what the Arabians were to Solomon. Even though they were

By quickening our *“mortal bodies,”* the Holy Spirit brings them into spiritual life. They are to us what the Arabians were to Solomon. Even though they were technically his enemies, and did not reside in the promised land, yet they brought tribute to him because of his superiority.

because of sin.” Here, death does not refer to the grave, and this *“life”* does not refer to the resurrection of the dead, or the graves yielding up their dead. While it is certainly true that *“this mortal must put on immortality”* (1 Cor 15:54), that is not the subject of this passage. Our text speaks of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, wherein the remnants of our old nature are subdued, and our members are yielded as servants unto righteousness.

Herein is a most marvelous work! Although our bodies are the weakest part of our constitution, and are *“dead because of sin,”* yet they can be employed in service to God. Through the Spirit, we can glorify God in our bodies, which do not belong to us, but to the Lord who bought

technically his enemies, and did not reside in the promised land, yet they brought tribute to him because of his superiority. It is written, *“And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon”* (2 Chron 9:14).

The Spirit gives life to our bodies in the sense of making them pay tribute to God. Our tongues are employed for God ((Psa 66:17). Our hands are lifted up to the Lord in holiness (1 Tim 2:8). Rather than being swift to shed blood (Rom 3:15), our feet now bring the glad tidings of the Gospel of peace (Rom 10:15). Now, by the grace of God, Christ can be *“magnified in my body, whether by life or by death”* (Phil 1:20). That circumstance is a powerful witness to the power of God.

CONCLUSION

You see what a large text we have covered. The Holy Spirit has pointed to the most difficult and taxing part of

spiritual life—inner warfare—and has affirmed it proves we are not condemned. We are not condemned because we have

lost our appetite for sin, and hate its intrusions into our minds. We are not condemned because our sins have been

Even though the believer struggles with evil within, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.--by Given O. Blakely

remitted and we are now awaiting deliverance from “the body of this death.” We are not condemned because we recognize our natural wretchedness, and refuse to acknowledge the cries of our sinful flesh. Grace has taught us to reject the appeals of the sinful nature, and to eagerly pursue holiness, without which no

man shall see the Lord.

All of these marvelous benefits have flowed from the wonderful works of God. In the last analysis, He did what “*the Law could not do.*” He not only raised Jesus, He raised us also. He has provided the help essential to walk in the Spirit and

not in the flesh. Although we acknowledge our imperfection, it is not credited to us, for we have been made accepted in Christ Jesus. These are things that could not be accomplished by Law. Only God’s grace, his only begotten Son, and His blessed Holy Spirit could accomplish them. Praise God for His marvelous works!

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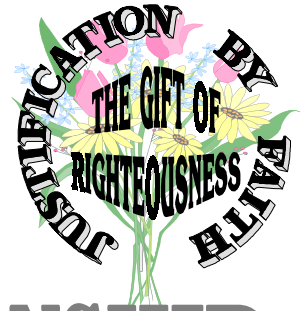
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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 25



THE HOLY SPIRIT and SONSHIP

8:12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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.— Romans 8:12-17 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

In some *Christian* circles, the subject of the Holy Spirit has been hotly debated. These contentions involve theological positions of extreme opposition. On one side of the theological pendulum, some choose to make the Holy Spirit and His work their emphasis. On the other side, some affirm the Spirit is strictly confined to the text of Scripture, never working directly with the believer. Additionally, all sorts of claims are being made concerning the work of the Holy Spirit upon the individual. Key expressions like "slain in the Spirit," "the baptism of the Holy Ghost," and "the Spirit works only through the Word," though never used a single time in Scripture, are treated as though they came from God, and are used to divide the body of Christ. It appears as

though many believers are very rarely subjected to the Apostolic doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

It is tragic that the Christian community has chosen to debate the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, rather than availing themselves of His indispensable ministry.

The text before us affirms the role of the Spirit in readying us to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He effectively leads us in this preparation, which consists of subduing the flesh and culturing our spirit. The need for His ministry was introduced in the seventh chapter and the first part of the eighth chapter. We need help!

AN AREA WHERE WE ARE POWERLESS

In summary, we are in a situation over which we have no power. The flesh inserts itself into our thoughts, and we are unable to stop it from doing so. We are forced to do battle with a nature we desire was not even there. How the words ring, so to speak, in my ears: "*For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do . . . 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 . . . I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good . . . But I see another law in my members, warring*

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. **NO LONGER** DEBTORS TO THE FLESH (8:12)
- II. WHEN **SPIRITUAL DEATH** IS INEVITABLE (8:13a)
- III. WHEN **SPIRITUAL LIFE** IS CERTAIN (8:13b)
- IV. "AS MANY," AND **ONLY** "AS MANY" (8:14)
- V. WHAT YOU DID **NOT** RECEIVE (8:15a)
- VI. WHAT YOU **DID** RECEIVE (8:15b)
- VII. THE **WITNESSING** SPIRIT (8:16)
- VIII. THE **STATUS** OF THE SONS OF GOD (8:17a)
- IX. THE BIG "**IF**" (8:17b)

against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (7:15,18,19,21,23).

Where is the believer who cannot identify with these words? What soul is there who is joined to the Lord who has not felt the tug of the flesh, and engaged in a hearty effort to neutralize its power? And where is the individual who can boast of final victory in these areas?

While we do not have to give in to that nature, we do have to confront it. Divine power is required in this effort. That is where the blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit comes in.

THE LIABILITY OF "THE FLESH"

Let the children of God take the matter of "the flesh" too lightly, the Spirit expounds on its nature, and how it affects

those following its dictates. Already we have been reminded "no good thing" can be found in our flesh (7:18). Ponder the strength of the Spirit's words.

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh . . . For to be carnally minded is death . . . the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be . . . those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (8:5,6,7,8). Those words are like a Divine trumpet blast, piercing into the heart of man, dividing the spirit from the soul, and unveiling the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12). No person can receive the Spirit's diagnosis of the flesh and remain indifferent to the solemn obligation of subduing it.

The absence of condemnation is only confirmed in those who "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (8:1,4). The flesh in its totality has been rejected by God, and nothing that emits from it is accepted by Him. Those are just the facts in the case, and they are sobering ones.

HOW CAN WE BE VICTORIOUS?

How can we be victorious in our battle with the flesh? How can we be successful in walking in the Spirit? Is all of this to be accomplished by mere human discipline and religious scholarship? Are we left to navigate the treacherous sea of life alone?

Although I have frequently referred to Colossians 2:20-23, it is appropriate to bring it to bear upon our present subject. In that text, the Spirit reveals the impotence of human power, wisdom and

discipline in all of its facets. Nature, regardless of how it is disciplined and cultured, cannot produce or maintain spiritual life. Thus God's people are chided for relying on lesser things to achieve spiritual superiority. Here is how the Colossian text reads in the Amplified New Testament.

"If then you have died with Christ to material ways of looking at things and have escaped from the world's crude and elemental notions and teachings of externalism, why do you live as if you still belong to the world? - Why do you submit to rules and regulations? [such as], Do not handle [this], Do not taste [that], Do not even touch [them], referring to things all of which perish with being used. To do this is to follow human precepts and doctrines. [Isa 29:13.] Such [practices] have indeed the outward appearance [that popularly passes] for wisdom, in promoting self-imposed rigor of devotion and delight in self-humiliation and severity of discipline of the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh—the lower nature. [Instead, they do not honor God] but serve only to indulge the flesh." (Colossians 2:19-23, Amplified Bible)

Faced with a recalcitrant nature and no inherent ability to subdue it, we stand in need of assistance—Divine assistance. The realization of that aid is called "walking in the Spirit" and "minding the things of the Spirit" (8:4-5). Let it be clear, there is no such thing as an individual who can conquer the flesh, or sinful nature, in the energy of nature. No amount of discipline, however rigid, can make us adequate for the assignment of subduing the flesh. Until this is learned, we are shut up to defeat and a defiled conscience. There simply is no such thing as a salvation that does not require the consistent involvement of Deity.

NO LONGER DEBTORS TO THE FLESH

^{8:12} **Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.** "Other versions read, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh,"^{NASB} "Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it,"^{NIV} "So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do,"^{NLT} "So then, my brothers, we have no

obligation to human nature to be dominated by it."^{NJB}

You will notice the later and more general translations read "we have no obligation," while the more literal ones read "we are under obligation, but not to . . ." There is a reason for stating we DO have an obligation, but it is NOT to the flesh. In Christ, we have not come into an area where there are no obligations. We have not been set free simply to roam

about in a moral vacuum. The obligation that is placed upon us is a strong one. It has two sides. First, we have an obligation NOT to follow the dictates of the flesh. Second, we have an obligation to follow the direction of the Holy spirit. We will be held strictly accountable for fulfilling these obligations.

Without being unduly critical, this line of thinking is not prominent in the modern church. Viewing the average

Christian, one might be led to conclude no moral obligations exist at all. It will contribute greatly to our faith to “hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

“WE”

There are teachings addressed exclusively to those who are in Christ Jesus. They have no application to anyone else. Examples of such texts are at the very heart of Apostolic doctrine (Rom 12:6-7; 13:12-13; 14:13,19; 1 Cor 5:8; 10:8-9; 2 Cor 7:1; Gal 5:25-26; Gal 6:9-10; Phil 3;15-16; 1 Thess 5:6-9). Many believers rarely have a word from God addressed specifically to them. Tragically, not a few churches are devoted, they profess, to the salvation of the lost, with hardly a word being ministered to the saints. But you

foundations upon which godly living is based. It is imperative that these be known by the people of God.

“DEBTORS”

While we are “not under Law,” we are nevertheless “debtors.” A “debtor” is one held by an obligation, or bound by some duty. It speaks of someone who owes something, and who is obliged to fulfill a duty.^{STRONGS} This is a strong word.

Grace does not relieve us of responsibility and indebtedness. We have been freed, but not from obligation! **The grace of God does not relieve us of obligation or duty.** Being “justified freely” (3:24) has liberated us from guilt, condemnation, and enslavement to sin. It

become servants to God” (6:18,19,22).

It appears to me that there is a general ignorance of this requirement among professing believers. The modern church is characterized by a level of casualness and indifference that betray a lack of commitment to the Living God. There is too much self, too much human will, and too much deference to the flesh to deny this condition.

Make no mistake about this, “**WE ARE DEBTORS!**” Our text will affirm what we are NOT debtors to, but it will not affirm indebtedness has been removed. Jesus paid the debt created by our sins and transgressions. We must pay the debt created by our redemption and justification.

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LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

No believer follows the dictates of the flesh because of obligation: “we are under obligation, **not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.**”^{NASB} To live “according to the flesh” is to obey its lusts, or desires. It is to cave in to the conflict described in chapter seven. Living according to the flesh is conducting our lives as though this world was the primary one, and the satisfaction of our earthly natures was preeminent.

will find no such trend among the Apostles. All of their Epistles, without exception, were written to the saints. They energetically, and in the power of the Spirit, spoke to the people of God.

The word before us is such a teaching. It is spoken to the saved; those who have been born again, and are in covenant with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. They are critical words because they unveil Divinely appointed

has freed us from death and delivered us from the wrath to come. But it has not freed us from debt. There is something that we owe, a duty we must fulfill. In a very emphatic way, we are not our own, we have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:19). This case has been made repeatedly in the book of Romans. “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness . . . yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness . . . But now being made free from sin, and

A person in Christ who reverts to living according to the flesh has **chosen** to do so. Because there is no obligation in Christ to live in that manner, the person doing so has succumbed to the delusion of the wicked one and the cries of his own flesh. It is imperative that this acknowledged. The teaching that follows is unusually strong, confirming the blessedness of having no obligation to “the flesh.”

WHEN SPIRITUAL DEATH IS INEVITABLE

“^{13a} **For if you live according to the flesh you will die . . .**” The words are undeniable strong in every translation. Some examples follow. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die,”^{KJV} “if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die,”^{NIV} “if ye live according to flesh, ye are about to die,”^{DARBYS} “if you go in the way of the flesh, death will come on you,”^{BBE} “if you keep on following it, you

will perish,”^{NLT} “If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die.”^{NJB} “If you live according to [the dictates of] the flesh you will surely die.”^{AMPLIFIED}

REMINISCENT OF EDEN

The words are reminiscent of the first Divine prohibition: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou

eatest thereof **thou shalt surely die**” (Gen 2:17). The death of which Adam was warned was as real as the life he was experiencing. Because God had made Adam and put him into the Garden was no reason to imagine he would not die if he did what was forbidden. His life had come from God’s own breath (Gen 2:7), but it would leave Adam if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

All of the strength of that first prohibition is in our text. It is to be approached with all of the sobriety required of Adam. Men may formulate theologies that attempt to neutralize this text, robbing it of its powers, but they will have no effect upon the Word of God. Just as surely as it was not possible for God to lie in Genesis 2:7, it is not possible for Him to lie in Romans 8:13. The death is real, not metaphorical.

LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH Not to the Unregenerate

This is NOT a word to the unregenerate. To say this to someone outside of Christ would be superfluous. They are already dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-3), are condemned already (John 3:18), and the wrath of God is upon them (John 3:36).

To Those Who Are Justified

The **“you”** of our text are those who are in Christ Jesus. It is the same ones told they had *“peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* It refers to those who struggle with the conflict delineated in the seventh chapter (7:15-25). It addresses those who are emphatically told *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”* (8:1).

If there is any doubt about this, the Spirit opens this teaching by saying, *“Therefore, brethren, we . . . ”* (v 12). There is, then, no question about who is being addressed.

According to the Flesh

To live *“according to the flesh”* is to live in agreement with, and subordination to, *“the law of sin”* that is in our *“members”* (7:23,25; 8:2). It is to follow the course of nature, without regard to the life of Christ and the direction of the Holy Spirit.

This warning is sounded because *“the flesh”* is still with us. As long as we are *“in the body,”* we must contend with our fallen natures. While we have no obligation to *“the flesh,”* and are indwelt by One who is *“greater than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4), we must take care not to assume our safety. Our faith is the only victory we possess (1 John 5:4-5)!

In my judgment, this warning (*“if you live after the flesh you shall die”*) is one of the least acknowledged truths among professed believers. Perhaps many who wear the name of Jesus have not even heard these words. It is certainly not fashionable to declare them.

If It Happened Suddenly

If all across our land, professing believers were to suddenly take hold of this word with both hands, there would be such a revolution within the church the gates of hell would be shaken! Entire church programs would be changed. Multitudes of staff members would be relieved of their duties. The thrust of *Christian* education would change.

The purported scholars would lose their prominence. Motivators and

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psychologists would no longer have a place among believers. Religious structures like multi-purpose centers and entertainment organizations would be moved to the back of the church’s agenda, if, indeed, a place was found for them at all. Men would not be venerated because of their education, degrees, or lofty titles.

The landscape of the Christian music world would be so altered one would scarcely be able to recognize it. Those who have been viewed as leaders in the local congregation, like elders, deacons, and various ministers, would be thrust from their offices. Christian literature, religious bookstores, and purveyors of religious paraphernalia would be drastically changed, or be put out of business. The trend of brief meetings, short sermons,

and shallow approaches to Scripture would come to a grinding halt.

Why do I say such things? Because all of these are concessions to the flesh. They are the result of living according to the flesh, pacifying its desires, and conceding to its demands.

Living With Nature Being Central

Living according to the flesh is living with this world viewed as being primary. Such an approach to life perceives the needs and preferences of the body and life in this world as the most important. Little, if any, regard is given to the end of this world, the world to come, or standing before the Lord.

Living *“after the flesh”* includes, but is not limited to, immorality. Sins like adultery, fornication, sodomy, murder. . . etc., are at the bottom of the moral ladder. A person, however, can live *“according to the flesh”* without committing such reprehensible sins. Such a life ignores the appointed occupation of all men, which is to seek the Lord (Acts 17:26-27). It does not lay up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt (Matt 6:19-20). The person living *“in the flesh”* does not contemplate the return of Christ (Tit 2:13), the judgment day (Heb 9:27), or the subtlety of the devil (Eph 6:10). The Word of God is not perceived as essential to life (Matt 4:4), and plans are made as though this world, and life in it, had no appointed end.

Living *“after the flesh”* disrupts spiritual life. It is like a wedge forced between God and man, the Redeemer and the redeemed. Those who revert to the flesh no longer view Christ Jesus as essential, as when they first turned to God. Such people are their happiest when their earthly needs and desires are met, and most disappointed when they are not.

YOU WILL DIE

And what will be the result of living *“according to the flesh?”* Right here, at this precise point, the faith of all professed believers is put to the test. God will not debate with us on this subject, nor, indeed, will He allow for disagreement among ourselves about it. The sentence is

unequivocal. Not even the linguists, with all of their etymological expertise, have been able to deny the affirmation or neutralize its power. **“YOU WILL DIE!”**

Throughout history, and in this present day, there are countless voices who deny this affirmation. Some say it is impossible for a person in Christ to ever walk after the flesh—even though this word is addressed to such. Others say if a believer reverts to the flesh, God will awaken him and bring him back—even though our text admits to no such nonsense. Those who espouse the “once saved always saved” absurdity acknowledge believers can again walk after the flesh, but emphatically deny that it will have any effect upon their eternal destiny.

Still others who deny all of the above doctrines live as though they did believe them. They starve their souls, give in to the flesh, and allow their human nature to dictate the whole of their lives. Just as surely as Satan said to Eve, *“Thou shalt NOT surely die,”* so the Tempter has deceived these poor souls into believing they will not die. However, he lied to Eve, and he has also lied to them.

The moment our ears are tuned to the flesh, death begins its work in us. Our hearts begin to be insensitive to God. Our eyes no longer see His glory. Our hearts are no longer nourished by His word. Like *“the sorrow of this world,”* which is a facet of walking in the flesh, a life lived in deference to the lower nature *“worketh (or produces NKJV) death”* (2 Cor 7:10).

Make no mistake about this. If we do not reject the demands of the flesh, it will dominate us! No person, regardless of the level of discipline attained, can prevent this from happening. The wrath of God is emphatically pronounced against all who do not live for Him. *“You will die!”* In this saying, the Spirit has confirmed what was stated in verse six: *“to be carnally minded IS DEATH.”* It does not lead to death, it IS death!

Those who walk after the flesh have no place before God, and therefore no place among His people. While institutionalism allows for their exaltation, God does not. It is in the church’s best interest to refuse to promote those consigned to death to places of leadership—and those living after the flesh ARE consigned to death. They must either be removed from that category, or there is no hope of them being forever with the Lord.

WHY SUCH A SOLEMN SENTENCE

It is obvious that the pronouncement is strong. Why is this so? Why is the Lord so intolerant of those who wear His name, yet follow the dictates of nature? There is a reason – a sound reason!

Believers have been *“made free from the law of sin and death”* (8:2). They have been *“delivered from the law”* (7:4). They have been united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (6:1-4).

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WHAT IS INVOLVED IN DEATH?

Ultimately, this death is eternal separation from God. It is the lake of fire, hell, and *“everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power”* (2 Thess 1:9). This death, however, has an impact upon men while they remain in this world. The prayers of such people are not heard. The Lord Jesus will not teach them. The grace of God will not sustain them. The Holy Spirit will not lead them. Their religion is all in vain, because they have the spot of the world upon them (James 1:26-27). They are literally on their own, with no helper from heaven, and at the mercy of the devil.

Their *“old man”* was crucified when their new life began (6:6). They owe nothing to the flesh, and are under no obligation to obey its lusts, or desires (8:12).

Those who *“live according to the flesh”* have chosen to ignore these realities. They have quenched and grieved the Spirit, resisting both His warnings and direction. They have shut their ears to the voice of the Lord, and listened to the devil and their condemned earthly nature. They did not do this inadvertently, but deliberately and with focused attention. Every advantage was given to them, but they chose to crucify the Son of God afresh, rather than hear Him who is speaking from heaven.

If all of this seems too strong, ponder again the gravity of our text. There is not the slightest chance that those living *“according to the flesh”* will **NOT** die!

By listening and yielding to the *“old man,”* they have put themselves on the broad road that leads to destruction. The only hope is to **NOT** live according to the flesh!

The person who walks after the flesh is *“the enemy of God”* (James 4:4). He is hostile toward the Lord, and fights against His Law. God is not for that person, but against him. Such have degenerated to the state of an enemy, from which they were once delivered. When God says *“YOU will die!”*, there is no power or wisdom on earth that can negate the sentence! Men may object, but God will be *“justified”* in this saying (3:4).

WHEN SPIRITUAL LIFE IS CERTAIN

“^{13b} . . . but IF by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, **you will live.”** Now we come to grips with the appointed means by which spiritual life is maintained—and it **MUST** be maintained! In Christ, we are not put

into an automatic holding pattern. Our faithfulness is not an appointment, and is nowhere presented as though it was.

“IF”

When the word “IF” is used, human choice is involved, and faith is required. Neither the choice nor the faith are taken for granted. This key word–“IF”–is repeatedly used in Romans.

❑ *“But for us also, to whom it [righteousness] shall be imputed, **IF** we believe on him that raised up Jesus*

may be also glorified together.” (8:17)
 ❑ *“But **IF** we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” (8:25)*
 ❑ *“**IF** God be for us, who can be against us?” (8:31)*
 ❑ *“That **IF** thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (10:9)*
 ❑ *“For **IF** God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.” (11:21)*

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our Lord from the dead” (4:24).
 ❑ *“For **IF** we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” (6:5)*
 ❑ *“Now **IF** we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.” (6:8)*
 ❑ *“**IF** then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.” (7:16)*
 ❑ *“Now **IF** I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” (7:20)*
 ❑ *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, **IF** so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” (8:9b)*
 ❑ *“Now **IF** any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (8:9b)*
 ❑ *“And **IF** Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (8:10)*
 ❑ *“But **IF** the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (8:11)*
 ❑ *“For **IF** ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” (8:13)*
 ❑ *“And **IF** children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we*

❑ *“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, **IF** thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” (11:22)*
 ❑ *“And they also, **IF** they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.” (11:23)*

The word “IF” stands as a sort of line of demarcation. The result posed is conditioned upon the circumstance required by “if.” It simply is NOT possible to receive the righteousness of God if we do not believe on Him (4:24). If we have not been planted together in the likeness of Christ’s death, we cannot be in the likeness of His resurrection (6:5). If the Spirit of God is not in us, we are still in the flesh (8:9a). If we choose to live in the flesh, we will die!

The word “IF,” therefore, puts the ball into our court. At this point, the lot is cast into our lap (Prov 16:33). If we react to our responsibility properly, as we will see, the Lord will accomplish the work in us. If we do not, we are foolish to imagine the desired work will be completed.

BY THE SPIRIT

“... but if ye through the Spirit,”^{KJV}
“But if through the power of the Holy Spirit.”^{NLT} Those in Christ Jesus have a

challenging assignment set before them. However, they also have access to a power sufficient for the task. The Holy Spirit is mentioned nineteen times in this eighth chapter. All of them point out His pivotal role in the matter of salvation.

❑ Walking after the Spirit (8:1).
 ❑ The Spirit of life has freed us (8:2).
 ❑ Walking after the Spirit (8:4).
 ❑ Those who live according to the Spirit (8:5a).
 ❑ The things of the Spirit (8:5b).
 ❑ Not in the flesh, but in the Spirit (8:9a).
 ❑ The Spirit dwelling in us (8:9b).
 ❑ Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Him (8:9c).
 ❑ The Spirit is life (8:10).
 ❑ The Spirit dwells in us (8:11a).
 ❑ God enlivens our mortal bodies by the indwelling Spirit (8:11b).
 ❑ Through the Spirit, we put to death the deeds of the body (8:13).
 ❑ Those led by the Spirit of God are God’s sons (8:14).
 ❑ We have received the Spirit of adoption (8:15).
 ❑ The Spirit bears witness with our spirit (8:16).
 ❑ We have the firstfruits of the Spirit (8:23).
 ❑ The Spirit helps our weaknesses (8:26a).
 ❑ The Spirit makes intercession for us (8:26b).
 ❑ God knows the mind of the Spirit, who intercedes for us according to God’s will (8:27).

In all of these references, the Spirit is presented as working within and together with the saints of God. He is the empowering One from heaven, given to assist us in making it safely from earth to glory. The text clearly implies the necessity of the Spirit’s working within the believer.

The responsibility set before us cannot be accomplished independently of the Holy Spirit. No law, however clearly stated and rigid, can accomplish this appointed work. Further, this is not something that is optional.

The involvement of the Holy Spirit in our salvation is extensive.

❑ The love of God is shed abroad in our

- hearts “by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).
- The offering up of the Gentiles is made acceptable “by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16).
- We are enabled to keep what is committed to us “by the Holy Spirit” (2 Tim 1:14).
- Holy men of God wrote the Scripture as they were moved “by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21).
- Righteousness, peace, and joy are “in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).
- We are washed, sanctified, and justified “by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- Various gifts are dispensed to the church “by the Spirit” (1 Cor 12:8).
- Believers are being changed from one stage of glory to another “by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).
- The message and implications of salvation have been revealed to God’s holy Apostles and prophets “by the Spirit” (Eph 3:5).
- The Word of the Gospel is effective in those who believe because of the working of “the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:5).

will come after Me, let him **deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me**” (Mark 8:34). Again He said, “**And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched**” (Mark 9:43-44). Notice the aggressive nature of our Lord’s words.

Apostolic doctrine is equally strong on this matter. “**Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin**” (Rom 6:6). “**And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts**” (Gal 5:24). “**Mortify** [put to death] **therefore your members which are upon the earth . . .**” (Col 3:5).

This is “*the flesh*” unveiled in Romans 7:15-25. It is the residue of the Adamic nature that remains with us until we are “*absent from the body*” (2 Cor 5:8). Absolutely no tolerance is to be given to

admonishes us, “**make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts**” ^{NKJV} (Rom 13:14). This is abstaining from “*fleshly lusts that war against the soul*” (1 Pet 2:11). It is staying away from what feeds those lusts, and refusing to enter environments where they are encouraged and fed. When they assert themselves, intruding into our thoughts, mortifying them is saying “**NO**” to them, refusing to allow them to be satisfied (Tit 2:11-12).

And, how is such an aggressive stance to be accomplished? How can we who were once ruled by the flesh put it to death? Is it through some rule of discipline—some sanctified routine? Indeed not! This is done through the Holy Spirit—through His enablement. If we refuse to quench, grieve, or resist Him, He will lead us in the mortification of the flesh. However, He will not do so without our consent. People like Ananias, Saphirra, Demas, and the Corinthian fornicator will bear witness to the truth of that!

Proclaim the Ministry of the Spirit

How can anyone hope to mortify the deeds of the body if they remain fundamentally ignorant of the Holy Spirit? How can those who rarely, if ever, hear of His indispensable ministry gain the triumph over the flesh?

And what of those who only relate the work of the Spirit with mystical and ecstatic experience? Or, those who only relate the working of the Spirit with spiritual gifts—for them, mere external shows purported to be of the Spirit? To such people, what value is putting to death the deeds of the body? Perhaps that is why frequent outbreaks of immortality occur among those with distorted views of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

To put to death the deeds of the body is similar to suffocating them. It is to deprive them of what they need to live. It is to not allow them to erupt in words and deeds. Thus the Spirit admonishes us, “make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” ^{NKJV} (Rom 13:14). This is abstaining from “fleshly lusts that war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11)

- We can build ourselves up in the most holy faith by praying “in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the requirements of spiritual life depend upon the working of the Holy Spirit. The work set before us is not sensational, or appealing to the flesh. It is a necessary work, not an optional one.

PUTTING THE DEEDS OF THE BODY TO DEATH

When addressing the subject of “*the flesh*,” the Spirit always speaks with a tone of violence. Jesus said, “*Whosoever*

“*the flesh.*” **It is to be put to death!**

Those sophists who argue that the old nature has been destroyed, and thus causes us no more difficulty are fools. You cannot put to death, or mortify, something that is not alive, or with which you do not contend. Further, there is no need to mortify the deeds of the body if they pose no threat, or there is no liability in their influence.

To put to death the deeds of the body is similar to suffocating them. **It is to deprive them of what they need to live.** It is to not allow them to erupt in words and deeds. Thus the Spirit

“The Deeds of the Body”

Precisely what are “*the deeds of the body*?” We have already noted that the sinful nature itself, or “*the flesh*,” cannot be eliminated while we remain in the body. The “*law of sin*,” resident in our “*members*,” cannot be simply removed from



existence. Neither, indeed, can the desires of the flesh, though hated, be utterly eliminated from human experience—even though a person is born again. No matter how strong the believer is, he will have to contend with wayward and degenerate thoughts. That is the whole point of Romans 7:15-25.

This eighth chapter is showing us that the presence of the sinful nature, as well as the desires that erupt from it, are not of themselves a source of condemnation. When, however, those desires find expression, whether in prolonged and willful thought, or overt action, sin has resulted. This is the point developed by the Spirit in the first chapter of James. *“But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death”*(1:14-15).

The *“deeds of the body”* are the result of being *“dragged away”* from devotion to the Lord. They are when the lusts have been nurtured and allowed to express themselves in intentional actions. This is why Ananias and Saphirra were judged so harshly. They did not *“put to death the deeds of the body,”* refusing to give expression to the *“law of sin.”* Rather than the *“law of sin”* simply being within them, they allowed it to produce a *“deed,”* and thus were judged. The Holy Spirit could have assisted them in mortifying that *“deed,”* but they chose to quench His holy work, and welcome the deviate thought.

Mortifying *“the deeds of the body”* is putting to death the expression of sin. It is refusing to allow our bodies to become the vehicle of transgression. Every word or deed is produced by either the *“old man”* or the *“new man.”* Either we have been moved to action by the *“law of the Spirit of life,”* or the *“law of sin.”* No deed, regardless of its seeming insignificance, is neutral. Blessed is the person who sees this, and develops a keen sensitivity to the circumstance.

When *“the deeds of the body,”* or the outward expressions of inward unwanted lusts, are not mortified, or put to death, sin has been committed. In keeping with the provisions of the New Covenant, those *“deeds”* are to be *“confessed”* and

forgiveness appropriated (1 John 1:7). This is not mentioned in our text because of its focus. In it, the Spirit is dealing with us on a higher level. HE is showing us the secret to subduing the sinful nature, convincing us of the marvelous provisions of this great salvation.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL EMPOWER US TO DENY UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS.

The grace of God will teach us to do this, and the Spirit will assist us in the doing of it. This is one of His primary functions.

A PROGRESSIVE WORK

The mortifying of the deeds of the body is nothing less than sanctification—learning how to possess our vessels *“in sanctification and honor”* (1 Thess 4:4). It is a progressive work in which we are to become more proficient. The NASB emphasizes this perspective: *“but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body . . .”* Several things become apparent when we consider this verse.

- ❑ We are never rid of *“the deeds of the body”* while we remain in this world.
- ❑ Too, these *“deeds,”* or expressions, are so powerful they can only be put to death with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.
- ❑ The word *“IF”* confirms that a choice is involved in this matter.
- ❑ The involvement of the Holy Spirit in this work assumes He is not being quenched or grieved.

As we will see, it is imperative that this work be done. It is not an instant accomplishment, nor is it one that is imputed to us.

YOU WILL LIVE

Spiritual life is not to be taken for granted. It is **not** maintained independently of our involvement. The *“living”* of reference is conscious and effective participation with the living God, the Source of true life. It is having the blessing of God upon you, being heard by Him, and acknowledged as His own. The prophets used this same kind of language, even though Israel never realized its fulfillment under the Old Covenant. *“Behold, I will cause breath to enter into*

you, and ye shall live” (Ezek 37:5). *“And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live”* (Ezek 37:14). *“For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live . . . Seek the LORD, and ye shall live”* (Amos 5:4,6).

Mortifying *“the deeds of the body”* is putting to death the expression of sin. It is refusing to allow our bodies to become the vehicle of transgression. Every word or deed is produced by either the *“old man”* or the *“new man.”* Either we have been moved to action by the *“law of the Spirit of life,”* or the *“law of sin.”*

The *“life”* of reference is not to be divorced from eternal life. While it is not our purpose to judge who possesses eternal life, it is our responsibility to show its relationship to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. No person is *“alive to God”* who consistently yields to the flesh. Further, *“life”* is never promised to those who continue to live *“according to the flesh,”* yielding their members as instruments of sin.

This affirmation is to be taken seriously! *“But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*^{NASB} The *“newness of life”* into which we were raised in baptism is maintained through the power of the Holy Spirit (6:4). We are to reckon ourselves to be *“alive unto God through Christ Jesus our Lord,”* humbling yielding to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit (6:11). While we are, indeed, *“alive from the dead,”* that life must be maintained through the Spirit (6:13).

Too frequently, spiritual life is considered without due regard for the subduing of the sinful nature. **Those who insist on being sloppy about their relationship to God, whether young or old, will not be able to sustain fellowship with God and Christ** (1 John 1:3). Where a commitment to putting to death the deeds of the body is not found, life toward God cannot and will not be sustained. It is only a vain

imagination to think God can be served and man advantaged by a life that is not devoted to war against sin. Sin is always the evidence of death. It is always the

result of not putting to death the deeds of the body. By the same token, where the deeds of the body are being put to death, and refused expression, there is

undeniable evidence of the life ministered by the Holy Spirit. Those making progress in this area are to be encouraged by the precious promises of God.

“AS MANY,” AND ONLY “AS MANY”

“¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” It should be apparent to you that we are speaking of weighty matters. By “weighty,” I mean things pertaining to life and godliness, acceptance by God, and everlasting life. Many approach the book of Romans as though it were too profound for most believers. It is not uncommon for purported schools of theology to reserve courses in this book for more advanced students. All of this is an absurdity borne out of the flesh, and not the Spirit. In Christ, critical matters are not for the more learned, but for all of the sons of God. They deal with common needs and provisions, without which no person can make it safely to the heavenly harbor.

Light and frivolous views of Scripture are enemies to the soul. They rob the individual of Divine provisions, pamper the flesh, and give the advantage to the “*law of sin.*” It is altogether too fashionable for self-appointed preachers and teachers to walk upon Scripture like a spider walks on water, always dealing with the superfluous and relatively inconsequential. Such men treat life in this world as though it was the most important life. By so doing, they give the devil an advantage, who is the “*god of this world,*” as well as its “*prince*” (2 Cor 4:4; John 14:30). If any person imagines this to be too strong, the due consideration of this verse will throw that imagination down to the ground, where it belongs.

“AS MANY”

Here the Spirit makes a critical distinction among men—even those who profess to be in Christ Jesus. He will make no allowance for a lifeless theological position, identity with a religious institution, or self-accessed worth. The blessing pronounced will ONLY apply to the ones mentioned—“*as many.*”

Further, it will include everyone in the category mentioned—“*as many.*” **No one identified by the description is excluded, and no one not so identified is included.** This will be a single test that has been determined by God, ratified by the Son, and validated by the Spirit.

LED BY THE SPIRIT

Some contemporary versions read “*guided by the Spirit.*”^{BBE,NJB} Again, the involvement of the individual is assumed.

Again, the involvement of the individual is assumed. The Holy Spirit does not coerce people, but *leads* them. They are not forced into certain paths of life, but *guided* in them. Leading assumes effectiveness on the part of the Spirit, and willingness on the part of the ones being led. If either of these is not true, the leading cannot occur.

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The word “*led,*” as you might expect, is not a casual one. It indicates an aggressive, though not coercive, stance. The idea is that the Spirit is leading us where HE is going, which is the primary meaning of the word: “*to lead, or take with one.*” **The Holy Spirit never leads**

someone in a path He Himself is not walking! He never steps out of the will of God to guide individuals. While it should not be necessary to say this, the current religious climate demands that I do so. Those who live out of harmony with the revealed will of God are not being led by the Holy Spirit. **Any and every action that is in conflict with the purpose of God has been wrought independently of the Spirit’s influence.**

To be “*led by the Spirit*” is to be brought to a Divinely appointed destination. It is to be conducted in the way of life through the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let there be no ambiguity about the kind of leading being referenced. **This is speaking about putting to death the deeds of the body.** It is not speaking about buying houses and lands, accumulating wealth, or determining an earthly vocation! **Those who are not subduing the flesh are not being led by the Holy Spirit, regardless of their laudable works.**

Not A Reference to Scripture

The leading of the Spirit does not refer to the Scriptures themselves, as some suppose. It is true that He always directs men according to the Scriptures, and in strict harmony with the revealed purpose of God. There is no question about this. However, this is not the point of our text. This is a personal direction, where the individual is directly impacted by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

There are some who emphatically deny this to be the case. Unfortunately, these advocates are largely part of the religious movement with which I was identified. These affirm the Spirit works “only through the Word,” although such an expression is not found in God’s Word. Let

it be clear, the leading of the Spirit is never in contradiction of Scripture. It is never into territories not revealed in Scripture, or that cannot be explained by Scripture. Yet, His leading is personal, and thus effective.

The Holy Spirit is actually leading men into uprightness, or a life that is in harmony with the nature of God. As it is written, *“Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness”* (Psa 143:10). How wonderfully the desire is stated!

Guidance From Within

This Direction occurs WITHIN the believer, not external to his person. This is where the Holy spirit has been sent by God. As it is written, *“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father”* (Gal 4:6). And again, *“Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”* (2 Cor 1:22).

quenched, for this is His appointed work.

THE SONS OF GOD

Lest we be tempted to view this text in a cold and lifeless manner, the subject is related to being *“the sons of God.”* There are great masses of *church* people who have never heard this Divine declaration, and even greater numbers who have never heard it expounded. **There exists in the modern church a phenomenal number of people who never associate being the sons of God with being led by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body.** Some would consider such a view to be salvation by works. But salvation is NOT by works which we have done (Tit 3:5), yet only those who are led by the Spirit to subdue the flesh are the sons of God. Both affirmations are from heaven!

Evidence! Evidence!

If you are going to build the confidence

to be received by faith, and faith requires no other evidence than Divine declaration. In fact, faith itself *“is the evidence,”* or assurance (Heb 11:1).

The Spirit's use of evidences

When dealing with proofs, or evidences, the Spirit deals with our faith, our sonship, and our acceptance with God. One such expression is found in First John. *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments”* (5:2). Again, *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”* (1 John 4:14).

This is the kind of evidence declared in our text. **The proof of sonship is found in the effective mortification of the “deeds of the body.”** That will appear too strong for some, but no person can allow himself the luxury of competing with God in his thoughts. The Spirit is firm and precise in this pronouncement. *“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”* ^{NASB} (Rom 8:14). Men may reason that God has some wayward sons who are NOT led by the Spirit—but they cannot argue their case from this text! If, in fact, it is possible to be God's son, yet NOT be led by the Spirit, this text falls to the ground and must be declared spurious and worthless.

Further, the purpose of this text is not to produce endless wrangling, as the legalist is prone to do. The Spirit has no regard for the foolish prattling of men, and gives no honor to their carnally contrived doctrines. His purpose is to build up those into whom He has been sent. His aim is to confirm their salvation to them, and to convince them of their new life in Christ Jesus.

One of the fundamental ways through which He accomplishes this vital ministry is effectively leading the believer to deal with the eruptions of the *“law of sin”* within. He has already told us we will have to contend with this unwanted law. Now He shines a ray of hope upon our hearts and minds, assuring us that contention does not mean we must be defeated, and war does not mean we must lose. He will assist us in gaining the victory over sin! When we are able to perceive that victory, we will have in our

If you are going to build the confidence of God's people, and destroy the confidence of pretenders, you must deal with evidences. By this, I mean proofs of affiliation with God that can be determined by spiritual perception.

This takes place in fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel: *“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them”* ^{NKJV} (Ezek 36:27). And again, *“I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live”* (Ezek 37:14).

The Holy Spirit, then, working from within our hearts, and in harmony with the human spirit, guides us in the subduing of the sinful nature, or the mortification of the deeds of the body. Wherever success is realized in this sacred work, the Holy Spirit has led. Wherever success is not realized, He has been

of God's people, and destroy the confidence of pretenders, you must deal with evidences. By this, I mean proofs of affiliation with God that can be determined by spiritual perception.

Man's use of “evidences”

In the theological world, the word “evidences” deals with the field of apologetics. It is an effort to substantiate the existence of God and the fact of His creation through visible and logical evidences. Let it be clear that no such approach is found in Scripture! There are no extended efforts by inspired men to prove the existence of God or the fact of His creation. **That is because both are**

hand the evidence that “we are the sons of God”(1 John 3:1-2). Forever remove from your mind the notion that confidence can be achieved while nurturing sin or pampering the flesh. If you do not mortify the flesh, it will mortify you.

WHAT YOU DID NOT RECEIVE

“^{15a} **For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear . . .**” Other versions read as follows. “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again.”^{NASB} “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.”^{NIV} “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.”^{NRSV} “For you did not get the spirit of servants again to put you in fear.”^{BBE} “So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves.”^{NLT} “For what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear.”^{NJB}

This verse confirms the truth declared in Second Timothy. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear . . .” (1:7). By this, the Spirit means that in Christ, we have not been brought into a condition that strikes fear into the heart. Salvation is not a circumstance where we are dominated by torment and anxiety, fearful of being rejected by the Lord we have embraced. Many believers live under the cloud of doubt, unable to rest confidently in the Lord. They daily wonder if they have done anything that may have excluded them from the Lord’s favor, even though they desire only to please Him. Their fears have been produced by a Law-approach to God. This is an approach that relies on human effort alone.

YOU DID NOT RECEIVE

Salvation does involve RECEIVING. It is not a program that requires achievement before reception. **Rather, achieving follows receiving.** Because of the warfare inside of the believer, it is first stated that we have NOT received the spirit of bondage again to fear. The conflict with the flesh is apt to produce bondage within the believer, particularly if it is not understood. Immediately, therefore, the Spirit assures our hearts that what we have been given in Christ in no way enslaves the believer.

THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE

The “spirit of bondage” is the result of being under the Law. Paul has already described this bondage. “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.

in the presence of the Lord. It does not mean being afraid of men, or of circumstances. Rather, it has to do with drawing back from the Lord because of the misconception that He is austere, and

When sinners are told the truth about sin and its alienating effects, yet are provided no remedy for their condition, they are even more enslaved to sin. Cast upon their own resources, they are dashed upon the rocks of despair. Fear then enters with great power, driving the guilty from the presence of the Lord, and destroying any hope of recovery.

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.” (7:8-9). Rather than the Law liberated men from sin, it actually resulted in their enslavement to sin. This was because their nature was not changed. As a result, the Law enhanced the conflict between men and God, offering no resolution for the dilemma.

looking for a reason to condemn. This is accentuated by the inner conflict believers experience. They suppose the presence of the “law of sin” causes them to be condemned, or at least judged harshly, by the Lord. They are unable to distinguish between “the law of sin” and sin itself. As a result, they are afraid of being in the presence of the Lord.

AGAIN

When sinners are told the truth about sin and its alienating effects, yet are provided no remedy for their condition, they are even more enslaved to sin. Cast upon their own resources, they are dashed upon the rocks of despair. Fear then enters with great power, driving the guilty from the presence of the Lord, and destroying any hope of recovery.

The word “again” reminds us of our former state under the Law. The Law condemned us for the very thoughts with which we now struggle. When we were under the Law, we did not hate those thoughts as we do now. However, the Law condemned us because they were present in our persons: i.e., “Thou shalt not covet!”

The “spirit of bondage” compels men to view themselves as enemies of God, alienated from Him, and dominated by the law of sin. This is precisely what moves men to say Christians are just like the Israelites of old—recalcitrant and wayward. It is what causes men to immerse themselves in religious activities, all the while remaining aloof from God, fearful to come into His presence.

This is not the kind of spirit we have received in Christ Jesus. To put it another way, we have not simply received a new set of rules—a new law that is to be executed in the energy of the flesh. The New Covenant is “not according” to the covenant made with Israel. It is of another order. It is another kind of covenant. We were not simply given a new set of rules, and a new start with a clean slate, but one with a new nature, and the power to maintain it.

This fearfulness has to do with being

THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH IS TO BE FOUGHT!

WHAT YOU DID RECEIVE

“^{15b} . . . but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” Other versions read as follows. “But you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”^{NASB} “But you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”^{NIV} “But you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”^{NRSV} “But the spirit of sons was given to you, by which we say, Abba, Father.”^{BBE} “You received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’”^{NJB}

At once you will notice the various translations fall into two categories. The first views “the Spirit” as applying to the Holy Spirit Himself (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NJB). The second views “the spirit” as meaning an attitude, or frame of mind (NASB, NRSV, BBE). There is a sense in which both views are correct, but what is the intention of the Spirit in this text?

First, the Holy Spirit is referred to no less than twenty-one times in this chapter.

- “. . . who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (v 1)
- “. . . the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” (v 2)
- “. . . who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (v 4)
- “. . . that are after the Spirit.” (v 5a)
- “. . . the things of the Spirit.” (v 5b)
- “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.” (v 9a)
- “. . . if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” (v 9b)
- “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” (v9c)
- “. . . but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (v 10)
- “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus . . .” (v 11a).
- “. . . shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (v 11b)
- “. . . if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” (v 13).
- “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (v 14)
- “. . . but ye have received the Spirit of

adoption.” (v 15)

- “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit.” (v 16)
- “. . . but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit.” (v 23)
- “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities.” (v 26a)
- “. . . but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (v 26b)
- “And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit.” (v 27)

In view of the dominating theme of the Holy Spirit in this chapter, I will expound

- “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.” (1 John 3:24)
- “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.” (1 John 4:13)
- “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 6:19)
- “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the

The word “adoption” emphasizes the legality of our status as sons. To put it another way, it underscores the choice of God—that we are His sons because He desired it to be so. The word also opens how we have been placed into the status of sons against the constraints of nature.

the text as referring to the Holy Spirit, also called “the Spirit of Christ” and “the Spirit of God.” It does not refer to a mere attitude or frame of mind, for we cannot be made sons by such a mind. A proper mind set is the **result** of being made sons, not the cause of it.

YOU RECEIVED THE SPIRIT

Upon coming into Christ, we received the Holy Spirit. That is a fundamental part of Apostolic doctrine. This is declared frequently, and is beyond all controversy.

- “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” (1 Cor 2:12)
- “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” (2 Cor 1:22)
- “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” (2 Cor 5:5)
- “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit.” (1 Thess 4:8)

remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”^{NKJV} (Acts 2:38)

This is not a gift received by SOME who are in Christ Jesus, but by ALL of them!

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of adoption” because His presence within is what confirms we are God’s sons. His presence ratifies or confirms our status. Thus it is written, “And **because ye are sons**, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

Why use the word “adoption?” Why not refer to regeneration as a new birth, as elsewhere (John 3:5,8; 1 Pet 1:23)? This is not an uncommon view of our status in Christ. Later in this very chapter “**the adoption**” will be equated with the “redemption of our body” (v 23). Later, “**the adoption**” is said to have pertained to Israel “according to the flesh” (9:4), among whom we have been grafted (11:17). Galatians 4:4-5 declares “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,

made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive **the adoption of sons.**” Ephesians 1:5-6 associates our adoption with the predestination of God Himself. *“Having predestinated us unto **the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.**”*

The word “adoption” emphasizes the legality of our status as sons. To put it another way, it underscores the choice of God—that we are His sons because He desired it to be so. The word also opens how we have been placed into the status of sons against the constraints of nature. There is nothing in us by nature that brought about our adoption. It was purely *“according to the good pleasure of his will”* (Eph 1:5).

The term *“the Spirit of adoption”* instructs us that while our acceptance was according to God’s predetermined purpose, it was carried out by the Holy Spirit. We were, in fact, *“born of the Spirit”* (John 3:6). Thus, God is said to have *“chosen”* us *“through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”* (2 Thess 2:13). Again, those in Christ are said to be *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit”* (1 Pet 1:2).

BY WHOM WE CRY OUT

It is *“by”* or *“through”* the Holy Spirit that we *“cry out, Abba, Father.”* To *“cry”* conveys the idea of energetic and loud calls. Coming from the Greek word κρᾶζομεν, *“cry”* means “cry out, cry aloud, and speak with a loud voice” – exclaiming. It is not a gentle word, and does not convey the idea of a soft and casual plea. This is best explained by the Spirit’s reference to our Lord’s agony in the garden. *“Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt”* (Mk 14:36). The book of Hebrews refers to this prayer as Jesus offering up *“prayers and supplications*

with strong crying and tears” (Heb 5:7).

This is a cry of dependence. It is a call for support and strength. It is also an insightful call in which the relationship to God is known. This is a cry of confidence, where a loud voice is raised toward heaven in expectation of needed resources.

word *“Abba.”* It was a word intended only for sons, not servants, and depicted a degree of confidence that only comes when the individual is convinced of his sonship.

There is a two-fold teaching in this word. First, there is no longer a division

This is a cry of dependence. It is a call for support and strength. It is also an insightful call in which the relationship to God is known. This is a cry of confidence, where a loud voice is raised toward heaven in expectation of needed resources.

Galatians 4:6 declares precisely the same thing taught in this passage. *“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”*

“ABBA, FATHER”

There is a lot of nonsense taught by some regarding this phrase. Some affirm *“Abba”* is a synonym for *“Daddy,”* a sort of child-like reliance upon the Father. While there may be an element of truth to this, it is certainly minuscule and unworthy of emphasis. It is, in my judgment, an attempt to impose casual Western culture upon the Word of God. The family relations of Western culture were not the manners of the Eastern world. There was a level of respect among the ancient people that is scarcely known in our society.

In all three times where the word *“Abba”* is used, it is joined with the word *“Father.”* It is never used alone (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). The word *“Abba”* is a Syriac, or Chaldean word. It was used, authorities say, by the Jews also. We are told there was a law among the Jews that forbade servants to call their masters *“Abba.”* ^{Haldane} This is confirmed in the Hebrew canon, Berachoth, fol. 16.2. It appears to me that all of these views are to be seen in the

between Jew and non-Jew in Christ Jesus. Both come to God as their *“Father.”* Second, we do not approach unto God as mere servants, with no inheritance or rights. Rather, we come as sons, with rights and privileges that have been righteously conferred upon us through the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. We have been freed to come to God, and the Spirit assists our coming by enabling us to confidently cry out *“Abba!”*

The word *“Abba”* is a transliterated word, with the letters simply being converted to another language, rather than translating the word. That makes the word universal, like *“Amen”* and *“Hallelujah.”* From this perspective, all believers everywhere call upon the Father with one voice. In this, there an acknowledgment of our oneness in Christ.

I want to emphasize that this is not an infantile cry, but one of spiritual maturity. Insight and strong faith characterize it, neither of which is childish. It comes from one engaged in a fierce battle with the flesh. The use of the word *“Daddy”* in reference to God can only be used when dominated by spiritual ignorance. No person acutely aware of the Almighty God could approach Him in such a casual manner. Such an approach is not found before, during, or after the Law.

THE WITNESSING SPIRIT

“ ¹⁶ *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*” God has established

the necessity of two witnesses. Under the law, two witnesses were required before capital punishment could be enacted. One witness was not enough (Deut 17:6). A solitary witness was forbidden to rise up *“against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established”* (Deut 19:15). The Revelation portrays the message of God as being delivered by God’s *“two witnesses”* (Rev 11:3). In confirming His promise to His children, *“God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us”* (Heb 6:18). It is the Divine manner to buttress critical matters

The witness of reference is not through the Scriptures, although it is in perfect accord with them. It is not the witness of our brethren, although it will be in agreement with those who have spiritual understanding. This is the witness of *“The Spirit Himself.”* This is the *“Spirit of adoption”* who confirms the reality of that adoption to us.

The confirmation of our sonship will not come through a reasoning process, or through human logic. It will come from *“the Spirit Himself.”* **Our confidence will not come from human deduction, but from Divine witness.**

BEARING WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT

The Spirit bears witness with our essential persons—the part of us that is *“born of God.”* Here is where the *“new*

Scripture says *“with our spirit.”* The Duoay-Rheims version says *“to our spirit.”* The New Jerusalem Bible seems to capture the real sense of the text. *“The Spirit Himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God.”*

A Confirming Witness

This is a confirming witness. It is a witness already declared by the cry *“Abba, Father!”* It is confirmed by a new affection, an appetite for the *“things of the Spirit,”* and a hatred or all iniquity.

The witness of our own spirit is declared a most unique way in John 3:33. *“He that hath received His [Christ’s] testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.”* The expression *“set to his seal”* reads more clearly in the NASB: *“set his seal to this.”* The NKJV reads, *“has certified.”* The idea is that in the acceptance of Christ’s testimony the individual will become convinced that God is true. Faith will expel doubt from the soul, bringing joyous confidence.

The Spirit joins with our renewed spirit, confirming what has already been sensed by faith. This drives the truth of our status as sons of God home to the heart, producing the confidence required to finish the course set before us. No child of God can be without the witness of the Spirit. It is a necessity, not a luxury.

THE CHILDREN OF GOD

The objective of the Spirit’s witness is spelled out. It is that we are *“the children of God.”* Our own cries (Abba, Father) declare this, and now the Spirit does also. John refers to this very witness when he says, *“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself”* (1 John 5:10). No enemy can reach this witness, or deprive the redeemed of it. It speaks to us in quiet and in storm, in good times and in trying ones. When we have no one else to confirm we are the children of God, we have the witness in ourselves, and it is confirmed by the certification of the *“Spirit Himself.”*

The inner witness is involved in our Lord’s most remarkable statement to the Samaritan woman. *“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be **IN HIM** a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14).

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with at least two witnesses.

Now, in the matter of our sonship, the Lord has also established two witnesses. One is His Word. In it He has declared those in Christ Jesus are His sons. All who have been justified are His children, and He is their Father. Now the Lord provides us with a personal Witness.

THE SPIRIT HIMSELF

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” ^{NIV} Herein is a marvelous truth: that the Spirit of God could bear intimate witness to the spirit of man! This reality confirms that we have been justified, and are accepted in Christ. If this were not the case, the Holy Spirit could bear no such testimony to us. To those outside of Christ, His ministry is one of conviction, confirming that men are alienated from God (John 16:8-11).

man” exists. It is associated with our *“heart,”* which is the inmost part of our being. This is the part of man declared in Job 32:8. *“But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.”* **There is no more noble understanding than this, that we are the sons of God!** Every facet of spiritual life hinges on this understanding, and it can only be ministered by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Spirit does not bear witness to our minds, or to our souls, but to our spirits. This is the part of us that can be enlightened from above—the part where there is accord with the Living God.

There is significance in saying the Spirit *“bears witness **WITH** our spirit.”* He does not say *“to our spirit,”* as though He were merely instructing or enlightening us. Nearly every version of

This is an accurate statement of our status: *“the children of God.”* God has begotten us with the Word of truth, and thus we are His children (James 1:18). We were born again, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *“of God”*. Thus we are *“the children of God”* (John 1:13). This is what we should be called. As it is written, *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we **should be called** the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God . . . ”* (1 John 3:1-2a).

How frequently the saints are identified as the sons, or children, of God. Ponder the power and ministry of these words.

- ❑ *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the SONS OF GOD”* (Rom 8:14).
- ❑ *“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the SONS OF GOD”* (Rom 8:19).
- ❑ *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the SONS OF GOD, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world”* (Phil 2:15).
- ❑ *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the SONS OF GOD”* (1 John 3:1).
- ❑ *“Beloved, now are we the SONS OF GOD, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him;*

for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

- ❑ *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS, saith the Lord Almighty”* (2 Cor 6:17-18).
- ❑ *“To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of SONS. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father”* (Gal 4:5-6).
- ❑ *“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many SONS glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings”* (Heb 2:10).
- ❑ *“Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the CHILDREN OF GOD”* (Rom 8:21).
- ❑ *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:26).
- ❑ *“In this the CHILDREN OF GOD are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother”* (1 John 3:10).
- ❑ *“By this we know that we love the CHILDREN OF GOD, when we love God, and keep his commandments”* (1 John 5:2).

A GREAT DEFICIENCY

Right here there is a great deficiency in the modern church. A remarkable lack

of assurance exists among believers. Great numbers of them acknowledge they are not sure of their relation to God. The relative silence of the pulpit on this subject has only served to make the condition worse.

This is not at all acceptable! Modern religion has silenced two witnesses, drowning out their testimony with its trumped up agendas and misplaced emphases. The witness of the renewed spirit has been silenced, as well as the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit. The result is that sin is blazing out of control within the very society that has received power to assist us in overcoming it.

Let here be no doubt about this! In order to wage the warfare described in Romans 7:15-25, some assurance of our adoption by God is required. I am not prepared to define a particular level of that knowledge, but some level must be possessed.

I have every confidence that, when realized, the witness of the human spirit and the Holy Spirit will grow louder and louder. In the wake of that witness, strength will be renewed, and victory over the flesh will be realized.

When our conscience is awakened to the inner witnesses salvation brings, we will have less difficulty with the hard experiences of life. Our enemies will not trouble us as much, and Satan will be more readily and effectively resisted.

THE STATUS OF THE SONS OF GOD

“^{17a} and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ . . . ” Are there any advantages to being a child of God? The devil would

have us think there are not. That, in essence, is what he deceived Eve into thinking (Gen 3:1-6). With subtle aggressiveness, the Tempter promotes the

idea that the world has more to offer than God. This is why people are not seizing the Kingdom with violence, as a prize to be obtained (Matt 11:12). It is why church meeting houses are empty on Lord’s evening, and only briefly occupied on Lord’s day morning. It is the reason why believers are in the minority in our country, State, and city. People have been duped into believing there are no significant advantages to being a child, or son, of God. It is why more men are not preaching. It is why people ignore their Bibles, preferring entertainment to edification. It is why supposedly Christian concerts are preferred to powerful

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preaching. It is why there has been a decline in evangelistic and revival meetings. This is the reason for compromise in *Christian* colleges. Satan has convinced people there are no real advantages to being the children of God. Thus, satisfaction is sought elsewhere.

The epitaph over these conditions is, *"An enemy hath done this!"* (Matt 13:28). There are wonderful advantages to being the children of God. The world has nothing that can compare with them. They will survive the end of the world, and minister to the believer in both life and death. Here is something we must speak of more frequently. The words *"reward"* (Matt 5:12; 1 Cor 3:8,14; Col 3:24), *"crown"* (2 Tim 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4), and *"prize"* (1 Cor 9:24; Phil 3:14) must find their way into the vocabulary of the church! Preachers and teachers must get their heads out of the sand and deliver a message that speaks of a glorious future for the children of God. The subject of heaven needs to be revived. Words like *"inheritance"* (Eph 1:14; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4), *"treasures in heaven"* (Matt 6:19-20), and *"reign with Christ"* (Rev 22:5 2 Tim 2:12) must become familiar to the saints!

There is too much earth being thrown on the saints of God from the pulpit! Much of the supposed *Christian* literature of our time is nothing more than dust thrown in the eyes of believers. It becomes obsolete too quickly, and does not pull back the veil so men may see the glorious future of the children of God.

IF CHILDREN

Everything hinges on whether or not we are *"the children of God."* Nothing else matters if this is not true! It is therefore imperative that every believer be confirmed in the persuasion he is a child of God. If, in fact, we are *"children,"* what a glorious circumstance belongs to us!

HEIRS

The flesh reasons that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Thus it would rather have something now than wait patiently for something greater. But this is not the spirit of the Kingdom! If we

are children we are **"HEIRS,"** and that has to do with the future.

What Is An Heir?

An *"heir"* is someone who shares in the possessions of another. They did not earn what they will receive, nor did they purchase it. The heir receives something wrought out or procured by another.

The *"heir"* receives something that has been determined and apportioned by someone else. The provider is a benefactor who has been constrained by an affection for the appointed *"heir."*

Isaac was the immediate *"heir"* of Abraham's possessions, as well as the promises given to him. Of him God said, *"but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir"* (Gen

future—to the coming of the Lord. That is when we will receive our real possessions!

A Forward Posture

Wherever a forward posture is not found, defeat is ever present!

When believers do not think of their inheritance, they will find it easier to think of life in this world. They will overestimate earthly treasures and advantages. They will experience more disappointment, and will more readily fall into doubt! But when they consider the fact that they are *"heirs,"* the horizon of the future will grow brighter. The promises will become more precious, and the coming of the Lord will be longed for with great anticipation and eagerness.

It is no wonder the children of God are called *"heirs according to the promise"* (Gal 3:29). By God's grace they have been *"made heirs according to the hope of eternal life"* (Tit 3:7), and are the *"heirs of salvation"* (Heb 1:14).

"Heirs of God"

What a word is this—*"heirs of God!"* Here, in one word, the summation of our inheritance is stated. **It is God Himself!** The *"heirs of God"* will inherit God! As Galatians 4:7 says, *"Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."*

How well David stated it: *"My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever"* (Psa 73:26).

Inheriting God Himself is involved in the wonderful promise, *"and I will be their God"* (Jer 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 37:23,27; Zech 8:8; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10). Full and unhindered access to God will be given to us as *"heirs of God."* This is the inheritance of all who are *"the children of God."*

"Joint Heirs with Christ"

This too is a most marvelous phrase! It is too large for worldly wisdom to receive. The bag of nature is too small to hold this promise! If ever a person is to gain some insight into these things, he must put a large distance between himself and the world. The bigger the world, the smaller the promises of God. Conversely, the

Wherever a forward posture is not found, defeat is ever present! When believers do not think of their inheritance, they will find it easier to think of life in this world. They will overestimate earthly treasures and advantages. They will experience more disappointment, and will more readily fall into doubt!

15:4). Ishmael, the son of Abraham through Hagar the Egyptian was *"not heir"* with his son Isaac (Gen 21:10; Gal 4:22-31).

An inheritance is reserved for the *"heirs,"* and *"heirs"* are appointed to obtain the inheritance. Those with little or no interest in rewards or an inheritance must remember there is no point to being God's children if there is no inheritance. Notice the reasoning of our text. It is most powerful. He does not say, "And if children, then comfortable." Or, "And if children, then happy." Or, "and if children, then prosperous." The Word lifts our eyes and points them toward the

larger our inheritance looms before us, the more inconsequential this world is.

Sharing the Inheritance

A “joint heir” is one who shares the inheritance of another. Such a person

no small thing, therefore, to be a “joint heir with Christ!” In that status untold riches are found.

A Word from Heaven

In confirmation of this blessed

Throughout eternity, as it rolls its ceaseless cycles on, the saints will not be sitting on clouds and strumming harps. Indeed,, they will be “joint heirs with Christ.” Whatever He is doing, they will be doing. His activity will be their activity!

participates with one who has inherited the assets of another. And what can be said of Christ’s inheritance? Presently God is speaking to us “by His Son, whom He has appointed **Heir of all things**” (Heb 1:2). Notice, God has “**APPOINTED**” the Son as “**Heir**” of everything! **Whatever can be inherited WILL be inherited by the Lord Jesus Christ!** The “heathen” have been given to Him for His “inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psa 2:8). The whole of God’s government has been put upon His shoulder, and He will “establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever” (Isa 9:7). Because of His uncontested Headship, “the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand” (Isa 53:10). Everything has been “put under His feet” (Eph 1:22). It shall yet reverberate throughout the universe, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15). It is

promise, a cry sounds from the heavenly throne room. It is intended to buoy up the spirit of the faithful, encouraging them to fight the good fight of faith and finish their course. “He who overcomes shall **inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son**” (Rev 21:7). The Lord Jesus alluded to this when he promised, “*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matt 5:5).

Throughout eternity, as it rolls its ceaseless cycles on, the saints will not be sitting on clouds and strumming harps. Indeed,, they will be “joint heirs with Christ.” Whatever He is doing, they will be doing. His activity will be their activity! The “world to come” will be given into their charge, as “joint heirs with Christ” (Heb 2:5-10).

In their appointed role of “joint heirs,” they will “judge the world,” and even “angels” (1 Cor 6:2-3). The saints are the “strong” with whom Jesus will divide the spoils (Isa 53:12).

Daniel’s Prophecy

Something of the greatness of being “joint heirs with Christ” was revealed to Daniel. Let these words sink down into your ears. “*But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever – yes, for ever and ever . . . until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom . . . Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him [them, ^{NRSV}]*” (Dan 7:18,22,27) ^{NIV}

Abraham’s Seed

In confirmation of this blessed status, the Spirit reasons with us concerning the Lord Jesus and those who are in Him. This particular reasoning is found in the book of Galatians, and it is marvelous. “*Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ . . . And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*” (3:16,29).

Salvation has forged a unity between Christ and the redeemed that is so close and so effectual that they are counted as “Abraham’s seed!” It is in that capacity that they are “joint heirs with Christ.” A marvelous condition, indeed! Once this is seen, victory will be realized, and a high degree of confidence and boldness attained.

THE BIG “IF”

“^{17a} . . . **IF indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.**” Here is another one of those “IF” clauses. Wherever an “if” is found, choice is required. This is not the “if” of happenstance. Make no mistake about this. Those who do not meet the requirement will not enjoy the benefit! I realize it is not fashionable to speak in this manner among certain people, but that is no to concern to me. Those who

speak of unconditional love, and the impossibility of coming short of the rest do well to adjust their theology, for it is flawed at the core. There is not a syllable in Scripture that suggests salvation, the most magnanimous display of Divine love, is without conditions. Faith is a condition (Heb 11:6). Repentance is a condition (Lk 13:3,5). Obedience if a condition (Acts 5:32; Heb 5:9). Hearing what the Spirit is saying is a condition (Rev 2:7).

Now we come to another condition. The issues are great. Let no one be foolish enough to disassociate this text from salvation. We are speaking of being “heirs,” “heirs of God,” and “joint heirs with Christ.” The person who imagines it is possible to miss these things and still be saved is a fool. Such a person has been deceived by the devil and thrown into a state of spiritual insanity. Being an “heir,” an “heir of God,” and a “joint heir

with Christ" IS salvation.

IF INDEED WE SUFFER

Again, the language is strong. The KJV reads, "if SO BE that we suffer with Him." Other versions read, "if indeed we suffer with Him," ^{NKJV,NASB} "if indeed we share in his sufferings," ^{NIV} "if, in fact, we suffer with him," ^{NRSV} "provided we suffer with him," ^{RSV} "we must also share his suffering," ^{NLT} This is not, then, a casual suggestion.

Two things are required. **First**, the suffering must be genuine, or germane to the faith-life. **Second**, it must be "with Christ," experienced in the crucible of fellowship with the Son, into which God has called us (1 Cor 1:9). These two views are worthy of further development.

Genuine Suffering

The suffering must be "indeed," and "in fact." The status of an "heir" is conditioned on this suffering: "provided we suffer." That means there is a suffering that does not qualify for the blessing. Suffering as an "evil doer," for example, does not count (1 Pet 4:15). There are also sufferings related to living in this world—sufferings that are common to all men, whether they are believers or not. They do not qualify for the blessing either.

Genuine suffering includes reappraisals for being godly—suffering "for righteousness sake" (1 Pet 3:14). It is the result of separation from the world and an earnest quest for heaven. It is written, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (1 Tim 3:12). Such people are promised their suffering is not the end of the matter. Their day is coming! In them the promise will be fulfilled, "The LORD will make you the head, and not the tail; you shall be only at the top, and not at the bottom" (Deut 28:13).

Those who recoil from such suffering put a distance between themselves and the promises of God. If they do not take up their cross every day and follow Jesus, they will not be "heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." If, however, they bear up patiently under the harsh treatment of the world, God will richly reward them. For them, there is coming a day when they will not recall a single

wrong. Their eternal inheritance will drown out such remembrances in a blaze of everlasting glory.

With Christ

For suffering to be valid, it must be "with Christ," not merely for Him. This speaks of the "fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil 3:10), sharing the same rejection and opposition our Lord experienced. This is not the suffering Jesus did when He bore the sins of the world. No person can share in that sufferings. They can only share in the benefits that flow from them. This is the suffering of which Jesus spoke when He said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

When we get into the yoke with Jesus, taking His yoke upon ourselves (Matt 11:28), men will react to us as they do to Him. His enemies will become our enemies, and His friends will become our friends. Those who disagree with Him will disagree with us. Those who reject Him will reject us. It is His life in us that produces these conditions. As Paul confessed, speaking for all who are in the Son, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" ^{NASB} (Gal 2:20).

If you will bear up under the suffering that results from this fellowship, you are an heir, an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ! Pass the word along to fellow sufferers! They need to hear it. You need to hear it! I need to hear it! Jesus has left a remnant of suffering behind for us—suffering in which the choicest Divine fellowship will be realized. Paul referred to this suffering when he wrote, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church" (Col

1:24). These are not redemptive sufferings. They do not remove sin, either yours or the sins of others. But they ARE sufferings appointed as the prelude to inheriting God and being a joint heir with Jesus! Embrace them with zeal!

GLORIFIED TOGETHER

There is a stated objective to suffering "with Christ." It is that "that we may be also glorified together." This means "together" with Christ, as indicated by

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to hear it!**

other versions: "in order that we may also be glorified with Him," ^{NASB} "in order that we may also share in His glory," ^{NIV} and "in order that we may also be glorified with Him." ^{RSV}

The idea is that when Jesus appears in His glory, we will also appear in glory. That is precisely how it is stated in Colossians 3:4. "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Christ being "our life" now involves suffering with Him. But when He shall appear in all of His glory—the glory He presently possesses—then we will be glorified "together with Him."

Then we will be seen for who we really are—"the children of God." Our real self

will become apparent, and the *“body of this death”* will be discarded. Then Jesus *“will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself”* (Phil 3:21). Until then, we just run the race with patience, not desiring a

premature showing. Better to be glorified together with Christ than to seek glory independently of Him!

One additional word is in order. The point here is not that suffering causes us to merit glory. Rather, it is that suffering necessarily precedes glory. Just as Jesus

suffered, then was glorified, so must we suffer with Him before we can be glorified with Him. That is the Kingdom manner as lived out in the Lord of glory Himself. He set the tone for spiritual life. The individual who seeks to avoid suffering with Christ, by that very action, forfeits being glorified with Him.

CONCLUSION

What we have received in Christ Jesus is far superior to all that was before Him. Nothing about salvation promotes debilitating fear, or moves one to withdraw from the Lord in shame and dread. Instead of that, we have received the Spirit of adoption, or the Spirit of sonship. We have been marked down in heaven as sons of God, and the impact of it has registered upon our spirits.

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greatness of salvation has been expounded in a most effective manner. With great power, we have been apprized that we owe nothing to the flesh. We have no obligation to it, and need not extend ourselves to pacify it. Nothing good is found in it, and it cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). We must not, therefore, allow the flesh to enter our lives in general, or the focused parts of life in Christ, including personal devotion and our assemblies. Flesh insists on dominating, and will do so whenever given an opportunity. *“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh”* (v 12).

We must also gird up the loins of our mind and accept the fact that following the dictates of the flesh eventuates in death—spiritual death. It negates all progress that has been made and throws us into the death process once again. It is not possible to survive living *“after the flesh.”* God has spoken, and experience confirms it to be true. *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die”* (v 13a).

Just as surely as living after the flesh produces death, putting to death the deeds of the body through the Holy Spirit

results in life. We are sensitive to God only to the degree that the deeds of the body are mortified. The Spirit will empower and direct us in refusing to allow sin to express itself through our members. It is our business to believe that. It simply is impossible to enjoy Divine fellowship and benefits if we allow sin to erupt in words and deeds. However, if we subdue such expressions, we will become more sensitive to the Lord and His direction. *“But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (v 13b).

Being the *“sons of God”* is a most blessed privilege, and is to be guarded at all cost. This state is not to be taken for granted, for it is conditioned upon being led by the Spirit of God. Those who are not easily directed by the Spirit are standing in *“slippery places”* Psa 73:18).

Those, however, who hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, and can be easily directed by Him are in safety, and have every reason to be of good cheer. Their triumph is as sure as their faith is strong. Faith IS the victory that overcomes the world. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”* (v 14).

All of the complexities of our nature are met in Christ Jesus. Not only do we have a sense of Divine acceptance that is attested by Scripture, a personal Witness is given to us to assure us we are the children of God. That witness is the Holy Spirit, who comes along side our Spirit and joins it in confirming we are the children of God. *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (v 16).

The benefits of being God’s children extend far beyond time and circumstance. Presently, we are enjoying the firstfruits of salvation, with the bulk of our inheritance to come. There is a birthright up ahead that goes beyond the capability of the human mind. As it is written, *“But as it is written: ‘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’”* (1 Cor 2:9). However, God has not left us in a quandary about these things. Rather, He *“has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things,*

yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10). Part of that revelation has been made known in our text. It is in summary form, but it is challenging to ponder. It involves being "*heirs*," "*heirs of God*," and "*joint heirs with Christ*." Obtaining that status

is worth the most arduous effort! It will be granted to you if you suffer with Christ, filling up the small measure of suffering He has left behind.

Now, put yourself into the work.

Extend yourself for Christ. We only have a short while to wait. "*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together*" (v 17).

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 26



SUFFERING is the PRELUDE to GLORY

8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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.— Romans 8:18-27 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

ADJUSTING OUR FOCUS

The eighth chapter of Romans is a Divinely appointed means of adjusting our spiritual focus, or tuning our spiritual perspective. It clarifies the **nature** of salvation as well as its marvelous provisions. After we have been confronted with the world and all of its delusions, this wonderful chapter causes us to look upward, where our Lord resides.

NO CONDEMNATION

After we have grappled with the law of sin within our members, and experienced the frustrations that attend the fierce inward war brought on by faith, we are told *“There is therefore now no condemnation”* (8:1). Without that

precious facet of understanding, the warfare would soon get the best of us.

FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN

The flesh presses us relentlessly, demanding its own way, and aggressively seeking to once again dominate us. In mercy, the Lord reveals through this chapter that *“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”* has made us *“free from the law of sin and death”* (8:2). We have no obligation to *“the flesh,”* and can confidently refuse its demands.

SIN HAS BEEN CONDEMNED

Sin looms before us like Goliath, seeking to intimidate us. Using our prior sins, the devil can harass us with our past,

dredging up transgressions that have been forgiven. He craftily reminds us we are capable of doing those things again, and seeks to lure us back to living in the flesh. His advances are thwarted when we lay hold of the Word. The Spirit affirms God was in Christ and has *“condemned sin in the flesh,”* robbing it of its power (8:3).

CLARIFYING CARNALITY

The religious world beats upon our ears with a compromising message that makes allowances for the flesh. It offers explanations for living beneath the privileges of salvation, and makes provision for a spiritual life that lacks commitment and advancement. However, as we pay heed to this choice chapter,

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE CONSIDERATION OF FAITH (8:18)
- II. CREATION IS WAITING (8:19)
- III. THE EXTENT OF THE CURSE (8:20)
- IV. CREATION TO BE RELEASED (8:21)
- V. ALL CREATION IS INVOLVED (8:22)
- VI. FELLOWSHIP IN GROANING (8:23)
- VII. THE CRITICAL ROLE OF HOPE (8:24-25)
- VIII. HELP IN OUR IGNORANCE (8:26)
- IX. EFFECTIVE INTERCESSION (8:27)

heaven shouts to us, *“For to be carnally minded is death . . . the carnal mind is enmity against God . . . they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (8:6-8). It brings us back to the understanding that no provision whatsoever has been made in Christ for following the dictates of the flesh or being carnally minded.

BELIEVERS HAVE THE ADVANTAGE

When the old serpent tempts us to imagine we are not equal to the rigors of spiritual warfare, we are told *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you,”* and *“if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life*

because of righteousness,” and *“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you”* (8:9-11). The heavenly Helper has been assigned to us, to bring us through the morass of sin, and land us safely on the shores of glory.

AN AGGRESSIVE STANCE

When the devil tempts us to imagine an aggressive spiritual stance is not necessary, we read, *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (8:13). The Spirit will lead us in a victorious battle against the flesh, like God led Israel against mighty Jericho, and David against Goliath.

In all of these matters, life in Christ is seen more clearly, thereby enabling the child of God to wage effective war, and live a productive spiritual life.

ONLY THE BEGINNING

The bulk of the privileges and involvements related to our sonship are ahead of us. In this world, we have, at best, only been introduced to them. The passage before us will refer to our present participation in God’s *“great salvation”* as the *“firstfruits of the Spirit”* (v 23).

THE ROLE OF SUFFERING

While the saints remain in these bodies (and consequently in this world), sufferings constitute a major part of their

experience. A primary facet of these sufferings was introduced in the seventh chapter, which elaborated on our struggle with the flesh. The Spirit will now deal with the whole range of sufferings that have resulted from our identify with Christ Jesus.

We have already been introduced to this in the verse preceding this section: *“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together [with Him]”* (verse 17). **There is a sense in which a glorified future depends upon successfully negotiating through present sufferings.** The real issue for believers is NOT whether they will suffer or not, but whether they will survive the suffering.

For this reason, the Spirit will now reveal the extensiveness of the help God gives us in these sufferings. He will also confirm they are vastly inferior to what we will receive in the future. He will even show us that we have joined a great chorus of suffering that is rising from the realm of the curse.

Generally, this section of Scripture is little known to the saints of God. It simply does not fit well into an institutional agenda. Further, this exposition of suffering is in sharp conflict with the psychological approach that has been popularized in our day. Once declared, however, the glory of the truth will be at once seen by those who believe.

THE CONSIDERATION OF FAITH

“^{8:18} For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” As with all Scripture, this passage is not the personal interpretation of the writer. It is ever true, *“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”*^{NIV} (2 Pet 1:20-21). The fact that Paul says *“I consider,”* does not mean this view originated with him, or

that it is a mere human opinion. From heaven’s point of view, this is a revelation given to Paul for the edification of the saints. From the human point of view, this is a deduction produced by faith, that is *“common”* to all saints (Tit 1:4). It is essential that we perceive this, else the passage will lose its significance to us, and be robbed of its Divine power.

CONSIDERING

“For I consider . . .” The KJV reads, *“For Ireckon.”* Some rather liberal paraphrases read with alarming

weakness. *“I am of the opinion,”*^{BBE} and *“In my estimation.”*^{NJB}

Let it be clear that *“reckoning,”* or *“considering,”* is not a mere human exercise, or effort to analyze. In Scripture, considering is not a facet of human logic, but an aspect of faith. It involves reasoning, but not mere reasoning. **It is rationale based upon revelation.** While the things of God conflict with the worldly mindset, they are not irrational or unreasonable. Faith has a reasoning of its own, and *“reckoning,”* or *“considering”* involves arriving at conclusions mandated

by faith. **It is thinking that results from believing**—and believing God does impact upon the way we think! Admittedly, this removes glory from man, but that is needful.

The word from which “reckon” or “consider” is translated is λογίζομαι, which etymologically means *count, reckon, calculate, consider, think, suppose, or evaluate*. Linguistically, it is *thinking according to logical rules*.^{Liddell-Scott Lexicon} However impressive these definitions may appear, they do not tell the whole story.

In Scripture, reckoning is based upon revelation, not human logic. It is an expression of faith, not of mere human nature. This reckoning or considering is also a spiritual conclusion. The book of Romans frequently uses the word in this manner.

- ❑ “Therefore **we conclude** that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law” (3:28).
- ❑ “Likewise **reckon ye also yourselves** to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- ❑ The word is also used in the book of Hebrews to describe how faith moved Abraham to reason. “**Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure**” (Heb 11:19).

In each of these passages, the reasoning contradicts what appears to be, and violates the manner in which flesh thinks. The conclusion that man is justified “without the deeds of the Law” violates the human way of thinking, but perfectly conforms to the logic of faith. Considering ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God contradicts thinking that is based upon experience, yet strictly comports with the rationale of faith. For Abraham to determine to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to God in hope that God would raise him from the dead defied every form of human reasoning. Yet, it was impeccably accurate for the reasoning patterns of faith.

What is here affirmed is not an

appeal to mere human reason. Rather, it is a Divine affirmation made to faith. This does reflect the reasoning of Paul, but only because he had faith. It is not the conclusion of Paul the scholar, but Paul the believer. For this reason, every person in Christ can arrive at the same conclusion. Because of this, they can be both comforted and strengthened by reasoning in this manner.

THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME

“ . . . *the sufferings of this present time* . . . ” There are at least three senses in which “this present time” is used.

It is not the conclusion of Paul the scholar, but Paul the believer. For this reason, every person in Christ can arrive at the same conclusion. Because of this, they can be both comforted and strengthened by reasoning in this manner.

- ❑ First, it refers to the period of time itself, sandwiched between eternity past and eternity future.
- ❑ Second, it pertains to the period of time during which we live by faith—the period between our new birth and our glorification.
- ❑ Third, it relates to what believers are presently experiencing—today, and at this present time.

All three views are relevant to our spiritual understanding. The first teaches us to properly evaluate life itself. The second instructs us concerning life in Christ Jesus. The third helps us to properly evaluate what we are presently experiencing. This is a statement made for all believers of all time.

Sufferings Induced By Faith

These are sufferings brought on by faith, NOT sufferings common to all humanity, or miseries experienced in the routines of normal life (i.e., sickness,

calamity, etc.).

These sufferings range from bloody persecution and social ostracization, to inner turmoil and conflict with our own flesh. All of them are very real, and all of them are limited to our time in “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4). **Persecution and rejection** are the result of becoming citizens of another world (Phil 3:20; John 15:19), and receiving a nature that is in sharp conflict with the spirit of this world (2 Cor 5:17). **Inner turmoil and conflict with the flesh** are the result of possessing a “*new man*” and an “*old man*” simultaneously (Eph 4:22-24) – a “*spiritual man*” and a “*natural man*” at the same time (1 Cor 2:14-15).

Both of these conditions – the outward and the inward – produce “*sufferings*.” These are afflictions that are painful, and hardships that chaff against the soul. By their very nature they can cause discouragement, sorrow, and spiritual stupidity. Under the stress of suffering, many a believer has been moved to think incorrectly. When suffering, some have even thought believing and serving God were not worth going through such grief, and have therefore went back to the past like a dog to its vomit.

Multitudes of believers live in a state of constant confusion and frustration because they cannot account for the difficulties they endure. “*The sufferings of this present time*,” though they may differ in intensity and type, are common to us all. We need the perspective of faith to be able to endure them.

NOT WORTHY OF COMPARISON

“ . . . *are not worthy to be compared* . . . ” You might call this **comparative thinking**. In order to obtain a proper view, one thing is compared with another. It is critical that we know how to make such comparisons. We are not, for example, to compare ourselves with other people (2 Cor 10:12). Consequently, our sufferings are NOT to be compared with the sufferings of others.

Although such comparisons are common (i.e., “We have not suffered as much as the martyrs of old,” . . . etc.), it is

not proper for such analogies to be made. One may imagine they will yield a thankful spirit, but they rarely do. They are too shallow. Experiences in time are not to be compared with one another.

By saying “*worthy*,” the Spirit is not ascribing one level of worthiness to sufferings and another level to glory. It is the comparison itself that is “*not worthy*.” The purpose is to lighten the cross by affirming sufferings are NOTHING compared to glory. They seem significant, but they are not: they are “*nothing*.” They are not “*nothing*” because they do not hurt, but because they will not be remembered when we are delivered from time and this present evil world.

This type of reasoning (which is really the only proper way to reason) postulates that God’s people live with “*the world to come*” in view. They are fundamentally other-worldly, and not of this world. A worldly minded people simply cannot think in the manner of our text. In fact, such thinking is foolishness to those whose roots are not in eternity.

GLORY REVEALED IN US

“*... with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*” There are different views of this text presented in the various translations. The first affirms glory will be revealed “*IN us*” (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NIB, WEBSTERS, DUOAY-RHEIMS, YLT). Another view is reflected in the words “*to us-ward*,”^{ASV} “*to us*,”^{NASB} and “*disclosed for us*.”^{NJB} Yet another view places the emphasis on a future time: “*in the future*,”^{BBE} and “*give us later*.”^{NLT}

Let it be clear, the saints of God will not be mere spectators, as is suggested by some of these meager translations. Whatever justification may be presented for saying the glory will be revealed “*to us*,” that cannot be the intent of the words. Those who suffer are experiencing the suffering, and they will also experience the glory. If this is not the case, these words can bring us no comfort.

Glory Is Now In Us

These words posit that glory is presently “*in us*,” but has not yet been revealed. It is veiled, or hidden, by our flesh. The Scriptures confirm this is actually the case—i.e., we presently have glory. The intensity of this glory has not

yet reached its pinnacle. We are presently being changed “*from one degree of glory to another*” by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). Even now, when we are “*reproached for the name of Christ*,” “*the spirit of glory and of God*” rests, or resides, on us (1 Pet 4:14). In his address to elders, Peter affirmed he was “*a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed*” with them (1 Pet 5:1).

Glorified Bodies

Just as the glory of Jesus was hidden by His flesh, so the present and initial glory of the saints is hidden by their flesh. But it will not remain hidden. Who we really are will eventually be made known to the complete consternation of our enemies. “*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory*” (Col 3:4). Then we will be clothed in a “*glorious body*,” free from weakness and inaccessible to our foes (Phil 3:21).



The Realm of Glory

When those in Christ are “*glorified*,” according to Divine appointment (Rom 8:30), they will be perfectly suited for the realm of glory. That is the realm to which God has called us (1 Pet 5:10), and to which Jesus is bringing us (Heb 2:10).

“*Glory*” is the realm where God is obvious to all, and there are no competitors. It is where perfection exists in all of its inhabitants, and where there is no conflict, sorrow, or regrets.

The **realm** of glory awaits those who now participate in Divine glory. Both the realm and the participants will soon be revealed. That revelation will be made

known when the Lord Jesus is revealed in all of His glory. It is then that the people of God will become obvious. As it is written, “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as He is*” (1 John 3:2). The appearance of Christ is not simply visibility, but when He will be seen as He really is. In the blaze of His glory, those in whom God’s glory now resides will become “*glorified*,” with every vestige of the curse once and for all removed.

GLORY MUST BE CONSIDERED

When the Spirit says our present sufferings “*are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us*,” He is not saying a comparison of suffering with glory is not to be made. Rather, due consideration of glory will produce the comparison, verifying the smallness of our sufferings, and enabling us to endure them. As we ponder the coming glory that will be made known “*in us*,” the weight of our sufferings will diminish. This is precisely the point made in Second Corinthians 4:16-17. “*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*”^{NIV}

Troubles and afflictions are not “*light*” unless they are offset in the scales of consideration by the coming glory! Whether we ponder the inner warfare of Romans Seven, or the tribulations of Romans Five, the contemplation of glory will reduce their weight, tipping the scales in our favor.

The saints must not be deprived of this perspective! Let it be clear that such deprivation takes place when the minds of believers are pushed to consider the affairs and experiences of this world. If we are basically citizens of heaven, then we need to hear about the homeland! If our lives are “*hid with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3), then we must hear more about them both! Too long the church has been pummeled with stones of worldly thought. The glories of the world to come, and the glory that will be revealed in us has been withheld by spiritual midgets attired with academic robes. The result of this is an

anemic and confused church.

All of this may appear negative and unduly critical. However, in the light of passage before us, I have actually been very lenient in my assessment of contemporary teaching and preaching. The present condition of the church is

largely the result of the diet it has been given. It has been sadly lacking in both quantity and quality. But this does not need to continue.

Men and women of God can rise up and declare the glories to come, and the marvelous benefits that await the sons

and daughters of the most high God. When faith takes hold of these good words, sufferings will at once become tolerable. They will be lightened and zeal will be increased. Gladness will be enhanced, hope will flourish, and faith will grow, bringing glory to God. Boldness and confidence will also flourish.

CREATION IS WAITING

⁴¹⁹ ***For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.*** The Spirit now widens our perspective of salvation, showing it to be far more extensive than unassisted reasoning can fathom. Other versions read, ***“For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God,”*** ^{NASB} ***“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed,”*** ^{NIV} ***“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God,”*** ^{NRSV} ***“For the strong desire of every living thing is waiting for the revelation of the sons of God,”*** ^{BBE} ***“For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.”*** ^{NLT} The greatness of the text, then, should be obvious.

and all that in them is . . .” (Acts 4:24).

The creation includes the firmament, or airy heavens. A immense array of stars, planets, galaxies, and other celestial bodies are included in the creation. There are waters and land, together with minerals and a vast array of stones and formations. Ponder the massive variety of vegetation, or seed bearing plants and trees. There are heavenly bodies, some of which emit light. There are creatures that live in the waters, fowls that fly in the air, creatures that walk upon the earth, others that crawl upon the earth, and still others that live underground. The immensity and variety of creation is staggering. All of this, and possibly more, are involved in this text.

and shown to have an immediate association with our own circumstance.

EAGERLY WAITING

It is the *“earnest expectation”* of the creation that *“eagerly waits.”* This involves fervent desire and anxious anticipation. It is something that cannot be quenched, and has been prompted by a form of revelation or intuition that is unknown to the sons of men. No matter how expert men become in the natural sciences, it is utterly impossible to arrive at the knowledge of this expectation apart from the Word of God. If He had not told us of this universal anticipation and longing, it could never have been known by us.

Why Mention This Expectation?

There is good reason for mentioning the earnest expectation of the whole creation. Hope has been affirmed to be a compelling incentive for the child of God. In contradiction of all human hope, our father Abraham *“in hope believed”* (4:18). When the Holy Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts, hope becomes dominant, and the child of God is not ashamed of it (5:5).

The Spirit has also declared the role of perseverance and patience in the life of faith. Eternal life will be given to those who *“by*

patient continuance seek for glory, honor, and immortality” (2:7). He has reminded us that ***“tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope”*** (5:3-5).

Now, in order to encourage us to be steadfast and unmoveable, the Spirit

THE CREATION

Because sin brought a curse upon the entirety of creation, all of it is involved in redemption. The word *“creation,”* or *“creature,”* KJV refers to everything that has been created, or made. To be more specific, it is everything created by God. It does **not** refer to the works of men. Both the animate and the inanimate are included—the sub total of God’s creation. Scriptural phrases that connote the whole creation are as follows.

- ❑ *“The heavens and the earth . . . and all the host of them”* (Gen 2:1).
- ❑ *“The things that are in heaven, and in the earth!”* (Psa 113:6).
- ❑ *“The heaven and the earth, and all that is therein. . .”* (Jer 51:48).
- ❑ *“. . . heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is. . .”* (Ex 20:11).
- ❑ *“. . . heaven, and earth, and the sea,*

The entire creation, animate and inanimate, are eagerly anticipating something. More than dependability and consistency are found in the impersonal creation. There is an ardent sense of expectancy that fills the whole creation.

EARNEST EXPECTATION

The entire creation, animate and inanimate, are eagerly anticipating something. More than dependability and consistency are found in the impersonal creation. There is an ardent sense of expectancy that fills the whole creation. This expectation will now be developed,

asseverates we are surrounded by an entire creation that is patiently and hopefully enduring. For over six millennia the “*whole creation*” has been in a state of expectancy. Further, it has maintained that eager longing amidst the precise execution of its varied roles. Day and night, together with seasons and years, have faithfully been maintained while creation remains in a state of eager longing. What are a few short decades of our patience compared to that?

THE REVELATION OF THE SONS OF GOD

What is it that the whole creation is looking forward to and longing for? It is the revealing, or manifestation, of “*the sons of God*” –“who His children really are.”^{NLT}

This certainly does not pertain to the angelic hosts, who are called “*the sons of God*” in the book of Job (1:6; 2:1; 38:7). The creation knows who the angels are, for they presently exercise authority over the creation. There is “*the angel in charge of the waters*”^{NIV} (Rev 16:5), another who has “*charge of the fire*” (Rev 14:18), and others who can hold back “*the four winds of earth*” (Rev 7:1). One angel authoritatively stood on the land and sea simultaneously (Rev 10:8-9). No, the revelation of the angels is not what the whole creation is waiting for!

The creation is waiting for the manifestation for those who are sons by “*adoption*”–the ones who have received the “*Spirit of adoption*” (8:15). These are the ones who are “*led by the Spirit of God*” (8:14). By virtue of their faith, they have been granted the right to “*become the sons of God*” (John 1:12). These are the premier people in the earth–the ones who are recognized and singularly blessed by God Almighty. The Almighty God refers to them as “*my sons and daughters*” (2 Cor 6:18).

Presently, these “*sons and daughters*” are incognito: that is, their identity is concealed. Only those within the family of God have any capacity to recognize these privileged people–and even some of them have considerable difficulty doing so. According to

appearance, they seem no different than other people, even though they are “*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*” (8:17). Their sins have been forgiven, but there is no tangible proof that this is so. Their names have been written in the Lamb’s book of life, but you cannot determine this by their appearance.

It is certain that “*the whole creation*” is unable to detect these “*sons of God*.” When God created man, He placed all things under him. He made man “*a little lower than the angels*,” crowned him with “*glory and honor*,” and “*set him*

For over six millennia the “*whole creation*” has been in a state of expectancy. Further, it has maintained that eager longing amidst the precise execution of its varied roles. Day and night, together with seasons and years, have faithfully been maintained while creation remains in a state of eager longing.

over the works of His hands.” Nothing was omitted from this Divine subjugation: “*For in that he put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him.*” However, with the entrance of sin, an interim period was introduced during which “*we see not yet all things put under him*” (Heb 2:7-8). Creation is serviceable to man, but is not in thorough subjection to him (Gen 9:2-3).

Jesus Is The Pledge

The appointed subjection, however is slated for the future, and will come to pass. In the meantime, a pledge of the privilege to be vouchsafed to men is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus it is written, “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by*

whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:9-10). When He was among us, the winds and the waves obeyed Him. Trees withered at His command, and a fish delivered a coin to Peter at a word from Jesus. Now that He is exalted at the right hand of God, His reign is even more extensive, and is absolutely unquestioned.

The Sons Are Being Prepared

Presently, the Lord Jesus is preparing the sons of God to assume the rule with Him–i.e., “*joint heirs*.” That is one of the primary reasons for bringing them to glory. In sanctification through His blood, Jesus has set the sons aside for Divine employment. In practical sanctification, He is separating them from this world, and giving them familiarity with heavenly manners and purposes.

Christ’s intercessory ministry is not simply to get them through this world, but to prepare them for “*the world to come*.” It has been determined that they will be given “*the kingdom*” (Dan 7:18,22,27), and they are presently being readied for it. Jesus promised the Father would give His disciples a kingdom. “*And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Luke 22:29-30). That kingdom was not limited to the Apostles, for “*the saints will judge the world*,” and “*angels*” as well (1 Cor 6:2-3). Our walk with Jesus here is preparing us for a reign with Jesus there.

The Time of Revelation

The revelation of the sons of God will occur when the Lord Jesus Christ, the “*only begotten Son*,” is revealed. As it is written, “*when He appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as He is*”^{NIV} (1 John 3:2). And again, “*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory*” (Col 3:4).

It is true the sons of God are revealed in their conversion. They receive a “*new heart*” and a “*new Spirit*,” and enter a process wherein they are being

changed “from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of our God” (Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:18). But this is not the revelation mentioned in our text. The evidence of the new birth is neutralized by the remaining remnants of our old nature. Too, our sonship is in the state of confirmation or

verification. The work within us has not yet been completed. A modicum of honesty will confirm this to be the case in every honest and good heart.

Until the work is finished (Rom 9:28), performed (Phil 1:6), and completed

(Col 4:12), the creation eagerly waits for the unveiling of the sons of God. If the impersonal creation, void of reason, can eagerly and patiently wait, what of those who have received “the firstfruits of the Spirit?” Will not hope sustain them even more surely than it does the creation?

THE EXTENT OF THE CURSE

“²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope.” With the vaunting of an academic approach to Scripture, the extent of the fall of man became veiled. Religious leaders began to explain sin with words of worldly wisdom. They traced it to environmental influences, disease, physiological makeup, and differences in brain waves. As a result, the emphasis was changed from preaching the Gospel to counseling, therapy, work shops, and how-to-do-it literature. The result of this academic shift confirms it was all of the devil. Those subjected to this sort of leadership are abysmally ignorant of how far man fell, and how serious sin really is.

Our text stretches our hearts and minds beyond the reach of the worldly wisdom. It moves us into the area where faith alone can apprehend the real situation. A single sin, committed only one time, has sent a wake of destruction throughout the entire universe, or “worlds” (Heb 1:2; 11:3). The entirety of the realm involved in the creation of the “heavens and the earth” became defiled. Everything God created had to die because His chief creation had sinned! Now, death not only stalks and devours humanity, but the impersonal creation as well—both animate and inanimate. Let those who think lightly of sin, finding it easy to explain it away with carnal hypotheses, ponder the effects of sin—a single sin. It will assist in freeing them from the delusion that has engulfed them. Let it be clear, no measurable victory will be gained over sin until we are persuaded of its enormity. As long as sin is regarded as minor, men will be losers.

SUBJECTED TO FUTILITY

Other versions read, “the creature was made subject to vanity,” ^{KJV} “the creation was subjected to futility,” ^{NASB} “the creation was subjected to frustration,” ^{NIV} “creation had frustration imposed on it,” ^{NJB} and “everything . . . was subjected to God’s curse.” ^{NLT}

By these words, the Spirit means the whole creation is dying. “Subjected to futility” does not mean futility is possible, but that it rules. It also means that unless God does something about the situation, nothing **can** be done.

Contrary to the purported finding of scientists, new things are not being created, but all things are in a constant state of deterioration. Nothing in the realm of nature can remain in a

made for him, and over which he was intended to have dominion. We learn from this that apart from mankind, creation has no real purpose. Not only, therefore, has man been appointed to death, he lives in a realm of death.

Solomon’s Observation

Solomon was granted unparalleled wisdom “under the sun” (Eccl 1:3,9,14; 2:11,17-22). In his consideration of the state of things, he saw “all is vanity,” or pointless (Eccl 1:2,14; 2:17; 3:19;12:9). He enunciated the truth of our text, except without sounding the note of hope.

NOT WILLINGLY

Other versions read, “not of its own will,” ^{NASB} “not by its own choice,” ^{NIV} “not by its own desire,” ^{BBE} and “against its will.” ^{NLT}

Contrary to the purported finding of scientists, new things are not being created, but all things are in a constant state of deterioration. Nothing in the realm of nature can remain in a continuous and permanent state. That is one of the aspects of death, or mortality.

The expression “not willingly” is intended to show at least two things. **First**, the imposition of mortality upon the whole of creation was not owing to its own disobedience or obstinance. It was because of man’s sin. **Second**, there was no desire on the part of creation for mortality. It had no inclination toward this condition. Rather, it was contrary to everything about creation.

We do not do well to take this text and go about saying there is some form of intelligence in the creation like that of man. No text of Scripture ever insinuates that creation bears the image of God, which image includes both choice and reason. There is, however, some form of intuitive knowledge resident in creation that makes death repugnant to it. Just as brute creatures have intuition that enables them to swim, so there is something innate

continuous and permanent state. That is one of the aspects of death, or mortality.

This state of mortality was imposed upon the creation. It had no choice in the matter. Man’s transgression thus infected the whole of the environment that was

within the whole creation that makes it disdain death and long for freedom from it.

It is my understanding that the purpose of this text is to show the utter unreasonableness of NOT living by hope. It is also to confirm to the saints that they are part of a vast and remarkably large chorus of hope that is rising from the earth.

THE REASON BEHIND THE FUTILITY

“ . . . but because of Him who subjected it in hope.” Other versions read, “but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope,” ^{KJV} “but because of Him who subjected it, in hope,” ^{NASB} “but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope,” ^{NIV} and “but for the

purposes of Him who imposed it.”^{NJB}

God does nothing without a cause (Ezek 14:23). The imposition of futility upon the whole creation is no exception to that rule. The meaning of this verse is that God’s purpose was being served in the infliction of mortality upon the creation. It was not something the creation chose, as man did when he sinned. Rather, it was something God chose.

There is a remarkable truth to be seen here. While creation groans under the weight of mortality, it looks forward to the manifestation of the sons of God. **Hope, therefore, grows and flourishes in the midst of unfavorable and difficult**

circumstances!

The creation functions in strict conformity to the will of God, never rebelling or straying from its appointed purpose. Faithfully “*the sun rises and the sun sets*” (Eccl 1:5), “*which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat*” NKJV (Psa 19:5-6). It is showing an example of obedience while waiting for the revelation of the sons of God.

Nature effectively speaks to us about the role of hope, and how it enables us to survive the difficulties of life. A living hope exercises a great power upon us!

CREATION TO BE RELEASED

“²¹ **Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.**” This verse proclaims that redemption reaches as far as the curse, praise the Lord! It registers an even greater impact that transgression. As it is written, “*But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*” (Rom 5:20).

THE CREATION ITSELF

The creation, or “*the things that are made*” (Heb 12:27), was contaminated by the sin of man, and thus corruption was imposed upon it. This is seen in the Lord’s word to Adam: “*cursed is the ground for thy sake*” (Gen 3:17). Only the ground is mentioned in Genesis because of the nature of the curse of man: “*in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*” (3:17b-19).

Our text broadens the matter to include the entirety of creation. This agrees with the assessment of David, the

Prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles. “*Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed*” ^{DAVID} (Psa 102:25-26). “*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment*” ^{ISAIAH} (Isa 51:6). “*Heaven and*

heat?”^{PETER} (2 Pet 3:10-12).

Corruption consists of two things. **First**, deterioration and death have been passed upon all creation. It is, in a sense, winding down. **Second**, there will be an abrupt termination to everything that is corrupt—a consumption by fire. As it is written, “*But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men*” (2 Pet 3:7).

This verse proclaims that redemption reaches as far as the curse, praise the Lord! It registers an even greater impact that transgression. As it is written, “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”

“*The creation itself*” refers to the heavens “*with all their host,*” the earth “*and all things therein,*” and the sea “*and all that is therein*” (Neh 9:6). All of them have been infected with the curse, and all will be affected by “*the regeneration*” (Matt 19:28).

DELIVERED FROM BONDAGE

The Prophets and the Apostles refer to this deliverance as the new heavens and the new earth. Through Isaiah, God said, “*For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind*” (Isa 65:17). And again, “*For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me*” (Isa 65:22). Peter affirmed, “*Nevertheless we,*

earth shall pass away” ^{JESUS} (Mk 13:31). “*The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. . . the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent*

according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet 3:13). From Patmos, John said “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Rev 21:1). This is nothing less than deliverance from the bondage of corruption, and the whole creation is waiting and longing for it.

No More Hostilities In Creation

Because hostility and friction are aspects of death, they will all be eliminated when creation is liberated from the “bondage of corruption.” While they do not dwell upon this, the Prophets give us a hint of what will be involved. “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den” (Isa 11:6-8). And again, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD” (Isa 65:25).

Ezekiel wrote, “And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods” (Ezek 34:25).

Hosea wrote, “And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely” (Hos 2:18).

Creation Not Annihilated

We learn from this that the destruction or passing of the heavens and the earth does not mean they will be annihilated or eradicated. Rather, they will be “changed.” As it is written, “Of old

hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed” (Psa 102:25-26). They will be renovated, with all corruption burned away in the baptism of fire. They will pass away as we presently know them, and will be invested with a new appearance and manner. It will be much like our bodies, which are part of the natural order. They will be “changed” (1 Cor 15:52). As it is written, “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:53). Again, it is said of the body, “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42-44). A CHANGE! That is what will

In the maintenance of spiritual life, distraction is lethal, and can even remove us from the Source of our life. We do well not to pursue an understanding of things the Spirit does not expound. After all,

occur in the creation—from corruption to incorruption, and bondage to liberty!

Care Must Be Taken

Care must be taken not to take these texts and run about wildly in a theological maze of confusion. These passages are also related to the New Covenant, in which a degree of peace is realized that was never before experienced (Isa 11:9-10; 66:12; Ezek 35:29; Hos 2:23). This by no means indicates they have no applicability to “the world to come.” It does, however, serve to neutralize carnal curiosity about the ages to come.

There is no justification for saying ones pets will be in heaven. In fact, there is a certain absurdity to the whole notion, seeing we will be with the Creator of all

things. That impersonal associations would remain dominate under such a condition is an absurdity unworthy of embracing.

The liberation of creation is nowhere associated with a resurrection. That applies to humanity alone. We should be willing to let the matter rest there.

Curious Details Are Omitted

For those with a compelling desire to pursue the nature of creation’s release from the bondage of corruption, this inspired passage will offer little satisfaction. Details about creation’s coming freedom are not approached from an academic point of view. In fact, it only has relevance because it is related to the glorification of the saints of God.

In my judgment, all of this is the deliberate work of the Holy Spirit, who is directing us in HOW to think about these things. In the maintenance of spiritual life, distraction is lethal, and can even remove us from the Source of our life. We do well not to pursue an understanding of things the Spirit does not expound. After all, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever” (Deut 29:29).

GLORIOUS LIBERTY

“...the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Creation’s deliverance from the bondage of corruption will be “INTO” the glorious liberty of God’s children. From bondage to liberty, and corruption to glory!

Other versions refer to this liberty as “the freedom of the glory,”^{NASB} “the glorious freedom,”^{NIV} “the liberty of the glory,”^{ASV} “the liberty of the glory.”^{YLT} This, then, is a freedom or liberty produced by glory. It is an aspect of glorification. The unspeakable freedom that will attend the total removal of mortality transcends our fondest imagination. The sentence of death was consignment to bondage! Presently, the saints have a heavenly treasure in an “earthen vessel,” or jar of clay (2 Cor 4:7). This frail vessel is responsible for weakness, ignorance, and conflict. It causes frustration, sorrow, and danger.

Because of it we must “*put on the whole armor of God*” (Eph 6:10), “*fight the good fight of faith*” (1 Tim 6:12), and “*resist the devil*” (James 4:7). All of this will be eliminated when we leave this “*vile body*” (Phil 3:21).

Liberty of Expression

However, there is an even greater liberty that will be experienced when we enter into our new body, our “*house from heaven*” (2 Cor 5:1-5). Then we will enjoy unexcelled liberty in expression and movement. No more souls will be “*under the altar*” crying out for vengeance (Rev 6:9-11). There will be no more “*spirits in prison*,” held in an interim state until the

resurrection of the dead (1 Pet 3:19). Glory will bring thorough freedom. Instantly, it will propel the redeemed above even the angelic hosts, and they will be given “*the world to come*,” to govern and manage it with Jesus (Heb 2:5-9).

At the time the sons of God are revealed and obtain the freedom that comes from being glorified, the whole creation will also be effected by that glory. That freedom cannot come until the sons of God are revealed, or appear with Christ in glory. Glory itself will bring about this freedom from corruption and decay.

Do Not Think Lightly of Sin

The liberation of the whole creation is God’s compensation for enduring the judgment of corruption because of man. Should we choose to think lightly of sin, or excuse it as though it was a small thing, the consideration of creation should cause us to cease such foolishness. The universe is winding down because of man’s sin! Blights attack plants and vegetation because of sin. Wild and uncontrollable beasts exist and prey upon one another because of the sin of man. All of this was a caused by one sin, committed in a single act of disobedience! The knowledge of this circumstance will work sobriety within the believing heart. A certain revulsion for sin will be developed.

ALL CREATION IS INVOLVED

“²² *For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*” There is an aggressiveness depicted in this verse. Creation is like an expectant mother in the throes of her final birth pains. There is nothing casual or passive about this travail.

UNIVERSAL GROANING

Everything that is made is involved: “*the whole creation.*” There is an intensity in the groans: “*labors with birth pangs.*” For six thousand years this groaning has continued without interruption or relief: “*until now.*” The groaning is found in every place on earth, and in the most distant galaxy as well. If you have an ear, you can hear the discontent of nature. It is not satisfied with its present condition. It cannot adjust, so to speak, to death, for God subjected it “*in hope.*”

HARMONIOUS BIRTH PANGS

The groaning of “*the whole creation*” is like a harmonious chorus rising into the heavens. Everything that has been made is moving toward an appointed end. For “*the whole creation,*” the end will be liberating and glorious. No aspect of creation will be excluded from the coming liberty. One ancient poem says,

That God which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,

And one far-off Divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.
In Memoriam

The idea is that “*the whole creation*” is moving toward a Divinely appointed time. I do not know the extent to which creation is aware of the coming liberty.

serviceable nature was to Jesus. It is as though it welcomed a beneficent Ruler, submitting to Him.

God has promised, “*Behold, I make all things new*” (Rev 21:5). In some marvelous way, the whole creation knows this, and is yearning for it to occur. The world has had one new start following the flood. As it is written of the flood, “*Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*” (2 Pet 3:6). It was, so to speak, baptized with water, and again appeared after the floods receded without the contamination of sinful multitudes. It will yet be baptized with fire, after which it will emerge thoroughly cleansed.

I do not know the extent to which creation is aware of the coming liberty. But it is aware enough to groan, expect, and look! Every aspect of the creation joins in the chorus, groaning in harmonious expectancy.

But it is aware enough to groan, expect, and look! Every aspect of the creation joins in the chorus, groaning in harmonious expectancy. Let no child of God live beneath the privileges of the impersonal creation. Let expectation be found within the church, which has been slated to spearhead the coming glory.

Methinks creation received a foretaste of the coming liberty when the Son of God entered into its domain. He commanded blustering storms, stilled raging waves, and walked on water. How

Our text associates this liberation with the revelation of the children of God. Nature is not an end of itself. It was made for man, and not man for it. The whole creation is now travelling in birth until the sons of God are made known—until they are glorified together with Christ, as God has predestined (Rom 8:29-30). Even the creation, in some way, knows the sons of God were not made for this world. It knows they are concealed by time and circumstance, and yet fervently and consistently longs for their full exposure and glorification. It is uncomely for the sons themselves to be less aware of this.

However marvelous all of this may seem, the point being made by the Holy Spirit is not the liberation of creation, but the glorification and manifestation of the sons of God. He is showing us that we

ought not to balk at waiting and longing for the time when we will suffer no longer. We should patiently and joyfully endure the hardships of life as we wait for our coming liberty. After informing us of the

involvement of the whole creation in redemption, we now return to the saints themselves. The Spirit takes care not to leave us marveling at the creation, as though it as the center of God's purpose.

FELLOWSHIP IN GROANING

“²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” The phrase “not only that” is translated in a variety of ways in other translations. “And not only they,” ^{KJV} “and not only this,” ^{NASB} “not only so,” ^{NIV} “and not only the creation” ^{NRSV} It is as though the Spirit said, The glory to which the saints have been appointed is so marvelous that even the impersonal creation, with neither mind nor reason as we have, are eagerly anticipating it. How much more, then, will the anticipation of that glory be found in those for whom it has been prepared.

WE ALSO and WE OURSELVES

Here again, Paul confirms he is speaking for all of the people of God. Romans seven and eight are not an autobiography of Paul, but an index to the experience and hope of every person who is in Christ Jesus. By saying “we also,” he means the saints join in the travailing chorus of creation. By saying “we ourselves,” he means this is no mechanical, or even intuitive groaning. Our groaning is deeper than that of creation because we have been given to more fully see the cause, necessity, and extent of the coming glory and its attending liberty.

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

Here, the entirety of what we have received in Christ Jesus is called “the firstfruits of the Spirit.” This is a pregnant phrase that accurately depicts what we presently possess, while accentuating that the bulk of our salvation is yet to come. What we now have is to salvation what the small gleanings of Ruth were to the full harvest of the fields of Boaz. It is written that she “gleaned AFTER the reapers,” who had

gathered the bulk of the harvest (Ruth 2:3). As with us, the gleanings left for Ruth were not left to happenstance. It is written that Boaz said to the reapers, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not” (Ruth 2:15-16). So it is with the graces we enjoy in Christ Jesus. They have been deliberately left for us to gather.

Some consider that the Holy Spirit Himself is the “firstfruit” of the land. A few versions reflect this view: “having the first-fruit of the Spirit,” ^{YLT} “we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste.” ^{NLT} There is certainly a sense in which this is

By saying “we ourselves,” he means this is no mechanical, or even intuitive groaning. Our groaning is deeper than that of creation because we have been given to more fully see the cause, necessity, and extent of the coming glory and its attending liberty.

true. Thus we read of the “earnest,” or pledge, “of the Spirit” (2 Cor 1:22), who is “the earnest of our inheritance” (Eph 1:4). Yet, I do not believe that to be the meaning of the text. The “firstfruits” are given to us by the Holy Spirit, and are thus said to be “of the Spirit.”

The Scriptures affirm the active role of the Spirit in our experience of the things blessings of God.

- ❑ “Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance” are declared to be “the fruit of the Spirit”—what He gives to us, or causes to develop within us (Gal 5:22-23).
- ❑ The “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).
- ❑ The essential attributes of the Kingdom of God, “righteous, peace and joy” are said to be “in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).
- ❑ We also “abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).
- ❑ The inner strength we receive in order that Christ can dwell without our hearts by faith comes “by His Spirit” (Eph 3:16).
- ❑ Our washing, sanctification, and justification are accomplished “by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- ❑ Our continued change from one stage of glory to another is accomplished “by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

A few drops of the coming deluge of glory have been given to us by the Holy Spirit. That heavenly sampling has whetted our appetite for the whole of our inheritance. What the Spirit gives us now is like the “one cluster of grapes” from *Eschol* to the luscious vineyards of Canaan (Num 13:23-24). It is elsewhere referred to in these words: “those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb 6:4-5). All of these blessed realities are introduced to us in salvation, but we by no means have experienced the whole of them.

GROANING WITHIN OURSELVES

The “sufferings of this present time,” combined with the sampling of our

inheritance, produces deep groaning “within ourselves.” It is the groan of expectation, and it has made us discontent with “this present evil world.” We join the groaning chorus of all creation, lifting up the song of expectancy, and expressing our discontent with our present surroundings and abilities. We have freedom, but not complete freedom. We remain shackled to a body that cannot inherit the kingdom of God 1 Cor 15:50). Just as the Canaanite was in the promised land when Abraham entered it (Gen 12:6), so the remnants of our old nature remain with us while we are in the world.

Our groaning is not outward, erupting through murmuring lips. It is “within ourselves,” where the fight of faith is waged. Even as the birth pains of an expectant mother are at first known only to her, so these groans are known only to those who have them. As we will find, they involve an intense longing for liberation from this house of clay, which is coupled with a firm persuasion that our longing will be realized.

WAITING FOR THE ADOPTION

“ . . . waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” This groaning is also mentioned in the Second chapter of Second Corinthians. There it also has to do with our bodies. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being

burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (5:1-5).

We have already received the “*Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father!*” (8:15). However, we have not yet been openly revealed as sons: “*it doth not yet APPEAR what we shall be*” (1 John 3:1-2). What we are within will yet be beheld from without, and it will happen when the Lord Himself appears.

We have freedom, but not complete freedom. We remain shackled to a body that cannot inherit the kingdom of God 1 Cor 15:50). Just as the Canaanite was in the promised land when Abraham entered it (Gen 12:6), so the remnants of our old nature remain with us while we are in the world.

Our redemption is not complete until we occupy our new bodies. They are houses, as compared to our present bodies that are frail tents. Our desire is not simply to get out of these bodies. That is the meaning of “*nor for that we would be unclothed.*” We yearn to inhabit our new bodies, which are adapted for glory, and through which no adversary can approach us. Our present bodies are a weight to us. They burden us because of the vileness

that is found in them, as well as their incapacity for the work of the Lord. We must “*keep under them,*” never allowing them to govern our actions. Rather, as we do to an enemy, we must bring them into “*subjection*” (1 Cor 9:27).

Notice that “*the adoption*” is related to the redemption of our body—or the change that will occur at the coming of the Lord. It is then that our present “*vile bodies*” will be changed to be like the “*glorious body*” of our Lord (Phil 3:20-21). Until then, neither adoption nor redemption is complete. If this was not the case, neither hope nor groaning would be in order.

There is a “*salvation ready to be revealed*” (1 Pet 1:5), and “*the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 1:13). That is the time when our adoption will be fully ratified, and the fulness of the curse removed. In patience we are waiting for that day, when what we presently have embraced by faith will be received in all of its glorious fulness.

The change of our bodies is nothing less than “*the redemption of the purchased possession*” (Eph 1:14b). Our bodies have been “*bought,*” and do not belong to us (1 Cor 6:19-20). They are, in fact, “*the members of Christ,*” belonging to Him (1 Cor 6:15). Our adoption will be complete when those bodies are changed. Then Christ’s mediation, as we presently know it, will end. Struggle and disappointment will end, and there will be no more weakness or danger. There will be no more sin in our members, and nothing that can house “*the law of sin.*” How sweet to ponder this coming reality!

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF HOPE

“²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.” This is the Divine explanation for why we are

patiently waiting for “*the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” – “**FOR.**”

SAVED BY HOPE

Hope plays a vital and indispensable role in our salvation, which cannot be finalized without it. When we were born

again, it was in order “*to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Pet 1:3). A “*living hope*” is a dominating one—one that is fed by the “*power of the resurrection*” of our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3:10). Having “*access into this grace wherein we stand,*”

faith moves us to “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2): that is, rejoice in the anticipation of participating in that “glory.” Even the Scriptures were written to sustain this hope, keeping it vibrant and alive in the midst of tribulation.

Hope is one of the three dominate graces: “faith, hope, and love” (1 Cor 13:13). It is the soul’s anchor that keeps the believer’s soul from drifting from its

appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:12-13).

We cannot be saved without hope! We have not merely entered into a ship that is drifting to glory. We ourselves are involved in the process of salvation—and salvation is a process in which change and conformity to Christ’s image is taking place (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 3:29-30). The remarkable absence of a dominating hope

heaven (1 Pet 1:4). You cannot feed hope by speaking of things in this world. It will not grow and flourish with practical tips on how to live in this present evil world. Hope withers and dies in a realm that is saturated with “here and now” thinking and speaking.

If hope is to flourish, it must hear about the country faith has moved us to seek (Heb 11:14). Word of the homeland must be heard, and the “powers of the world to come” must be experienced (Heb 6:5). It is no wonder that hopelessness and despair dominate the hearts of those who never hear about heaven, their inheritance, their reign with Christ, and “the ages to come.”

Hope has to do with the future, and it empowers you for the present. Hope knows what is coming, and in view of that knowledge makes appropriate preparation. We do not hope for what we already have: “hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” Although faith brings benefits to us here and now, it will not allow us to settle down there.

EAGERLY WAITING WITH PERSEVERANCE

Hope chooses to live now in the prospect of the future glory, when what we eagerly long for will be brought to us. It is willing to wait for the glory that is to be revealed, and to do so under great stress and trial. It can compel a sufferer like Job to shout, “If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, Till my change comes” (Job 14:14). And again, “And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:26-27).

eternal moorings (Heb 6:19). There is no point in the life of faith where hope is not required. As long as faith exists, hope must exist with it.

Hope “saves” us in the sense of sanctification, not of justification. Hope does not remove our sins, deliver us from the power of darkness, or translate us into the kingdom of Christ. It does not prompt the new birth, wash us, or write our names in the book of life.

Hope “saves” us in the sense of working out our own salvation “with fear and trembling” AFTER we have been born again (Phil 2:12). It moves us to “go on to perfection,” growing up into Christ in all things (Heb 6:1-3; Eph 4:15). It “saves” us by compelling us to purify ourselves, even as Jesus is pure (1 John 3:1-3). Those who are driven by hope avail themselves of the grace of God that teaches them “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious

in much of the contemporary church is cause for alarm. Legion is the name of those who argue and dispute about various facets of the Lord’s return, yet are not hoping and longing for it! You cannot be saved by discussing the return of Christ! You must eagerly long for it, for that alone will empower you to endure all things!

THE NATURE OF HOPE

Hope has to do with the future, and it empowers you for the present. Hope knows what is coming, and in view of that knowledge makes appropriate preparation. We do not hope for what we already have: “hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” **Although faith brings benefits to us here and now, it will not allow us to settle down there.**

Hope is an aspect of faith, having to do with things unseen. It has been convinced of the truth of the Gospel, particularly the good news of an inheritance that is reserved for us in

Where there is no dominating hope, there will be no perseverance! If men are not “eagerly waiting,” they will not be “steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). Those who speak to us about being faithful, yet withhold food for hope, have only hindered us, they have not helped us. Hope moves men to eagerly wait and persevere because it is sure of a blessed future, and anxious for the day when they will be liberated from corruption. Then everything inhibitive will abruptly end, and no enemy will be in the land! The surety of it all is most comforting.

HELP IN OUR IGNORANCE

“²⁶ 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.”

Having established the essentiality of hope, the Spirit will now confirm the need of a Helper from heaven. Required perseverance cannot be accomplished in self-strength. However cultured and capable the individual may appear to be, he is not, in himself, equal to the rigors of living by faith. I do not believe this has registered upon the souls of average churchmen. They appear to rely too much on the flesh, and overestimate the power of nature. While men are made in the image of God, they cannot fulfill His will apart from Him. We need help, and the good news is that help has been provided!

THE DIVINE HELPER

What a humble ministry for Deity-helping men! The Psalms declare God dwells on high and *"humbles Himself to behold The things that are in the heavens and in the earth? He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes; with the princes of His people"* (Psa 113:6-8). Now the Spirit will declare something of what is involved in lifting the needy out of the ash heap and setting them with the princes of God's people. To speak more from a New Covenant point of view, this is how God takes men from being the enemies of God to the point where they will reign forever with Christ.

"Likewise"

"Likewise the Spirit also helps..."

Other versions read, *"And in the same way the Spirit also helps."*^{NASB} *"And as well as this, the Spirit too comes to help us."*^{NJB} The idea is this: we are aided in our journey to glory by a living hope from God. In the same way, we are also assisted by the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is given to us.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is like unto the ministry of hope. What He does within us blends perfectly with the function of hope. His ministry is never out of harmony with the work of preparing men for the coming of the Lord and glory.

"Helps"

The word *"helps"* is an unusually strong word. In the flesh, one might equate this word with a sort of casual involvement with those in need. But there

is nothing casual about this word. The Spirit helps us by assuming part of the burden, taking it upon Himself. He goes under the burden, and lifts us up, making us equal to the challenges of life. He *"helps"* us like the good Samaritan helped the man who fell among thieves, binding up our wounds, pouring in the oil and wine of sweet comforts, and taking care of us (Luke 10:34). He carries us to the house of comforts, where our vision is restored and our faith renewed. We could not safely negotiate to glory without the ministry of the Holy Spirit! If it were not for the marvelous help of the Holy Spirit, our groanings would get the best of us.

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OUR WEAKNESSES

The KJV reads *"infirmities."* Some versions use the word in the singular: *"weakness."*^{NASB,NIV,NRSV} This is not correct, however, for the word is in the plural. Like the high priest of old, we are *"compassed with infirmity,"* or are *"subject to weakness"*^{NKJV} (Heb 5:2). That weakness takes many forms, and thus is used in the plural form in our text. This is weakness traced back to the presence of the *"law of sin"* that is resident in our bodies. The *"old man"* has neutralized our strength. We will see this particularly touches upon our abilities of expression.

Some would lead us to believe the saved have no weaknesses, but that is just an imagination foisted upon men by the devil. Those who admit to no weakness have not told the truth, and are deceived. The conflict of Romans seven loudly announced that we have weaknesses, and cannot rid ourselves of them.

Because of his understanding of the manner of the Kingdom, and of the very present help of the Holy Spirit, Paul gloried in his infirmities. He knew the power of Christ is devoted to those who know and acknowledge their weaknesses (2 Cor 12:5-9). The redeemed have weaknesses they cannot dismiss from their persons. There is no human discipline or procedure that can rid us of these weaknesses. That is precisely why the Holy Spirit helps us in them. One key weakness is now mentioned.

HANDICAPPED!

"For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought."

The NIV reads, *"We do not know what we ought to pray for."* It is not that we do not know that we SHOULD pray, but we do not know HOW to pray, or what we should pray for. The idea is that there are resources we need—Divine supplies and graces that are required to persevere and come at last into the glory. Our infirm condition, however, has produced this circumstance: *"we do not know how to pray properly"*^{NJB} concerning these matters.

To put the subject in a proper context, those in Christ feel the weight of mortality. They have a contrary law within them, competing with the law of their mind, and lusting against the Spirit as well (Gal 5:17). They find thoughts arising in their minds that they have neither desired nor cultured, and it grieves them deeply. Yet, they are surrounded by ignorance when it comes to praying about this condition. What resources do they need? How can they ask for them? When do they need them? How can they appropriate them? A few conscious moments in the battlefield will cause this confession: *"I am not 'not able to make prayer to God in the right way.'"*^{BBE}

Let it be clear, there is no course of study that can teach men to pray properly—no catechism that will make this text obsolete. This is a statement of the truth. It is not a mere possibility, but a very real condition. It is in the framework of this situation that the Holy Spirit goes to work in our behalf. The revelation of this circumstance is not to be doubted or debated, but believed. Faith will enable us

to rely on this wonderful ministry.

THE SPIRIT'S INTERCESSION

"The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." This is not something done in us, but FOR us. It is not an intercession the Spirit enables us to make, but one He accomplished FOR us. Other versions read, *"the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words,"* NASB *"the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express,"* NIV *"that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words,"* NRSV *"the Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings,"* DOUAY-RHEIMS *"but the Spirit puts our desires into words which are not in our power to say,"* BBE *"But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words."* NLT and *"the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words."* NJB

Prays for Us

Benefits are not always received because of our prayers. Sometimes they come to us because of the prayers, or intercessions, of the Holy Spirit. Your needs are NOT totally dependent upon your prayers, for your needs transcend your abilities of expression. Also, there are needs that cannot be expressed in human language—any language. There are

"groans" that are very real, yet cannot be explained or even articulated by men to God. These are matters that require the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Note, the Spirit does not pray through us, but FOR us. He does not enable us to pray, but prays FOR us. This does not refer to a prayer language for men, uttered through their mouths, and apart from their understanding. The language of the text does not allow for

Note, the Spirit does not pray through us, but FOR us. He does not enable us to pray, but prays FOR us. This does not refer to a prayer language for men, uttered through their mouths, and apart from their understanding.

such an interpretation, which is purely the tradition of men.

Unutterable Groanings

The prayers of reference burst forth in us *"in groanings,"* not words. The groanings themselves are the work of the Spirit. He stirs within the saints deep and unutterable desires and longings. They

are so deep the mind cannot contain them. They erupt in restlessness, discontent, and a sense of good things to come. More specifically, these are groanings of travail, or the expectation of good things to come. When attempting to explain such things, we sound like mere babblers.

These deep groanings are the expression of very real longings and needs. Yet, we cannot handle them with our understanding. They are too profound for us. Therefore, the Spirit takes these groanings and makes intercession FOR us. His intercessions exceed the capabilities of our minds. We are not capable of uttering them in speech. They must be uttered FOR us.

The Spirit Himself

Our text states the matter very carefully. In this case, it is not the spirit of man that prays. It is not an extraordinary ability that is given to the saved. They are not empowered to speak their prayers in special words. From our view, these intercessions are unutterable. It is *"the Spirit HIMSELF"* who makes them. He is devoted to our benefit, and always works to assist us in our weaknesses—even to the point of praying for us when we cannot properly pray for ourselves. Let your faith take hold of this marvelous reality. This is a very wonderful provision. But it is more than wonderful, It is essential!

EFFECTIVE INTERCESSION

"²⁷ 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." The Spirit now clarifies for us that the intercessions of reference have been made by the Spirit Himself, and not by us. Further, their effectiveness is traced to the Spirit, not human expression.

At this point we will see that although we cannot understand the groanings that erupt from us, yet they are important. Even though we cannot articulate them, they are expressing very

real needs that must be answered by God. Among other things, this confirms the relative poverty of the human intellect. Here is something we need—something for which prayer must be made. Yet, we are totally incapable of lifting a prayer to God about the matter.

THE SEARCHER OF OUR HEARTS

"He who searches the hearts . . ." This is referring to the Father Himself. It is God who *"searches the heart."* David said to his son Solomon, *"the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts"* (1 Chron 28:9). Through Jeremiah the

prophet the Lord affirmed, *"I the LORD search the heart"* (Jer 17:10). Jesus said it this way, *"your Father knoweth what things ye have need of"* (Matt 6:8).

Frequently, the fact that God searches the hearts is a solemn warning to those whose hearts are impure and defiled. In this sense He *"tries"* the hearts of men (1 Chron 29:17; Psa 7:9; 44:21; Prov 17:3; Jer 11:20). This is NOT, however, the emphasis of this text.

Here, the Lord is searching the heart for the groanings produced by the Holy Spirit—deep spiritual longings that

He desires to fulfill. This aspect of Divine searching is partially revealed in the words of Hanani the seer to king Asa: *“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His”*^{NASB} (2 Chron 16:9). Such a heart has profound longings which cannot be articulated by those possessing them. Thus, the Lord has made provision for the gratification of such a heart.

The truth of the matter is that God is looking for a reason to bless His people! He looks deep within the heart, listening, as it were, for groanings that have been produced by His Holy Spirit. These are groanings brought about because the Spirit was not quenched or grieved. The individual has been easily led by the Spirit in the subduing of the deeds of the body, and thus profound spiritual groanings have been stimulated within. There is a strong desire to gain the blessing of the Lord that goes far beyond the believer’s ability of expression.

David, the *“the sweet psalmist of Israel”* (2 Sam 23:1), was a man ahead of his time. Many of his prayers reflected the spirit of the New Covenant. Here is one of them that unveils something of the magnitude of our text. *“Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee”* (Psa 38:9). Such a person has nothing to fear concerning the Lord’s searching of the heart.

For those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit, their heart is the repository for spiritual groanings that will be a source of blessing and benefit. The believer can only sense them, and is capable of taking them no further than that. But these groanings are not only real, they are a sort of call to God for necessary advantages. God is looking for these groanings, searching the heart to find them.

When He does, He will rely on the Holy Spirit to properly interpret them and make a petition for their fulfillment. You must believe that God is devoted to your salvation, else He would never have made such a marvelous provision!

THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT

“... knows what is the mind of the Spirit is . . .” There is perfect harmony between the Father and the Holy Spirit. Their thoughts never are in conflict, and there is perfect accord between them. That is not merely a theological position, it is a view that brings great solace to the struggling believer. It is especially relevant in this passage because the Spirit is speaking to

The truth of the matter is that God is looking for a reason to bless His people! He looks deep within the heart, listening, as it were, for groanings that have been produced by His Holy Spirit. These are groanings brought about because the Spirit was not quenched or grieved.

God *“FOR us.”*

Notice the wording of this text. It is significant. The Lord searches the hearts, but knows the mind of the Spirit. It does not say the Lord searches the hearts and knows what is in man—although that is certainly true. The idea is that the Holy Spirit is within the heart of the saints—in the same place where the groaning is found. As it is written, *“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father”* (Gal 4:6).

It is as though the Father immediately looks to the Spirit to intercede for us. From another perspective, the Spirit is eager to speak to the Father about the groaning He has stimulated within us. He wants our deep spiritual needs to be met, and the Father wants to meet them.

Some do not think of the Spirit as having a mind. They think of Him in a heathenistic way—as a power, an influence, or an overpowering force, like electricity. Such views of the Spirit may be

popular with men, but they are debilitating to the saints. The Holy Spirit is powerful, to be sure. That power, however, is channeled to the betterment of believers, giving them the advantage in the good fight of faith.

There is a certain manner in which the Spirit thinks, and a way in which He expresses Himself. His intercessions are made in strict accord with HIS mind, not that of man. While men may choose to be comfortable with clumsy expressions, God is not. If He is to give you what you need, there must be an spiritually intelligent presentation of that need. The Holy Spirit has been provided to make such intercessions. Every believer has good reason to be thankful for this.

INTERCESSION ACCORDING TO GOD’S WILL

“... because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

When the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us, it is in strict accord with *“the will of God.”* It is never in order for men to seek to impose their will upon the Lord, approaching Him as though He was their servant. There is a Divine purpose that is being served in salvation as well as human need. Let it be clear that the primary purpose is NOT to meet human need, but to fulfill Divine purpose. As simplistic as that may appear, it is not commonly acknowledged.

The *“will of God”* is the driving force behind all of His workings. Jesus taught us to pray, *“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* (Matt 6:10). When struggling with the temptation to withdraw from drinking the bitter cup God placed before Him, Jesus Himself prayed, *“Thy will be done”* (Matt 26:42). The Holy Spirit makes intercession in strict accord with that will. It is a predetermined will expressed as *“the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Eph 3:11). Both the groanings the Spirit produces and the intercessions He makes ready men for participation in that purpose.

Those who seek their own will and lack the strong inner groanings

mentioned in our text are in a serious situation. I speak of those who lack spiritual appetites and longings—who have no driving compulsion to put away the flesh and all competing influences. Their condition betrays they have quenched the Spirit, and grieved Him in His holy work. Strong spiritual appetites are lacking where the things of God are not eagerly sought.

What is more, effective intercessions are not being made by the Holy Spirit for such people, for He interprets the

groanings to the Father, who is looking for their presence.

But for those who are being brought from one stage of glory to another by the Holy Spirit, their appetites are increasing. They cannot be satisfied with the husks of human theologies and the learned disquisitions of religious experts. They are driven by a single desire—to *“dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple”* (Psa 27:4). In embracing the Gospel by faith, they have

become discontent with *“this present evil world.”* They are displeased that the flesh can intrude into their thinking, and they perceive that no good dwells in it.

All such people have solid grounds to be of good cheer. God is searching the hearts of such people, looking for the marvelous workings of His Holy Spirit. The Spirit Himself is there with them, ready to offer powerful intercessions in the behalf of the believer. He will make sure what is needed will be obtained by the one who is willing to live by faith.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that suffering is the appointed prelude to glory. If we live by faith, it cannot be avoided. From one point of view, it is not pleasant or to be desired. It is genuine suffering, and there is nothing pleasant about it. However, it is the path to glory, for we are leaving a cursed realm to enter into a blessed one. We are being brought out of defiled surroundings into a realm that is pure and unmixed with any form of weakness or corruption. The suffering is produced because we live in a body that is set to resist such a journey. We also have an *“old man”* that cannot be changed, and is firmly opposed to any progress toward glory. These circumstances are the cause of much frustration within our minds and emotions. They produce most uncomfortable situations.

The glory of salvation is found in the thoroughness with which it addresses our situation. It not only removes the defilement of the past, and secures a blessed future, it also completely meets the need of the present. In a sense, we are suspended between the past and the future. In this state inner warfare and outward opposition are experienced. They soon deplete our resources and prove our earthly wisdom to be impoverished. We cannot make it to glory without help—constant and powerful help!

We cannot control our own flesh, let alone our circumstances. We have a

constantly erupting contrary law within that will not listen to reason. We shout at it to leave us alone, but it will not. We have a body that always has to be managed and controlled—that never volunteers to do the things our new heart desires. We have remarkable difficulty doing what our regenerated self desires, to say nothing of what the Lord of glory desires. Where is the enlightened soul that does not repeatedly say, *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Rom 7:24).

The complexities of our present circumstance extend beyond our abilities. The situation is such that we do not even know how to pray. But even that is addressed in salvation. First, we are given strong longings by the Spirit. They are deep within us, where human discernment cannot reach. There is no form of human language that can articulate these groanings. The intellect can never discover nor express them.

The marvelous salvation of God fully addresses this situation. He takes our sufferings and makes them a catalyst for even stronger desires for glory. As we embrace them by faith, the sufferings go to work for us, increasing *“the weight of*

glory” that awaits us.

To assist us in perseverance, the Lord tells us something we could not possibly know if He did not tell us. The *“whole creation”* is in the same situation as ourselves—struggling with a curse and looking for the appointed blessing. It too is suffering under the weight of mortality and bondage, yet knows that liberty and freedom are coming. It is waiting for the sons of God to be revealed. So why cannot we eagerly anticipate the same thing?

The complexities of our present circumstance extend beyond our abilities. The situation is such that we do not even know how to pray. But even that is addressed in salvation. First, we are given strong longings by the Spirit. They are deep within us, where human discernment cannot reach. There is no form of human language that can articulate these groanings. The intellect can never discover nor express them.

But we are not without hope. The very Spirit who produced the groanings of anticipation within us will decipher them to God in effective intercession. He will present them within the context of God’s appointed purpose, thereby guaranteeing our need will be met. God will see to it that we are not without needed resources.

As a loving Father, our Lord is

searching our hearts, looking for those uninterpretable groanings implanted by the Holy Spirit. He will not miss them. Their presence will rejoice His heart, for He takes delight in His children. They will even move the Spirit to take them and

intercede for us to the Father, thereby helping our infirmities. With joy, the Father will receive the Spirit's intercessions, for He knows the mind of the Spirit, which is in perfect accord with His own beneficent will.

Tell me, is there not ground for good hope? Is there any reason why we saints of God should hang our heads in despair? Let us be strong in faith like our father Abraham, thereby giving glory to God. We are saved by hope while we suffer!

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 27



GOD HAS PREDESTINATED

8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ 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. – Romans 8:28-34 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

There is a remarkable progression of thought in the book of Romans. The spiritual advancement of the brethren in Rome provided an opportunity for the Spirit to open up some of the deep things of God. Their faith had been mentioned throughout the world (1:8) – and that without the presence of any Apostle. They had a “mutual faith” that would bring advantages to the Apostle Paul himself (1:12). With strong desire he longed to be with them, knowing they would profit from his presence (1:11). The brethren in Rome had proved faithful stewards of what had been given

to them, and therefore the grace of God now brings them more. This is according to the manner of the Kingdom. As it is written, “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance” (Matt 13:12; 25:29).

Whether it is a person or a congregation, those who handle the truth of God with thankfulness and faithfulness will be given more. Paul’s Apostleship is a confirmation of that. Remarkable insights were given to him because God counted him faithful (1 Tim 1:12). How is it that such marvelous insights were

given to Paul? Hear him testify of the uniqueness of the things revealed to him. “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation **He made known unto me the mystery;** (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), **which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in**

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. GOD IS WORKING NOW (8:28)
- II. DIVINE DETERMINATION REVEALED (8:29)
- III. THE APPOINTED PROCEDURE (8:30)
- IV. THE RESPONSE OF FAITH (8:31)
- V. THE REASONING OF FAITH (8:32)
- VI. THE CONFIDENCE OF FAITH (8:33)
- VII. EVERYTHING IS ADDRESSED (8:34)

*Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: **to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God**" (Eph 3:2-10).*

This same principle is unveiled in the book of Romans. There is a lofty pattern of thinking here that is not found in other Epistles. Because of the remarkable statements made in this book, this elevated reasoning can easily escape us—like missing the forest because of the trees. A brief overview will serve to better prepare us for the text before us.

**A BRIEF OVERVIEW
The Gospel of Christ**

From the affirmation that the Gospel is God's power in order to the experience of salvation, the Spirit has deduced that the power of the Gospel is owing to its revelation of the righteousness of God. That righteousness is given to men upon the basis of their belief of the Gospel and faith in Jesus Christ. God is upright in conferring this righteousness upon men because of the accomplishments of His Son (1:16-18).

Righteousness Is Needed

Because the need for righteousness is not readily perceived, the Spirit produced extensive arguments that confirmed that all men stand in need of this righteousness (1:19-3:20). Although men lived within the consistent and powerful testimony of creation, yet not a single offspring of Adam got the message. Although some engaged in a quest for the Lord, their quest fell short of Divine intention, and they ended up serving idols. Moral degeneracy also proliferated throughout the race (1:19-32).

If any are disposed to imagine that men only needed some direction to get on the right path, the Spirit shows us this is not the case. The Jews were given the Law, which identified sin with extraordinary precision. It also declared the consequences of sin and the rewards for righteousness. Both promises and curses were unusually strong. If any vestige of spiritual ability remained in fallen man, sufficient incentive was provided to awaken that latent ability.

But this did not prove to be the case at all. The Jews, in covenant with God, ended up doing the same things as the Gentiles, who had no covenant with God. The conclusion is that *"all have sinned and [do] come short of the glory of God"* (3:23). They could not achieve righteousness without verbal direction from God. Nor, indeed, could they achieve it with such direction. All men need the righteousness announced in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

The Role of Faith

With great power, the role of faith is declared in this Epistle. It is repeatedly affirmed that the righteousness given by God is appropriated by faith in men. That righteousness has now been made known in strict conformity with the testimony of the Law and Prophets. It is also realized independently of the works of the Law. In this circumstance God has excluded all human boasting. Valid boasting, or glorying, can only be in the Lord, from whom salvation in all of its glorious fullness comes (3:21-32).

The Example of Abraham

To assist us in laying hold of the function of faith Abraham is held before

us. God made a promise of blessing to this patriarch. The promise contradicted every form of human reasoning. There is not a law of human logic that could support what Abraham was promised. There was no possible way the promise could be fulfilled through natural means. What is more, it extended to generations after Abraham—even into eternity.

Confirming the power of faith, it is affirmed that *"Abraham believed God."* He did not stagger at the promises of God, but was *"strong in faith, giving glory to God."* As a result, God accounted, or imputed, Abraham's faith to him as righteousness. That is, he received the righteousness of God because he believed.

The record of Abraham is not for his sake alone. That is, it is not a mere historical account of the staggering accomplishments of a hero. Rather, he is an example of how God gives men His righteousness. His record is provided to assure us God will give us His righteousness if we believe the record He has given of His Son (4:1-25).

The Practicality of Faith

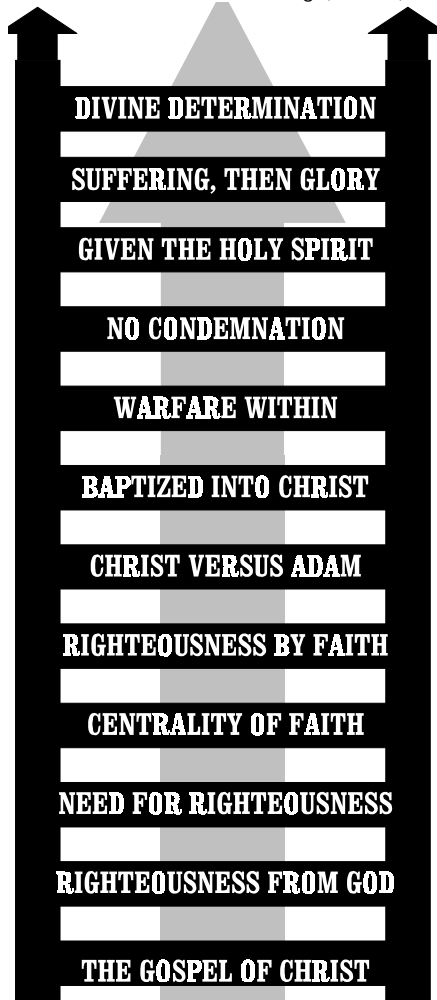
Faith is effective in the transformation of our lives. First, it brings the peace of God to us, in order that we may throw ourselves into the good fight of faith. Within the framework of that glorious peace, we come to glory in God, finding delight and great joy in His Person. The joy is so remarkable that we even glory in tribulations, aware that they are used of God to prepare us for glory.

Through faith we come into patience, or perseverance. Character is developed, which results in a dominating hope. The hope that is generated within us is so glorious, we are not ashamed of it. The love of God toward us is then shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. God's purpose is being realized in those who have received His righteousness by faith (5:1-5).

Christ's Death Is Effective

With great care, the Spirit refuses to allow us to glory in our growth, even though it is remarkable. Instead, He turns our attention to the death of Jesus Christ, which is the foundation for our

reception of righteousness. He confirms to our hearts that if such great things were wrought by Christ's death, much more will be accomplished through His life. There is an upward movement that characterizes God's working (5:6-11).



Only Two Men

The condition of all men is traced to two men – Adam and Christ. They are federal heads of their respective generations. Everyone who is under them partakes of their likeness. The attitude of God toward each of them carries forward to all who are under them.

What is even more, the effect of each man, Adam and Jesus, is traced to a single deed of each. Adam's act of disobedience, and Christ's act of righteousness. Adam's act was eating from the forbidden tree. Christ's act was laying down His life a ransom for many. The single act of both Adam and Jesus

affects everyone who is under them—“ALL.” That condition also removes all boasting (5:12-21).

Buried Into Death

Those who were once dead in sin, are buried by baptism into Christ's death. In that obedience they are *“buried with him by baptism into death”* –death TO sin. Their faith is to reckon, or reason, upon the reality of this experience. Those in Christ, because of their identity with Him, are *“dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God.”* Consequently, they are to no longer yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness. Rather, their capabilities are to be yielded to God Himself. In Christ there is no room for willing involvement in sin, the wages of which is always *“death”* (Rom 6:1-23).

Inner Warfare

Faith has spawned a war within the believers. The remnants of the old nature remain in them, being indissolubly tied to their bodies. Those remnants spew forth imaginations into the thought streams of the believer, causing great frustration. Faith has made sin repulsive in all of its forms. It produces a strong longing for Divine fellowship, and enables us recognize the vanity of this world and everything associated with it.

The person who is justified does not want to contend with sin, particularly in himself. Even though weaponry is provided whereby imaginations and contradicting thoughts can be cast down, deliverance from *“the body of this death”* is longed for (7:1-25).

No Condemnation

The Law does not allow for the thoughts with which the believer contends. Even though they are not wanted, the Law soundly condemns the individual in whom they are found. Notwithstanding this circumstance, we have been delivered from the Law in its condemning capacity (7:4).

Within the context of fierce inner warfare, the Spirit fairly shouts to us: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.”* They are not condemned for having to contend with sin, for it is against their will. Their righteousness is not found in their

personal accomplishments, but in their faith (8:1-4).

Lest we imagine this allows for carnal, or fleshly, mindedness, we are reminded that death ALWAYS follows carnality. The mind that is not spiritual fights against God, and consequently God will fight against it (8:5-11).

Given the Holy Spirit

To assist us in the good fight of faith and the casting down of the expressions of the *“old man,”* God has given us the Holy Spirit. Faithfully He leads us through our faith to certain triumph over the flesh, thereby preparing us for glory.

The Holy Spirit testifies to us of our sonship, bearing witness with our spirits that *“we are the children of God”* (8:12-17). It is an effective witness.

Suffering, Then Glory

The sufferings endured by the believer are the appointed prelude to glory. They range from the fierce inner conflict believers endure to the oppositions of sinful men, and other matters related to being in this world. Because of the greatness of the glory that will be revealed *“in us,”* these sufferings are unworthy to be compared with it. They are a small price to pay for the privilege of reigning with Jesus.

To assist us in our suffering, we are reminded the whole creation is groaning in travail, eagerly anticipating *“the manifestation of the sons of God.”* When they are unveiled at the appearing of Jesus, the whole creation will also be released from *“the bondage of corruption.”* Redemption will effect everything just as surely as sin did!

The deep groanings of the believer extend beyond the perimeter of both human understanding and expression. For this reason, the Holy Spirit Himself comes along side of us to assist us in bearing up under the present affliction. Sufferings have a way of depleting our spiritual resources, yet we do not know how to pray about such things, for the experience itself is not fully comprehended. Thus the Spirit effectively *“makes intercession for us.”* God, who is looking for groaning souls, knows how

the Spirit thinks, and thus honors His faithful intercession for us. The outcome is that we receive what we need to survive this world and prepare for the next, even though we did not know how to pray about it (8:18-27).

Behold the progression of those thoughts. They are like the pinions of the flying eagle that mounts higher and higher, until it soars in lofty climes. If the saints of God are to survive this world,

they must learn to fly high—to reason in the Spirit, and behold things from the heavenly point of view. Low and shallow thoughts do not serve God’s purpose, even though carnal men cry out for the simplification of the things of God.

The Lord will not allow His children to grovel in the dust of simplicity. He calls them to “*come up higher*” (Rev 4:1; 11:12). As Solomon wisely said, “*For it is better that he say to you, ‘Come up here,’*

Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince” (Prov 25:7). Better to reason in higher realms.

Far better to soar in Romans than to crawl in hermeneutics, philosophy, and the wisdom of men. Determine in your heart to rise into the heavenlies where you have been placed in Jesus (Eph 2:6). When you are there, living by faith makes more sense, and you receive more power to do so. This is the manner of Romans.

GOD IS WORKING NOW

^{8:28} ***And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*** We have been presented with the complexity of spiritual life. It is being lived out in the crucible of conflict, suffering, and frustration. The matters over which we have no control are so numerous we cannot number them. It only takes a day of living by faith to confirm we are not reigning with Jesus yet. Those who boast of continual triumph have not told the truth. Either they are deceived, or they have deliberately misrepresented their circumstance—and either condition is inexcusable. Now, the Spirit will show us that the heavenly Architect is working behind the scenes. We have not been left to shift to and fro with the winds of circumstance. Eternal objectives are being worked out in us.

WE KNOW

Faith moves one into the realm of spiritual knowledge. This is not the mere knowledge of facts, but the persuasion of reality. This is NOT the knowledge of experience (from **ginwskomen**), or experiential knowledge. This is the knowledge of faith, which is not based upon experience. Rather, it is founded upon Divine affirmation. The word used here is **oidamen**, which is used throughout Romans (3:19; 7:14; 8:22,26,28). The only way such knowledge can be possessed is by believing what the Lord has declared. We will find there is no other proof for

the reality embraced. It cannot be demonstrated in human experience or satisfactorily explained through human logic. This should become very apparent to us as the Spirit develops this thought.

WORK TOGETHER

Trouble and suffering, therefore, do NOT work against salvation. Rather, God works them together to accomplish the fulness of salvation.

“... all things work together for good” Other versions read, “*God causes all things to work together for good,*” ^{NASB} and “*in all things God works for the good of those.*” ^{NIV} This is a high view, like viewing the earth from a distant planet. It will enable us to obtain confidence and live boldly in the world.

Trouble and suffering, therefore, do NOT work against salvation. Rather, God works them together to accomplish the fulness of salvation.

“All Things”

The “*all things*” have to do with the conflicting experiences of life—both the

inward and outward ones. For the saints, no human experience stands on its own. It is part of a whole. It neither happens nor results in things unrelated to God’s purpose for us. Nothing is omitted, everything is included.

“Work Together”

Things are not simply falling together by chance. They are BEING worked together by God Himself. Our experiences are the result of God weaving the tapestry of life, blending everything together like Joseph’s coat of many colors.

Behind the scenes, undetected by the human eye, but discerned by faith, God is manipulating our circumstances. He is seeing to it that everything fits together. He will work the circumstances of Moses together, so that being raised in the king’s palace, and keeping sheep on the back side of the desert will all fit together. He will take the circumstances of Joseph—being thrown in a pit, sold to Ishmaelites, falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife, and life in prison—and will work it all together, making one harmonious whole of it all.

Do not imagine these are only for the choice servants of God. This is the manner in which God works with all of His children. That is the point of this passage. What is more, only the Lord can cause everything to contribute to the ultimate advantage of His children—but that is precisely what He does.

"For good"

It is possible for everything to work together for a curse—working against the individual (Deut 2:15). This is how it is with the ungodly. Everything is actually working against them. From time to time, it may seem to the saints like this is their lot also. But this is not the case. God is working everything together for their good—their ultimate advantage.

This does not mean that every experience of life is good of itself. Rather, it is being fitted into the whole of God's purpose. In the end, everything will fit together for the advantage of the child of God. The sea and the wilderness will prove to have been advantages. The barren desert and the fruited plain will both make the child of God better, fitting him for his eternal inheritance.

Allow Joseph to come to the witness stand on this matter. Although the good was not seen from the beginning, let him tell you how the adversity to which he was subjected was *"worked together"* by the living God. He speaks to his hateful brothers, who sold him into a most grievous slavery. *"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 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"* (Gen 50:19-20).

Joseph knew this AFTER the fact. In one place, Paul knew it BEFORE the fact. It will be comforting to hear him testify. *"Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"* (Phil 1:15-19). You can see what effect the spiritual knowledge of this has upon the elect of God. I say *"spiritual knowledge"* because it is above

the ordinary knowledge of men, being driven by faith. Such knowledge does not require immediate evidence that everything is being worked together for good. A word from God will suffice to proceed confidently to live by faith. Faith needs nothing more than that!

The bottom line is this: the end of those for whom God is working everything together for good will be better than their beginning. The best words will be heard at the conclusion of their race. The largest advantage will be given to them after heaven and earth have passed away, and there is no more sea.

THOSE WHO LOVE GOD

This statement confirms that loving God is not natural for men, else there would be no point to this affirmation. Loving God is the response of a faith that perceives God loved us. As it is written, *"We love him, because He first loved us"*

It is not the portion of everyone to have God work everything together for their ultimate good. This is not common to everyone. Amos once spoke of everything working against those who displeased the Lord. *"It will be as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, And a serpent bit him!"*^{NKJV} (Amos 5:19).

The blessing set before us belongs exclusively to *"those who love God."* God is not on the side of anyone else, but He IS on the side of everyone who loves Him. This statement confirms that loving God is not natural for men, else there would be no point to this affirmation. Loving God is the response of a faith that perceives God loved us. As it is written, *"We love him, because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). And again, *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he*

laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16).

In return for this love, God manages our lives, so that everything ultimately fits together, contributing to our good. The perception of this fuels both love and zeal. Those who try to love God out of a sense of mere obligation, as dictated by the first and greatest commandment, will experience great difficulty. But when they see the truth of this verse, their love for God will grow by leaps and bounds.

If our love for God wanes or diminishes, life begins to work against us. Not only is God working all things together for good to those who love Him, He is doing it in direct proportion to their love. One has only to consider men like Joseph, David, Daniel, and Paul to confirm this is true. If a waning of our love for God is not arrested, it can get to the point where God no longer works in us *"both to will and do of His own good pleasure"* (Phil 2:13). Candidly, that is a dreadful thing to contemplate, for if God is not working all things together for our good, it will not be possible for good to come to us.

CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE

The identity of the ones for whom God is working everything together for good is here expanded. Not only are they the ones who love God, they are described as *"the called according to His purpose."*

The Called

Several versions read *"THE called"* (KJV, NKJV, Websters). From a linguistic viewpoint, the article *"the"* is not in the original text. However, the use of the identifier *"the"* is proper. The word *"called"* is **not** a verb, but an adjective (**klhtoij**). That simply means it describes a people, not an activity. Here the word *"called"* is used to denote **those who have accepted the call**, and not the call itself. Even the versions that do not contain the word *"the"* emphasize that *"called"* refers to the people themselves: *"those who are called,"*^{NASB} *"who have been called,"*^{NIV} *"who are called,"*^{NRSV} and *"them that are called."*^{ASV} This emphasis is confirmed by the following verses that elaborate on the people

themselves, and the God who has saved them: i.e., "for whom. . ."

By saying "the called," the Spirit places the EMPHASIS on the One who called rather than the one responding to the call. This is again confirmed by the Spirit's elaboration. He does not develop what men did, but what was done by the Lord. From another perspective Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him . . . Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John 6:44,65). No one comes to the Lord who is not first invited. Further, they only come because they have been invited.

Called by the Gospel

This call is facilitated through the Gospel, as affirmed in Second Thessalonians. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:13-14). However, the calling by the Gospel does not in itself guarantee the benefit of Romans 8:28.

It may appear trite to say so, but it is not the Gospel that calls us. Rather, it is God Himself calling through the Gospel. There is an inward drawing that takes place in this call—a wooing toward the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to this drawing when He said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him . . . Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (John 6:44,65). In that particular text, Jesus was not only explaining WHY people came to Him, He was also declaring why

some did NOT come to Him.

"The called" are those in whom all of this has been accomplished. They are the ones who have heard the Gospel of Christ. They are the ones who have "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). God has "drawn" them to Jesus, opening their hearts so they could "respond to the things spoken" ^{NASB} (Acts 16:14). "The called" are those who have "turned to

the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13). From one perspective, God does save men because they call upon His name, or cry out to receive what is promised in the Gospel of Christ. Our text, however, goes deeper into our salvation. In it, the Spirit is dealing with foundational matters. He does not want our faith to rest in the fact that we called upon the name of the Lord. Rather, it must rest on the fact that God called us according to an "eternal purpose."

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God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven" (1 Thess 1:9-10). They have been called "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" (2 Tim 1:9).

Those in Christ Jesus are described as individuals "whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (Rom 9:24). The expression "the called," therefore, is a weighty one indeed. What is here said concerning them powerfully confirms that: **God is working everything together for their good.** Further, what is said of these people in the following verses removes any notion that this is a loose and fragile concept.

According to His Purpose

The Spirit is now making a critical distinction. It is quite true that "whosoever shall call upon the name of

Our identity with God is NOT in order to the fulfillment of our purposes. Rather, it is that His "eternal purpose" might be fulfilled (Eph 3:11). Further, this is a purpose God has "purposed in Himself" (Eph 1:9). The NIV reads, "which He purposed in Christ." This accords with Ephesians 3:11: "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." This objective will be expounded in the next two verses with a most unusual power.

The point being made is simply this: for everyone who has been effectively called into the execution of God's eternal purpose, God is working everything together for their ultimate good. Their path is being Divinely orchestrated so as to conclude in their good and God's glory. The ultimate objective to be realized is "good." It is our business to take hold of this by faith.

DIVINE DETERMINATION REVEALED

" ²⁹ 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." Here we confront one of the most controversial verses in all of

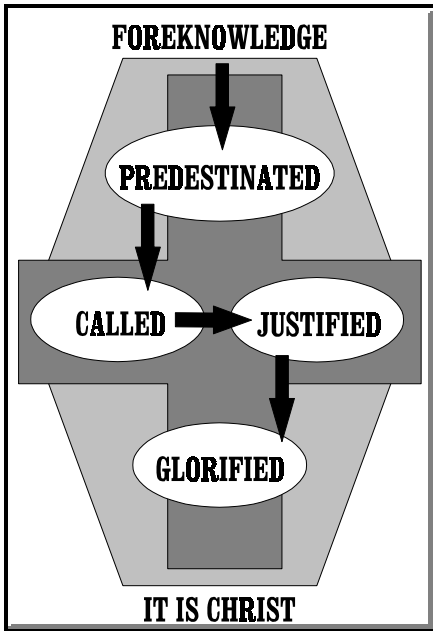
Scripture. However, we must not allow ourselves to approach it as though it was controversial. Rather, it is to be seen as a Divine expression that will sustain faith and bring confidence to our hearts. As for myself, I will approach this verse as a

precise and inspired statement of truth. Its meaning will not hinge upon word definitions, but on Apostolic doctrine. Its purpose is to confirm to our hearts what God's intention is, and to persuade us He is fully able to accomplish it in us.

Divine Determination is not only a Reality, it is the Foundation upon which Faith rests --by Given O. Blakely

DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

"For whom He foreknew. . . ." Nearly all versions, both older and contemporary, use the word "foreknew" or "did foreknow." Some freer translations read, "those of whom he had knowledge before," ^{BBE} "God knew his people in advance," ^{NLT} and "He decided beforehand who were the ones." ^{NJB} I give these translations to confirm this is a very weighty expression.



The word "foreknow" emphasizes Divine choice, not mere foresight. The teaching of the passage will confirm this. It is also supported by the meaning of the word itself. One of the primary meanings of the word used here (**proegnw**), which meaning lexicographers apply to this text, is "select in advance, choose, or appoint before hand." ^{BarclayNewman} Doctrinally, when it comes to what is done, God's foreknowledge applies to what HE does. "Known to God from eternity are all **HIS** works" (Acts 15:18). This even applies to the birth and positioning of men. "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26). ^{NIV}

It should be clear to us that God did not conceive of an eternal purpose in view of what man would do. Those whom God "Foreknew" are those upon whom His

favor rested, even before the foundation of the world. These are the individuals toward whom He was inclined. In our consideration of this facet of the Divine character, care must be taken to allow the Scriptures to form our concepts, and not theological positions developed by men.

Associated with Determination

The foreknowledge of God is also associated with Divine determination. It CAUSES things to happen. This use is seen in Acts 2:22-23. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Other versions read "determined purpose and foreknowledge of God," ^{NKJV} "predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God," ^{NASB} and "God's set purpose and foreknowledge." ^{NIV}

Surely no one would affirm God simply foresaw that Jesus would be delivered to death. Rather, God's foreknowledge related to **what He had determined to do**. Peter uses the word in the same way when, through the Spirit, he refers to saints as "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ . . ." (1 Pet 1:2).

Christ's Foreordination

This is further confirmed in First Peter, where the same word for foreknowledge is used (**proegnwsmenou**). "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you" ^{NASB} (1:20). Other versions read "foreordained," ^{KJV,NKJV} "chosen," ^{NIV} and "destined." ^{NRSV}

When Christ was among us, He traced His total involvement in the will of God to the Father Himself. He did the will of the Father (John 5:30), said the words the Father had given Him to say (John 12:50), and did nothing except what he saw the Father doing (John

5:36). There is only way to account for "the Man Christ Jesus," and that is the determination of God Himself. Indeed, Jesus did volunteer to do God's will, but only after (speaking as a man) it had been established (Heb 10:4-8). Can you imagine the absurdity of the children of God standing before the throne of the Almighty upon the basis of their own words and deeds? **Their involvement in salvation must be upon the same basis as that of their Savior!**

Both doctrinally and linguistically, therefore, the word "foreknow" is related to Divine purpose and intent, not merely to prescience, or seeing things ahead of time.

Further Confirmation

To further confirm that our salvation is not the result of God knowing ahead of time what we would do, the Spirit declares, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim 1:9). However difficult it may be to receive these things, it is on the part of wisdom to simply believe them. Faith is fully capable of acknowledging this truth and deriving comfort from it.

The foreknowledge of God is also related to the placement of His love. This is the sense of the passage before us. It is also referred to in the eleventh chapter. "God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 'LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?' But what does the divine response say to him? 'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal'" (Rom 11:2-4).

There Are Special People

God has revealed those to whom He is attracted, and for whom, He will make provision. All of these are affirmed in full awareness of the fall of man, and the corruption that resulted from that fall. A few Divine utterances on this matter will suffice to establish who will find favor in the eyes of the Lord.

1. "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chron 16:9).
2. "For all those things hath Mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word" (Isa 66:12).
3. "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psa 34:18).
4. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psa 51:17).
5. "Though the LORD be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly: but the proud He knoweth afar off" (Psa 138:6).
6. "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:35).

28:9). He "tests the hearts and minds" of men (Psa 7:9), and "sees the mind and the heart" of every man (Jer 10:12).

In all of these searchings, it is my understanding that God perceives capacities and inclinations as well as accomplishments.

This is involved in God knowing and separating Jeremiah before he came out of his other's womb (Jer 1:4-5). It is also

is no difference between Cain and Abel, neither of which were born again. Nor, indeed, does it suggest there was no inner distinction between Hezekiah and Sennacherib, or David and Saul. So far as being dominated by sin is concerned, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." No person is able to change their condition themselves. All of them need a Savior. There is no inherent goodness in any of them. On this, there is no question. It is a matter of revelation (3:10-12).

Tenderness of heart is what endeared people like Jacob, Joseph, David, and Cornelius to the Lord. None of these individuals were born again at the time God's favor came to them.

Yet, there is a depth to the human nature, into which God alone can peer. He has declared in His Word that He does search the inner recesses of the heart. In my judgment, His foreknowledge relates to the hidden part of man, known only to Him. I gather these are the things God has declared He looks for.

A Case In Point

We have an example in Scripture of people who responded to the Gospel according to Divine appointment. Although a highly controversial passage, its wording is quite clear. The occasion was the preaching of Paul in Antioch of Pisidia. The whole city was set on fire with the powerful preaching of the Apostle, with "almost the whole city" coming together on the Sabbath day "to hear the Word of God" (Acts 13:44). However, "when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." Intolerant of their heartless opposition, 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. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth'" (13:46-47).

No person should balk at these statements, imagining that the fallen nature of man forbids the presence of such qualities. Tenderness of heart is what endeared people like Jacob, Joseph, David, and Cornelius to the Lord. None of these individuals were born again at the time God's favor came to them. Three of them lived before an atoning sacrifice for sin and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit had been given. Yet God called David "a man after Mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). He said of Jacob, "Jacob have I love" (Rom 9:13). Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, was told, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). Whatever deficiencies they may have possessed, and whatever failures may have been found in these men, their sensitivity to God was their premier quality.

related to God loving Jacob before he was born, or had done any good or evil (Rom 9:11-13). This aspect of God is also revealed in Paul, who was separated from the mother's womb, then called (Gal 1:15). Those who desire simplistic views of profound utterances need faith.

Some Difficulties

I am aware that this introduces some difficulties. The Spirit has already informed us "there is none righteous, no not one" (Rom 3:10), and "there is none that doeth good, no not one" (Rom 3:12). With power He has affirmed, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seekth after God" (Rom 3:10). What, then, is the point of the eyes of the Lord scanning the whole earth in quest of a man "whose heart is fully committed to Him?"^{NIV} Why search the heart, weigh the motives, and test the mind?

The Holy Spirit declares the Gentiles were glad when they heard this, adding, "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48)^{NKJV}.^{NASB} The KJV reads "ordained to eternal life." Other versions read, "appointed for eternal life,"^{NIV} "destined for eternal

The Lord "looks upon the heart" (1 Sam 16:7), and "weighs the spirits," or motives, of man (Prov 16:2). The Lord "knows the hearts of the children of men" (1 Kings 8:39), "searches the hearts," and "understands all the imaginations of the thoughts" (1 Chron

In order to resolve this difficulty, some have said there are no distinctions at all among men. After all, the Scriptures affirm, "there is no difference, for all have sinned" (Rom 3:23). However, that does not mean there

life,"^{NRSV} "those marked out by God for eternal life,"^{BBE} "those marked out by God for eternal life,"^{NewCentury} "as many as were destined (appointed and ordained) to eternal life believed."
Amplified

Every major translation reads the same way—"appointed," or "ordained." Every paraphrased version but one reads that way also, the single exception being the Living Bible, which reads "and as many as wanted eternal life, believed." No small number of people have adopted this view—i.e., that the word "ordained," or "appointed," refers to what the people themselves desired, and not God. This view is based on a variant meaning of the Greek word meaning: "disposed toward," or "agree upon." Thus the verse is imagined to say, "as many as were disposed to eternal life believed." If Acts 13:48 was the only place where such a thing is declared, we might be more tolerant of these would-be scholars. However, when God speaks on the subject elsewhere with even greater clarity, and when the combined linguists of the centuries agree on the general use of the word, we can hold no sympathy whatsoever for such a meager and watered down view.

Believing, or having faith, cannot be accounted for by human disposition. It is the Lord who opens the heart in order that people may respond to the Gospel (Acts 16:14). Faith is "obtained" (2 Pet 1:1). Those who believe do so "through grace," not human disposition (Acts 18:27). Faith does come "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 6:23).

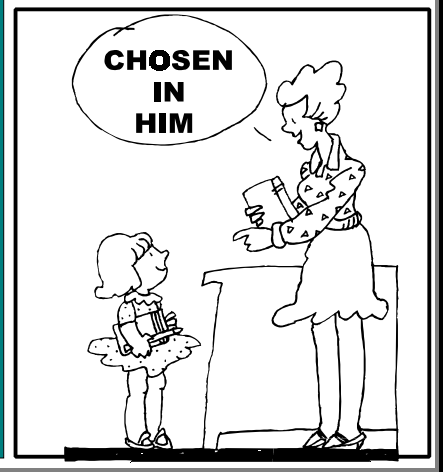
The people of God must be willing to accept Divine affirmation without questioning it. What God does will not violate any aspect of His person, nor will it find Him imposing a blessing upon those who do not desire it. That is the genius of salvation. It also is the reason why salvation in its totality will, in the end, be ascribed to God, and God alone (Rev 7:10; 19:1).

Thus, the "foreknowledge" of God is associated with His choice, His determination, and His will. It is just, and will not overlook any tender heart, or

THE OUTSIDE VIEW



THE INSIDE VIEW



impose salvation on anyone who is hardened.

THE FACT OF PREDESTINATION

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate . . ." At this point, the Holy Spirit is very specific. Remember, He is building the confidence of the people of God, providing a foundation for their faith. **That foundation will not be what they have done, but what the Lord has done!**

God alone effectively predetermines things that will come to pass. He has clearly revealed this aspect of His nature. God Almighty determines, and brings to pass, certain things in a moral arena, where it looks as though human choice is the sole factor. A few reminders should suffice to establish this fact.

7. The birth of Isaac was according to God's appointment, and at an appointed time (Gen 18;14).
8. The plagues leveled against Egypt took place at a Divinely appointed time (Ex 9:5).
9. The good and sound counsel of Ahithophel was overthrown by God's appointment (2 Sam 7;14).
10. The laws of nature were appointed by God (Jer 33:25).
11. The purchase of the potter's field with the betrayal money of Judas "as the Lord appointed" (Matt 27:10).
12. The times and exact places where people would live were appointed by God (Acts 17:26).

13. The day of judgment has been appointed by the Lord (Acts 17:31).
14. Jesus appointed a kingdom to His disciples (Lk 22:29).

With great power, the Lord declares that predetermination is a part of His nature. "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, **declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it"^{NKJV} (Isa 46:9-11).**

Categorically we are told believers were "chosen" in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4). The living God "**predestinated**" them "to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph 1:5). Those in Christ obtain an inheritance because they have been "**predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will**" (Eph 1:11). The Thessalonians were told, "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 Thess 2:13-14). God's choice was implemented through the separating

power of the Spirit and the belief of the truth of the Gospel by the people. However, just as in the passage we are considering, the call by the Gospel came **after** the Divine determination had been made. None of that removes the responsibility to believe, or excuses the presence of unbelief.

When the early church effectively prayed for boldness and power, they explained the death of Jesus through the hands of lawless men, by tracing it back to God's pre-determination. *"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done"* (Acts 4:27-28). They did not have the theological confusion and difficulties that characterize our generation. They were more interested in declaring the Gospel with power than preserving the wilted doctrines of an emaciated institution. Oh, for a return to the purity of faith in and love for the Lord.

The Gospel itself is associated with the predetermination of God: *"but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory"*^{NASB} (1 Cor 2:7). This, of course, accounts for the effectiveness of the Gospel – why it is *"the power of God unto salvation"* (Rom 1:16).

Fulfillment Is Certain

When we speak of predestination, we are speaking of something that is sure, and cannot fail of fulfillment. That is the whole purpose of this passage, to anchor our faith in the certitude of God's *"eternal purpose."* What God predestinates, or determines, comes to pass. Jesus was not only the one *"foreordained before the foundation of the world"* (1 Pet 1:20), He actually *"laid down" His life, "a ransom for many,"* in fulfillment of that predetermination.

The vocabulary of the Holy Spirit, or words *"taught by the Holy Spirit"*^{NASB} (1 Cor 2:13), include *"predestinate"* (Rom

8:29-30), *"predestinated"* (Eph 1:5,11), *"foreordained"* (1 Pet 1:20), *"foreknow"* (Rom 8:29), *"foreknew"* (Rom 11:2), *"foreknowledge"* (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet 1:2), *"determined before"* (Acts 4:28), *"chosen"* (Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 2:9), and *"elect"* (Matt 24:24; Rom 8:33; Col 3:12; Tit 1:11 Pet 1:2), and *"elected"* (1 Pet 5:13). The fact of predestination, therefore, cannot be effectively negated or questioned. God has extended Himself to make this aspect of His character known. **Those who make a studied practice of either ignoring God's predestination, or disputing its existence, will eventually have to explain to God why they did.**

PREDESTINATED CONFORMITY

The predestination of God is not a

The meaning of this passage is this: God has predetermined that everyone He adopts as sons (8:19) will be fashioned to bear the *"image of Christ."* That is not a commandment, it is a predetermination. It is not a possibility, it is a predestined purpose.

lifeless doctrine. Nor, indeed, does it center around the individual believer. The Lord's determination has to do with the culmination of His work. This is the revealed destiny of everyone who lives by faith, or is *"in Christ Jesus."* ***"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."*** Other versions read, *"the likeness of His Son,"*^{NIV} *"be made like His Son,"*^{BBE} and *"become like His Son."*^{NLT}

The meaning of this passage is this: God has predetermined that everyone He adopts as sons (8:19) will be fashioned to bear the *"image of Christ."* That is not a commandment, it is a predetermination. It is not a possibility, it is a predestined purpose. It is not a goal for which we are to strive, but a work God will do.

The "IMAGE" of His Son

Why does the Spirit say *"image of His Son?"* Why not simply say *"conformed to His Son?"* Remember, the passage before us is elaborating on the manner in which we are being brought to glory. We are coming through the veil of sufferings, being *"saved by hope."* What we will ultimately be is determining the pathway through which we are being led. We are *"heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"* (8:17). That has to do with our future, and our present affiliation with God, through Christ and by the Spirit, is preparing us for that future. In this glorious work, the Son of God is set before us **through the Gospel.** That presentation is, in a very real sense, *"the image of His Son."*

The idea is that God, through the Gospel, has set before us the Image to which we are being conformed. Of particular emphasis is that suffering is one of the means through which this conformity is being accomplished. As the Spirit said through Peter, *"But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps"* (1 Pet 2:21).

Not A Sudden Departure

Our text is not a sudden departure from the line of reasoning being developed. Ponder again what marvelous thoughts have been presented to us.

15. Faith has brought us into a fierce struggle with the flesh (7:15-25).
16. We are not condemned, even though we struggle and are tempted (8:1-4).
17. No concessions can be made to the flesh, even though it makes demands upon us (8:5-8).
18. The Holy Spirit is assisting us in the struggle with the flesh, directing and empowering us to mortify it (8:9-13).
19. The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are the sons of God, even though we are engaged in warfare (8:16).
20. Our sonship and future glory are related to our present sufferings (8:17).

21. Our sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us (8:19).
22. The whole creation joins us in the travailing groans of expectation (8:20-22).
23. The redeemed are groaning in travail, expecting the redemption of their bodies (8:23).
24. The expectation of hope enables us to fight the good fight of faith (8:24-25).
25. The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, making effective intercession for us, because we do not know what to pray for (8:26-27).
26. God Himself is working everything together, including our suffering and groaning, for our ultimate good (8:28).

Verses 29-30 explain WHY all is being worked together for our good. It is not just happenstance. Divine purpose is behind it all. God has predestinated that His children will be conformed to the "image," or representation, of His Son. **That predetermination is what guarantees the outcome—that all will work together for our good.**

Conformity to the Image Involves Means

This verse is not teaching a mere Divine appointment, but **the means through which that sure and unaltered assignation will be realized!** Because we are standing on holy ground, great care must be taken to properly present what is declared in this passage. I have sought to make a distinction between being conformed to the "image of His Son," and being conformed to the Son. Let it be clear, we "shall be like Him," according to the promise of God (1 John 3:1-2). When Jesus appears, we will also "appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:4), receiving bodies "like unto His glorious body" (Phil 3:20-21). That is a precious truth that must be heartily embraced by the saints.

However, this is not what is being taught in the verses under consideration. God has predestinated His children will be conformed to the "image," or representation, of His Son. In my judgment, this is declaring the same thing

affirmed in Second Corinthians. "But we all, with open [unveiled] face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same **image** from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (3:18). Later in the same book, this reality is stated again: "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6).

In our sufferings, the Holy Spirit so powerfully intercedes for us that God enables us to see Christ Jesus, His Son, more clearly and precisely. As we behold that revealed "image of His Son," we are actually conformed to what is perceived.

This process refers to being changed by what we have beheld of Christ. God is conforming us to what we see, or perceive, of Christ Jesus. This is not cast into the area of personal opinion, for God Himself is the One revealing the Son. He does this through the Gospel, but in an intensely personal way. The principle is precisely the same as experienced by Moses in the holy mount. His person was altered by what he saw of God—which is precisely the point in Second Corinthians 3:7-18).

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An Example

We have a concrete example of this in the death of Stephen. When this mighty man of God was rejected by the Jewish council, Scripture says, "he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus

standing at the right hand of God." The sight was so glorious he shouted, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ^{NKJV} (Acts 7:55-56). Now, we will see how that perception influenced Stephen.

The council immediately led Stephen out of the city and stoned him. As the stones struck upon this saint, he knelt down, crying out with a loud voice: "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60). What had happened? In his sufferings, Stephen was given to see the Lord Jesus, and was conformed to the image he perceived! His response to his own sufferings precisely conformed to the Lord's own response to those who killed Him: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

Our Ultimate Conformity

We are being conformed the "image" of Christ now through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. To the degree we see Jesus, that change is accomplished "from one stage of glory to another." **When Jesus comes again, the conforming process will reach its culmination.** Then, in the fullest and most precise sense, "we shall be like Him!" And what is the means through which that blessed conformity will be accomplished? We are not left to speculate on the matter: "because we shall see Him just as He is." (1 John 3:2). We will be conformed to "the image" – what we behold. Then our beholding will be unfettered and complete—"just as He is." For that reason, the conformity will be thorough! This is the predestinated purpose of the Almighty. It begins now, and will be consummated at the appearing of Christ.

Jesus is, then, a pattern of what believers are pre-appointed to become. While this must become our purpose also, that is not the point of this text. Here the Spirit affirms this to be God's predetermined and unwavering purpose. This is the settled objective of the whole redemptive enterprise. There is not the slightest chance this will not be accomplished.

As demonstrated throughout Divine

history, God is fully capable of accomplishing His purpose. His word has gone out on this matter, and it will not return unto Him "void," or "without accomplishing" what He has determined ^{NASB} (Isa 55:11). Those whom He foreknew **will** be "conformed to the image of His Son." Their perception of Jesus will precisely determine what they become. It all begins here, in the midst of suffering. It will be brought to a glorious consummation when God shows, or unveils, "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15).

The Relevance of Seeing Jesus

All of this accents the importance of perceiving Jesus now—knowing and understanding Him! **Preaching and teaching that opens Jesus to the understanding of people prepares them for transformation. When men do not see Jesus, they are shut up to nature.** Through the revelation of the Gospel "we see Jesus" (Heb 2:9) – that is His "image." It is through that perception that we are conformed to what we behold by faith!

A Sterling Example for Us

Allow me to bring Paul to the witness stand. He will confirm what I have said, and show the marvelous reality of God's predetermined purpose. In a rare and extended declaration of what motivated him, Paul revealed the powerful effects of perceiving Jesus.

When Paul confronted Jesus, it constrained him to change his whole purpose and focus. Although he was part of an elite group within an elite race, and although he had unparalleled religious advantages, he counted all of them "loss for Christ." He willingly and zealously did this "in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus." ^{NASB} In comparison to "gaining Christ" he saw everything else to be "dung." With unparalleled fervency Paul desired to "know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." ^{NKJV} He was unrelenting in his pursuit of this objective.

Although confronted by seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Paul "pressed on," that he might "lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." ^{NKJV} Although he knew full well he had not yet apprehended, his aim became single, as he forgot the things that were behind and stretched forward to "things which are ahead." He pressed "toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:7-14). The result was that his labors were indefatigable. In fact he "labored more abundantly" than all the other apostles (1 Cor 15:10). He approached his appointment with the same kind of zeal the Son of God approached His (Lk 9:51).

What made the Apostle do this? Why was he so radically transformed from being a persecutor to being a member of

It is comforting to know God has predestinated conformity to Christ's image! From a practical point of view, that means you WILL become like what you see of Jesus.

the household of faith? It is because he saw Jesus! He was being conformed to Christ's perceived image! He knew this is how God has determined valid change to take place, and therefore determined to "know" Christ, experience the "power of His resurrection," and be made "conformable to His death" through sufferings.

Deliver Us From Mere Academic Views

How the church needs to be delivered from lifeless academic views of Jesus! The Gospel contains the only valid view of the Son of God, and it is to be believed, embraced, and heartily sought. Historical views of Jesus, however interesting they may appear, will never conform anyone to "the image of His Son." Philosophizing about Jesus will not change anyone, or

make them more like their Savior!

Comforting to Know

It is comforting to know God has predestinated conformity to Christ's image! **From a practical point of view, that means you WILL become like what you see of Jesus.** This does not refer to an intellectual view, but the persuasion of faith, which is "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen (with the eye)." **What faith perceives of the Son of God will have as sure an effect upon man's spirit as the sight of God's glory had an effect on Moses' face!** The final transformation will come when those who were being changed in the earth behold the Lord Jesus in all of His glory!

Furthermore, earth cannot produce a situation where the sight of Jesus can be effectively blocked! He can be seen while Stephen is being stoned. Paul and Silas can see him from prison, while their feet are in stocks. Peter can see him from a prison cell, and John the Baptist while he is on his way to be beheaded.

Not Predestinated to Be Sons, But Sons Predestinated to be Like THE Son

This text is not teaching that God predestinated who would be saved, or become His children. I do not question this is taught elsewhere, although care must be taken in drawing unwarranted conclusions from those affirmations (Eph 1:4-5,11; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:2).

Our text declares what God has predestinated concerning His children—those who are born of the Spirit. **They will become like Jesus Christ!** The process begins now, being especially made known in the crucible of suffering. It will be brought to completion when we behold the "only begotten Son" in all of His glory.

All of this has a significant bearing on us now. Those who are presently being "changed from glory unto glory" have, in that change, the pledge of future glory. **Those who are not being changed**

are not beholding Jesus! If it is true that God has predetermined that men will be conformed to the **"IMAGE of His Son,"** we had better keep that *"image"* in

Christ's brethren are also His children. They are His brethren because God is their Father as well as His. As it is written, *"For both He who sanctifies and*

be *"like Him."* All of His brethren will be *"like Him."*

That is God's predestinated purpose. It cannot be negated or changed. It only remains whether or not we become involved in the conforming process here and now. If we do, we will be fully conformed to the *"image His Son"* when He appears. If we do not, His appearance will find us consigned to perdition.

Let it be clear in your mind that God's aim is not simply to remit your sin – although that is necessary for the larger purpose. Neither, indeed, is His objective form you to reach all of the world for Jesus – although that too is involved in the ultimate purpose.

Salvation Is Not A Mere Formality

With the era of an academic approach to the things of God, salvation began to be viewed as a mere formality. All manner of doctrines have been foisted upon men that represent salvation as a once-for-all experience that takes place at a given point in time. No essential change is perceived as taking place after that. Some have formulated this into a doctrinal statement. Others, refusing to adopt a credal statement, simply live as though that were the case.

Thus churches are literally filled with people who have made no apparent progress in the faith at all. They appear to see Christ no clearer than they ever did, and perhaps even less. There is no obvious conforming work going on. They do not seem to think more and more like Jesus, or increasingly see things with *"the mind of Christ."* Most of these people have little or no confidence or assurance, and it is no wonder. **It is difficult to have any degree of assurance when you are almost totally lacking any evidence of being related to Jesus!**

It is not our purpose to sit in judgment upon other people. There is One who is able to save or destroy (James 4:12). However, it is our obligation to boldly proclaim the revealed purpose of God—even, His predestinated purpose. Where that purpose is not taking place, there is no evidence of salvation. It is conceivable that God is conforming those who, because of flawed teaching or spiritual immaturity, are not yet aware of it. That is one of the reasons for this strong section of Scripture.

view. This is not a mere mental image, or an impression created by human imagination. Rather, it is the *"image"* developed by faith when the Gospel is believed, embraced, pondered, and preferred above all else.

THE REASON FOR PREDESTINATION

What is the reason for God predestinating that His children be conformed to the *"image of His Son?"* It is marvelous for simplicity, yet mysterious because of its profundity. It is in order *"that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."* The objective was to have a whole race of personalities that were like Jesus Christ. He was the *"Firstborn,"* the first of a new race who would all become like Him. They would be changed into His image.

Let it be clear in your mind that God's aim is not simply to remit your sin – although that is necessary for the larger purpose. Neither, indeed, is His objective form you to reach all of the world for Jesus – although that too is involved in the ultimate purpose. The revealed purpose is not to build an institution or give you extraordinary health and wealth! Such delusions are unbecoming for the saints of God. Whatever good may be seen in them, they are centered in this world, not *"the world to come."* The *"image of His Son"* is the point of conformity.

Christ's Brethren Are His Children

*those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them **brethren**, saying, I will declare thy name unto My **brethren**"* ^{NKJV} (Heb 2:11). This circumstance is also reflected in the resurrected Lord's words to Mary Magdalene, the very first person to whom He appeared following His resurrection. *" . . . go to **My brethren**, and say unto them, I ascend unto **My Father, and your Father**; and to **My God, and your God**"* (John 20:17).

The same individuals are also called Christ's *"children."* Thus, He is depicted as standing at last before the Father saying, *"Behold I and the children which God hath given me"* (Heb 2:13). Isaiah prophesied that the vicarious death of Christ would yield multitudinous offspring. *"But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand"* (Isa 53:10). The Psalmist boldly announced, *"A seed shall serve him"* (Psa 22:30). Jesus is like *"a grain of wheat"* that went into the ground, but brought forth *"much fruit"* (John 12:24).

Aaron's children were not like him (Lev 10:1). Eli's children were not like him (1 Sam 2:12). David's children were not like him (2 Sam 13). Joseph's brethren were not like him (Gen 37). David's brethren were not like him (1 Sam 17:28). But all of Jesus' children will

**CHRIST'S BROTHERS ARE ALSO HIS CHILDREN,
AND THEY WILL BE CONFORMED TO HIS IMAGE.**

THE APPOINTED PROCEDURE

"³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." In our text, the Lord is *"declaring the end from the beginning . . . the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure"* (Isa 46:10). This is a marvelous proclamation of the involvement of God in every aspect of our salvation, from beginning to end. Several objectives are achieved in this declaration.

- 27. What God is doing in Christ Jesus is clarified.
- 28. The surety of salvation is established.
- 29. The processes by which we are being brought to glory are affirmed.
- 30. The preeminence of God Himself in salvation is declared.
- 31. The points at which we are identified with the processes are made known.
- 32. A basis for strong confidence and assurance is substantiated.
- 33. The critical choices—the ones guaranteeing the completion of our salvation—belong to God alone.

Allow me to underscore that this is a commentary on the working of God, not the response of men. HE predestinated. HE calls. HE justified. HE glorifies. Faith can build on that foundation!

It is another way of saying, *"He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil 1:6).

The Lord knows all of those to whom these words apply. As it is written, *"Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His'"* (2 Tim 2:19). The text has been clear on this. God foreknew all of His children, and predetermined they would be conformed to the image of His Son. This is **WHY** *"all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (v 28). This is the Spirit's explanation for the safe arrival of *"the*

elect" in the world to come. It is not given to cause confusion, but to spawn and nourish hope. If we will believe, that is precisely what this proclamation will do for us. It will help us, and will not hinder us.

CALLING

"Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called . . ." At this point we learn that while Divine choices are not always known to us, we can now associate our calling—something we DO know—with God's predetermination. In fact, Peter puts calling and election together: *"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your **calling and election** sure . . ."* (2 Pet 1:10). Predestination, or election, is not to be viewed as a cold and lifeless doctrine! **A Living God cannot proclaim lifeless doctrine!**

Those who are predestined are called. From the beginning, God has made known He calls, invites, or summons. This is the very first response of God to the fall of man: "And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"

Divine Choice Implemented by Means

Immediately we see that the foreknowledge and predestination of God are carried out by appointed means. In the matter of salvation, God does not accomplish His determinations by decree, or Divine fiat. His people are not spoken into existence.

The Predestinated Are Called

Those God foreknew and determined to be conformed to the image of His Son are *"called."* God can put a hook in the jaw of His creation, and draw them in, so to speak. Thus He said to Sennacherib, *"Therefore I will put My hook in your nose, And My bridle in your lips, And I*

will turn you back by the way which you came" (Isa 37:29). **This is not, however, how salvation is implemented!** The salvation of God is set in motion by a call.

Those who are predestined are called. From the beginning, God has made known He calls, invites, or summons. This is the very first response of God to the fall of man: *"And the LORD God **called** unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"* (Gen 3:9). A call is how Abraham was brought into the working of the Lord (Gen 12:1-3). God brought Moses into the work of appointed deliverance when he *"**called** unto him out of the midst of the bush"* (Ex 3:4). Samuel was summoned into Divine employment when *"the Lord **called**"* him (1 Sam 3:4). When Jesus chose His disciples, He did it by **calling** them unto Himself (Matt 10:1).

In all of the examples, the ones called were first chosen. It is the same in our text: *"those He predestined, He also called."* ^{NIV} Elsewhere in Scripture, we are told that God calls men by the Gospel of His Son. *"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 Thess 2:14). The Spirit uses the Gospel to awaken conviction and deep desire within those who are *"dead in trespasses and sins"* (Eph 2:1). The Gospel boldly announces *"Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev 22:17). That is obviously an invitation that is open to every person.

But our text does not say every person is called – only those who are *"predestinated."* This does not mean the Gospel is not addressed to everyone, or that a general summons is not sounded to *"every creature"* (Mk 16:16). Rather, this is viewing the totality and conclusion of salvation from the beginning. These are common factors to all who ultimately will be glorified.

God Knows How

God knows how to get the Gospel call to those He foreknew. He can, for example, get the Gospel to the treasurer of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, whom no one but God knew was searching to know the meaning of Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus (Acts 8:26-29). The Lord once directed Paul to remain in Corinth for, He said, "I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10). Who can forget the whole city of Samaria responding to the Gospel call (Acts 8:5-6), or the centurion Cornelius and his entire household, directed miraculously by God so they could hear the call (Acts 10:1-48). Lydia and several women by a river praying, unexpectedly heard the call from Paul and Silas (Acts 16:13-15). The Philippian jailor, awakened by tumult and chaos, heard the call of the Gospel and responded (Acts 16:25-34). What of Saul of Tarsus himself, arrested by a Divine call from the glorified Christ (Acts 9:1-19).

These occasions did not happen by mere chance. **They were Divinely orchestrated!** A holy angel directed Philip to go to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26). The Lord Himself appeared to Paul, directing him to remain in Corinth (Acts 18:9). An angel of God appeared to Cornelius, preparing him for the Gospel, and instructing him what to do (Acts 10:3). A vision and voice "from heaven" informed Peter of his role in Cornelius hearing the Gospel (Acts 10:11-16). Lydia, the Philippian jailor, and those with them, heard the Gospel because of a vision Paul had in which "There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9). As for Saul of Tarsus, he heard what he was to do because the glorified Christ Himself appeared to him saying, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6).

When you view salvation from the perspective of the day of judgment, it will be easy to loudly confess, "those He predestined, He also called." ^{NIV} He has provided us the details of particular conversions to assure us of this. If we are

unable to see the details of our own calling, we are still to believe it was not the result of mere chance. Nothing in Scripture will lead a person to such a conclusion. We must be sure we do not allow man-made theology to do so.'

When you view salvation from the perspective of the day of judgment, it will be easy to loudly confess, "those He predestined, He also called." ^{NIV} He has provided us the details of particular conversions to assure us of this. If we are unable to see the details of our own calling, we are still to believe it was not the result of mere chance.

An Inside View

What we are reading is an inside view of salvation. It is not intended to be declared to the lost, providing them with an excuse for not seeking the Lord. This word is meant to comfort the people of God, assuring them He will complete the work He has started in them.

Jesus offered a word of explanation concerning the reception of His word by some, while others failed to receive it. "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (John 8:47). When reading this, keep in mind, "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them" (Prov 20:12). Particularly when contemplating responding to the Gospel call, it is God "that planted the ear" (Psa 94:9). There are those who DO have "ears to hear" (Matt 11:15). Those who lack such ears do so because "the LORD hath not given [them] an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear" (Deut 29:4). That explanation is revealed and should be accepted.

Those "with ears to hear" have NOT escaped the attention of God. Whether they are in a lonely desert, by a river, or in an idolatrous Grecian city, "whom He did predestinate, them He also called."

He will appeal to their volition and to their will! He will see to it that the Gospel gets to them just as surely as it did to you!

Not Intended to Make Us Slothful

God forbid that any should conclude that this circumstance justifies a slothful stance in regard to preaching the Gospel "to every creature." Rather, as we walk by faith and lean not to our own understanding, the Lord will direct our path (Prov 3:5-6) into productive service.

Do Not Draw Fine Lines

Some have drawn fine theological lines that allow for the formation of a highly systematic theology. They conclude that because men are "dead in trespasses and sins," they cannot respond to God. They must first be awakened from the "sleep of death." But this is not the reasoning or declaration of the Holy Spirit. The cause of our salvation is so presented that we may conclude in faith, "all things are of God" (2 Cor 5:18), and "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever" (Rom 11:36).

You were called by God because He foreknew you and predestinated you to be conformed to the image of His Son. That is how you are to reason on the matter. That way of thinking will produce an abundance of thanksgiving and propel you into hearty labor for His great name.

No wonder the saints of God are referred to as "the called" (Rom 1:6; 8:28). No marvel they are admonished to "see" their "calling" (1 Cor 1:26). We have been "CALLED" into Christ's fellowship (1 Cor 1:9), "to peace" (1 Cor 7:15), and "into the grace of Christ" (Gal 1:6). Believers have been "CALLED" into liberty (Gal 5:13), God's "kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12), and "unto holiness" (1 Thess 4:7).

JUSTIFICATION

"... and whom He called, them He also justified..." The text does **not** say that justification is offered to every one that is called, but that the ones He calls are "also justified." That tells us He is

not speaking of the general call that goes out to the whole world. These are those who were effectively drawn to Christ by God, and whom Jesus did not cast away (John 6:44). This is admittedly a high view, but faith needs to hear it. Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

These are the people who are "justified" – those effectively called. Justification is the imputation of God's righteousness. From the underside, it is the complete acquittal from all guilt. As it is written, "And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). From the top side, justification is being "made the righteousness of God in Him [Christ]" (2 Cor 5:21). Justification involves the complete removal of the curse brought on by sin. It also involves the impartation of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

And to whom is this singular blessing given? It is for those whom "He also called!" The invitation of the Gospel, then, is necessarily joined to "justification," or being "made righteous" (Rom 5:19). This involves reconciliation to God (Col 1:21), deliverance from indebtedness to the flesh (Rom 8:12), and liberation from the defiled conscience (Heb 9:14). It includes peace with God (Rom 5:1), fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and access to the Father and His grace (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12).

God **Himself** justifies: "**HE** also justified." It is not the result of human ingenuity or mere conformity to a code. It follows the call of God: "whom **HE** called, them **HE** also justified."

The Association with Our Text

We cannot allow our minds to drift away from the subject at hand: suffering with Christ (8:17). We are suffering together with the "whole creation." Christians, particularly those who know very little about the magnitude and glory of their salvation, will be tempted to recoil from suffering. They may even consider modifying their commitment to

Christ, or no longer confessing Him before men.

The reasoning of our text is this: "If you are tempted to despair because of suffering, consider what marvelous benefits have come to you because you were sensitive to the call of God! If such blessings followed your calling, what will attend your justification? Even though the world is against you, all of heaven is for you. Do not draw back from suffering, it is the appointed means of coming into an eternal reign!"

GLORIFICATION

"... and whom He justified, them He also glorified." This is the language of

If you are tempted to despair because of suffering, consider what marvelous benefits have come to you because you were sensitive to the call of God! If such blessings followed your calling, what will attend your justification? Even though the world is against you, all of heaven is for you. Do not draw back from suffering, it is the appointed means of coming into an eternal reign!

hope. It is something that has not yet been experienced, but is as sure as our calling and justification. Glorification is as much a part of salvation as being "called." It is as essential as being "justified." It is something that man can no more accomplish than his own calling or justification. This is something that God must do, or it will not be done. The point of our text is that He **WILL** do it.

Being "glorified" is the final stage of being "conformed to the image of His Son." It is when we will "be like Him," and it will happen because we will "see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2). Glorification involves the complete removal of every competing and inhibiting influence. It also involves receiving a glorified body that is like Christ's "glorious body" (Phil 3:20-21).

This is glory that is eternal, and does

not pertain to life in this world. It is the appointed answer to inward struggle, and "the sufferings of this present time" (8:18). We are told that salvation is "with eternal glory" (1 Tim 2:10), and that we have been called "unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus" (1 Pet 5:10). The Lord Jesus, in His mediatorial ministry, is "bringing many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10). All of this confirms that the purpose of God's "great salvation" is primarily related to the world to come, not this one. It is in prospect of the time when death will be "swallowed up in victory," and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:4).

Although believers have not yet been "glorified," it is spoken of as though it was already accomplished. The reason for this is that God has already determined it. But why is there such an unwavering note in this text? Is it not possible to fall into sin again, and actually be overcome by it, producing a worse state than at the first. Indeed, it is! As it is written, "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Pet 2:20). Why, then, speak of being glorified as though it had already occurred—especially since we remain in a danger zone? Can faith lay hold of a word like this?

This Is the Norm

Settle it in your mind that while falling away is possible, it is certainly not the norm of the Kingdom. Those who are "fallen from grace" (Gal 5:4) or "depart from the faith" (1 Tim 4:1), have neglected the means of salvation. Presently, the benefits of salvation are ALL held by faith. Glorification will remove the necessity of faith, at least as we know it.

As long as we live by faith, glorification is sure. It is appointed to follow justification. That justification is both obtained and maintained "by faith" (Rom 3:28; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:24). It is not possible to have faith without being justified. Equally true, it is not possible to be justified and not be glorified.

Jesus prayed for the glorification of those who had been given to Him by the Father. "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold **My glory**, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). John clarified that beholding Jesus as He is will result in us being "like Him" (1 John 3:2).

This appointed procedure is also proclaimed in Second Thessalonians. "For this purpose He called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"^{NRSV} (2:14).

All of this is intended to confirm to our hearts the fulness and surety of salvation. As faith lays hold of this word, it will strengthen us to endure suffering in anticipation of being glorified. It is as sure as our calling and justification.

Why Is So Little Being Said

If God has called us to obtain glory, and if that is the appointed result of being justified, why is so little being said about glory these days? Why is such a stress being placed on "the affairs of this life,"

to the neglect of the coming glory? Why is the church being flooded with supposed experts in solving problems, rather than men who are able to assist men and women in preparing for glory? And why, with all of these experts, do we appear to have more problems than ever before? Why aren't these specialists more special?

Why do we hear so little about heaven, being glorified, and reigning with Jesus? Why are such things as the coming of Christ, the end of the world, and the day of judgment so rarely declared? Why does hope languish and faith wither? It is because the matters declared in this passage are perceived as having no real significance to the institutional program. They simply are not seen as relevant, and are thus neglected, and often despised.

THE RESPONSE OF FAITH

"³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*" It is not enough to simply adopt a proper theological position. The truth must touch our hearts, provoking us to think correctly about the opposition we face. If opposition from the enemy is an integral part of spiritual life, then we should be able to view it properly. Thus the marvelous things set before us demand a response from us.

The Spirit has lifted us into the heavenly realms. He has told us the reason for our sufferings, and that we are not alone in them. He has announced that nothing about salvation has been left to chance. From beginning to end, the Lord Himself is involved. He knew us before the foundation of the world. He determined we would be conformed to the image of His Son. He called us. He justified us. He will yet glorify us. These are not suppositions or possibilities, they are bold proclamations to be believed. Now it is necessary to arrive at a God-honoring conclusion.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

If we could look into men's hearts,

Who is the professed believer who will dare to question that God is "for" them, working everything together for their good? Who will question His benevolence because they face hardship, suffer, or experience fierce opposition?

many would say, "I do not believe 'these things!'" Others would not say that, but they never declare "these things." Although the Spirit has stated some very remarkable realities, they have not registered upon the hearts of such people. They think nothing of simply eliminating them from their preaching and teaching.

The Spirit, however, will not allow us to brush these things aside. He bring them to bear upon our hearts and minds. If we will hear what the Spirit is saying, He will lead us to consider these matters and think correctly about them. The persuasion of them is critical to our triumph in both life and death.

GOD IS FOR US

"If God is for us . . ." This does not suggest that God is NOT "for us," but actually affirms that He IS. This is family language. The "us" refers to those who have been justified by faith and against whom there is no condemnation. The fact that God foreknew us proves He is "for us." Predestinating that we be conformed to the image of His Son confirms He is "for us." Consider how our God broke through the silence of ignorance, the deadness of sin, and the forces of darkness, calling us to Himself. That proves He is "for us." The fact that He justified us declares that He is "for us." His revealed intentions to glorify us also substantiates that He is "for us." Let no one doubt this fact, or suppose that God is against them if they have believed the record He has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11)!

Who is the professed believer who will dare to question that God is "for" them, working everything together for their good? Who will question His benevolence because they face hardship, suffer, or experience fierce opposition? One of the great tragedies of our time is that self-acclaimed Christian teachers

lead people to imagine that questioning God or even being angry with Him is all right. It is not all right! It is evidence of unbelief, and without faith, it is impossible to please God!

The point of the words, "If God be for us," is to establish that there can be no justified doubt of this. This is so firm we can reason upon the basis of its reality, and derive comfort for our souls.

WHO CAN BE AGAINST US

"... who CAN be against us?" Some versions read, "who IS against us." NASB, NIV, NRSV It is like saying, "Is Goliath effectively against David? Can Nebuchadnezzar really do anything against Daniel? Are the 450 prophets of Baal really jeopardizing Elijah? If God is for Joseph, will his brothers be able to bring him down? If God has decreed Sarah will have a son,

will anything be able to stop it?"

Oh, the people of God do have enemies. But all of them, to a person, are under the governing power of God. Every child of God can say to every one of their enemies, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" NASB (John 19:11). Not even the devil himself can harass us without permission (Lk 22:31).

This question ["Who can be against us?"] is affirming that **the process revealed cannot be aborted by any foe from any realm!** No enemy can stop the process of being conformed to the image of God's Son! No foe can stop those foreknown by God from being called. No hostile forces can prohibit God from justifying those He calls. There is no

opponent that can keep God from glorifying those He has justified! That is the way it is, and faith accepts it!

The "ransomed of the Lord" can cry out with David, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me all around" (Psa 3:6). And again, "In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psa 56:11). And again, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psa 27:1). These are proper conclusions to the doctrines set before us. They make for confidence, boldness, and great joy. No person who has received the love of the truth has cause to be fearful of man or circumstance! Child of God, believe this: **God IS for you!**

THE REASONING OF FAITH

" ³² 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?" There is more to be said on this matter: "What shall we say to these things?" They are too great and powerful for simplistic responses. Faith can reach into the depths of sanctified reason, coming up with conclusions that bring glory to God, honor to Jesus, and strength to the heart.

GOD DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON

Jesus once cried out to be spared: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt 26:39). Of this occasion it says, "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared" (Heb 5:7). The Father did not deliver Jesus in the sense of not allowing Him to die. Instead, He delivered Him from being swallowed up of death. In other words, He raised Him from the dead. However, He did not spare Him from death.

Who was more worthy to be spared than Jesus? He had not sinned, and there was no guile in His mouth. He had

spoken all the Father had given Him to say, and did only what He saw the Father doing. He had went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil. Who was more fitting to be spared? But God "did not spare His OWN SON."

GOD DELIVERED JESUS UP

Peter declared Jesus was "delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Paul goes even further, declaring it was God Himself who delivered Him up. It was the Father who delivered Him "for our offenses" (Rom 4:25). The Savior was not victimized by the powers of darkness. God delivered His Son over to them. As Jesus Himself said to those arresting Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour,

and the power of darkness" NKJV (Lk 22:52-53).

Jesus was "the Lamb of God," and God Himself offered Him! He "delivered Him up for us all!" Never forget, we are not saved by what men did to Jesus! It is not the opposition of Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod that saved us! It was God's opposition to the Son, when He laid on Him the stripes by which we are healed! The wrath of God thrashed Jesus on the cross in order that we might go free. In the deepest and fullest sense of the word, Jesus "tasted death for every man" (Heb 2:9).

GOD FREELY GIVES US ALL THINGS

The Spirit is confirming to our hearts that God is "for us," and nothing can be effectively "against us." If God did not spare His Son, delivering Him over to death in order that we might be

The Father did not deliver Jesus in the sense of not allowing Him to die. Instead, He delivered Him from being swallowed up of death. In other words, He raised Him from the dead. However, He did not spare Him from death.

reconciled, what will He do for us now that Jesus is raised and we are justified? If He extended Himself for us when we were enemies, what will He do for us now that we are reconciled. If we received grace when we were sinners, what will we receive now that we are righteous? Here is the same line of reasoning stated earlier in Romans. *"But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were*

enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (5:8-10).

Now that we have received the Spirit of adoption, God will "freely," or graciously and abundantly, give us "all things." These are "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3). They are everything required to safely negotiate through the straits of suffering and opposition, weakness and trouble, to the other side!

If God did not withhold His Son when we were "dead in trespasses and sins," will He refuse to give us what we need to resist the devil, go on to perfection, and endure suffering? Indeed, He will not! When we are "without money," we can "come," "buy," and "eat" at the Masters table. Now that we are "in Christ Jesus," "no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa 84:11). Child of God, you can count on that! You can receive precisely what you need, when you need it!

THE CONFIDENCE OF FAITH

"³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." With great power, the Spirit continues to teach us how to respond to the question, "What shall we say to these things?" Proper questions are deserving of proper answers! Thus the Spirit does not leave the answer up to men. Rather He tutors us in how to answer, knowing that faith will at once recognize the validity of the response and derive help from it.

BRINGING A CHARGE

The saints of God have been declared to be "justified" – fully exonerated of all guilt. Is that justification thorough? Is there a personality in heaven, earth, or hell, that can level a charge against the person the mighty God has justified? Can someone dredge through our sordid past and find something that can be charged against us?

Let us bring Joshua the high priest to the witness stand, and let him testify on this matter. In his case we will confront the ultimate enemy who will raise the ultimate accusation. The accusation will also be attempted before the ultimate tribunal, the throne of Almighty God. This vision was revealed to Zechariah the prophet.

"And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the LORD said

unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments,

Proper questions are deserving of proper answers! Thus the Spirit does not leave the answer up to men. Rather He tutors us in how to answer, knowing that faith will at once recognize the validity of the response and derive help from it.

and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment" (Zech 3:1-4).

There you have it! A charge sought to be leveled against someone serving the Lord. Other versions say Satan was at Joshua's right hand "to accuse him." NASB, NIV The situation was even complicated by the fact that Joshua was "clothed with filthy garments." Surely this is a case where a valid accusation can be made. The most crafty of all enemies is

set to make it. The person against whom it is to be leveled has no righteousness of his own.

Satan does not get a chance to raise the accusation. Although Joshua was standing before the angel of the Lord, the Lord Himself intervenes. He does not rebuke Joshua for having filthy garments, but Satan for seeking to accuse him. Joshua is a "brand plucked from the fire," and God will allow no accusation to be made against him!

But that was not the end of the matter. God said to those standing by Joshua, "Take away the filthy garments from him." He then informed Joshua what had happened. "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." See, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

GOD'S ELECT

The "elect" are the ones God foreknew, predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, called, and justified. Furthermore, He has also determined to glorify them. In fact, that is His predetermined and unalterable purpose. Now, who will lay anything to the charge of these "elect."

These are not people who elected God. God elected them. They are "God's elect," God is not their elect! It is true that they know God. It is "rather" true that they are known by God (Gal 4:9). They are called "the elect" – that is one of the terms by which they are known. Jesus called them "the elect" (Mk 13:22). Paul called them "the elect" (Col 3:12; 1 Tim 5:21). John called them "the elect" (2 John 1). The church is "elected" (1 Pet 5:13). God's purpose stands "according to election" (Rom 9:11). There is an "election of grace" (Rom 11:5). Even though great masses of Israel were cut off from salvation, "the election hath obtained it" (Rom 11:7). The "election of God" can be known (1 Thess 1:4). It is our business to give diligence to make our "calling and election sure" (2 Pet 1:10).

Now, who is going to level a successful charge against a people so identified? Furthermore, what would move people to resist such an appellation—"God's elect?" To "elect" is to choose or select. No person should question there are people God has chosen, or selected. In fact, the saints are called a "chosen generation" (1 Pet 2:9). Believers are emphatically told, "He has chosen us in Him" (Eph 1:4). Those identified with Jesus "are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev 17:14). Who is there that can raise a charge against these people? Who can burst before God and accuse His "elect"?

By this, He means that the debt incurred by sin has been fully paid, and the complete penalty exacted at the hands of Christ Jesus. He was "made a curse for us," enduring the judgment of God, and treading the winepress of the wrath of God alone

GOD JUSTIFIES

The inability to accuse these people is not owing to a law that has been issued against doing so. It is not that accusations are illegal. When God justifies people, there simply is nothing that can be found against them! They may be wearing filthy garments because of an untrained and guilty conscience, but they have been plucked from the fire of condemnation, and no record of transgression can be found against them.

Micah said God would "subdue" the "iniquities" of the people, and "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). By this he means they cannot be accessed. They are beyond the reach of the accuser!

Isaiah foretold the coming age of grace when God spoke through him, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa 44:22). They no longer exist! They have been "removed" from us as "far as the East is from the West," and can no longer be joined to us (Psa 103:12).

That is the state of those whom God has justified. No one can lay an accusation against them and make it stick! Eventually, before an assembled universe, all accusations against them will be thrown down. In it God will be vindicated in the purity of His people.

EVERY NEED IS ADDRESSED

³⁴ **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.** The climax to this lofty argument is marvelous. Truth soars like a mighty eagle into the heavenly realms, summoning faith to follow. This chapter began with the words, "There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Now the Spirit hurls the challenge in the face of the adversary, and into the conscience of the believer as well. He is going to confirm that salvation has, indeed, been established as protective "walls and bulwarks" (Isa

26:1).

HE WHO CONDEMNS

Who is the one who will condemn God's justified ones? If there really is "no condemnation," do not those who seek to censure God's people do so in vain? Because Goliath charged David with coming to him with sticks, cursed him by his gods, and condemned him to be eaten by the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, does that make it do? Can Nebuchadnezzar really condemn Daniel to be consumed in a den of lions? Or the three Hebrew children in a furnace of fire? If God is for them, can the enemies of God really pass judgment against them?

To condemn is to judge against, or pass sentence against because of some injustice. The person who seeks to condemn God's people attempts to pass a lasting sentence against them. That people make such attempts cannot be denied. The Sanhedrin condemned Stephen. Herod condemned James. Antipas, faithful martyr of Jesus, was condemned by his enemies. But know this, none of that condemnation will stand the test of the judgement seat of Christ. It will not survive the confrontation of the throne of Almighty God! God will reverse all of those condemnations made by his enemies, and

his saints will “judge the world,” setting the record straight (1 Cor 6:2).

CHRIST WHO DIED

The Spirit now reasons with us, confirming it is impossible to condemn someone God has justified. First, “*It is Christ who died.*” By this, He means that the debt incurred by sin has been fully paid, and the complete penalty exacted at the hands of Christ Jesus. He was “*made a curse for us,*” enduring the judgment of God, and treading the winepress of the wrath of God alone (Gal 3:13; Isa 63:3). No one can condemn those who have been buried into the death of Christ! Christ’s death becomes their death also.

Even when our conscience condemns us because of our past, “*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” (Heb 9:14). There is “*no condemnation*” to those who are in Christ Jesus!

FURTHERMORE IS RISEN

The work of Christ did not end at His death. “*It is finished*” John 19:30) referred to His death, not His work! I prefer the reading of the KJV—“*yea, rather.*” That is a more proper rendering of the word **mallon**, which means “very much, exceedingly, as a high point, more, and to a greater degree.” The idea is that if Christ’s death wrought such great things, what will be brought by His resurrection! He was “*crucified through weakness*” (2 Cor 13:4), being brought to His weakest point.

The “*power of His resurrection*” will now work even greater effects than His atoning death. As it is written, “*For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been*

to it by God Himself (Heb 3:1-2). Christ’s intercessory work is not merely keeping us from being condemned – that issue was settled by His death. We were reconciled by His death (Rom 5:10). His intercession is the means by which we are

If no one can condemn us because Christ died, surely no one can condemn us now that He has risen from the dead and representing us in heaven!

reconciled, will we be saved by his life”^{NRSV} (Rom 5:10). If no one can condemn us because Christ died, surely no one can condemn us now that He has risen from the dead and representing us in heaven!

EVEN AT GOD’S RIGHT HAND

Behold how truth soars to lofty realms! Not only did Christ die, and was even more raised from the dead, He “*is at the right hand of God,*” where all final judgments are made, and from which all blessings are issued. He is not merely there for Himself, He is there for us! When the Father beholds the Son, He thinks of us, for we are some of His “*many brethren.*”

ALSO MAKING INTERCESSION

Jesus is not idle at the Father’s right hand. He “*ever lives to make intercession for us*” (Heb 7:25). His intercession is not a mere attempt to speak for us, it is an effective intercession. This is His High Priestly work, and He has been appointed

sustained. This is the appointed way of getting supplies to us—“*every good and perfect gift.*” In His intercessory work He manages our trials, ensuring that none of them exceeds our ability (1 Cor 10:13). Angels are dispatched to protect us (Heb 1:13-14), and the Holy Spirit is sent by Him to minister to us.

No one can condemn the people of God because every provision required for their calling, justification, and glorification has been supplied in Christ. Nothing is lacking, therefore none can effectively accuse or condemn them. Praise the Lord! Additionally, He that is in them is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). Child of God, lift up your head! God is for you! Jesus is for you! The Spirit is for you! The holy angels are for you! Everything is being worked together for your ultimate good. They that are for us are more and greater than they who are against us. Be strong! Be strong! Lift up those feeble hands!

CONCLUSION

The passage we have just reviewed is to Scripture what the Holy of holies was

to the tabernacle. Though brief in words, it is abundant with sanctifying truth. It

The passage we have just reviewed is to Scripture what the Holy of holies was to the tabernacle. Though brief in words, it is abundant with sanctifying truth. It helps us to not only make sense out of our sufferings, but endure them to the glory of God. In salvation nothing is left to chance. Everything is in the hand of God, who has appointed Jesus as the Arbiter of every facet of salvation.

helps us to not only make sense out of our sufferings, but endure them to the glory of God. In salvation nothing is left to chance. Everything is in the hand of God, who has appointed Jesus as the Arbiter of every facet of salvation. As with all pivotal or central proclamations, men have chosen to argue and debate over this text. Such great confusion has been generated by these controversies that unskillful preachers have chosen to

ignore the text, withholding this precious and refreshing elixir from the saints. The results have been devastating. The confidence, boldness, and joy that can be ministered by the persuasion of these things can hardly be found among professed believers. Thousands of churches exist in which hardly a single person can be found that is being noticeably conformed to the image of God's Son. There is scarcely a spark of understanding that even sees such a conformity as necessary, much less predestinated.

Theological schools have elected to put their accent on other things – and what a conglomeration of things they are! They range from developing happy

families and smooth running institutions, to resolving domestic difficulties and revising the music of the church. Those who are seemingly more astute give themselves to critiquing the Bible, providing such valuable information as what books and texts do or do not belong in the Bible. They can even develop a theological template through which we can read the Bible, just to ensure we come to the same deceptive conclusions they have.

All of this may seem quite innocent, but it is not. The weak and emaciated churches that clutter the landscape of the Christian world are the direct result of their leadership. Blind guides have led them, and they have all fallen into the

ditch. This is precisely why such a high level of Scriptural illiteracy exists in the churches. It is why the people stumble through life without a strong confidence, knowing whom they have believed, and being persuaded He is able to keep what they have committed unto Him until *“that day.”* I do not mean to be overly critical, but the serious of the situation demands that strong words be spoken. Jesus is not honored by such conditions. They betray a high level of unbelief.

This passage will give great assistance in resolving these unfortunate difficulties. It is to be faithfully and powerfully proclaimed in faith. It has been given to the children of God for sustenance and encouragement.



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 28



GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE

8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." ³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ 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.

Romans 8:35-39 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

From the human point of view, the situation of the believer is fragile, and the prospect of making it safely to glory impossible. That is precisely why the Spirit is opening to us the real condition of those who are in Christ Jesus. Although they are surrounded by opponents that are vastly superior to their natural abilities, yet they are safe and protected in the Lord. However, only faith can perceive this circumstance. Therefore, powerful affirmations of the protective aspect of salvation will now be declared.

The approach of the Spirit will be to fortify our faith, not clarify our obligation. This is not to be construed as a

minimization of duty or a license for laxness. God forbid that such thoughts should be entertained by those in whose hearts the Holy Spirit has shed abroad the love of God (5:5). Without exception, those who seek a way to glory that places no demands upon them are *"blind, and cannot see afar off"* (2 Pet 1:9). If the Savior Himself was required to enter wholeheartedly into His work, it is utterly absurd to imagine we are not to enter energetically into ours.

ADDRESSED TO BELIEVERS

The passage before us is addressed to those who are in Christ Jesus. All of the glorious affirmations of their situation are

taken to be true. Allow me to reaffirm some of them.

- We have peace with God (5:1).
- Faith has given us access into the grace wherein we stand (5:2).
- We are rejoicing in hope of the glory of God (5:2).
- We glory in tribulations, knowing the effectual work they accomplish in us (5:3-4).
- We are not ashamed of our hope, because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy spirit (5:5).
- We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ (5:11).
- We are dead to sin (6:2).

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHO CAN DO IT? (8:35a)
- II. SEPARATING CIRCUMSTANCES (8:35b)
- III. THIS IS HOW IT LOOKS (8:36)
- IV. CONQUERING IN CONFLICT (8:37)
- V. THE PERSUASION OF FAITH (8:38-39a)
- VI. THE LOVE OF GOD IS IN CHRIST JESUS (8:39b)

- We were baptized into Jesus Christ (6:3a).
- We were baptized in Christ's death (6:3b).
- We were raised by the Father to walk in the newness of life (6:4).
- We were planted together with Christ in the likeness of His death (6:5).
- Our old man is crucified with Him (6:6).
- We have been freed from sin (6:7).
- We are not under law, but under grace (6:14).
- We obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to us (6:17).
- We have become the servants of righteousness (6:18).
- We experience a struggle with inner influences we hate, and do not desire (7:15-20).
- We have a law within, that when we would do good, evil is present with us (7:21).
- We delight in the law of God in the inner man (7:22).
- A contrary law exists in us that wars

- against the law of our mind (7:23).
- With our minds we ourselves serve the law of God (7:25).
- We are not condemned (8:1).
- The law of the Spirit of life has made us free from the law of sin and death (8:2).
- The Spirit of God dwells within us (8:9).
- Our bodies are dead because of sin (8:10).
- The Spirit quickens our mortal bodies (8:11).
- As the sons of God, we are led by the Spirit of God to mortify the deeds of the body (8:13-14).
- We have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear (8:125a).
- We have received the Spirit of adoption (8:15b).
- The Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are the children of God (8:16).
- We are heirs of God (8:17a).
- We are joint heirs with Christ (8:17b).
- We have the first fruits of the Spirit (8:23a).
- We are groaning in anticipation of the redemption of our bodies (8:23).
- The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought (8:26).
- God is working everything together for our good (8:28).
- God has predetermined the glorification of those who are justified (8:29-30).
- God is for us, not against us (8:31).
- Through Christ, God will freely give us all things (8:32).
- No one can effectively accuse us (8:33).

- No one can condemn us (8:34a).
- From God's right hand, Christ is making intercession for us (8:34b).

There are FORTY-TWO affirmations of the condition of the children of God. Our text is a further elaboration of our status. It is not a cold and calculating doctrine to be propagated as a lifeless dogma. Further, it is not intended to build confidence in those who are living in the flesh, or neglecting "so great salvation" (Heb 2:3). Those who approach this section of Scripture to justify themselves in sin or slothfulness are wicked. We have no time to hear their miserable explanations of this passage.

The affirmations of our text are for those who are fighting the good fight of faith, endeavoring to lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). These are words addressed to those who are living in hope, in anxious anticipation of being forever with the Lord (5:24-25). These are words for those who are patiently running the race that has been set before them (Heb 12:1-2), resisting the devil (1 Pet 5:8-9), and have put on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10). They will offer no "everlasting consolation" to anyone else!

To the degree we are able to identify with the declarations of the status of the redeemed, we will receive great comfort and encouragement from the promises of the text before us. The Holy Spirit freely declares who we are, and the provisions that are made for us. There is no revealed limit to the involvement with God that is possible through our faith.

WHO CAN DO IT?

^{8:35a} **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Some versions provide varied readings, all with the same essential meaning. "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ?" ^{Douay-Rheims} "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" ^{Revised Webster} "Who will come between us and the love of Christ?"^{BBE} "Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love?" ^{NLT} and "Can anything cut us off from the love of Christ?" ^{NJB} This is a question addressed to the heart!

The question is a rhetorical one. The Spirit is not asking for an answer, or even suggesting that there is something or someone who CAN separate us from the love of Christ. This is like a challenge to the sceptic or the faint-hearted to ponder the greatness of the salvation that is "in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10). We will find that the love of God is strong as well as tender.

Erroneous Questions

It is vital to perceive how this question

is asked. We are living at a juncture in human history when the effects of false teaching have saturated the theologies of men. In defense of their dogmas, they pose questions that are NOT submitted in Scripture. Some examples will suffice to acquaint us with their nature. (1) "Can we lose our salvation?" (2) "Once a person is saved, can they ever be lost?" (3) "Once we are in God's grace, can we ever fall out of His grace?" (4) "IS it possible to fall away?" All such questions come from the mind, not the heart.

Men enter the theological battleground to resolve these questions. Debates and lengthy disquisitions are developed to answer them. Yet, all of them miss the mark. They are not stated acceptably, and thus answers to them are not found in Scripture. To put it another way, God does not approach salvation in this manner. There is only one reason for these questions. The Christian community is plagued with members who do not reflect the spiritual life described in Scripture. Thus these doctrines have been concocted to justify the conclusion they are still Christians, even though any evidences of such a conclusion are sadly lacking.

Our text presumes involvement and fervent desire. It postulates a longing for the redemption of the body, and an aggressive discontent with “*the law of sin*” that is resident in our members (7:23,25; 8:2). **Where these are lacking, a discussion of the safety of the believer is out of order!** Those who are not living by faith have no right to indulge in either thoughts or discussions about Divine safety. If they are living in the flesh, they are enemies of God (8:8:7; James 4:4). The wrath of God is abiding upon them (John 3:36), and they are “*condemned already*” (John 3:18). What the worldly church calls “carnal Christians” are a flagrant contradiction of the Spirit’s affirmation of life in Christ. They are not “*dead to sin*” or “*alive unto God*” (6:11). They are not walking in the Spirit (8:4), mortifying the deeds of the body (8:13), or waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body. No doctrines must be presented to such people that would only serve to complicate their situation. Our text is comforting the faithful, not salving the conscience of the unfaithful!

SEPARATE US

Having been reconciled to God, and possessing peace with God, is there any inimical influence that can negate what we have received, or put us beyond its reach? Who can thrust from the presence of the Lord those who have been brought near to Him?

The question is NOT whether or not

we can leave our “*first love*” – we can (Rev 2:4). Here, the focus is on influences outside of ourselves. The point here is that those who are convinced of this truth will “*stand against the wiles of the devil*” confidently and boldly. When the dark night of affliction surrounds the saints of God, the brightness of Divine love bursts through that darkness to warm their hearts and produce the “*full assurance of understanding*” (Col 2:2).

The word “*separate*” means to divide, be separate from, or be at a distance from. The question is whether or not anything can drive a wedge between the saved and the love of Christ. Are there any personalities or influences that can put a distance between the “*saved of the Lord*” and His love?

When the dark night of affliction surrounds the saints of God, the brightness of Divine love bursts through that darkness to warm their hearts and produce the “full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2).

This is not a question regarding temptation. Can our relationship to the Redeemer be altered by personal or impersonal influences outside of ourselves?

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Prior to this, we have read of “*the love of God*,” which is “*poured out within our hearts by the Holy Spirit*” ^{NASB} (5:5). Later, we will read of the “*love of the Spirit*,” which has a powerful influence upon the people of God (15:30). Now, for the first time in the book of Romans, we read of “*the love of Christ*.” **In all three cases, the love is toward the believer.** It is not speaking of the believers love for God, the Spirit, or Christ—even though all three are found in the redeemed. Here, the reference is to Christ’s love for us. His love is the stronger and more effective love! Our love derives its effectiveness from His.

“*The love of Christ*” for the saved is mentioned five other places in Scripture.

- ❑ “*For the **love of Christ** compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*” ^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:14-15).
- ❑ “*That He [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height; to know **the love of Christ** which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*” ^{NKJV} (Eph 3:16-19).
- ❑ “***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*” ^{NKJV} (Eph 5:25-27).
- ❑ “*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***” ^{NKJV} (Gal 2:20).

- ❑ “*And walk in love, as **Christ also hath loved us**, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor*” (Eph 5:2).

Christ and the Church

Christ’s love is exclusively related to His children, or brethren—the church. It was in this sense that He said to His disciples, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and **I will love him** and manifest Myself to him*” ^{NKJV} (John 14:21). While God’s love is said to have been focused on the world in Christ (John 3:16), this is never said of Jesus

Christ. There is an exclusive relationship He holds with the saved, and His love focuses upon that.

The Reason for this Representation

There is a reason for this representation, and we do well to consider it. No one should conclude from these remarks that Christ has no interest in the world, or that His atoning death was not for them. This is not, however, how Christ's love is proclaimed.

In the Divine economy, God turns the saved over to Jesus. They are referred to as those whom God has given to Christ. He trusts His Son to bring them home.

- "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has **given them to Me**, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:28-29).
- "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all **He has given Me** I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (John 6:39).

- "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom **You have given Me**, for they are Yours" (John 17:9).
- "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name **those whom You have given Me**, that they may be one as We are" (John 17:11).
- "Father, I desire that they also whom **You gave Me** may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).
- "And again: 'I will put My trust in Him.' And again: 'Here am I and the children **whom God has given Me**'" (Heb 2:13).

These are the people Christ shepherds (John 10:11,14), leads (John 10:3), teaches (Eph 4:20-21), and for whom He faithfully intercedes (Heb 7:25). His mediatorship is exclusively for them (Heb 12:24), and He is bringing them alone "to glory" (Heb 2:10). He is the "Captain of their salvation" (Heb 2:10), and ministers

in "the true tabernacle" exclusively for them (Heb 8:2). He is actually ruling the entire world with them in mind, marshaling favorable forces for them.

Separated from the Love of Christ

To be separated from the love of Christ is to be pushed beyond His loving care as the "good Shepherd." It is to be moved where His intercession is ineffectual, and where He no longer teaches. To be separated from the "love of Christ" is to be no longer led to glory, or taste of the benefits of His heavenly ministry.

For any person interested in this "great salvation," this is a pertinent question, indeed! Is there something in earth's battle zone that can cut off the heavenly supplies? Is there an enemy that can suffocate our spirits by shutting off communication with the Lord of glory? Can circumstance separate us from God's love? That is what it means to be separated from the love of Christ! It is essential that we know if we can face any adversary or circumstance that can effectively move us beyond the perimeter of Christ's loving care, thus separating us from it.

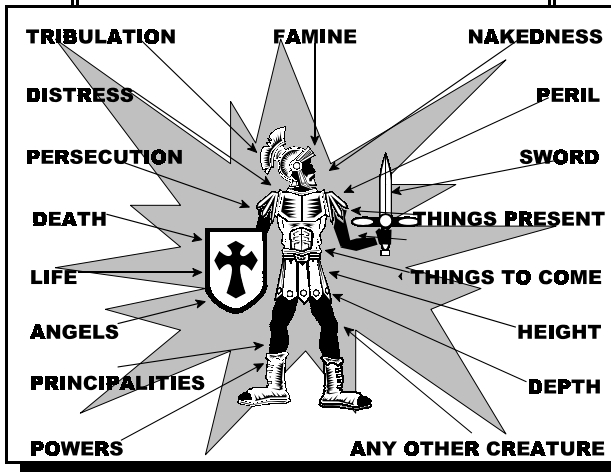
SEPARATING CIRCUMSTANCES

^{4:35b} **Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"**

There are at least two reasons why men philosophize about the safety of God's people. First, they do not recognize the essentiality of faith. Second, they are blissfully unaware of the forces that are aligned against us. The knowledge of either or both of these realities will move us away from philosophizing, to a fervent quest to lay hold on the hope that is set before us (Heb 6:18). Any approach to life in Christ that imagines there is no danger, has been foisted upon men by the devil himself. It is a doctrine of demons, and is to be thrust from us with zeal.

The Spirit will first draw our attention to general circumstances that are designed by the enemy to lure us away from believing, and into trusting in the

flesh. If you remove Divine protection from the picture, any of these experiences



are sufficient to move us from "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." They all have the ability to so distract the heart that fear and doubt will rush in like a torrential flood. Further, there is a

natural fear of all of these experiences. The believer is given the peace of God that is able to "rule in your hearts," and "keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Col 3:15; Phil 4:7).

Why Are They Mentioned?

Why are these oppositions mentioned? To some, they seem to contradict, what is called, "the victorious life." Others perceive Divine protection as prohibiting the experience of such things. These misconceptions are particularly prevalent in the Western world, where opposition to the faith is not as aggressive as other places in the world. The passage before us is more readily received in places like China and Sudan than in our own country. Nevertheless, saints everywhere, whether enjoying quietness from the Lord, or fierce and open opposition from the "old serpent," must embrace this

passage by faith. In some way, and to some degree, these are matters that we all will face. Here is the truth about them.

TRIBULATION

The word “*tribulation*” means anguish, burden, affliction, oppression, or trouble. The literal meaning is “a pressing together, or pressure.” It is being pressed down under the weight of opposing influences.

This word is used seven times in Scripture, and is always accompanied with a most somber tone.

- ❑ “For then shall be great ***tribulation***, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt 24:21).
- ❑ “For in those days shall be ***affliction***, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be” (Mark 13:19).
- ❑ “Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great ***affliction***: and our fathers found no sustenance” (Acts 7:11).
- ❑ “***Tribulation*** and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile” (Rom 2:9).
- ❑ “And not only so, but we glory in ***tribulations*** also: knowing that ***tribulation*** worketh patience” (Rom 5:11).
- ❑ “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye ***burdened***” (2 Cor 8:13).

Tribulation is a weight upon the soul that exceeds the natural capacity of the individual. It is an experience in which the person must be sustained by a power outside of himself.

Faith does not exempt us from “*tribulation*.” Whatever you may think of resisting the devil (1 Pet 5:8) and overcoming the world (1 John 5:4-5), they cannot put you beyond the experience of “*tribulation*.” If that were the case, the verse before us would have no meaning, and could certainly bring no comfort to the believer. The question before us now is if “*tribulation*” can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

DISTRESS

“*Distress*” emphasizes a different aspect of living by faith. Whereas “*tribulation*” stresses what puts pressure upon us, “*distress*” underscores the effect it has upon our spirits. This word means “anguish.” It is the result of being put into a narrow place where we have no mobility – a sort of spiritual claustrophobia. “*Distress*” takes place when all of our own resources run out, and no alternatives are placed before us. It is like Paul spending “*a day and a night in the deep*” (2 Cor 11:25), or Joseph being in the pit (Gen 37:28-29). Do not think that such an experience cannot happen to you! David once said, “*In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and He heard me*” (Psa 120:1). The question put

“Distress” takes place when all of our own resources run out, and no alternatives are placed before us. It is like Paul spending “a day and a night in the deep” (2 Cor 11:25), or Joseph being in the pit (Gen 37:28-29). Do not think that such an experience cannot happen to you!

before us is whether or not “*distress*” can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

PERSECUTION

“*Persecution*” occurs when the enemy pursues and chases us with aggression, inflicting pain and sorrow upon us. It can come from oppressive words spoken against us, like the people said against Jeremiah (Jer 18:18). It can be the flogging of Paul (2 Cor 11:24-25), the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:5), or the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).

In persecution, the enemy seems invincible, gaining the advantage over the saints. He makes them flee like David and Paul (1 Sam 19:10; Acts 14:6), hide like Israel (1 Sam 13:6), and suffer like John

the Baptist (Mark 6:25-27). There is no question about whether or not the saints **will** suffer persecution, for “*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim 3:12). The question before us now is if “*persecution*” can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

FAMINE

A famine is a dearth, a scarcity of food. Sometimes there is no food at all during a famine. In a famine, there is no harvest, no reaping, no replenishment of the food supply.

The first famine of Scriptural record took place when Abraham first entered into Canaan. Not only was “*the Canaanite in the land*,” but “there was a ***famine*** in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the ***famine*** was grievous in the land” (Gen 12:6,10). About the time Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, “there was a ***famine*** in the land” (Gen 26:1). Joseph was exalted to the throne of Egypt because God had revealed to him how the land could be sustained during a grievous famine that lasted seven years (Gen 41:27-36). In the land of promise, where Jacob and his sons resided while Joseph was in Egypt, “the ***famine*** was sore in the land” (Gen 43:1). The record of Ruth is couched in as time when “there was a ***famine*** in the land” (Ruth 1:1). In the days of David,

there was a famine for three consecutive years (2 Sam 21:1). When Elijah confronted wicked Ahab, “there was a ***sore famine*** in Samaria” (1 Kgs 18:2). A similar one rose in the same country during the time of Elisha (2 Kgs 6:25). Elisha told of a famine God called for, which lasted seven years (2 Kgs 8:1). All of these famines touched the saints of God. Some had to seek means by which they could be sustained, while God miraculously supplied the needs of others.

The question before us now is if “*famine*” can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

NAKEDNESS

Nakedness is destitution that erupts in a lack of adequate clothing, or a state of

poverty. This is the condition of Lazarus, who was daily placed at the gate of “a certain rich man” (Lk 16:20). It was the state of many faithful saints of old, of whom it is said, “they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb 11:37).

Paul once told of the pathway into which faith led him. In carrying out his ministry, he did so “in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor 11:27). Again Paul writes, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace” (1 Cor 4:11). On one occasion, while in prison, Paul wrote to Timothy, “Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come” (2 Tim 4:13). The question before us now is if “nakedness” can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

PERIL

Peril is danger, risk, jeopardy, or hazard. There is a note of uncertainty in “peril,” as the danger is not always seen. It rather lurks in the darkness of uncertainty, thus promoting fear in those who are in peril. Paul once testified of the many perils to which he was subjected. “In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Cor 11:26).

The Spirit also testified of the last days when “perilous times shall come,” endangering the souls of believers (2 Tim 3:1). Indeed, the Lord can make His people “dwell in safety” (Psa 4:8), and “safety is of the Lord” (Prov 21:31). But let no soul imagine this means there is no peril, no danger, no jeopardy to which the saints are subjected. The question put before us is whether or not “peril” can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

SWORD

The “sword” speaks of more than a mere weapon wielded by some despot. It

stands as a symbol of violent death, often carried out by political powers. The word is used in this manner in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, where the principle of governmental power is said to come from God. Of the ruler it is said, “he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Rom 13:4).

However, many despots have turned their sword against the saints of God. Wicked Herod “killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:2). Other saints, of old time, “were slain with the sword” (Heb 11:37). Thus wicked Jezebel “cut off the prophets of the Lord” (1 Kgs 18:4), and by the sword some of the very chosen people “devoured” the prophets like a “destroying lion” (Jer 2:29). One of the “sins of the people” that

Peril is danger, risk, jeopardy, or hazard. There is a note of uncertainty in “peril,” as the danger is not always seen. It rather lurks in the darkness of uncertainty, thus promoting fear in those who are in peril.

Jeremiah declared was that they had “shed the blood of the just in the midst of her” (Lam 4:13).

It is quite true that it is written, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper” (Isa 54:17). However, no person must conclude from this that absolute safety is guaranteed to all who trust the Lord, or that such a conclusion is to be drawn from that text. Should they do so, a host of righteous men will rise in refutation of such a naive conclusion – men like Abel, Isaiah, Zechariah, John the Baptist, James, Stephen, Antipas, Peter, and Paul. The meaning of Isaiah’s statement is that the intentions of the godless against the righteous will not be realized. God’s purposes will be fulfilled in spite of the opposition of the wicked.

The question put before us is whether or not “the sword can separate us from

the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

THE LIFE OF EASE IS A DELUSION

The text before us declares the nature of spiritual life. Life in Christ Jesus does not involve exclusion from hardship and difficulty. There are texts that seem to indicate saints are exempted from the type of difficulties mentioned in our text. “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psa 37:25). “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the LORD” (Isa 54:17). Jesus said, “And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Matt 6:28-30). It is vital that we comprehend these texts.

These texts do not mean John the Baptist cannot be killed by Herod, or that the Apostles cannot be beaten by the Jews, or that Stephen cannot be stoned by the Jewish council. They do not mean Paul and Silas cannot be beaten and thrown in the inner prison, or that Joseph cannot suffer because of the false accusation of Potiphar’s wife. Our Lord’s words do not mean Lazarus will never be a “beggar,” or that Paul cannot experience “nakedness.” Often God is glorified by sustaining His people in such grievous circumstances, rather than delivering them from them.

The text in Psalms does not say the righteous will never beg bread, but that their “seed,” or offspring, will not do so. The text in Isaiah is affirming that nothing shall abort the purpose of God for His people. Our Lord’s words in Matthew confirm that we are in the care of the Lord. The lilies of the field are not always robust and beautifully attired, and those who imagine they are do greatly err. Christ’s words assure us we are not left to

the power of circumstance, and that no situation is capable of putting us beyond the loving care of God. The love of God is powerful as well as tender. It is never abrasive, and always effective.

The power of this text is seen in the experience of the things mentioned, not in being exempted from them. If such things could not occur to the people of God, the text would have no meaning. God has

designed to save them "in" these things. The comforting power of this affirmation is found in the total inability of such things to effectively separate us from the love of God which is in Christ.

THIS IS HOW IT LOOKS

⁴⁶ ***As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'*** Other versions read, "Just as it is written, 'For thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" ^{NASB} "As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" ^{NIV} "As scripture says: For your sake we are being massacred all day long, treated as sheep to be slaughtered." ^{NJB} This is a confirmation of why grievous circumstances cannot separate us from the love of God.

The reference is found in Psalm 44:22. "Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." A similar expression is found in Psalm 141:7. "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth." It was even prophesied of our blessed Lord, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa 53:7). Why do such things occur?

Let it be clear that this is not a mere complaint because of difficult and unpleasing circumstances. This is an expression of spiritual insight, not one of Satanic delusion. It is not an insightful cry of the flesh, but of the spirit. It confirms the commonality of trouble among the faithful, and the extreme difficulties to which they are subjected in this world.

FOR YOUR SAKE

While sufferings are common to all of humanity, and man is "born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7), our text speaks of a special category of sufferings. These are sufferings for the sake of the Lord, or because we have

embraced Him and His promises by faith. When we take hold of the Lord and His Word, the world at once begins to oppose us. It is driven by hatred (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13). It is animated by the prince of the power of the air, who has focused all

Make no mistake about this, God does not overlook such wicked treatment of His people. Rather, it furnishes Him with a justifiable reason for repaying the wicked.

of his wrath against the remnant of the "seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17).

Here are severe sufferings that have NOT come because of a departure from the Lord, as with Israel. Rather, they have come because of a close and productive affiliation with Him—"For YOUR sake." ^{NIV} Make no mistake about this, God does not overlook such wicked treatment of His people. Rather, it furnishes Him with a justifiable reason for repaying the wicked. As it is written, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you" (2 Thess 1:6). And again, "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath He sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye" (Zech 2:8).

In these difficult sufferings, the present possession of the saints of God is

confirmed. As our Lord said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted **for righteousness' sake**: for theirs **IS** the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you **falsely, for my sake**. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for **great IS your reward in heaven**: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt 5:10-12).

KILLED ALL THE DAY LONG

To be "killed all the day long" is to be undeservedly subjected to the brutality and inhumanity of the ungodly. It is to live under the threat of the worst dangers possible to men in the body. It is for Abel to be subjected to the hatred of his own brother while in the field of labor (1 John 3:12). It is for David to live under the aggressive and malicious quest of king Saul (1 Sam 23:14). It is for Elijah to be subjected to the evil intents of Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:2). It is for Paul to receive "stripes above measure," be "in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft." It is for him to receive "forty stripes save one" five times from the Jews, be thrice "beaten with rods," and "stoned" (2 Cor 11:24-26).

By saying "we," both David and Paul refer to the host of the godly. Every day, to this day, some of them are escorted by holy angels from this world to the unseen world. Somewhere today, our brethren are being "killed" and persecuted by the ungodly.

This is the result of faith – of receiving the atonement, and walking in the Spirit. And what is the reason for it all? Why are the people of God subjected to such maltreatment? The answer is shouted back to us by the Holy Spirit: "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, **that we should not trust in ourselves**, but

in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor 1:9). That is the reason for our afflictions—to remove any tendency to imagine that we are sufficient of ourselves!

ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER

From the standpoint of appearance, it seems as though the righteous have been raised up to be slaughtered, maligned, and subjected to the evil intentions of the godless. How else can we account for the heartless and undeserved death of the holy prophets (1 Thess 2:15) and those who were "stoned, they were sawn asunder [and] slain with the sword" (Heb 11:37).

One of the purposes of this passage is to encourage the hearts of the saints not to balk at suffering, or faint when they are exposed to the harsh treatment of the ungodly. Too, we must not overemphasize our sufferings, failing to accent the love of God. Our faith will be strengthened and confirmed in the crucible of suffering.

Often that suffering has come in the harshest and most severe forms. The Spirit informs us that this is according to Divine appointment. Of the Apostles Paul says, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were **appointed to death**: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1

Cor 4:9). Of the general body of the redeemed it is written, "That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know" (1 Thess 3:3-4).

The point of our text is that nothing appointed by God is capable of separating us from His love. This includes the most grievous of circumstances, all of which are designed to wean us away from this present evil world, while promoting faith in God. How blessed to see this truth! This is needful and profitable instruction.

CONQUERING IN CONFLICT

"³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

YET

The KJV reads more appropriately, "Nay . . ." instead of "Yet." The NIV and NRSV read, "No . . ." This verse is given in answer to the interrogation of verse 35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" It is given in view of the overriding advantages that are given us in Christ Jesus.

- God is working everything together for our good (v 28).
- God has predestinated that those who are justified will be glorified (v 30).
- If God is for us, no one can effectively be against us (v 31).
- Through Christ, God will freely give us all things, even in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances (v 32).
- No one can lay an effective accusation against those God has justified (v 33).
- No one can condemn those for whom Christ has died (v 34a).
- No one can condemn those for whom Jesus is presently interceding (v 34b).
- No earthly circumstance, regardless of its intensity and duration, can cause

God to cease to love us through Christ (v 35).

The words that follow are declared in the midst of an oppressive battlefield. These words are not spoken to those reclining on "beds of ivory," and reposing on "couches" of ease (Amos 6:4).

opposition and hardship meant they had been abandoned by God. It is one thing for Job, without the Law and without a Bible, to conclude such (Job 23:3-5). It is quite another thing for those who have been "illuminated" and "tasted of the heavenly gift" to assume such things (Heb 6:4-6; 10:32).

We must not allow the devil to deceive us into thinking God's greatest and most productive work only takes place in peaceful environs, where all is going well for the believer. Many a soul has stumbled at this, imaging that opposition and hardship meant they had been abandoned by God.

What will now be affirmed takes place **IN** tribulation! It is experienced **IN** distress! It is something that occurs **IN** persecution! This is our heritage **IN** famine! Here is what God gives His people **IN** nakedness. It is what happens to them **IN** peril. It is their lot **IN** opposition by the sword! "**IN ALL THESE THINGS!**"

"**ALL**" these things must be seen as meaning every one of them, and in every kind of them. It is all of them, whether experienced one at a time or all at once. It is true of each individual difficulty, or all of them collectively.

IN THESE THINGS

Here is a facet of salvation that is essential to see. We must not allow the devil to deceive us into thinking God's greatest and most productive work only takes place in peaceful environs, where all is going well for the believer. Many a soul has stumbled at this, imaging that

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

" . . . we are more than conquerors." Other versions read, "we overwhelmingly conquer,"^{NASB} "we overcome,"^{DUOAY-RHEIMS} "we are able to overcome all these things,"^{BEBE} "we conquer overwhelmingly,"^{NAB} "overwhelming victory is ours,"^{NLT} and "we come

through all these things triumphantly victorious."^{NJB}

The phrase "more than conquerors" comes from a single compound Greek word (ὑπερνικῶμεν). It means to gain a surpassing victory, be completely victorious, or completely win out over something. It means the purpose of the adversary was thoroughly frustrated, and the intentions of the Lord completely dominated the circumstance.

Someone who is "more than a conqueror" overcomes the devil, principalities and powers, and trying circumstances. They are the better for their tribulation, even glorying in it because of their insight into the purpose of God (Rom 5:2ff). Their faith and their joy have only increased because of these hardships, thereby testifying to the greatness of God's salvation. They have gotten the victory over their adversaries "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev 12:11).

Such marvelous victory is not common in our day. However, that is not owing to any deficiency in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. If men will embrace the Gospel by faith, they will become "more than conquerors" in THEIR AFFLICTION. Any other result comes from unbelief, and is unsatisfactory before the Lord.

Well did Solomon say, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small" (Prov 24:10). Again, Jeremiah challenges the people of God, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer 12:5).

Hasty Conclusions Must Be Avoided

Those who cannot bear up under difficulty have reason to be concerned. But care must be taken not to arrive at a false conclusion. It is certainly not that they are condemned, and no one should allow themselves to think that is the case. What is revealed in such weakness,

however, is a need for stronger faith. This can only be accomplished by taking a firmer grip on the Good News of Christ, and laboring to uproot trust from the soil of self and humanity.

THROUGH HIM

In Christ Jesus, full provision is made for the obtaining and sustaining of faith. Neither of them are found in the flesh. Both of them can be realized in the midst of adversity, and even while seemingly alone. There are times when the only consolation is this: "we may boldly say, *The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*" (Heb 13:6). In loneliness and seeming despair, faith can shout out, "The LORD is on my side; *I will not fear: what can man do unto me?*"

In Christ Jesus, full provision is made for the obtaining and sustaining of faith. Neither of them are found in the flesh. Both of them can be realized in the midst of adversity, and even while seemingly alone.

The LORD taketh my part with them that help me" (Psa 118:6-7).

The words "through Him" declare the appointed means through which the saints gain the victory. Faith, strength, and determination are given to them by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are never close enough to God to receive His blessings apart from Christ Jesus. Even though they are forgiven of all sin, enough of old nature remains in them that a Mediator is still required.

Faith is like a conduit between the saints and Jesus, through which Divine power sustains them in ever increasing measures. God gives nothing to His people that does not come through Christ Jesus. He is the "One Mediator between God and man" (1 Tim 2:5).

THAT LOVED US

"... through Him that loved us." Note, the text does NOT say "Him that

loves us," but "Him that loved us." This is a vital distinction, for it takes us back to the Gospel of Christ, wherein the love of God was demonstrated. As it is written, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). Our perception of God's love for us must not rest upon our feelings, or the assessment of our circumstances. It must firmly rest in the revelation of His love, not the experience of it!

This does not mean God's love is not experienced. It DOES mean that circumstances sometime make it appear as though He does not love us. Flesh will reason, "If God really loved us, He would not allow us to go through such grief." But faith reasons upon the basis of Christ's atoning death, not present circumstances.

The love that is mentioned is God's. Thus it is written, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us . . . Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us . . . Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we

ought also to love one another" (Eph 2:4; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 John 4:10-11). That indefatigable love is always sufficient and effective to "cause us to triumph in Christ" (2 Cor 2:14). Blessed is the person who can see these things.

A FINAL WORD OF WARNING

The saints of God must take care to avoid the tendency to base conclusions upon appearance, or even upon personal experience. **Sound reasoning is always based upon Divine affirmation.** By that, I mean a "thus saith the Lord," as found in the Scriptures. When rationale begins with human experience, it always leads away from God. Man does not live by personal views or even exalted feelings and persuasions. Rather, he lives "by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). When Jesus successfully repelled the attacks of the wicked one, He did it by quoting from the Scripture—even though He Himself was in constant communion with the Father. It

is foolish indeed to assume that God would sustain us by some other means. || Those who are persuaded of the truth of the Word can use it as a sword! This is particularly applicable in regards to the text we are considering.

THE PERSUASION OF FAITH

“³⁸ **For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God . . .**” The power of faith is revealed in these words. The declaration of Divine intent has been made, and faith has taken hold of that word.

I AM PERSUADED

“For I am persuaded . . .” Other versions read, “For I am convinced,”^{NASE,NIV} “For I am sure,”^{DOUAY-RHEIMS} “For I am certain,”^{BBE} and “For I am certain of this.”^{NJB}

First of all, let it be clear that Paul is not merely speaking for himself. This is the reasoning of faith, and is something available to all the children of God. If this were not the case, the text would be nothing more than the boast of a sort of hero. But that is not the case. This is a response that belongs to all who are in Christ Jesus.

And what is it that brought such a strong persuasion to the Apostle. It certainly was not the experiences of life! If he were to look at them alone, this is what he would see: “we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears . . . we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life . . . We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed . . . after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus . . . and there are many adversaries . . . Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the

heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor 7:5; 1:8; 4:8-9;

The ONLY way we can be persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of God is to believe what God has said. That is the sole proof of the matter! Appearance seems to contradict the affirmation.

1 Cor 15:32; 16:9; 2 Cor 11:24-27). Of themselves, such experiences do not bring a powerful persuasion of the keeping power of God.

An Aspect of Faith

Persuasion is the aspect of faith described in the words, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). **One in possession of “substance” and “evidence” cannot be ruled by doubt.**

In this regard, our father Abraham is a noble example. It is written of Him, “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being **fully persuaded** that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom 4:19-21).

And what was it that enabled Abraham to be “fully persuaded” of God’s ability? Ponder the circumstances in which he found himself.

He had no children.

- His own body, when it came to reproduction, was “dead.”
- He was about a hundred years old.
- Sarah’s womb was dead.

What wise man upon earth could have confirmed the possibility of the Divine promise that he would “become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be” (4:18). What archaeological find could have supported such a commitment? Was there some ancient manuscript that could confirm what was said? What form of human logic could confirm the promise? Was there a human feeling that could do it? Could our father Abraham find some hermeneutical principle that could console his heart, and persuade him he could have offspring as multitudinous as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the sea shore?

Indeed, the ONLY way he could be fully persuaded is to believe what God had promised. That was the ONLY evidence He possessed that the promise was true. God said it! However, this fully satisfies faith. It needs no more than God’s word.

So it is with our text. The ONLY way we can be persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of God is to believe what God has said. That is the sole proof of the matter! Appearance seems to contradict the affirmation. Abel died. Joseph was unjustly imprisoned. The prophets were slain. John the Baptist was beheaded. James was killed by Herod. Stephen was killed. The early church was scattered abroad by a vicious persecution. Paul was imprisoned. On and on we could go. Such circumstances do not appear to justify a persuasion that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God. Flesh erroneously reasons, “If God loves me, why does He allow such things to happen to me?” Such questions are foolish, and unworthy of any attention from the child

of God. The described circumstances are the lower view. They are very real, and have very real affects upon us. In Christ, however, we are given to rise higher, and perceive things from a loftier and more comforting perspective. The Holy Spirit is calling us up to that higher view.

We will find that faith does not gloss life. It does not ignore difficulties, or pretend they are not there. Rather, it looks them squarely in the face while taking hold of the promises of God.

What follows are very real. They are matters the saints of God will confront. Their magnitude is determined by God, not man, and not even the devil. **Not a single one of them has power to drive a wedge between the saved and the Savior, or the children and the Father!**

DEATH

Death is the necessary consequence of Adam's sin, and has been passed upon all men. *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Rom 5:12). Again, *"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one . . ."* (5:17). The reality and inevitability of death, therefore, is not to be questioned. In order to attest to the factuality of the unseen world, two men were exempted from death: Enoch and Elijah (Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5; 2 Kgs 2:1-11).

There will also be an entire generation that will not see death in the ordinary sense of the word—namely those who are *"alive and remain"* to the coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4:15-17). Even then, that generation will be *"changed,"* being given new bodies (1 Cor 15:51-52). Apart from these exceptions, *"it is appointed unto men once to die"* (Heb 9:27).

While the appointment to death is common for all men, the manner in which they die is not. Abel was murdered (Gen 4:8). Abraham died *"in a good old age"* and in peaceful circumstances (Gen 25:8). The mighty prophet Elisha died of a sickness (2 Kgs 13:14). Stephen died a prolonged death by being stoned (Acts 7:58-65). Some were *"sawn asunder"* and

"slain with the sword" (Heb 11:37). James the Apostle was killed with a sword by Herod (Acts 12:2). The *"prophets of the Lord"* were cut off by wicked Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4). Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, died of an extended illness (John 11:6,13). All experiences of death are certainly not the same, and we should not approach them as though they was.

Death separates us from the world. In it we are separated from our worldly possessions, and from our family and friends. Death separates the spirit and soul from the body. Yet, with all of that, it cannot separate us from the love of God!

In death, the promise of God holds true: *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but*

The reference to death confirms that Satan will seek to work aggressively at that time to drive us from the Lord. He will try to constrain us to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). He will promote despair, unbelief, and fear at that time.

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). It is true, and it is possible to be persuaded of it, that death cannot separate us from the love of God. It may be attended by unusual misery, but it cannot drive a wedge between you and God's love for you! **Death cannot bring us where God's love cannot reach us!**

Among other things, this confirms that the love of God does not necessarily exempt us from hard experiences. We should not allow the devil to deceive us on this matter. When it appears as though we have been counted as sheep for the slaughter, and when we are required to pass through circumstances that terminate in our death, we still have not

been separated from the love of God. God's love for Abel did not relieve him of a hard death, nor did it do this for John the Baptist and Stephen. Sometimes His great love is seen in supporting those who are in seemingly impossible circumstances.

Because of erroneous teaching and conceptions in this matter, I have known of people who have ceased to trust and serve God because a loved one died, whom they thought should not die. In their case, the death of someone whom they respected and relied upon took place. Yet, even in that circumstance, neither the ones who passed, nor those who dearly cared for them, were separated from the love of God. Faith can receive this.

Some of the greatest expressions of faith have occurred when people died. Jacob blessed his sons *"when he was dying"* (Heb 11:21). Stephen prayed for those who were killing him while he was dying (Acts 7:60). When his death drew near, Paul confessed, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Tim 4:7). Rather than separating us from the love of God, death can actually accentuate His love!

The reference to death confirms that Satan will seek to work aggressively at that time to drive us from the Lord. He will try to constrain us to *"curse God and die"* (Job 2:9). He will promote despair, unbelief, and fear at that time. Yet, in all of his efforts, he is absolutely impotent to separate us from the love of God in our death. Whatever may seem to pass from us while we are dying, the love of God will become more firm at that time.

LIFE

It is possible for life to become a burden. Our lives are frail and uncertain. As it is written, *"For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away"* (James 4:14). It passes *"swifter than a weaver's*

shuttle" (Job 7:6), being "of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). David said his life was "as an handbreadth" (Psa 39:5). Notwithstanding, the brevity and uncertainty of life, however burdensome they may become, are not capable of separating us from the love of God.

Sometimes life can be spent under the oppression of the enemy, like Israel in Egyptian bondage (Ex 1:14). Sometimes it can be lived amidst the hatred of your own brothers, like Joseph (Gen 37:8), or in a prison with fetters hurting your feet (Psa 105:17-19). Life can be lived "in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb 11:38). A lifetime can be filled with hardship, living as a beggar full of sores (Lk 16:20-21,25). Those who imagine that faith guarantees a pleasant life without hardship, do well to give heed to the Scriptural record of those who had no such life.

Life is not always fraught with hardship. Sometimes the Lord grants "rest" and comfort in the Holy Spirit, relieving men of stress and trouble (Acts 9:31). He can cause our enemies to be at peace with us (Prov 16:7), while we "dwell safely in the land" (Lev 26:5). Sometimes people move away from the Lord during these peaceful times (Lk 12:19). It is possible to "be full, and deny" the Lord (Prov 30:8).

Yet, whether life is lived in the crucible of difficulty, or in the domain of comfort and ease, life itself cannot separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Life does not have separating power. Therefore, whatever our lot in life, let faith be strong and unwavering.

Here also we learn that Satan will work consistently to sever us from the love of God in life. He will do all within his power to cause life to obscure the love of God. He will foster bitterness and fear, or self-confidence and forgetfulness while we live in this present evil world. His efforts, however, have no power to separate us from the love of God in life's experiences. Whatever may be withheld from us in life, the love of God will not be included in that exclusion for those who live by faith.

ANGELS

These are evil angels, not holy angels. The holy angels are not engaged in efforts to drive a wedge between us and the love of God. Instead, they are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14).

The devil also has angels. As it is written, everlasting fire has been "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41). These are "the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their

Life is not always fraught with hardship. Sometimes the Lord grants "rest" and comfort in the Holy Spirit, relieving men of stress and trouble. He can cause our enemies to be at peace with us, while we "dwell safely in the land."

own habitation," and have been "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). These are "the angels that sinned," and have consequently been cast "down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" 2 Pet 2:4).

This category of spiritual beings include "lying spirits" (1 Kgs 22:22), "demons" (1 Cor 10:20; 1 Tim 4:1), "unclean spirits" (Acts 5:16), "evil spirits" (Lk 7:21), "seducing spirits" (1 Tim 4:1), "a spirit of infirmity" (Lk 13:11), and "a spirit of divination" (Acts 16:16). These beings are vastly superior to natural men. Scripture records the influence of these spirits upon people. For eighteen years, one woman was "bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself" (Lk 13:11). Another evil spirit harassed a young boy, frequently throwing "him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him" (Mk 9:22). Another made a man "dumb," and unable to speak (Mk 9:32). Another caused a man to be both "blind and dumb" (Matt 12:22). Still another

grievously "vexed" a young girl (Matt 15:22).

It will do no good for people to pretend as though these spirits do not exist. Nothing in God's word remotely suggests this is the case. These are very real personalities. However, they are all subordinate to the Lord Jesus, the "Captain of our salvation" (Heb 2:10). Their head, Satan, together with themselves, cannot "touch" the one who is born of God (1 John 5:18). With all of their cunning craftiness and superiority over nature, they are impotent to separate us from the love of God!

The chief wicked angel is Satan himself. He is called "the angel of the bottomless pit," and is set to destroy (Rev 9:11). He cannot change the fact that he is the primary fallen angel, but does transform himself "into an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). On a person-to-person basis, you are no match for him! He is more subtle and more powerful than you are in yourself. Your ONLY protection against him is "in the Lord," "by the Spirit," and "through faith." Yet, he has no power whatsoever to separate you from the love of God.

Often, the people of God are tempted to oversimplify life in Christ Jesus. They do not see themselves as in a volatile and hostile environment, teeming with spiritual personalities who are set against them. Such poor souls view life from an academic viewpoint, imagining they have somehow become smart enough and powerful enough to stand against "the wiles of the devil." That is a delusion. The ONLY way to stand against him is to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," and to "put on the whole armor of God" (Eph 6:10-11). Know that in such a stance, the wicked angelic order, from Satan himself down to the lowest demon, cannot separate you from the love of God!

PRINCIPALITIES and POWERS

The unseen world has a sort of hierarchy. All personalities in the realm of the unseen are not the same. On the side of righteousness, for example, there are

not only angels, but “*arch angels*” (1 Thess 4:16; Jude 9), cherubim (Gen 3:24; Ezek 10:3), seraphim (Isa 6:2,6), and four living creatures (Rev 4:6-8). There are also “*principalities*” among this mighty and holy host (Eph 3:10; Col 1:16). All of **these** are for us, not against us. These are NOT the “*principalities*” of reference.

There are evil “*principalities*” – powerful spirits that have dominion over regions. While we are not provided a lot of information about them, sufficient is revealed to make us glory in Divine protection. Were we given to actually behold the forces that are aligned against us, our hearts would fail because of fear.

The Testimony of Daniel

We are exposed to three these principalities in the book of Daniel. In the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede, Daniel “*understood by books*” that the Babylonian captivity was about to come to an end (Dan 9:2). The books are said to be those of Jeremiah, in which the captivity was specified to be seventy years in duration (Jer 25:11,12; 29:10).

Some time later, during the third year of the reign of Cyrus king of Persia, a message was revealed to Daniel. The message concerned a great conflict that would occur in the unseen realms. Daniel understood the message, beginning a vigil of mourning that lasted three full weeks. During that entire period, he ate no tasty food, no meat or wine touched his lips, and he put no refreshing ointments on his body (10:1-3).

Following this twenty-day vigil, a heavenly messenger appeared to Daniel. He informed the prophet that as soon as Daniel had begun to pray, he had been dispatched from heaven in response, to bring an answer to him. However, a spiritual power had confronted and detained him for twenty-one days. His words concerning this occasion are certainly arresting. “*But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings*

of Persia”^{NJKV} (10:13).

It is staggering to consider the magnitude of the opposing power this mighty angel confronted. Angels, we know, have no difficulty in their confrontations with mortal men. A single angel slew 185,000 of Sennacherib’s army in a single evening, with no difficulty whatsoever (2 Kgs 19:35). Yet, “*the prince of Persia*” successfully detained this angel for twenty-one days! Not only that, “*Michael, one of the chief princes*” came to “*help*” him, thereby freeing him to bring the message to Daniel!

Here Daniel was told of three spiritual princes. One was “Michael,” who was holy. The other two were opposing forces who were apparently seeking the continued removal of Israel from their land. We know that one of Michael’s chief responsibilities is the people of Israel (Dan 12:1). He stands for them.

That was not even the end of the matter. After delivering his message, the angel said to Daniel, “*And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come*” (10:20).

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This record provides an explanation for the overthrow of the kingdom of Persia and the consequent dominance of the Grecian empire. It was not mere military power that overthrew Persia,

even though historians may imagine that to be the case. There was a wicked “*principality*” over Persia, as well as one over “*Greece*.” Considering them within the framework of the government of God, **they** were the real governors of those nations.

When the angel of the Lord came to Daniel with a message from heaven, it appears as though “*the prince of Persia*” knew the intent of the message, and thus sought to stop it from being delivered. It would, after all, announce his own demise. Later, another “*principality*,” “*the prince of Greece*,” would overthrow “*the prince of Persia*.” That overthrow was evidenced in the fall of Persia and the rise of Greece to military and political prominence.

We have no doubt witnessed a similar deposing of spiritual forces in our time. The fall of Japan, Germany, and Russia was not the result of military strength or political expertise. Those falls took place in the higher realms.

Now the question before us is whether or not these “*principalities*” can drive a wedge between the redeemed and the Redeemer! Can they push us beyond the reach of the love of God? **Emphatically, they cannot!** That is the persuasion of faith, and it is founded upon unalterable reality.

The fact that they cannot separate us from the love of God is not owing to their weakness, but to the greatness of God’s salvation, and the pressing nature of His remarkable love.

These “*principalities*” have all been plundered by the Lord Jesus. The plundering occurred in His atoning death. As it is written, “*And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*” (Col 2:15). Other translations say He “*disarmed*” the principalities and powers.

We Now Wrestle Against Them

These “*principalities and powers*,” who once detained mighty angels, are now

engaged by the saints of the most high God. It is written, *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but **against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places**”* (Eph 6:12). The spoiling of them by Jesus, therefore, does not mean they have been utterly removed. Rather, they have been so disarmed that we can now struggle against them for the freedom and enlightenment of the people.

To be sure, they cannot separate us from the love of God. However, the love of God can separate us from their malicious intents! How good it would be to have a revival of awareness in this area. Oh, that men would not only see the magnitude of the real foes we face, but that they are impotent to turn God against us!

THINGS PRESENT

“Things present” are the circumstances we face today. They are the conditions of the here and now. This is what we are confronting at this time.

Trouble, sorrow, and affliction are challenges when they are *“things present.”* When we are of sound mind, the griefs of yesterday do not drag us down. Troubles and afflictions that are behind us have only become occasions for thanksgiving and praise. When we live by faith, we do not grapple with such things. But when they are *“things present,”* it is quite another story.

Right here is where many a soul needs to be strengthened – handling *“things present.”* Even when we endure chastening, it is the fact that it is *“present”* that makes it grievous. As it is written, *“Now no chastening **for the present** seemeth to be joyous, but grievous”* (Heb 12:11). There surely are *“the sufferings of **this present time**”* (Rom 8:18).

Rather than *“things present”* separating us from the love of God, we can take ownership of them, knowing our God is working all things together for our good. Do not the Scriptures say, *“things present . . . are yours”* (1 Cor 3:22)? There

are distresses that are *“present”* (1 Cor 7:26), and *“the present evil world”* (Gal 1:4).

Still, *“things present”* cannot separate from God’s love toward us! The things we are going through right now may appear difficult and strong, but they are powerless to shut off the supply of Divine love. Still, *“in the midst”* of our enemies, our loving God can still prepare a table for us, laded with sustaining dainties (Psa 23:5).

THINGS TO COME

There have been generations who have been given grievous messages from God about *“things to come.”* Abraham was told that his offspring would be in bondage for 400 years (Gen 15:13). Gen Eli was told of the blotting out of his family name (1 Sam 3:12-14). Israel was told of the coming Babylonian captivity (Jer 25:11). Jesus told His disciples of the coming decimation of Jerusalem (Lk 21:24). Paul told of the days when *“seducing spirits and doctrines of demons”* would dominate the church (1 Tim 4:1), and times would be *“perilous”* (2 Tim 3:1-5). He spoke of a *“falling away”* (2 Thess 2:3).

All such fears are neutralized, and will eventually flee from us, if we are persuaded “things to come” are incapable of separating us from God’s love. Anything that is to come, regardless of its power, intensity, or longevity, will be bearable if God continues to love us.

Jesus spoke of a time when men’s hearts would fail *“them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth”* (Lk 21:26). The dread of coming things have struck fear into many a soul! Some have been gripped with fear at the possibility of what might occur in the future, even though there is no revealed basis for their fear.

All such fears are neutralized, and will eventually flee from us, if we are persuaded *“things to come”* are incapable of separating us from God’s love. Anything that is to come, regardless of its power, intensity, or longevity, will be bearable if God continues to love us.

HEIGHT

There are several senses in which the word *“height”* can be taken, and all of them have merit. I understand these to involve things that are **not** sought. They are **not** aspirations, nor are they things for which the believer longs. These are matters into which we are led by Divine power and purpose.

Lofty Circumstances

“Height” refers to lofty circumstances in which the individual is raised above the norm, and higher than his peers. It can include wealth, honor, or rank. It is possible to come into a situation where unusual honor is put upon us, or we are given responsibilities that far exceed the normal lot of believers. Some examples will suffice to illustrate the possibility of such occurrences.

Moses experienced unusual elevation in two ways. First, prior to being called of God, he *“was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds”* (Acts 7:22). Second, he was exalted above whole generations, for *“the Law came by Moses”* (John 1:17). Yet, his lofty positions did not separate him from the love of God. When in Egypt, he was faced with a decision. Of that time it is written, he *“refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward”* (Heb 11:24-26).

Later, after he had received the Law, was its mediator, and led the people of God, it was said of him, *“Moses was faithful in all his house”* (Heb 3:2). His faith kept him, and thus the heights to which he was raised did not separate him

from the love of God. These were not things to which he aspired, but things of which he was made a steward.

Aaron was chosen of God to be the first high priest of the people. This was a lofty position, indeed. Among the children of Israel, there was none higher, saving for Moses himself. Thus it is written, *“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron”* (Heb 5:1-4).

Later, in tribute to the faithful execution of the office of high priest, the Scriptures refer to *“Aaron the saint of the LORD”* (Psa 106:216). His exaltation did not separate him from the love of God.

Joseph was a rare person, indeed. No sin is recorded against him in Scripture. He was a person who experienced both height and depth in an unusual degree. From the prison of Pharaoh he was exalted to the second highest position in the land. His position was so significant that Pharaoh said to him, *“See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt . . . I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt”* (Gen 41:41-44). Yet, in humble faith, he gave the glory to God. *“God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive”* (Gen 50:20). Height did not separate him from the love of God!

Daniel had high political influence under the reign of four different kings. **Nebuchadnezzar** made him *“a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon”* (Dan 2:48). **Belshazzar** *“clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a*

proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom” (Dan 5:29). Daniel continued to be a superior counselor *“even unto the first year of king Cyrus”* the Persian (Dan 10:1). During the reign of **Darius the Mede** Daniel *“stood to confirm and to strengthen him”* (Dan 11:1).

Yet, throughout this period of time Daniel was *“greatly beloved”* in heaven (Dan 10:11). High places did not separate him from the love of God.

There are sublime spiritual experiences that can neither be accounted for nor expressed in human wisdom. Paul spoke of one such experience, declaring it to have been transcendent to all human ability.

Challenging Circumstances
“Height” can also be challenging circumstances that require more strength and ability than we have by nature. David spoke of his own determination not to exercise himself in *“matters too high for me”* (Psa 131:1). That was not his aspiration. He spoke of knowledge that was *“too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it”* (Psa 139:6).

Yet, when, as a mere boy, he faced the giant Goliath, faith made him equal to the occasion. Too, he was given to see aspects of the Lord and His will that few people have seen to this very day. *“Height”* did not separate him from the love of God.

Sublime Experiences
There are sublime spiritual experiences that can neither be accounted for nor expressed in human wisdom. Paul spoke of one such experience, declaring it to have been transcendent to all human ability. *“I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a*

man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” 2 Cor 12:2-4). Yet, this lofty experience did not bring about a separation from God’s love, or contribute to pride. Of the occasion Paul said, *“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities”* (2 Cor 12:5). Height did not separate him from the love of God.

Some people have drawn back from exalted spiritual experiences, or positions of great authority, thinking they will of themselves drive a wedge between them and God. However, when God leads people into such high places, they will not be able to separate them from the love of God.

DEPTH

There are human depths that stagger the imagination. Both in the body and in the soul, we can plummet to such depths as cause fear to rise in our hearts. David referred to these as *“the depths of the earth,”* and knew God could bring him back from them (Psa 71:20). Once he said, *“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD”* (Psa 130:1). Let no person doubt that such circumstances can arise. There are times when the depths of human contempt are felt. There are times of deprivation and destitution. No person of sound mind seeks these occasions, but God has led some us *“through the valley of the shadow of death”* (Psa 23:4).

Lazarus experienced the depth of being a beggar full of sores (Lk 16:20). Joseph was laid in fetters in prison (Psa 105:18). Daniel had to spend a night with the lions (Dan 6:16-17). Paul and Silas were beaten and left in the stocks of a cold and dark *“inner prison”* (Acts 16:23-24). Jeremiah was thrown into a pit, in which he sunk down into the mire (Jer 38:6).

David once said of one of his deliverances, *“He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings”* (Psa 40:2). He knew **depth** could not separate him from the love of God. You must know it too!

ANY OTHER CREATED THING

Nothing opposes the believer that has not been created – that does not have a genesis, or beginning. For that very

overwhelmed. But to assure us that full provision has been made for us, He says “*any other created thing.*” Faith is willing to accept that, and rest in the Lord.

loved us” (1 John 4:19). **His love is the river, ours is the tributary.**

This text presumes the superiority of God’s love. It is the manner of the New Covenant to place the highest priority on God’s love for us. It is what we prefer, long for, and fervently seek. It is generally known by the faithful that the love of God is powerful, sustaining the soul and standing between the believer and the forces aligned against him.

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reason, such things will also have an end. The idea here is that anything beneath God cannot interfere with His love for us! Everything that is under Christ – and that is “*all things*” (Eph 1:22) – has any power to push us beyond the reach of Divine love. Whether it is a personality or a circumstance, it cannot diminish the love of God for us in Christ Jesus.

ABLE TO SEPARATE

In a sense, this text is a promise, but it is more than a promise. It is a declaration of the real situation right now. All of the things that have been mentioned **are** totally incapable of separating us from the love of God. They simply have no power to do so. If we begin to think they can separate us, then we have been deceived on the matter.

We know that if God loves us there is neither person nor circumstance that can turn Him against us. If God is for us, who CAN be against us? Faith confidently responds, “*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God . . .*”^{NASB} Any person convinced of that will have the victory! That is why faith is declared to be “*the victory*” that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5). See to it that you abide in God’s love, and the powers of darkness can do nothing about it.

There are no doubt opponents and circumstances confronted in the faith life

THE LOVE OF GOD

The love of reference is God’s love **for** us, not our love for God. Our love flows from His love, and not vice versa. As it is written, “*We love Him, because He first*

of which we are totally unaware. I gather the Spirit has only introduced us to our enemies, in order that we be not

CONDITIONAL LOVE

“ 8:39b . . . **which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” There is much talk these days about God’s unconditional love. But it has no substance in Scripture. I believe I know what honest people are trying to say, but when they use such flippant speech, they do not do well. At best, they are trying to say that the love of God can reach us where we are, and that life is never hopeless if we will believe. It is far better to speak of God’s love in the words of our text, namely that nothing is able to separate us from it.

whom his love was placed (Deut 23:5). The second is applied to “*a cheerful giver*” (2 Cor 9:7). The words “*the Lord loves*” are mentioned eight times in Scripture. (1) “*The Lord loves His people*” (2 Chron 2:11). (2) “*The Lord loves justice*” (Psa 37:28). (3) “*The Lord loves the gates of Zion*” (Psa 87:2). (4) “*The Lord loves the righteous*” (Psa 146:8). “*For whom the Lord loves He reproves*” (Prov 3:12). “*The Lord loves Him*” (Jacob, Isa 48:14). “*The Lord loves the sons of Israel*” (Hos 3:1).

- “*For the Father Himself loves you, **because** you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.*” (John 16:27)
- “*The Father loves **the Son**, and has given all things into His hand.*” (John 3:35)
- “*For the Father loves **the Son**, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.*” (John 5:20).
- “*Therefore My Father loves Me, **because** I lay down My life that I may take it again*” (John 10:17).
- “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me **will be loved by My Father**, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*” (John 14:21)
- “*Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If*

None of the above texts are general, and all of them are selective.

JESUS SPEAKS OF GOD’S LOVE

The grand Expositor of God is the Lord Jesus Himself. If anyone can speak with clarity on the matter, it is the Son of God, the appointed Savior of the world.

The primary condition of God’s love is stated in our text: “*which is IN Christ Jesus.*” If you remove the Lord Jesus Christ from the picture, Divine love goes with Him. The words “*God loves*” appear only two times in any major translation of Scripture. The first applies to Israel, upon

anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and **My Father will love him**, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” (John 14:23)

Past Tense: “loved”

Jesus also referred to the Father’s love in the past tense—a love perfected BEFORE experienced by us.

- ❑ “For God **so loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)
- ❑ “As the Father **loved Me**, I also have **loved you**; abide in My love.” (John 15:9)
- ❑ “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You **loved Me** before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24)

The Apostles Did the Same

- ❑ “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ

Himself, and our God and Father, who **has loved us** and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace.” (2 Thess 2:16).

- ❑ “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He **loved us**.” (Eph 2:4)
- ❑ “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. Beloved, if God **so loved us**, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:10-11)

While the love of God is directed toward all people in Christ Jesus, we are to understand it to be active **only** in those who are in Him. His “great love” made abundant provision for us “when we were enemies,” but that love was focused upon the Lord Jesus Himself. It is only as we are “in Him” that experience that love.

Apart from the Son of God, men can, indeed, be separated from the love of God. In fact, that will be the ultimate portion of all who refuse to believe the record God

had given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11).

God is pointed on this matter. It is His Son in whom He is “well pleased” (Matt 3:17; 17:52 Pet 1:17), and upon whom His love rests in a most unique way. Even then, Jesus affirmed the Father loved Him BECAUSE He laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:17). God’s love for Christ is so strong that He loves us BECAUSE we love Christ, believing He came from God (John 16:27). God “WILL love” any person who loves Christ (John 14:21,23).

This is why God’s love is said to be “in Christ Jesus.” He does not love us in a sentimental and tolerating sort of way, for such love is not strong and does not change the individual. However, because His love for us is “in Christ Jesus our Lord,” it is consistent, protective, and effective. Those who have faith in the Son and abide in His love will find there is no opposing force that can neutralize or void that love. It is invincible. It is both strong and gentle, firm and tender.

CONCLUSION

Every person who is living by faith finds this text to be of great consolation. It contributes to their confidence, and enables them to boldly approach to the throne of all grace. If the love of men fails, the love of God will not. If they are assaulted by supernatural powers, they will prove impotent to move them away from this love. When Christ is dwelling in our heart by faith (Eph 3:16-17), He secures the love of God to us. Because of Him we benefit from that love. The Father will send us wisdom from above (James 1:17). He will give grace and peace in copious measures (Rom 1:7). Love and faith will be given to us by Him (Eph 6:23), together with mercy (1 Tim 1:12). “Everlasting consolation and good hope” will be given to us when God’s love is upon us (2 Thess 2:16).

force to separate us from “the love of Christ” and “the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In a sense, both

us get to the heart of the matter.

Now, what is there that can stop the flow of these benefits to us? Can tribulation stop the intercession of Jesus? Can distress cause God to cease to give us grace and peace? Will persecution, regardless of its intensity, stop the well of salvation from flowing into our hearts?

Jesus is living for us (Rom 5:10). He is interceding for us, and mediating the New Covenant to us (Heb 7:25; 9:15). He is leading, feeding, and teaching us (Heb 2:10; John 10:4; Eph 4:20-21). His love is made known in these activities, and more. God the Father is blessing us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph 1:3). He is orchestrating our lives so that everything will work together for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28).

Now, what is there that can stop the flow of these benefits to us? Can tribulation stop the intercession of Jesus? Can distress cause God to cease to give us grace and peace? Will persecution, regardless of its intensity, stop the well of salvation from flowing into our hearts? Will famine effectively hinder us from receiving everlasting consolation and good hope? What of nakedness or

TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER
The Spirit has challenged us to consider the impossibility of any opposing

are the same love. The point is that it is only realized in Christ Jesus. Lest that appear to be too cold and calculating, let

destitution? Cannot a beggar full of sores be carried by angels to Abraham's bosom? And what of peril and the sword? Can they take a single spiritual blessing in heavenly places from us? The answer should be obvious to you. These benefits are beyond the reach of our foes. What is more, they cannot no stop them from passing through their territory to us that Sihon could stop Israel from passing through his land (Num 21:23-26).

Can death of life stop Jesus from interceding for you? Can angels, principalities, or powers cause wisdom to cease to come to you from God? Is it

possible for the things of today or the prospects of tomorrow to make God stop working everything together for your good? Is there a place too high, or a circumstance too deep for grace and peace to be multiplied unto you? Is there any created thing that can blot out the Sun of righteousness, causing it to rise no longer with healing in His wings?

The resounding answer to all of these rhetorical questions is "NO!" That is what it means to remain unseparated from the love of God. It means no one can separate you from the benefits of that love. No one can stop God from blessing

and keeping you. No circumstance can put you in a place where Jesus does not work for and in you. It simply is not possible!

Now, let your faith take hold of what the Spirit has said. If you have ears to hear, hear what He is saying to the churches. You have every reason to be strong in faith, giving glory to God. You have no reason to be fainthearted and unbelieving. The Gospel has declared God is for you, and has provided for your "eternal salvation." If God be for you, who really can be against you! That is something you can heartily embrace without any fear of contradiction!



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COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 29



ISRAEL'S NEGLECTED ADVANTAGE

9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. Romans 9:1-5 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Having affirmed the powerful nature of the love of God, and that no adversarial power is capable of separating us from it, the Spirit now unveils a remarkable example of the love of God. As we embark upon this section of the book of Romans, we enter into an extremely controversial subject: the children of Israel. Although God speaks with consistency and clarity concerning the Israelites, seriously corrupted views of these people have been perpetrated by zealous religious leaders.

In summary, those views declare that God has repudiated the people of Israel, replacing them with the church. The promises made to them have, according to these views, been abrogated, and no longer apply to them.

In the exposition of chapters nine through eleven, I will devote considerable time to revealing the absurdity of these views. I have no regard for them, nor do I highly respect those who have and are proclaiming them. I will show that the point of these three chapters is to show us the indefatigable love of God – how that it is never pledged by Him, only to be abandoned.

The text will also address the objections of the Jews who believed they had, in fact, been forsaken by God. In Divine history, frequent pleas were raised up to God asking why they had been forsaken. Gideon once asked, “O my lord, if the LORD is with us, **why** then has all this happened to us? And where are all

His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (Judges 6:13). The Psalmist lamented, “*But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies”* (Psa 44:9). Again Asaph cried out, “*O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?”* (Psa 74:1).

Yet, even during those dark times, those with faith appealed to the strong love of God, calling upon Him to turn His face toward them again. “*Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever. Wherefore hidest thou thy*

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. TELLING THE TRUTH (9:1a)
- II. THE WITNESS OF THE CONSCIENCE (91b)
- III. THE COMPULSION OF GODLY CONCERN (9:2)
- IV. THEN CAPACITY OF A HEART IN FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST (9:3)
- V. THE ISRAELITES (9:4a)
- VI. REMARKABLE ADVANTAGES (9:4b-5)

face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake" (Psa 44:23-26). Again, listen to the cry of faith: "O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again" (Psa 60:1). Again, the faith of David, together with His acquaintance with the nature of God, compelled him to pray, "Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off? and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts? Give

us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies" (Psa 108:11-13).

If ever there was a people undeserving of the love of God, it was Israel. Their history is cluttered with murmuring, disobedience, and rebellion. Yet, our text will show that no force on earth or in the realm of darkness was able to separate them from the love of God. That was not owing to His mere attraction toward them, but because of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They will be shown to be enemies at this present time. Yet, a ray of hope will be beamed across the horizon of time. Their sin will not be excused, nor will the love of God for them be repudiated.

With godly wisdom, Paul will confirm that the judgment of God against Israel was thoroughly just. However, He will also show that God still has a regard for this people. He will yet reclaim them through inscrutable wisdom. He will do so

without violating His own holy nature. He will accomplish it without denying His love, or repudiating His promises to the fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They will not be coerced into returning to Him, but gently and effectively drawn by the Gospel, and the Deliverer, Jesus Christ.

Israel still stands as a testimony to the love of God. In all of this we must take care to see the consistency of Divine love. We must also look carefully at the purpose of God, which will not fail of fulfillment. When these things are clearly seen, they will generate a strong and compelling hope within our hearts.

Our condition is not precisely the same as that of Israel. We have been begotten by God, and His laws have been written upon our hearts and put into our minds. However, there is something that is similar about us. We too are loved for the sake of another. Israel is beloved "for the father's sake." For us, the love of God is "in Christ Jesus our Lord." For that reason, it is absolutely dependable, and will never fail those who believe.

TELLING THE TRUTH

"9:1a I tell the truth in Christ . . ." On the surface, it appears as though there is a sudden change in subject matter. However, this is not the case. In salvation, our feet have been set "in a large room" (Psa 31:80). When men are brought to reason in the Spirit, they navigate in exceedingly large realms.

Having expounded the profound truth of Divine purpose, the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit, and the inability of any created thing to separate us from the love God, Paul now speaks of what is in his heart. He is able to do this because of his accord with God.

This is an important acknowledgment. The Jews had charged Paul with despising their nation, saying that he taught things that was "not lawful" for them to receive (Acts 16:21). They said he taught "all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise

their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:21). While Paul did oppose circumcision as a means to justification, or Divine acceptance (Acts 15:1-2; Gal 5:2), he did not oppose it as a

point of view, for His death (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15). It is necessary to establish their judgment was totally wrong in this matter. This is required for at least two reasons.

Still, Paul will show that he has not been unduly influenced by the hatred of his own countrymen. His attitude toward them is compelled by his fellowship with Christ. He views them from the heavenly perspective, crucifying the flesh.

custom. In fact, he even had Timothy circumcised because of the Jews in that region (Acts 16:3). That this was not the pattern of his behavior is confirmed by his refusal to circumcise Titus. In that case, surrounding Jews did not have good hearts or intentions (Gal 2:3).

The reason for this vigorous teaching concerning the Jews should be obvious. As a whole, the Jews had rejected the Lord Jesus, being responsible, from a human

- ❑ The promise of an anointed one who would deliver the people was true (Isa 9:6-7; 61:1-3).
- ❑ The Lord Jesus Christ was that One, the Savior of the world (Acts 2:36; 5:30-31; 13:32-33).

Both of these had been denied by the Jews, and that with great zeal. They rejected Jesus, even though He came to them (John 1:11). They also opposed Paul

because he preached Christ. Five times they had him beaten with thirty-nine (forty save one) stripes (2 Cor 11:24). Paul said of them, they "have persecuted us"(1

In chapters nine through eleven, the Holy Spirit provides an extensive commentary of Israel's present and future condition. There is no need for any soul to speculate on this matter.

Thess 2:15). Some of them once said, "we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul" (Acts 23:14).

Still, Paul will show that he has not been unduly influenced by the hatred of his own countrymen. His attitude toward them is compelled by his fellowship with Christ. He views them from the heavenly perspective, crucifying the flesh.

The Spirit enables Paul to show the enormity of Israel's sin without removing hope from them. He **will** confess his deep concern for them and acknowledge their advantages. He will **not** summarily write them off, or affirm they are no longer a people. He will **not** say that the Gentiles have taken their place, or that they will never, as a nation, come to the Lord Jesus. These are all positions espoused by some Gentile theologians, and they are in sharp conflict with the Word of God.

An Extensive Commentary

In chapters nine through eleven, the Holy Spirit provides an extensive commentary of Israel's present and future condition. There is no need for any soul to speculate on this matter. In fact, it is the height of ignorance to do so when God has gone to such great lengths to declare His mind and purpose on the subject. Paul will now declare that he is in full accord with the Lord on the matter of the Jews. Further, his heart is influenced by his understanding.

TRUTH

This is particularly significant because Paul was represented by many as hating the Jewish people. "Truth," in this case, is more than stating something that is not a lie. This is the confession of his heart. It is not a mere statement of a formal creed. Paul is caught up in the truth he has been proclaiming. He has affirmed the Gospel is God's power unto salvation "to the Jew first" (1:16). He has also declared that both condemnation and eternal life will be pronounced upon "the Jew first" (2:7-8). All of this has brought out his inmost person, and are expressions of his "new man."

IN CHRIST

The words that follow flow out from Paul's fellowship with Christ. They are like "rivers of living water" flowing from his "belly," or inmost person (John 7:39).

While the words are intensely personal, they are joined to Omnipotence, because they have resulted from fellowship with Christ. They will therefore minister to our hearts, and assist in clarifying both the nature and intent of the Gospel.

God has called us into the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor 1:9), and as we traffic in the Gospel, that fellowship is enhanced. As we walk in the light (1 John 1:7), not only are our thoughts brought into accord with those of Jesus, we are able to confidently and accurately speak of them. The example before us is excellent, and worthy of our focused attention.

AN ELABORATION

The Apostle introduced us to the foreknowledge and predestination of God in chapter eight (8:29-30). He confirmed they are driving forces in the Kingdom of God, and are both employed in the matter of our salvation. They have been inexorably associated with our calling, justification, and glorification. Although they are the subject of much debate in the religious world, they are intended to buoy up the faith of the people of God.

Now, in a lengthy discourse, the Spirit uses the children of Israel to illustrate how these Divine qualities interface with the salvation of men. He will speak of Divine preferences and their outcome, relating them specifically to Israel. He will also be clear in his definition of Israel. The purpose is to confirm that we are justified in wholly relying upon the Living God through Christ Jesus. Divine favor rests upon Israel, but even more upon the Son, in Whom we have been made accepted (Eph 1:6).

THE WITNESS OF THE CONSCIENCE

"^{1b} ***I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit . . .***" The strength of this statement confirms it is not the mere espousal of a theological position. Much of what is said about the Jews today is nothing more than heartless religious views. They are not insightful, and they have not effected the consciences and hearts of those embracing them. How

differently Paul speaks on the subject.

NOT LYING

"*I am not lying . . .*" In this subject, Paul is unveiling his heart to us. It is not often that such an unveiling occurs, and it is a tribute to those to whom it is unveiled when done. You may recall it is written of our Lord, "*But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all*

men" (John 2:24). The Savior was a sterling example of one who refused to cast pearls before swine, something He Himself warned against (Matt 7:6).

In saying "*I lie not*," the Apostle means that his words are to be taken precisely as they are uttered. They are not veiled or disguised. There is not guile in his words, no hidden inferences or

deceptive tones. The spiritual integrity of the brethren in Rome allowed them to be exposed to some of the most profound longings and insights of the Apostle.

MY CONSCIENCE

“ . . . *my conscience* . . . ” One of the potential blights of academic pursuits is the tendency to ignore the conscience. Many a simple soul has lost their faith because they trusted in study and research rather than the Lord. They were brought to listen to men more than their own conscience.

Others have ignored their conscience, treating it as though it had no importance or directive qualities. Thus their conscience became “*seared with a hot iron*” of neglect. This is the declared condition of false prophets who gave heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons rather than the testimony of their conscience (1 Tim 4:2). I gather from this that they were eventually unable to distinguish between their conscience and the whisperings of demonic spirits. What a tragic condition! Even those hypocrites who brought a woman taken in adultery to Jesus eventually left, “*convicted by their own conscience*” (John 8:9).

The person who walks with God is zealous to maintain a “*good conscience*,” one that does not condemn him (Acts 23:1). Paul confessed he extended himself to maintain a “*conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men*” (Acts 24:16). He lived so that his conscience did not plague or condemn him concerning his conduct toward God or man.

Paul’s conscience, because he honored it and sought to keep it pure, bore testimony to what he said of himself, confirming it was the truth. “*For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world . . .*” (2 Cor

1:12). In fact, the goal of his teaching was to produce a similar conscience in others. “*Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith*” NKJV (1 Tim 1:5).

The failure to maintain a good conscience will eventually lead to a

the truth of his words. Those viewing things in this way consider this, and other Pauline affirmations, as his opinions. As such, if true, it could not be received as “*sound doctrine*.”

However, this is shallow and false thinking. The inspiration of the Almighty gives the human spirit understanding,

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shipwreck of ones faith. As it is written, “*I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith*” NIV (1 Tim 1:18-19). The truth of the matter is that you can keep hold of the deep truths of the faith only when you have a “*clear*” or “*pure conscience*” (1 Tim 3:9). God is only served “*with a pure conscience*” (2 Tim 1:3).

Thus, when Paul says his conscience bears him witness, he is confirming he had lived in spiritual sensitivity, and that sensitivity matched his words. He was not spouting some lifeless dogma as the scribes and Pharisees. His doctrine had influenced his heart and tenderized his conscience.

THE WITNESS

Addressing an Objection

Some might object to such an affirmation, saying that the testimony of the conscience is vastly inferior to the inspiration of God. Thus, they reason, it would have been better to say God had inspired Paul to say this, rather than affirming his conscience bore witness to

moving the individual to think and speak in concert with the Lord (Job 32:8). What had been revealed to Paul had been embraced by faith. His understanding was effected by this, and his conscience kept pure and profitable because of it.

The fact that the “*witness*” of Paul’s conscience perfectly correlates with Scripture confirms it reflected the very “*mind of Christ*.” That witness confirms he was inspired, making it incumbent that we receive these words as from the Lord.

IN THE SPIRIT

This further corroborates that Paul was not giving us a personal opinion—one that could be rejected, while another quite different view was preferred. The Holy Spirit Himself confirmed the testimony of Paul’s conscience. What he now declares is not only validated by his conscience, but by the Holy Spirit of God.

Paul’s attitude toward the Jews, which he will now declare, was not driven by human sentimentality. He was not brought to this position because he was a Jew, but because he was in fellowship with Christ Jesus. The truth of God had fashioned his persuasion, and it was in perfect accord with the promises of God.

THE COMPULSION OF GODLY CONCERN

“*2 . . . that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.*”

Other versions read, “*heaviness and continual sorrow,*” KJV “*sorrow and*

unceasing grief,” NASB “*sorrow and unceasing anguish,*” NIV “*great grief and*

unceasing pain,”^{NLT} and “filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief.”^{NLT} To say the least, these are unusually strong expressions. They reveal a facet of spiritual life that is not common in our time. They reflect a spirit that is the opposite of pride and selfishness. This great sorrow and grief is not remorse for sin. It is not prompted because of the awareness of personal deficiencies. Rather, it is brought on by an acute awareness of the condition of someone

run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psa 119:36). This same sorrow was experienced by Jeremiah: “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jer 9:12; Lam 3:48).

What Paul knew of the Jews caused “great sorrow,” or “great heaviness.” It was a burden difficult to be borne. It even influenced his outward manner, which I

between this declared response to the state of the Jews and that of much of the contemporary church. Swathed in Divine fellowship, with a tender conscience confirming the properness of his response, and the Holy Spirit bearing witness to its truth, Paul declares he had “great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart” over the Jews. In view of this, I find it exceedingly difficult to tolerate the attitude of many who write the Jews off as though God had no heart at all for His ancient people.

What the Apostle now acknowledges is true, and is no lie. It is confirmed by his conscience, and by the Holy Spirit. It is in accord with the nature of God and His “eternal purpose.” It is a frame of spirit that is so precise, it will be a proper introduction to a declaration of the profound working of the Lord.

Ezekiel’s Experience

On one occasion, when God was getting ready to judge Jerusalem, He allowed the prophet Ezekiel to see what was going to happen. In a telling revelation of how God feels about those who sorrow because of the state of the Jews, He revealed to Ezekiel how such people had touched Him. “And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Ezek 9:4). When the harsh judgment began. The manner in which it is described tears at the heart. “Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: 6 Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women.”

else—particularly the children of Israel.

What the Apostle now acknowledges is true, and is no lie. It is confirmed by his conscience, and by the Holy Spirit. It is in accord with the nature of God and His “eternal purpose.” It is a frame of spirit that is so precise, it will be a proper introduction to a declaration of the profound working of the Lord.

GREAT SORROW

Here, I prefer the KJV word “heaviness” to “great sorrow.” This is when sorrow presses the human spirit down with sadness and distress. It is not that Paul was weighed down with sorrow all of the time. The idea is that the recollection of the Jews always was accompanied with great and oppressive sorrow. It is the kind of sorrow Samuel had when he wept for rejected Saul (1 Sam 15:35). It is the same sorrow experienced by David: “Rivers of waters

gather to be the emphasis of “great sorrow.” It was associated with such things as tears and a fallen countenance—much like that experienced by Nehemiah (Neh 2:1-3). For this reason, Jesus “wept” over Jerusalem, being outwardly effected by their condition (Luke 19:41). A similar weeping took place at the tomb of Lazarus, when our Lord confronted massive unbelief (John 11:35).

CONTINUAL GRIEF

Whereas “great sorrow” was more external than internal, so “continual grief” focuses on inner effects. Thus he adds the words “in my heart”—or at the very center of his being.

It is important to again note the described condition was not brought on by personal sin or weakness. Paul’s heart was so sensitive it could be influenced by the condition of other people. I am struck with the sharpness of the contrast

The wrath of the Almighty had been stirred up by the wickedness of His people. Yet, the Lord gave one qualifying word, and it concerned those who had been sighing and crying because of the abominations found among His people. “But come not near **any man upon whom is the mark**; and begin at my sanctuary” (Ezek 9:5). In this case, God took due notice of those who were concerned for His people. His attitude has not changed, as our text will affirm.

THE CAPACITY OF A HEART IN FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

“³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh . . .” Remember, Paul has affirmed this is the truth, and that it is

not a lie. He has declared that his conscience testifies to its truth, and that the Holy Spirit also bears witness to its reality. This is not, then, a rhetorical overstatement or exaggeration. It is

obviously a strong statement, and thus must not be brushed aside as though it had no relevance for us.

I COULD WISH

"I could wish . . ." Nearly every translation reads the same way. A few depart from this expression: *"I have a desire,"*^{BBE} *"I would be willing,"*^{NLT}, and *"I could pray."*^{NJB} Grammarians point out that this is written in the past tense: i.e., *"I wished myself,"*^{Duoay-Rheims} *"I have wished,"*^{Darby} and *"I was wishing."*^{YLT} All of that, however, seems to me to be a distraction. The point Paul is making is not WHEN he had the desire, but WHAT the desire was.

The word *"wish,"* contrary to its ordinary use, does not reflect a casual and inconsequential desire. Rather, it is a strong and compelling desire. Sometimes, it is translated *"pray,"* as in *"pray to God"* (2 Cor 13:7). John used this very word (ἐύχομαι) to express his strong desire for Gaius, who was especially close to him. *"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth"* (3 John 1-2). James also uses this word in James 5:16, where he admonishes *"pray for one another."*

This is not, then, a casual or heartless expression. Here is a desire driven by the heart, not the mind. It is one confirmed by a pure conscience and ratified by the Holy Spirit. It is the expression of someone in fellowship with Jesus Christ, and is the truth. I cannot think of a way of stating a valid desire more strongly.

The expression *"could wish"* means if God had provided for the Jews to be saved in this manner, Paul would gladly acquiesce to it. There was no lawful means he would shun for the salvation of his brethren.

ACCURSED FROM CHRIST

And what is it that Paul so strongly desired? It is too weighty for timorous or frivolous hearts: *"that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren."*

At once the stereotyped theologians rush to our aid, stating that such a thing is impossible – that it is incredible to even think one can be *"accursed from Christ."*

And thus their folly neutralizes the text, making it of no consequence whatsoever. It paints Paul as a hasty writer, who had little or no regard for the truth which had set him free. However, Paul said what he meant, and told us it was *"the truth."* His conscience attested to its accuracy, as well as the Holy Spirit, who *"searches all things"* (1 Cor 2:10).

There are at least two things revealed by those who cannot receive this saying. **First**, they are unaware of the intense desire of godly people for those to whom

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salvation is promised. **Second**, they lack acquaintance with the Divine estimation of the children of Israel.

Moses

The reaction of Paul to Israel is much the same as that of Moses. On one occasion, when the Lord was especially provoked by Israel, Moses returned to Him from the people. One of the strongest intercessions of Scriptural record took place at that time. Here are Moses' words. *"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written"* (Ex 32:31-32).

Note that Moses' sentence is broken off abruptly, remaining unfinished: *"if Thou wilt forgive their sin- ."* At that point, words failed him, and there was no further plea he could make. He then laid himself, as it was, upon the altar of

appeasement. Before returning to the Lord, he had told the people, *"Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin"* (Ex 32:30). Yet, he had taken no sacrifice with him, and had presented no atoning blood before the Lord. Instead, he offered himself for the *"atonement,"* seeking the preservation of the children of Israel.

This appeal **did** have an effect upon God. First, He told Moses would only blot those out of His book who had sinned against Him—and Moses had not done that. *"Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book"* (v 33).

Those who say such a thing is not possible will have to answer to God for their insolent sayings. The Lord then told Moses, *"Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them"* (v 34). Even though the Lord *"plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made"* (v 35), yet they had gained some mercy because of Moses' powerful intercession.

We have every reason to believe that Paul's profound desire for Israel also had an effect upon the Lord. He saw the salvation of Israel as something that would bring great glory to God, even if it was at the expense of himself being cursed.

Throughout the eleventh chapter of this good book, the reasoning will confirm the legitimacy of Paul's desire. It will also point out the absurdity of those who malign the Israelites, saying they are no longer a people.

MY COUNTRYMEN

Paul is not talking about spiritual Israelites, but of his *"kinsmen according to the flesh."*^{KJV} In Christ, we have no *"kinsmen according to the flesh,"* for no such distinctions are found in Him (Gal 3:28). Further, the kinship was not through his father and mother, but through Abraham, the father of the

nation. While the relationship was “kinsmen according to the flesh,” it was based upon Divine choice and favor.

It is true that there is a spiritual

Israel within Israel (Rom 9:6). However, that it not what Paul is talking about. He is speaking of the fleshly offspring of Abraham, to whom promises were made

by a God who cannot lie. The relationship is founded upon “flesh and blood,” but his love for them is not. His heaviness and sorrow are flowing from a larger river.

THE ISRAELITES

“^{4a} . . . **who are Israelites** . . .” Let there be no doubt about the people intended. Paul is NOT referring to, what is commonly called, “spiritual Israel.” This is not a reference to the church, the redeemed, or those who are in Christ Jesus. These are his “kinsmen according to the flesh,” his “people, my Jewish brothers and sisters.”^{NLT} Of course, if God no longer recognizes these people, Paul could not have spoken in this manner. In fact, as we will see, it is precisely because of God’s attitude toward them that the Apostle has such strong feelings for them.

Years ago, I was with my beloved father when a young skeptic sought to challenge him with a question. Because he questioned the integrity of the Scriptures, he protested, “Give me one word that proves the Bible is true!” My father simply answered, “JEW!” This people cannot be accounted for apart from the working of the Lord. These are the only people for which an extensive history is provided in Scripture. Even though they were “the fewest of all people” (Deut 7:7), yet inspired volumes are written concerning them. Of the fifty chapters in Genesis, thirty-nine of them are about the beginning of this nation. The remaining thirty-four books of, what is called, “the Old Testament” deal preeminently with Israel. The books of Esther, Ruth, Jonah, and Obadiah, while mentioning other nations, obtain significance because of the Jews and their prophets. Other nations are mentioned primarily because of their identity with Israel.

Remove the Jews from the Scriptures, and what is left loses any semblance or of order of intelligence. Without the Jews, Jesus and the Gospel cannot be properly comprehended. They both postulate the

existence of the Jewish nation—“Israelites.”

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

In order to understand the meaning of “Israelites,” we must go back to Abraham, who was the progenitor of this nation. The first call of Abraham,

The word “Israel” is found a staggering 2,566 times in Scripture. Seventy-five of those references are found from Matthew through Revelation. Every child of God should have a good understanding of this name, and the nation with which it is identified.

originally called “Abram,” is recorded in the twelfth chapter of Genesis.

Prior to Abraham

Prior to this, Terah, Abraham’s father, together with Abram, his wife Sarai, and Lot [his grandson], had “went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan.” We are told they “went as far as Haran, and settled there” (Gen 11:31). There, Abram’s father Terah died at the ripe old age of 205 (Gen 11:32). That was about the year 1921 B.C. This ended a period of nearly 2,000 years, to which only eleven chapters of the Bible are devoted. Of those eleven chapters, four are devoted to a period of about one year, the time of the flood (chapters 6-9). That leaves leaves seven chapters in Genesis in which nearly 2,000 are covered.

Why Bring This Up?

Remarkable and extended details of Divine history begin with the call of Abraham. This accentuates the importance of what started with Abram. When the Lord began working with him, He changed his name, as well as that of Sarai, his barren wife (Gen 17:5,15). The Lord was beginning a new thing. He was going to bring forth a chosen people from a chosen man and woman. God repeatedly made this promise to Abraham.

“And I will make of thee a great nation . . . And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered . . . Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee . . .

Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation . . . I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.” (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5-6; 18:18; 22:17).

I understand that the consummation of this blessing is found in those who are in Christ Jesus, who was the ultimate Seed of Abraham. However, as our text will confirm, the nation of Israel is integral to the Abrahamic promise. God’s promise included a fleshly nation coming from Abraham. That is the nation to which our text refers: “who are Israelites.”

THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME ISRAEL

The word “Israel” is found a staggering 2,566 times in Scripture. Seventy-five of those references are found from Matthew through Revelation. Every child of God should have a good

understanding of this name, and the “father” (Jacob) and nation with which it is identified.

God called Jacob “Israel” when He changed his name. This occurred when Jacob wrestled with a heavenly messenger through the night. When the day began to dawn, and the angel demanded, “Let me go, for the day breaks,” Jacob responded, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” It was then that the messenger responded, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed” NKJV (Gen 32:26-28).

Jacob was the last among “the fathers,” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; Deut 30:20; 1 Chron 29:18; Acts 3:13). In fact, in a most unique way, the Lord is called “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6,15; 4:5; Matt 22:32; Mk 12:26; Lk 20:37; Acts 7:32).

There are precious few people with whom God has so identified Himself. He is also called “the God of Shem” (Gen 9:26), one of the revealed Messianic progenitors (Lk 3:36). He is also called “the God of David” (2 Kgs 20:5; Isa 38:5), “the God of Hezekiah” (2 Chron 32:17), “the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” (Dan 3:28), and “the God of Daniel” (Dan 6:26) – all Jews.

He is also called “the God of the Hebrews” (Ex 5:3), “the God of the Jews” (Rom 3:29), and “the God of Israel” no less than ninety times (Ex 5:1; 24:10; 32:27; 34:23; Num 16:9; Josh 7:13,19,20; 8:30; 9:18,19; 10:40,42; 13:14,33; 14:14; 22:16,24; 24:2,23; Judges 4:6; 5:3,5; 6:8; 11:21,23; 21:3; Ruth 2:12; 1 Sam 1:17; 2:30; 5:7,8, 10,11; 6:3,5; 10:18; 14:41; 20:12; 23:10,11; 25:32,34; 2 Sam 7:27; 12:7; 23:3; 1 Kgs 1:30,48; 8:15,17,20,23, 25,26; 11:9,31; 14:7,13; 15:30; 16:13,26,33; 17:1,14; 22:53; 2 Kgs 9:6; 10:31; 14:25; 18:5; 19:15,20; 21:12; 22:15,18; 1 Chron 4:10; 5:26; 15:12,14; 16:4,36; 17:24; 22:6; 23:25; 24:19; 28:4; 29:10; 2 Chron 2:12; 6:4,7,10, 14,16,17; 11:16; 13:5; 15:4,13; 20:19; 29:7, 10; 30:1,5; 32:17; 33:16,18,23;

34:23,26; 36:13; Ezra 1:3; 3:2; 4:1,3; 5:1; 6:14,21,22; 7:6,15; 8:35; 9:4,15; Psa 41:13; 59:5; 68:8, 35; 69:6; 72:18; 106:48; Isa 17:6; 21:10,17; 24:15; 29:23; 37:16,21; 41:17; 45:3,15; 48:1,2; 52:12; Jer 7:3,21; 9:15; 11:3; 13:12; 16:9; 19:3,15; 21:4; 23:2; 24:5; 25:15,27; 27:4,21; 28:2,14; 29:4,8,21,25; 30:2; 31:23; 32:14,15,36; 33:4; 34:2,13; 35:13,17,18,19; 37:7; 38:17; 39:16; 42:9,15,18; 43:10; 44:2,7,11,25; 45:2; 46:25; 48:1; 50:18; 51:33; Ezek 8:4; 9:3; 10:19,20; 11:22; 43:2; 44:2; Zeph 2:9; Mal 2:16; Matt 15:31; Luke 1:68).

Jesus is called “the Consolation of

dealing. If it is true that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16), and that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation . . . but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20-21), then we are brought to an obvious conclusion. The Holy Spirit has extended Himself to impress “the Israelites” upon our thinking. **In fact, it is not possible to think correctly about the Lord without being mindful of the Israelites!** He has tied His name to that nation, which can only be accounted for by the intervention of God Almighty. **It is impossible that a single individual could have come from Abraham and Sarah, to say nothing of a “mighty nation.”**

In fact, it is not possible to think correctly about the Lord without being mindful of the Israelites! He has tied His name to that nation, which can only be accounted for by the intervention of God Almighty.

These are the people to whom our text refers. They are the ones who caused Paul to have great heaviness and sorrow of heart. There is no record of any person of God having such concern for any other people. Jeremiah’s tears flowed because of the condition of the Israelites (Jer 9:1; Lam 3:48).

The Lord Jesus Himself wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Paul had heaviness and sorrow of heart because of them (Rom 9:1-2). There is no record of a Prophet, the Lord Jesus, or an Apostle weeping over a Gentile city. That does not mean God had no concern for such places. He did have an interest in the little children and cattle of Nineveh (Jonah 4:11).

An Exclusive Attitude

There is an overwhelming tone of Scripture concerning “the children of Israel” according to the flesh. It is true that they are consistently upbraided for their obstinance and unbelief (Rom 10:21). They were judged for their rejection of the Savior, because they did not know they were visited by the Lord of glory (Lk 19:44). Yet nowhere is it said they are “without hope.” **The door of salvation has been left ajar for them!** In fact, this section of Romans will affirm they will yet be forgiven and blessed, coming back from their spiritual deadness.

You should live close enough to the

“Israel” (Lk 2:25), and “the King of Israel” (John 1:49; 12:13). He is declared to be the Prophet raised up unto Israel (Acts 7:37), and the embodiment of the Word “God sent unto the children of Israel” (Acts 10:36). The New Covenant has been made “with the house of Israel” (Heb 8:8,10). John the Baptist came baptizing in order that Jesus might “be made manifest to Israel” (John 1:31). God has exalted Him “to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). With strength Paul affirmed, “God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus” (Acts 13:23). Paul accounted for himself being a prisoner by saying, “for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20). In our former lives, we Gentiles were characterized as “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise” (Eph 2:12).

The Relevance of These Things

These facts have a great deal of relevance to the text with which we are

Lord that the word “Israelites” sparks both sorrow and anticipation within your heart. If David could say, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee,” and “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem,” how much more can we join with Paul in the attitude he evinces in our text (Psa 122:6; 51:18). There was good reason why Jeremiah admonished those surviving the assault of Nebuchadnezzar, “You who have escaped the sword, Get away! Do not stand still! Remember the LORD afar off, And let Jerusalem come to your mind” (Jer 51:50).

The Israel of God

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul refers to “the Israel of God.” “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16). Many have taken this to mean “the church,” with no regard to the nation of Israel. However, that view is much too simplistic. It is true it does not refer to fleshly Israel. It does, however, refer to the “children of Abraham,” namely those who have believed. The third and fourth chapters focus on Abraham, showing that justification came by faith, not by works (3:7-18). He also shows that those in Christ Jesus are Abraham’s children—promised children, just like Isaac (4:22-31).

The point is that the expression “the Israel of God” has no significance if Israel as a nation no longer exists. Those whom God has accepted, both before Jesus and following Him, have been part of the true Israel, which is a nation within a nation. They are the “remnant” to which Paul will later refer (9:27; 11:5). Those of this number who are Gentiles in the flesh, have been grafted in to the Israelite tree, of which Abraham is the “root” and the promises are the “fatness” (11:17).

THE LAND GIVEN TO THEM

It would not be appropriate to leave this subject without mentioning the land that was given to Israel. This was a key aspect of the promise given to Abraham, and lends itself to the distinction of the nation springing from him.

In the entire history of the world, there

is only one piece of real estate where God placed His name. He refers to this area as “My land” (2 Chron 7:20; Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7; 16:18; Ezek 36:5; 38;16; Joel 1:6). It is also called “His land,” and associated with His people (Deut 32:43; Psa 10:16; Ezek 36:20; Joel 2:18; Zech 9:16).

This land was promised to Abraham for a possession. He promised, “Unto thy seed will I give this land . . . And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it” (Gen 12:7; 15:7).

The promise was renewed to Isaac. “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father” (Gen 26:3).

It was also renewed to Jacob. “And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee I will give the land . . . Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession” (Gen 35:12; 48:4).

The borders of the land are outlined in Numbers 34:3-12. “Your southern side will include some of the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom. On the east, your southern boundary will start from the end of the Salt Sea, cross south of Scorpion Pass, continue on to Zin and go south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Azmon, where it will turn, join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Sea. Your western boundary will be the coast of the Great Sea. This will be your boundary on the west. For your northern boundary, run a line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor and from Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath. Then the boundary will go to Zedad, continue to Ziphron and end at Hazar Enan. This will be your boundary on the north. For your eastern boundary, run a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham. The boundary will go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain and continue

along the slopes east of the Sea of Kinnereth. Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan and end at the Salt Sea. This will be your land, with its boundaries on every side.”^{NIV} Is this text not arresting for its amount of detail? (See map above)

The land has never been fully possessed by Israel. Under kings David and Solomon it reached its greatest extent.



Yet, even then, the people did not occupy much of the land. Enemies resided there, although they paid tribute to both David and Solomon (1 Chron 18:2; 1 Kings 4:21).

The Relevance of the Land

Through the Prophets, and after the Babylonian captivity, God promised He would bring His people back to their land (Jer 16:15; 24:6; 32:37; Ezek 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech 10:10). The things related to this return confirm it involved more than merely inhabiting the land. That return is associated with a dramatic change in the people themselves.

- They will be given a heart to know the Lord (Jer 24:7a).
- They will be His people, and He will be their God (Jer 24:7b; 32:38).
- They will return to him with their whole heart (Jer 24:7c).
- God will give them one heart and one way (Jer 32:39a).
- They will fear Him forever (Jer

32:39b).

- ❑ God will feed them and cause them to lie down in safety (Ezek 34:14-15).
- ❑ He will purify them from all uncleanness (Ezek 36:25).
- ❑ He will give them a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26a).
- ❑ He will remove the stony heart from them (Ezek 36:26b).
- ❑ He will put His Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in His statutes (Ezek 36:27).
- ❑ God will make them one nation, and they will no longer be divided (Ezek 37:22).
- ❑ They will be under the true Shepherd, and will walk in God's judgments (Ezek 37:24).
- ❑ They will be strengthened in the Lord (Zech 10:12).

These are only representative of a host of Divine commitments to the children of Israel – the ones for whom Paul had great heaviness and sorrow of heart. It is these commitments, and Israel's present failure to appropriate them, that causes the sorrow.

The Lord Jesus' Prophecy

Confirming that God has not abandoned the children of Israel, Jesus said this concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D. *"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"* (Luke 21:24). Our Lord left the door of hope ajar, showing that the judgment against Israel was temporal, and not like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, who *"suffered the vengeance of eternal fire"* (Jude 7).

Paul's Prophecy

Later, Paul will affirm that **partial** blindness has occurred. *"Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in"* (11:25). Again, a limit, known only to the Lord, is placed upon the blindness that has happened *"in part"* to Israel. The prophecies of both Jesus and Paul indicate a termination to the preeminence of the Gentiles.

CONCLUSION

Because Israel is the subject of chapters nine, ten, and eleven, this will suffice to introduce them. My point in giving this rather extensive introduction is to confirm WHY Paul had heaviness and sorrow of heart because of the Israelites. This was no sentimental reaction. Nor, indeed, did it reflect a mere fleshly attachment to his own nation. His attitude was driven by his possession of the mind of Christ, and fueled by his fellowship with the Son of God.

In this passage, God is speaking to us. He is confirming His commitment to what He has promised. He is showing us a concrete example of His foreknowledge and predestination. In this text, He unfolds some of the involvements of calling, justification, and glorification. He is unveiling what it means to be *"for"* someone, and how He can *"work all things together for the good"* of His people. The Spirit will not only speak candidly about these matters, but firmly, so as to anchor our faith in God. I want to emphasize that this is not a departure from the great theme of justification. We will see more fully what it takes to save!

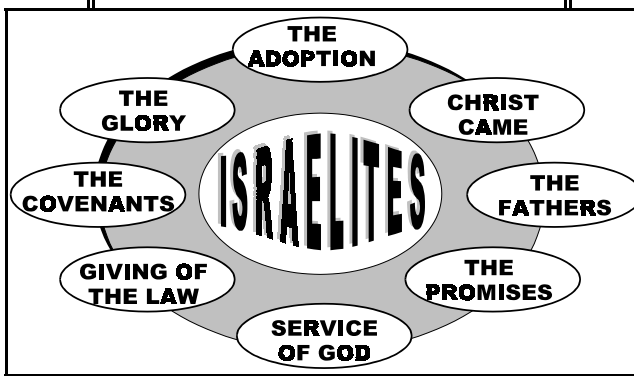
REMARKABLE ADVANTAGES

"^{4b} . . . to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."

Among other things, this text will confirm to our hearts that it takes more than information to save us. There are NO external advantages that can bring a person or a people into Divine favor. Without a change of nature and the obtainment of the righteousness of God, there can be no salvation!

What is more, it is inconceivable that any one could have received more outward advantages than Israel. If anyone could remain in the flesh and unregenerated,

yet dwell in the house of the Lord forever, it would have been Israel.



Remember, the Spirit has declared there is *"none righteous, no not one"* (3:10). Now He will take us to the premier fleshly people, showing that, with all of their advantages, they did not attain to the righteousness of God. No person can feel safe who maintains only an outward

identity; i.e., being associated with a church or some other religious body. Although it is common to find this sort of attitude, it is altogether unjustified. If Israel could not rely on the outward advantages they had, you can be sure no one today can. Her advantages came from the Lord, and yet they did not change her nature!

Why, Then, Mention These Advantages?

In view of this, why take the time to mention these remarkable advantages? As I have mentioned, it will show us that salvation is not of works, lest any man should boast. This will confirm to our hearts that our faith and hope must be in God, not in a system—even a revealed system!

However, it will show us something else. The Lord will confirm that while

many of the Israelites did not partake of the benefit, God's Word to them was not in vain. The Lord is capable of fulfilling His word, even though everything seems to be against it. He can work everything together for good, even though there appears to be no possible way for that to be accomplished.

TO WHOM PERTAIN

The word "pertain" means "belongs to." Other versions read, "to whom belongs,"^{NASB} "Theirs is,"^{NIV} "to them belong,"^{NRSV} "whose is,"^{ASV} "who have,"^{BBE} and "they have."^{NLT}

Observe that every translation puts the word in the present tense, and properly so. No version puts the word in the past: i.e., "pertained," or "belonged," or "had," or "was." The Spirit will not present to us something that Israel had, but lost. These advantages still belong to THEM. They are not benefits that have passed from the Israelites to the Gentiles. Rather the Gentiles have passed from alienation into these benefits.

Moses' Plea

When the Lord declared He would destroy Israel and raise up a great nation from Moses, the servant of God, knowing the mind of the Lord, pled effectively with Him. "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?' Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever'"^{NKJV} (Ex 32:12-13).

Again, when the children of Israel provoked the Lord by refusing to take the land of Canaan, the Lord again said, "I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they" (Num 14:12). Quickly Moses pled with

God again, and with great effectiveness. "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, **Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness**" (Num 14:13-16).

To this day, there remain precious few people who are able to so plead with the Living God! Moses saw that God would be dishonored by utterly removing or totally rejecting His people – something

To this day, there remain precious few people who are able to so plead with the Living God! Moses saw that God would be dishonored by utterly removing or totally rejecting His people – something that is vehemently denied by many pretended theologians.

that is vehemently denied by many pretended theologians.

In this text, Paul is speaking after the manner of Moses. He is confirming WHY the Lord will yet deal favorably with Israel. His name is upon them, and great promises have been given to them.

We do well to take these words into our hearts, for they form the foundation for what the Spirit will affirm in the remainder of this chapter, together with chapters ten and eleven.

THE ADOPTION

Nearly all versions read "adoption." Some read "sonship,"^{RSV} "the place of sons,"^{BBE} "God's special children,"^{NLT} "God's chosen children,"^{New Century} and "adopted as children."^{NJB}

This is not the "adoption" previously mentioned (i.e., "the Spirit of adoption," or "the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" – 8:15,23). However, it is related by type and shadow to the sonship of those in Christ, and the coming resurrection of the dead.

"The adoption," in this case, speaks of the national distinction of Israel before God Almighty. In "the adoption" of Israel, we have one of the singularly most remarkable matters in all of history. Here was an entire nation, a whole body of people, who were preferred and blessed by God completely independently of any merit. Their adoption was traced strictly to the will of God, not their own free will. Their adoption was **not** a matter of their choice, but of the choice of God Himself. I have no interest, at this time, in correlating this with the matter of our salvation. That is something I will address later. Now, however, it is imperative that we see this remarkable working of God: "the adoption" of Israel.

God spoke often of this matter, challenging Israel to consider their standing before Him. When preparations for Israel's deliverance from Egypt were set in motion by God, the matter of their identity with Him was brought up. Moses was commanded to say to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the LORD, Israel is **My son, even My firstborn**" (Ex 4:22). Hosea referred to this mighty deliverance in these words, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called **My son** out of Egypt" (Hos 11:1). That is a reference to "the adoption." Later, as they traversed through the wilderness, Moses told the people, "Ye are **the children of the LORD your God**" (Deut 14:1). That is a reference to "the adoption." Through Jeremiah the prophet, God lamented, "for I am a **Father to Israel**, and Ephraim is **My firstborn**" (Jer 31:9). That is a reference to "the adoption."

Even when Israel was inexcusably wayward, God spoke of this relationship. *“Is Ephraim **My dear son?** is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, **I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD**”* (Jer 31:20). That is a reference to *“the adoption.”*

God’s desire for Israel was unique. They remain the only nation with whom God has identified Himself. How eloquently Moses stated the case. *“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; **but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt**”* NKJV Deut 7:7-8). This is precisely the same reasoning the Spirit will introduce in this section of Romans – a preference for Israel because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (11:28). Just as every one who has been adopted by God, whether it be fleshly Israel, or the body of Christ, insightful souls respond, *“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake”* NKJV (Psa 115:1).

Should the Jews begin to boast in their national heritage, the Lord reminds them they were adopted through Abraham, not because of their works. *“Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: **for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him**”* (Isa 51:2). In this case, the people did not first increase, then experience the adoption. Rather, they were first chosen, and then increased, as confirmed in Deuteronomy 10:22: *“Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now **the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude.**”*

There was no other nation of whom it was said: *“Thou shalt be blessed above all*

people” (Deut 7:14). To this day, of what other fleshly nation can it be said, *“Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!”* (Deut 7:14). While the saints of God are, indeed, a *“holy nation”* and a *“royal priesthood”* (1 Pet 2:9), it was first said of Israel, *“And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation”* (Ex 19:6).

It is no wonder that Paul said to the Gentiles at Rome, *“For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings”* (Rom 15:27). Although he here refers to Jews who are in Christ Jesus, Paul states a principle that extends to the entire nation.

There was no other nation of whom it was said: “Thou shalt be blessed above all people.” To this day, of what other fleshly nation can it be said, “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!”

They remain the first nation birthed by God! It is the truth, *“the adoption”* pertains, or belongs to, them!

Paul knew all too well how Israel had departed from the Lord, even stooping to murdering His only begotten Son (Acts 5:30; 7:52). He knew God had given them a *“bill of divorcement”* (Jer 3:8; Isa 50:1). He knew Jerusalem was being left desolate because the Jews did not know the time of her visitation (Lk 19:44). He had confronted their obstinance in the rejection of the glorious Gospel he was given to preach (Acts 13:46). Yet, he also knew *“the adoption”* pertained, or belonged, to them. By faith, he had a high regard for the choice of God.

Yet, the Apostle also knew the nature of God and the immutability of His promises. He could sorrow and have hope at the same time concerning Israel, to whom pertained the adoption. He knew God had promised, *“With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; **But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, Says the LORD, your Redeemer. For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; For as I have sworn That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, **So have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, **But My kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed, Says the LORD, who has mercy on you**”***** (Isa 54:8-10). To the Israelites belongs *“the adoption!”*

THE GLORY

Some versions read *“the Divine glory.”* NIV,NIB This is a proper rendering, for the glory of God is what belonged to them. The New Living Translation reads, *“God revealed His glory to them.”*

After the giving of the Law, Moses reminded the people of the true words they had said. *“Surely the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives”* (Deut 5:24). There is not a fleshly people in all of history that have enjoyed such a revelation of Divine glory! To Israel belongs *“the glory.”*

Their deliverance. Israel’s deliverance through the Red Sea is associated with the glory of God. When the delivered people sang praise to God for the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, they said, *“Thy right hand, O LORD, is become **glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy**”* (Ex 15:6). To them pertained, or belonged, the glory.

Cloud and pillar. When God led the children of Israel, He did so with pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

Of that cloud it is written, “*behold, **the glory of the LORD** appeared in the cloud*” (Ex 16:10). The glory pertained to Israel, and to Israel alone.

Dedication of the Tabernacle.

When the Tabernacle was dedicated, a cloud of glory rested upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled it. “*Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and **the glory of the LORD** filled the Tabernacle*” (Ex 40:34). During this time, the glory of God was so great upon the Tabernacle that it is written, “*And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and **the glory of the LORD** filled the Tabernacle*” (Ex 40:35).

On another occasion, when the leadership of Moses and Aaron was being questioned by the people, the glory of God again appeared over the Tabernacle. “*And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the Tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared*” (Num 16:42).

Ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant was a key piece of furniture in the Tabernacle and Temple. There was a mercy seat of pure gold upon this ark—a sort of lid. It was a single piece, fashioned with two cherubim, one at each end. Their wings were spread, and they faced each other (Ex 25:17-18). The Lord communicated with the High Priest over this mercy seat. Scripture associates that communication with his glory. “*Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD’S house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.*” (Ezek 10:18-19). This is mentioned again in Ezekiel 11:22. The book of Hebrews also refers to “*the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat*” (Heb 9:5).

The glory of God was not made known to any other nation. There were no favorable visible attestations of His presence to any other people. The glory belonged to Israel!

THE COVENANTS

When it comes to making covenants, Israel is unique. Prior to Abraham, the only recorded covenant God made with anyone was the one made with Noah. “*But with thee will I establish My covenant*” (Gen 6:18; 9:9,11). The “*token,*” or sign, of that covenant was the rainbow (Gen 9:12-17). The covenant, however, was not one of pervasive

with Jacob” (Ex 2:24). When the Gospel was first preached, it was associated with the covenant God made with Abraham (Acts 3:25).

The Law, together with its attending statutes, was called “*the book of the covenant*” (Ex 24:7). The blood sprinkled upon the people was called “*the blood of the covenant*” (Ex 24:8). God refers to the whole Law as a “*covenant*” made with Moses “*and Israel*” (Ex 34:27). The commandments were called “*the words of the covenant*” (Duet 29:1). The priesthood, belonging exclusively to Israel, was called “*the covenant of the priesthood*” (Neh 13:29).

The glory of God was not made known to any other nation. There were no favorable visible attestations of His presence to any other people. The glory belonged to Israel!

blessing. Rather, it was the withholding of a curse: “*neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth*” (Gen 9:11).

Abraham, the father of the Israelites, was the first to receive a covenant of blessing. “*In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land . . . And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly . . . As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations*” (Gen 15:18; 17:2,4). That covenant was specifically associated with Israel. When, for example, the time came for Israel to be delivered from Egypt, “*God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and*

The Lord made a covenant with David, establishing it forever. “*I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn unto David My servant, thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations*” (Psa 89:3-4; 2 Sam 7:16). The New Covenant itself is said to be “*with the house of Israel*” (Jer 31:33). Whatever covenant of blessing you speak about, it belonged to Israel. God made no covenant with the Gentiles, or Gentile nation--only with Israel. The “*covenants*” belong to Israel.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW

Here is one of the epochs of history—the giving of the Law. It has global implications, because it was given “*that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God*” (Rom 3:19). In the Law, sin was precisely defined (Rom 3:20), and lawlessness was addressed (1 Tim 1:9). The revelation made known in the Law was given to Israel alone, but it applied to all the world.

Speaking of this unique revelation, Moses said, “*For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, **that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?***” (Deut 4:7-8).

Earlier in this book, the Jews were

said to have been given a fundamental advantage in receiving the law. *“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God”* (Rom 3:1-2).

Nehemiah also referred to this marvelous privilege, not taking it to be, in any sense, ordinary. *“Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: and madest known unto them Thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses Thy servant”* (Neh 9:13-14).

The Psalmist also spoke of this honor, affirming no other nation was so blessed. *“He showeth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD”* (Psa 147:19-20).

This indispensable and holy Law, used of God to define and convict of sin, belonged exclusively to Israel. To them pertained *“the giving of the Law.”*

THE SERVICE OF GOD

“The service of God” has to do with the worship and service of God, particularly as it related to the Tabernacle and Temple procedures. The book of Hebrews refers to this as *“the Divine service”* (Heb 9:1-10). This had to do with approaching God, representing the people, and keeping the people conscious of the Living God. This whole procedure was to be kept with care, as declared through Moses. *“And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service”* (Ex 12:25).

Although this has been greatly obscured by the modern church, serving God is a most unique privilege. It is not to be taken for granted. For instance, in

summarizing the totality of life, Jesus said, *“Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt 6:24). Even those in Christ are admonished, *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire”* (Heb 12:28-29).

Under the law, and with Israel, the *“service of God”* was procedural. While it was not ideal, as compared with the superior New Covenant, it served to develop a consciousness of what was involved in approaching God. It was imperative, for example, to be washed (Ex 29:4; 30:20), and to come with atoning

In its essence, serving the Lord has to do with approaching Him, or drawing close to Him. No other people could come to God. No other people had a high priest who could stand in the presence of the Almighty for the people. No one else had a mediator like Moses, who could bring things from God to the people. Those privileges belonged exclusively to Israel.

blood (Heb 9:7). The approaching one must be appropriately clothed, approaching only in an acceptable time (Lev 16:4,34). A proper sacrifice must be made, and the right person must present it (Heb 8:3). Illumination and a sweet fragrance were also required (Ex 25:6; 30:7-8; 35:8).

All of these are gloriously fulfilled in Christ. They were, however, introduced through Israel, to whom belonged *“the service of God.”* In Christ, our service is now expanded and more precise, but it is still based upon the introductions made in Israel’s service to God. You will search in vain for any Gentile nation or group of people that are said to have *“served God.”* No other people were told how to serve the Lord, or what was required in approaching Him. That privilege belonged

to Israel alone.

Approaching the Lord

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THE PROMISES

The expression *“the promises”* refers specifically to the coming Messiah and the glorious Covenant He is now mediating. These promises are referred to as *“His mercy; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever”* (Lk 1:54-55). In his remarkable response to the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah spoke of these promises. *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He*

swore to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life” (Lk 1:68-75).

Outside of Christ, all Gentiles are said to be *“strangers from the covenants of promise”* (Eph 2:12). By nature, they are excluded from them. Only in Christ can they become a partaker of the promises that belong to Israel.

While this does sound strange to those who have been cultured in the corrupted Gospel perpetrated by the Gentile church, it does not sound peculiar to those familiar with Scripture. For example, the church at Rome was told, *“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the*

Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy . . . ^{NIV} (Rom 15:8). Again, Abraham is called *"he that had received the promises"* (Heb 11:17).

The Promises

The extent of the promises given to Israel are impressive. All of them were given to the Israelites, and none of them were give to the Gentiles, although the Gentiles were mentioned as eventually being included with the Jews (Isa 11:10; 42:1,6; 49:6,22; 60:3,5; 61:9; 62:2; 66:12,19; Mal 1:11). A sampling of promises relating to salvation will serve to illustrate the magnitude of them being given to the Israelites.

- A coming Messiah (Gen 49:10; Dan 9:25-26).
- A Man being given for a source of protection and sustenance (Isa 32:2).
- A New Covenant (Jer 31;31-33).
- A new heart (Ezek 36:26).
- A new spirit (Ezek 11:19).
- The removal of stony and obstinate hearts (Ezek 11:19; 36:26).
- God will put His Spirit within men, causing them to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments (Ezek 36:27).
- The people gathered to a single Person (Gen 49:10).
- A Prophet to whom the people would hearken (Deut 18:15).
- The salvation of all who call upon the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32).
- The people will be willing in the day of God's power (Psa 110:3).
- Liberty and release for the captives (Isa 61:1-3).
- A Shepherd who would lead and feed His people (Isa 40:11).
- A covenant in which everyone would know the Lord (Jer 31:34).
- A time when God would no longer remember the sins of His people (Jer 31:34).
- God would write His laws upon the hearts of men, and put them into their minds (Jer 31:33).
- A dramatic change would take place in the people, like the heart of the

rash understanding knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerer speaking plainly (Isa 32:4).

- The deaf hearing and the blind seeing (Isa 29:18).

Partaking of the Divine Nature through the Promises

The importance of *"the promises"* is confirmed by a single statement in Second Peter. *" . . . Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (1:4). The greatness of this affirmation comes home to our hearts when we recognize

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those promises were all made to the Israelites!

All of the Promises Are Ours

All of the promises relating to the coming salvation belong to those who are in Christ Jesus. Thus it is written, *"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us"* (2 Cor 1:21). These include the days of the Messiah in which *"the righteous will flourish"* (Psa 72:7). They include salvation and safety (Jer 23:6). The promise of *"the work of righteousness"* being peace, and *"quietness and assurance"* being *"the effect of righteousness"* are also *"YES"* in Christ Jesus (Isa 32:17).

All of the marvelous Messianic promises of God were made to the Israelites. Not a

single one of them was made to the Gentiles, or even A Gentile. Truly, with unwavering consistency and stability, *"the promises"* belong to the Israelites.

Changing the View of Scripture

All of this significantly alters the way we view Scripture. Some, raised with a perverted concept of "new testament Christianity," actually neglect the promises made to Israel. They are largely ignorant of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Lk 24:44). They imagine those marvelous books were only for the Jews, and their teachers zealously fortify that misconception.

But if *"the promises"* were made to Israel, and in Christ we are *"grafted"* into their tree, who can justify remaining ignorant of what was promised to them? **The promises** belong to them! These are *"the promises"* relating to the Savior, redemption, a change of nature, and showers of blessing.

THE FATHERS

Spiritual Babylon (the false church) has corrupted the word *"fathers."* We hear of the "church fathers," or on an even lower level, "the fathers of our country." However, how does the Spirit speak of *"the fathers?"*

The Spirit uses the term *"fathers"* to refer to the progenitors of the Israelites: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:15-16; 4:5; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; Acts 3:13; 7:32). Joshua 14:1, 19:51, and 21:1 extend *"fathers"* to include the heads of the twelve tribes (the sons of Jacob). In the broadest sense of the word, *"fathers"* refers to the leaders among the Israelites (1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chron 9:9; 2 Chron 19:8; Heb 1:1).

The promise of a Savior, Paul affirmed, was *"made unto the fathers"* (Acts 13:22). Romans 15:8 declares Jesus became a servant to fulfill the promise made *"unto the fathers."* Acts 3:25 affirms there were undeniable advantages to being children of these fathers. *"You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your*

seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."

The importance of "the fathers," particular as regards Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is confirmed by the following facts.

- ❑ The Gospels refer to "Abraham" thirty times.
- ❑ The Epistles refer to "Abraham" thirty-one times.
- ❑ The Gospels refer to "Isaac" eight times.
- ❑ The Epistles refer to "Isaac" eight times.
- ❑ The Gospels refer to "Jacob" thirteen times.
- ❑ The Epistles refer to "Jacob" five times.
- ❑ Jesus is called "the Son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1).
- ❑ In the "kingdom of heaven," the saved will sit down with "Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob" (Matt 8:11).
- ❑ Jesus referred to a woman with faith as "a daughter of Abraham" (Lk 13:16).
- ❑ Jesus spoke of a poor beggar who was comforted in Abraham's bosom following his death (Luke 16:23).
- ❑ Jesus referred to Zacchaeus as "a son of Abraham" (Lk 19:9).
- ❑ Jesus said Abraham "rejoiced to see" His day (John 8:56).
- ❑ Abraham is proclaimed as the premier example of faith that justifies (Rom 4:1-16).
- ❑ The Gospel was preached "unto Abraham" (Gal 3:8).
- ❑ Those who are in Christ Jesus are called "Abraham's seed" (Gal 3:29).
- ❑ When Jesus came into the world, He took upon Himself the nature of "the seed of Abraham" (Heb 2:16).

Not A Diversion

While this may appear to be a diversion from the grand theme of Romans, it is not. What God has done in Christ Jesus is fulfill the promises made to "the fathers," Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, a familiarity with "the fathers" will only serve to enhance our understanding and appreciation of the "salvation which is in Christ Jesus with

eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10). If God lavished the promises we now enjoy upon the Israelites, we do well to become acquainted with those utterances.

THE CHRIST

"... of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Here is the pinnacle of blessing, for which everything else was preparatory! This is the ultimate advantage, to be held in the highest regard.

through both Joseph and Mary (Matt 1:2-16). He uses the father who begat the children ("... begat") as the means of tracing the lineage.

- ❑ Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus backward from Jesus to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). He uses "the son of" of the means of tracing Christ's lineage.

Among other things, this confirms to us that Jesus was fully man, or fully human. While He was the "Son of God" as

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Concerning the Flesh

This is a consideration of Christ's fleshly lineage. It is true that "God sent His only begotten Son" into the world (1 John 4:9). Our text tells us HOW He came into the world.

Considerable is said of Christ's lineage. Theologically referred to as "the incarnation," this is a doctrine of great weight. There are fleshly relationships that are used to identify "the Christ." All of them involve a flesh and blood lineage.

- ❑ The "Seed" of woman (Gen 3:15).
- ❑ The "Seed" of Abraham (Gal 3:16,19).
- ❑ The "Son of David" (Matt 1:1; 12:23).
- ❑ The "Seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3).
- ❑ The "Son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1).
- ❑ The "Son of man" (Matt 8:28; 13:41).
- ❑ The "Last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45).
- ❑ The "Second man" (1 Cor 15:47).
- ❑ He was "made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal 4:4).
- ❑ "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14).
- ❑ He was a Prophet raised up "from the midst" of Israel (Deut 18:15).
- ❑ He was the "Man," established for protection (Isa 32:2).
- ❑ Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus forward, from Abraham

well as "the Son of man," this did not diminish His manhood. This did not reduce His Deity, but it did involve the forfeiture of the prerogatives of Deity. He had to, so to speak, put the sword of Deity in its sheath, submitted to the restrictions associated with being human.

The Involvements of the Incarnation

This is the precise point that is made in the book of Philipians. There, a most remarkable view of Christ's entrance into the zone of defilement is given. "Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" ^{NASB} (Phil 2:6-7).

Prior to coming into the world, the Savior was "in the form of God," or "was God" - an eternally existent one (John 1:1). The text says He did not "regard equality with God a thing to be grasped," or "did not consider it robbery to be equal with God." ^{NKJV} A most profound truth is here declared. The picture is one of clinging to Deity ("a thing to be grasped"), or being deprived of the privileges of Deity ("did not consider it robbery"). The meaning is that Jesus had to lay something aside in order to come into the world. He had to become dependent upon

God, taking the role of a servant. He had to enter the world without the qualities of Omniscience (all knowing), Omnipotence (all powerful), and Omnipresence (everywhere simultaneously). None of these were active in that Babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger!

Yet, the salvation of fallen man was of such preference, that Jesus did not consider Himself to have been robbed, or deprived, by taking the *“form of a servant.”* He did not prefer to cling to His Deity, remaining in heaven, and refusing to *“come in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin”* (Rom 8:3). What marvelous grace!

The entrance of Christ into the world is not a casual subject in Scripture. It is one of great weight, designed to humble the hearts of men, and confirm the greatness of their salvation.

Tempted

Christ coming in the flesh involved Him being subject to temptation—real temptation. The Scriptures make a point of the fact that *“He was tempted in ALL POINTS like as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb 4:15). Some have erroneously concluded that Jesus did NOT sin because He was Divine. But that is not the point of the Scripture. Rather, the point is that He WAS tempted because He was a man.

The temptation was actual and extensive. The Spirit says, *“For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted”* (Heb 2:18). His first temptation lasted for forty consecutive days and nights, without interruption: *“Being forty days tempted of the devil”* (Lk 4:2). At the conclusion of that period, the devil assaulted him with three epochal temptations – all in the areas of human vulnerability: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16; Lk 2:2-13). During that wilderness temptation, because of the strength of it, *“the angels ministered unto Him”* (Mark 1:13).

On the night of His betrayal, the temptation was so strong, Jesus was *“in agony.”* In His prayers, *“His sweat became like great drops of blood falling*

down to the ground” (Lk 22:44). Again, because of the strength of the temptation, *“an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him”* ^{NKJV} (Luke 22:43). The humanity of Christ was no small matter, and is never to be so regarded.

Satan’s Attempt to Thwart the Birth

From the very beginning, Satan knew God was going to send a Deliverer through human birth. In fact, he was the very first person to whom the promise was addressed. *“And the LORD God said unto the serpent . . . And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (Gen 3:14-15). The Scriptures indicate Satan did not take this announcement casually, but engaged in every possible effort to thwart that birth.

The entrance of Christ into the world is not a casual subject in Scripture. It is one of great weight, designed to humble the hearts of men, and confirm the greatness of their salvation.

While some degree of conjecture is involved here, there is too much of a pattern for the facts to be mere coincidence.

- ❑ The first offspring of the women killed his brother, thereby incurring the curse of God (Gen 4:8-9).
- ❑ Before and after the promise of a “seed” was given to Abraham, his wife was “barren,” not able to have children (Gen 11:30; 18:11).
- ❑ Isaac, one of “the fathers,” also had a “barren” wife, Rebekah, through whom the Messiah would come (Gen 25:21).
- ❑ Jacob, one of “the fathers,” also had a “barren” wife, Rachel, through whom the Savior would come (Gen 29:31).
- ❑ Prior to the Exodus, Pharaoh decreed the death of male babies (Ex 1:22).
- ❑ When the Lord was born, Herod decreed that all infants two and under should be killed in Bethlehem

(Matt 2:16).

Only eternity will tell how many other initiatives were instigated by Satan to destroy the birth of Jesus! The coming of Jesus, *“according to the flesh,”* therefore, involved both the wisdom and power of God. God is greatly to be praised for such a magnificent display of Divine power.

Christ Came

In our text, the Spirit makes a specific point of the role of Israel in bringing forth the Messiah. This was a nation cultured to bring forth the Messiah. As a whole, the nation was a sort of spiritual womb, from which the Savior would make His entrance into the world. The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the birth of Christ in this manner—as coming from a nation. *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . .”* (Isa 9:6). On the night of His birth, the angels announced to Jewish shepherds, *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:11).

The apocalyptic Gospel in Revelation speaks of Satan’s efforts in these words: *“and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne”* (Rev 12:4-5). That “woman” was “Israel,” which includes all who are “Israelites” in their hearts (John 1:47; Rom 9:6).

Jesus did not come from a Gentile lineage! He was not born of Egyptian, Assyrian, Roman, or Grecian nation. He came from a chosen nation, a selected and cultured people. He was born under the influence of the holy Law of God, and where the service of God was prominent. He was not born amidst idolatry, or among a people ignorant of God. As concerning the flesh, He came from Israel!

The seed of Abraham

Another point of this circumstance is made in the book of Hebrews. There, the humanity of Jesus is developed with characteristic exactness. *“For verily He*

took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb 2:16). The truth revealed in this text is very precise. More modern versions emphasize that Jesus became a man in order to "help" certain individuals. That is quite true. However, the emphasis of this passage is not what Jesus **came** to do, but what He **DID**. Because of the indispensable ministry He was going to fulfill, He "shared," or partook, in the "flesh and blood" they had (verse 14). He is also said to have been "made LIKE His brethren" (verse 17). The point is that He became LIKE the ones He was going to save, which is the ultimate criterion for His ministry of "help."

Note how the Spirit refers to the "flesh and blood" Jesus took upon Himself. He does **not** say "all men," or "the world," or "the likeness of sinful flesh," as in Romans 8:3. Instead, He says, "the seed of Abraham," or "the descendants of Abraham." ^{NRSV} And who are "the descendants of Abraham?" They are "the Israelites," to whom the coming of Christ "belonged," as stated in our text.

According to the flesh, Jesus was recognized as a Jew. The wise men from the East knew He was born "king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2). The woman at the well of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me" (John 4:9). When Pilate asked Jesus if He was "the King of the Jews," He replied, "Yes, it is as you say" NIV (Matt 27:11). The sign placed over Jesus as He hung upon the cross was "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matt 27:37). When the Jews themselves remonstrated at this, being convicted, they asked Pilate to revise the sign to read, "He said, I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21).

The point in all of this is to confirm that the Spirit extended Himself, so to speak, to identify the Lord Jesus with the Jewish nation. Our text says He came from them "according to the flesh." Who is the person who would dare to despise the nation from whom the Savior came? It is no wonder that Paul had great

heaviness and continual sorrow of heart over them. Further, it should not surprise us when the Spirit affirms God is still working with them.

Who Is Over All

Because men have a tendency to think too lowly of Christ, the Spirit highly exalts Him. He will not allow us to consider Jesus only as a servant to fulfill our own desires, or a wise man to answer all of our problems. The role of Jesus chiefly relates

Because men have a tendency to think too lowly of Christ, the Spirit highly exalts Him. He will not allow us to consider Jesus only as a servant to fulfill our own desires, or a wise man to answer all of our problems. The role of Jesus chiefly relates to the fulfillment of the will of God, which included our salvation, praise the Lord!

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The phrase "over all" is a large one, indeed! It includes "angels and authorities and powers" (1 Pet 3:22). It includes all things "visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers" (Col 1:16). There is not a created personality in heaven, earth, or hell who, knowingly confronted with Christ's presence, does not bow to Him. If they are not confronted with Him in this world, they will when He is revealed. At that time, in confirmation that He is truly "over all," "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and . . . every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

Until that ultimate day, Jesus **IS** over everything! He is "over all" that is for us, including holy angels and Divine resources. He can marshal the powers of heaven to protect and direct us. He can

bring the blessings of God from heaven to us. He is "over all."

Jesus is "over all" that is against us. The "devil and his angels" are subject to Him! Principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places are against us, yet are subject to Him (Eph 6:12)! He can stop temptation, make a way of escape out of it, and rebuke the powers of darkness. He is "over all." He is the kind of Savior we sorely need!

God Blessed Forever

The blessing of God is upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It is upon Him because He "always" did what pleased the Father (John 8:29). The Father saw the travail of Christ's soul, as He poured it out unto death, and was "satisfied" (Isa 53:11). Jesus, the One who came from Israel, so pleased the Father that He "has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" ^{NKJV} (Phil 2:9). He was "well pleased" with Jesus when He started His ministry (Matt 3:17). He was "well pleased" with the Son at the peak of His earthly ministry (Matt 17:5). It has "pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell" (Col 1:19).

There is nothing about Jesus that displeases God. He is "God blessed," and thus everyone who is "in Him" is blessed. The sure way to blessing is to have your life "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). Jesus is blessed by God "forever." His sacrifice will never lose its effectiveness. His intercession will never be ignored by the Father. His exaltation will never be rescinded! Blessed be the name of Jesus!

Amen

What a blessed word: "Amen!" It is a fitting conclusion to our text. "Amen" is a word of acquiesce, or hearty agreement, with what has been said. It is a word of finality that says "nothing more can be added to what has been said. Let it stand just as it has been declared."

This is a word of strong affirmation and agreement. Literally, it means "let it be so, truly." Used at the beginning of an

affirmation (usually translated “*verily*”), it is declaring, “What I am about to say is the absolute truth” (1 Kgs 1:36; Matt 5:18; 6:2; 8:10). Used at the conclusion of a statement, it means “this is indeed the truth.” When used as a response from those hearing the word, it means “I agree, that is the way it should be.”

When the twelve curses of the Law were read to the people, they were required to say “*Amen*” after each one (Deut 27:15-26). When the ark of the covenant was returned to its place of prominence in Israel, insightful rejoicing

and praise burst forth. At that time, it is written, “*And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD*” (1 Chron 16:36). Some Divine affirmations were do strong, holy men would respond, “*Amen, and Amen*” (Psa 41:13; 72:19; 89:52). While this was a forced response rather than one of insight. It reflects Divine desire.

The word “*Amen*” is transliteration. Rather than the word being translated, each letter is converted to its equivalent in another language. It is a word like “*Hallelujah*,” that has the same sound in all languages. Its use in our text is like

saying, “*Let every thing that hath breath, praise the Lord*” (Psa 150:6). It is something that can be spoken by all who have been redeemed “*out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*” (Rev 5:9). A global salvation merits a global response! A universal Savior deserves universal praise! Whether we are Jew, Gentile, male, female, bond, or free – when we hear about Jesus being God blessed forever, we can shout “*AMEN!*” Here is an area where believers can unite with all their hearts, in saying “*Amen*” to the blessedness of Jesus, who came out of the nation of Israel!

CONCLUSION

Thus, our consideration of the “*Israelites*” ends on a high and most lofty note—the consideration of the Savior, who came from them. When we think of the fleshly descendants of Abraham, we are thinking properly when we are brought to the consideration of Jesus. Any thoughts of Israel that detract from the enthroned Savior are out of order! That does NOT mean we condone all that they have done, for God Himself was provoked by their unbelief and wickedness (Deut 32:16; Psa 78:58-59). It DOES mean we will honor the choice of God, and the way in which He brought the Savior to us through the Israelites.

In confirmation that “*salvation is of the Jews*,” and that they were singularly blessed, several considerations are in order.

- The Law was given to the Jews.
- The lawgiver was a Jew (John 1:17).
- They are the only fleshly nation acknowledged by God.
- Their homeland, “the land of Israel,” is the only land in the world’s history that God acknowledged as “*His land*” (Joel 2:18).
- Their central city, Jerusalem, is the only city in the history of the world where God has placed His name (1 Kings 11:36).
- All of the Prophets were Jews.
- All of the high priests (with the

possible exception of Melchizedec) and priests were Jews.

- The lineage of Jesus is Jewish.
- The mother of Jesus was a Jew.
- The man God chose to raise Jesus was a Jew.
- The man chosen to be the forerunner of Jesus was a Jew.
- The first people to whom the birth of Jesus was announced were Jews.
- The man who dedicated the infant Jesus was a Jew.
- The twelve Apostles were Jews.
- The Apostle to the Gentiles was a Jew.

willing to go to any extent possible so they could be saved? It was not merely because he was related to them, but because they are a monument to the working of God. He chose them and blessed them. There remains a remnant among them because of these realities.

None of their sin is condoned by God, and it cannot be excused by us. We can surely learn from them the things to avoid, seeking zealously to evade the transgressions into which they fell (1 Cor 10:8-10). But we can also learn from their record about the faithfulness of God, the sureness of His blessing, and the relentlessness of His love.

When we think of the fleshly descendants of Abraham, we are thinking properly when we are brought to the consideration of Jesus. Any thoughts of Israel that detract from the enthroned Savior are out of order!

God be thanked for the Israelites, for their record, the great believers that were among them, and the glorious Savior who came from them! May our hearts yearn, and our prayers go up, for them. To a measurable degree, we have been blessed because of them. We are in their tree, and are partaking of the rich and nourishing resources of their “*root*.”

- The names of the twelve tribes of Israel are on the gates of the glorified church (Rev 21:12).

Is it not clear to your heart why Paul had “*great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart*” over them? Should it not be apparent to us why Paul was

Some years ago, a dear brother in Indiana made a comment about the role of Israel in our salvation. It was in the mid-sixties, and I shall never forget it. Several of the men were in a wilderness in a time of fasting and prayer. During that time, when we were sensitive, and our hearts

and minds were enlarged, this brother said, "I thank God that the Israelites endured the great difficulties related to their tree taking root. They endured the blast of the desert heat, and the rush of torrential floods in order that the tree might be solidly rooted. Now it holds us, who were wild olive branches by nature." That brother's name is Carl Waldrop, now residing in the state of Alabama. Here I pray tribute to his eagle eye of insight,

given to him during that memorable week-end.

The church does well to develop a wholesome and godly attitude toward the "Israelites." The due and proper consideration of them will help us to avoid sin, expand our view of the Kingdom, and enhance our understanding of the rich

promises of God. It behooves us to zealously avoid any hatred of this people, and to refuse to rail upon them. Jesus asked the Father to forgive them WHILE they were at the height of their rejection of them. Can we not seek their salvation, seek the peace of Jerusalem, and pray for the lifting of the veil from their eyes? Indeed we can! May we faithfully do so.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 30



PROMISE WILL PREVAIL

^{9:6} But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, ⁷ nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” ⁸ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. ⁹ For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac ¹¹ (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹² it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

– Romans 9:6-13 ^{NKJV} –

INTRODUCTION

Paul has just finished bearing his heart concerning the Israelites, his “kinsmen according to the flesh.” He has shown he is in accord with the Living God, who chose this nation, granting them most remarkable benefits and advantages. His “great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart” was not mere fleshly sympathy or concern. Nor, indeed, was it a fleeting fancy, which came and went like a bout of melancholy. As we will see, it blended perfectly with the revealed purpose of God. One of the marks of legitimate feelings is that they can be expounded by, and integrated with, the purpose of God.

As with the believer’s sorrow related to death (1 Thess 4:13), Paul’s sorrow for Israel is not one with “no hope.” He is not overcome by his sorrow, so as to lose all spiritual rationality, or cease to live by faith. He is able to turn from his deep sorrow to the will of the Lord, gathering the harvest of hope and peace.

He will not leave his readers pondering his own view, but will quickly turn them to “the God of hope” (Rom 15:13). In order to nourish hope for Israel within the hearts of believers, Paul does not linger upon their present condition.

He rather goes back to their origin, which was solely traceable to the Lord. **Divine origins are where we gather our bearings and adjust our focus.** If we want to develop a proper view of mankind, we must go back to his creation and the revealed reason for it. When we seek a proper view of Israel, we must also go back to its origin, and to the Divine utterances related to that beginning. Our text begins such a process.

Because God does not change, and He cannot lie, His promises are irrevocable. Our theology must not

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE WORD IS NOT INEFFECTIVE (9:6a)
- II. ISRAELITES INDEED (9:6b)
- III. SPECIAL CHILDREN (9:7)
- IV. CHILDREN OF THE FLESH VERSUS CHILDREN OF THE SPIRIT (9:8)
- V. THE WORD OF PROMISE (9:9)
- VI. NOT JUST ONCE (9:10)
- VII. JACOB AND ESAU (9:11-13)

leave us embracing a God that changes or vacillates. While it may be done unwittingly by preachers and teachers, much of what is said of God concerning Israel leaves men with a completely erroneous view of Him. He is seen as altering His purpose, and abandoning His promises. Whatever explanations may be given for this approach, it cannot spark hope in the believer. It will not contribute to a strong and aggressive faith.

This is precisely why the Spirit moves Paul to begin this most remarkable line of reasoning. What appears to the flesh to be utterly hopeless is seen quite differently by faith. Taking us back to the foundations, the Spirit will lift up our heads, confirming there is good reason to be *“strong in faith, giving glory to God”* (Rom 4:20).

It is essential that we note the manner of the Spirit’s reasoning. He does not point us to the disobedience of Israel, or to their sure unworthiness of the least of God’s mercies. At this point, He will not expound their unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea, their murmuring in the wilderness, or their discontent with a Divinely provided diet. Instead, He will take us back to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Rachel. He will not tell us what they said or did, but what the Lord said to them. This will focus around four statements made by God.

- “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”*
- “At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.”*
- “The elder shall serve the younger.”*
- “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”*

These are Divine commitments are based upon an eternal purpose. They are nowhere represented as being temporary. None of them are based upon human works. Not one of them were sought by the individuals to whom they were spoken.

The covenant made with Abraham has not failed! The commitment of God to Rachel has not fallen to the ground! God’s statement concerning Jacob and Esau has not been rendered obsolete! These words from God fueled Paul’s hope for Israel. They are why he was willing to wish himself accursed from Christ for their sake. He knew God cannot lie, and that his purpose, like Himself, changes not.

The line of reasoning that follows is unusually strong, but it reflects both the nature and purpose of God. It is food for faith, not fodder for the intellect. While the mind can spend profitable time pondering these statements, it is essential that the heart first grasp them, by faith. There can be no question about their truth, or the intellect will not be able to handle them, thereby causing unbelief to enter. This is a principle of spiritual understanding that is both liberating and edifying. **The truth must be believed before it can be profitably pondered.** Thinking must start with *“God cannot lie.”*

Our text begins an extensive passage of spiritual reasoning. It will confirm that Paul is justified in having *“great heaviness and sorrow of heart”* over Israel. Through the conclusion of the eleventh chapter, the following reasons to have hope for Israel will be added.

- It is not as though God’s word has failed (9:6a). There is an accepted people within natural Israel (9:6b-13).
- God will have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy (9:15a).
- God will have compassion on whom He wills to have compassion (9:15b).
- Acceptance does not depend upon man’s effort, but on God’s mercy (9:16-18).
- God is the Divine Potter who can make vessels of mercy from the *“lump”* of Israel (9:20-24).
- The remnant of Israel will be saved, according to prophecy (9:27).

- The Lord has left survivors in Israel, else they would have disappeared like Sodom and Gomorrah (9:28-29).
- Paul’s heart’s desire and prayer to God is that Israel may be saved (10:1).
- Moses prophesied God would make Israel envious by those who were not a nation (10:19).
- Emphatically, God did not reject His people Israel (11:1a).
- Paul himself was an Israelite, confirming God did not reject them as a whole (11:1b).
- Again, confirming God has not repudiated the nation as a whole, He did not reject His people whom He foreknew (11:2).
- At this present time, there remains a remnant according to the election of grace (11:6).
- God has given them a spirit of stupor, accounting for their obstinance (11:8-9).
- They have not stumbled so as to fall beyond recovery (11:11).
- If their transgression brought riches for the world, how much more will their fulness bring? (11:12).
- Paul magnified his ministry by preaching to the Gentiles, in order to provoke his countrymen to jealousy (11:13-14).
- If their rejection meant reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (11:15).
- If the part of the dough offered to God was holy, then the whole batch is holy (11:16a).
- If the root is holy, so are the branches (11:16b).
- Gentiles should not boast against the natural Jewish branches that were broken off, for their root supports us, we do not support the root (11:17-18).
- The Jewish branches were not broken off to be replaced by the Gentiles (11:19-21).
- If they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in again (11:23a).
- God is able to graft them in again (11:23b).
- The Jews can more readily be grafted into their own tree than we Gentiles, who were wild by nature (11:24).
- Israel has experienced hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in (11:25).

- ❑ All Israel will be saved (11:26a).
- ❑ The Deliverer will come out of Zion and turn ungodliness away from Jacob, by which name the church is never called (11:26b).
- ❑ God's covenant with Israel is to take away their sins (11:27).
- ❑ Although presently enemies on the account of the Gentiles, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (11:28).
- ❑ God's gifts and callings are irrevocable (11:29).
- ❑ Just as we Gentiles were once disobedient, yet have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they have now become disobedient

that they too might receive mercy as a result of God's mercy upon us Gentiles (11:30-31).

- ❑ God has bound all men over to disobedience that He may have mercy on them all (11:32).

There are thirty-four arresting reasons for refusing to believe Israel is in a hopeless situation, or that they have been written off and replaced by the Gentile church. Such a thought is ludicrous to faith, offensive to a renewed heart, and evidence of remarkable ignorance. It is most unreasonable for Gentiles, whose acceptance by God is a great token of His mercy, to boast

themselves against the Israelites by affirming they have been repudiated and forgotten. The Spirit will not allow us to think in this way without challenging us with overwhelming proofs of God's love and intentions for Israel, Paul's "*kinsmen according to the flesh.*"

In this section of Scripture (chapters 9-11), the Holy Spirit will pile proof upon proof, appealing to our hearts, and justifying the attitude of Paul toward the Jews. When He is finished, a great chorus of praise will erupt, giving unquestionable glory to God. The purpose of the passage is to provoke both faith and hope in our hearts.

THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT INEFFECTIVE

^{9:6a} ***But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.*** "Because it is the tendency of men to take the exceeding great and precious promises of God and reason incorrectly with them, the Spirit will now give us examples of right reasoning. After telling us that "*the promises*" belonged to Israel, He will now show us how firm those promises really are. Religious flesh, which is the worst of all flesh, will not be able to receive this, but the Spirit affirms it anyway.

The sophist will reason that if such firmness is attached to the promises of God, it will promote laxity in the household of faith, moving them to withdraw from the work of faith and the labor of love.

I myself once thought in this manner. It is quite true that flesh seeks to exploit the promises, using them as an occasion for slothfulness and a lack of involvement in the will of the Lord. However, this tendency is not produced by the promises, but by the failure to believe them. It is "*through faith and patience*" that we "*inherit the promises*" (Heb 6:12).

The promises are dulled by vigorous attempts to blend them with Law, or argue why they are not to be trusted. The fact that some of those to whom the promises "*belonged*" did not believe them has taken nothing from the promises

themselves. Nor, indeed, will they be withdraw because "*some did not believe.*"

THE WORD OF GOD

Here, "*the word of God*" refers to His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He

The sophist will reason that if such firmness is attached to the promises of God, it will promote laxity in the household of faith, moving them to withdraw from the work of faith and the labor of love.

is not referring to the promises that attended the Covenant made at Sinai (Deut 28:3-9), for that covenant was "*added*" to the Abrahamic promise "*because of transgression*" (Gal 3:19). The great redemptive work of God never revolved around that "*first covenant*," and that redemptive work is the context within which Israel is being considered.

The "*word of God*," in this case, is nothing less than the Gospel which was first preached to Abraham. As it is written, "*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by*

faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (Gal 3:8). That word belongs "*to the Jew first*" (Rom 1:16), although it is not exclusively to them.

The Abrahamic promise took a variety of forms through the prophets. It was iterated and reiterated. The firmness of these promises is quite evident. Our text encompasses these commitments; i.e., to whom (Israel) "*belong . . . the promises.*"

- ❑ "*I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.*" (Isa 1:26)
- ❑ "*Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*" (Isa 41:10)
- ❑ "*For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you. Fear not, you worm Jacob, You men of Israel! I will help you,' says the LORD And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.*" (Isa 41:13-14)
- ❑ "*I will bring the blind by a way they*

did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them.” (Isa 42:16)

- *“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.” (Isa 43:3-4)*
- *“For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring.” (Isa 44:3)*
- *“I will rejoice in Jerusalem, And joy in My people; The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor the voice of crying.” (Isa 65:19)*
- *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” (Jer 31:31)*
- *“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.” (Ezek 11:19-20)*
- *“I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles.” (Ezek 20:41)*
- *“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.” (Ezek 36:26-27)

These are only a sampling of the hundreds of commitments God made to Israel. The number of such promises are staggering, and cannot be brushed aside with a casual sweep of the theological hand. They are “*the word of God,*” and thus cannot be regarded as some temporary word, or one that was strictly contingent upon the people themselves.

Who is the person who will step forth and say these words have been ineffective? However men may choose to assess God and Israel, a word from heaven comes back to us: “*But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect,*” or, as the NIV reads, “*It is not as though God’s word had failed.*” Like God Himself, the word of the Lord “*lives and abides forever*” (1 Pet 1:23). God’s word is an accomplishing word. If none of Samuel’s words “*fell to the ground,*” what shall we say of the words of the God of Samuel, whom he served (1 Sam 3:19)?

God “*cannot lie,*” and an unkept commitment is a lie. A stipulation of the Law was, “*When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee*” (Deut 23:21). One of the comely reactions of those who respond to the great salvation of God is this: “*I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people*” (Psa 116:14). Is God less righteous than those whom He saves? Will He declare a promise, swear by Himself, then fail to do what He has promised?

For those who are tempted to brush these words aside with a finely tuned theology that writes Israel off, it is well to remember this. This is the Holy Spirit’s reasoning on the matter. He speaks of the

effectiveness of God’s word when dealing with the continued identity of God with Israel. Whether or not this blends with the preconceived notions of men is entirely without significance. The sure consequence to be realized by seeking to minimize this text of Scripture is that God will be justified in all of His sayings at the expense of those who contradicted them.

ITS EFFECTIVENESS

God makes a point of speaking of the effectiveness of His Word. “*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,*

For those who are tempted to brush these words aside with a finely tuned theology that writes Israel off, it is well to remember this. This is the Holy Spirit’s reasoning on the matter. He speaks of the effectiveness of God’s word when dealing with the continued identity of God with Israel.

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”^{NKJV} (Isa 55:10-11).

With great power, the Sovereign God proclaims, “*Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: ‘I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone,’ Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness; Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers; Who says to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be inhabited,’ To the cities of Judah, ‘You*

shall be built, ' And I will raise up her waste places; Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers'; Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure,' Saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built, 'And to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'' (Isa 44: 24-28).

And who will dare to place the accomplishment of the salvation of God beneath the frustration of babblers or making diviners mad? Is the promise of God to Israel to be held with less regard than turning wise men backward or confirming the word of His servants? If God says to Jerusalem, *"You shall be inhabited,"* and to the cities of Judah, *"You shall be built!"* what form of reasoning constrains men to imagine it will not be done? Furthermore, our text is dealing with something of infinitely greater value than those things. That means His word is even more sure, for the greater the promise, the more sure is its fulfillment.

Illustrated In Israel Possessing Canaan

The particular issue before us is aptly illustrated in the account of Israel coming into Canaan. From the outset, their deliverance from Egypt was in order to their possession of the land of Canaan. God affirmed, *"I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey"* (Ex 3:17). His word declared He brought the people *"up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it"* (Ex 33:1).

When the people drew back in unbelief, they provoked Him to anger. Yet, He did not withdraw His promise, but rather excluded those who refused to believe. The nation was not written off, even though the majority of them refused to believe God. Of the footmen, over 600,000 in number, only two would come into the land: Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:30). Their little ones would outlast the forty year journey in the wilderness, while the entire generation of unbelievers died

out. Then they would inherit the land, according to the Lord's promise (Num 14:31-33).

Thus, the promise of God was not voided, nor were the children of Israel written off. Only those who were unbelieving were *"broken off."* It is not God's manner to destroy the righteous with the wicked (Gen 18:23-32). The word of promise to Abraham, which was confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, was not ineffective.

In precisely the same way, the promises of a new heart and spirit have not become ineffective to Israel. Only those who have not believed have been removed. Both the root and the tree remain, a source of both hope and nourishment.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

Cutting Down the Tree

Some may object to this reasoning, declaring that the tree has been cut down, not merely some of the branches removed. After all, did not John the Baptist announce, *"And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire"* (Matt 3:10; Lk 3:9).

Note, John did not say the ax was laid to the tree, but to the **TREES!** He traces this activity to individuals, not to the nation of Israel. In this case, the *"trees"* parallel the *"branches"* of Romans eleven. John spoke these words to *"many of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism"* (Matt 3:7). He did not speak of the removal of the nation, but of the rejection of its pretenders.

The House Left Desolate

Others might well site Christ's sharp denunciation of unbelieving Jerusalem. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is*

left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Lk 13:35).

This spoke of Divine judgment upon Jerusalem, not the removal of Jerusalem, to say nothing of the removal of the nation of Israel. The door of hope was left ajar in His words, *"I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*^{NIV} Later, Jesus affirmed *"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"* (Lk 21:24). He clearly referred to the punishment of the nation, not its total

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rejection. Had the Lord completely renounced the children of Israel, His word would have been of *"none effect."* However, such a condition is impossible. The nation remains before God because of the remnant within it—all Jews. More precisely, that remnant remains for the sake of *"the fathers."*

The rejection of Israel as a people would not only result in the promise of God becoming of none effect. It would require the abandonment of the Lord's commitment to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It would decimate both covenants, for *"the Law was ADDED"* to the original commitment (Gal 3:19).

The whole Gospel enterprise postulates the existence of the Jews, Paul's *"kinsmen according to the flesh."* Remove them from the Gosapel context, and the thread of reason unravels. The Gospel is God's power unto salvation *"to the Jew first"* – not in sequence, but in both promise and principle. The reasoning that follows is built upon these

unwavering realities. They provide an excellent example of God fulfilling His promises with precision.

ISRAELITES INDEED

^{9:6b} **For they are not all Israel who are of Israel . . .** "Other versions read, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel," NASB "For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel," ^{NRSV} "For all are not Israelites that are of Israel," ^{Duway-Rheims} "No, for not everyone born into a Jewish family is truly a Jew!" ^{NJB}

Here is an elaboration of Divine foreknowledge, "for whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). **God made promise to Abraham in full recognition of the future.** That promise was a declaration of "the end from the beginning," not of a mere possibility (Isa 46:10).

AN EXPLANATION

This is the Spirit's explanation for the effectiveness of the promise of God: i.e., "for . . ." The reasoning supporting this affirmation is lofty, and will not satisfy the flesh. It will, however, fully satisfy the believing heart.

NOT ALL

There is an Israel within Israel, a special nation within the general nation. Wicked men like Korah (Num 16:1-32), and Balaam (Num 22), together with those who rejected and provoked God at Kadesh Barnea (Num 14:11-23) were within Israel, yet did not truly belong to Israel. In the case of the latter, only two of those who were twenty years old and upward (603,550, Ex 38:26) believed God. Even so, God did not repudiate the army of Israel nor the nation of Israel. The remnant, who truly belonged to Israel, were the means of preserving the nation.

A TRUE ISRAELITE

Early in Christ's ministry, while He was in the process of calling His disciples, he found and called Philip, who was from the city of Bethsaida, a citadel of unbelief (John 1:44; Mk 8:22-23; Lk 10:13). Philip, elated with his call, found Nathaniel and

said to him, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Being familiar with Nazareth, Nathaniel replied, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip did not engage him in a lengthy conversation, but simply said, "Come and see." As Nathaniel approached Jesus, the Lord "saw him coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an **Israelite indeed**, in whom is no guile'" (John 1:46-47). Other versions read "a true Israelite," ^{NIV} and "a true son of Israel." ^{BBE} This is the relationship declared in our text.

Being able to trace ones fleshly lineage

house of Judah" (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8), only those with faith realized the fulfillment of the promise. The believers have always been the true Israel. Those who "believed not," though in the fleshly lineage of Abraham, were not reckoned as "of Israel."

What If Some Did Not Believe?

The line of reasoning being developed in our text was introduced in the third chapter. "What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?" ^{NIV} (3:3). The New Living Translation paraphrase expresses the sense of this expression well: "True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they broke their promises, does that mean God will break His promises?"

This is the Spirit's explanation for the effectiveness of the promise of God: i.e., "for . . ." The reasoning supporting this affirmation is lofty, and will not satisfy the flesh. It will, however, fully satisfy the believing heart.

It is true that the "some" were mathematically the greater number. Yet, those who believed carried a greater weight, thereby sanctifying the nation. Their presence kept the nation from being destroyed. Because of them—particularly Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promises to them remained in tact. Because of this, at any time, should any member of this chosen race choose to believe the promises given to their nation, they would realize the benefit of them.

This is the lowest view of this truth, yet it is a vital one. If God would spare Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of ten righteous souls, much more He will preserve the people He Himself chose for the sake of the faithful among them.

From Another Point of View

Our text expresses this truth from another point of view. Rather than justifying the existence of the nation because of those who believe, it shows why God was righteous in cutting off those who did not believe. They were not "Israelites indeed," and thus provided no reason for God to withdraw His commitments to "the house of Israel and

back to Abraham does not make one a "true Israelite." Neither, indeed, does it invalidate being an Israelite according to the flesh. Paul did not refer to himself as a former Israelite. Rather, he said, "I also **am an Israelite**, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom 11:1). He was speaking of his fleshly pedigree, for the spiritual one cannot be traced to "the tribe of Benjamin." With Paul, as well as with Nathaniel, being a "true Israelite" did not invalidate being a member of one of the twelve tribes.

The promise, or "word of God," was never fulfilled independently of faith. Although it was addressed to the nation of Israel, or "the house of Israel and with the

the house of Judah.” Judgment may come upon a nation because the majority of its constituents do not believe. However, wherever a remnant is found, the promise of blessing remains close enough to be realized.

Those who insist on contending Israel

has been cut off must do so with our text ringing in their ears. Their position cannot be successfully defended. It contradicts both the word and spirit of the promises of God.

A CONSIDERATION

If fleshly identity with Israel did not

make a person a “*true Israelite,*” it is elementary to observe the bodily affiliation with a good and godly assembly does not make one a Christian. Without laboring the point, much can be learned from this informative text. An astounding amount of contemporary religion is nothing less than polished Pharisaism.

SPECIAL CHILDREN

“⁷ . . . *nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’*” This may appear to be a redundancy, but care must be taken not to jump to that conclusion. Verse six declares that fleshly identity with the house of Israel was not sufficient to be accepted by God—i.e., group identity. This verse deals with personal pedigree, or lineage.

LINEAGE CAN BE ESSENTIAL

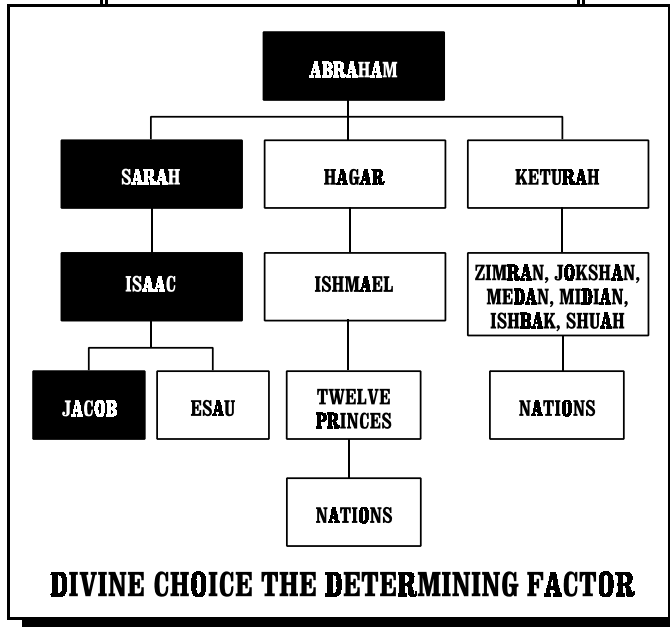
Fleshly lineage **can** be important. Take, for example, the matter of the Messiah. His blood line had to be traced back to Abraham, for He was the true “*Son of Abraham*” (Matt 1:1; Lk 19:9). This is why the genealogy of Jesus is precisely traced back to Abraham (Matt 1:1-16).

Direct relation by blood was also necessary for Isaac and Jacob, who stand among “*the fathers.*” To the Jews returning from the Babylonian captivity, precise fleshly genealogy was also important (Ezra 8:1-15).

WHEN FLESH AND BLOOD DO NOT COUNT

However, when it comes to the matter of salvation, the final word is not found in fleshly genealogy. In fact, believers are told to disregard genealogical thrusts. “*Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do*” (1 Tim 1:4). “*But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law;*

for they are unprofitable and vain” (Tit 3:9). That would include such matters as



generational curses, concerning which a renewed emphasis has arisen in some circles.

The Jews gloried in their blood-line, and John the Baptist rebuked some of them for it. Although they could boast of being Abraham’s generation according to the flesh, John called them a “*generation of vipers*” (Matt 3:7). He challenged them with these words, “*and do not think 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*”^{NKJV} (Matt 3:9).

When some Jews boasted that they were “*Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man,*” Jesus replied “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do*” (John 8:37-44).

Our text will now show us that flesh is not an arena where critical spiritual distinctions can be made. This is one reason why Jesus said “*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). Because “*flesh and blood*” are an area of contamination, qualifications for entrance into the kingdom of God cannot be found there. As it is written, “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor 15:50). Neither appearance (circumcision) nor earthly lineage (sons of Abraham) can qualify one to be the child of God. Nor, indeed, is flesh and blood something that can be “*conformed to the image*” of the Son of God.

The Spirit will confirm this to be the case by showing that God made a choice between those with an identical earthly father – and, in one case, an identical mother as well. If the truth of this statement can be substantiated, our confidence cannot be “*in the flesh*” (Phil 3:3), for it is a realm where Divine rejection can be experienced, even though a proper fleshly genealogy is found. No one, upon the basis of fleshly distinction, can claim a right to Divine acceptance.

OTHER CHILDREN

Abraham did have other children, yet all of them did not inherit the blessing promised to him. **Through Hagar, he begat Ishmael** (Gen 16:15). Twelve princes and nations came from Ishmael (Gen 17:20; 25:16). Although the precise nations are not all named in Scripture,

Ishmael's progeny included Arabians, Hagarenes, Saracens, Turks, Iturians, Midianites, and even Canaanites. They were all, furthermore, consistent enemies of the people of God, and remain so to this very day—even though they are technically the offspring of Abraham.

Through Keturah, Abraham begat six other sons: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (Gen 25:2). Many of these also beget Arabian nations, one of whom were the Sabeans, who stole Job's belongings (Job 1:15).

A "father of many nations," in deed! And that does not include the greatest nation of all, those who believe (Rom 4:16). Now we will see that tracing the bloodline back to Abraham was not sufficient. If it was, the Arabians and Turks, exceedingly large nations, as well as multitudes of others, could claim right to Abraham's spiritual birthright. Every one coming from him was **not** "a son of Abraham" (Lk 19:9). In the words of our text, "neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants."

ISAAC

"... but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called." This quotation is taken from Genesis 21:12, and is again quoted in Hebrews 11:18. The occasion was the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham's home; "for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman" (Gen 21:10; Gal 4:30). Even so, the Lord said concerning Ishmael, "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed" (Gen 21:13).

Prior to the births of both Ishmael and Isaac, when he was yet Abram, the patriarch reasoned with the Lord, "Lord

GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!'" (Gen 15:2-3). Twenty years had passed since the initial promise of Genesis twelve. However, this was not satisfactory, for the promise was bigger than Abraham's

at the "set time," the Lord visited Sarah, and she "received strength to conceive seed" (Gen 18:14; Heb 11:11). Divine appointments cannot fail.

The phrase "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned,"^{NIV} narrows the promise. It does not make the other offspring of Abraham any less his

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ability. Even though Eliezer was born in his house, along with many other servants (Gen 14:14), he was not the suitable heir, and could not be called Abraham's "seed." The answer of the Lord therefore came to him, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come **from your own body shall be your heir**" (Gen 15:4).

When Ishmael was born, Sarah still remaining barren, Abraham reasoned that Ishmael would be heir of the promise. Nearly eleven more years had passed, and thus Abraham besought the Lord, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen 17:18). The answer of the Lord returned, "**Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him . . . But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year**" (Gen 17:19,21). Shortly after that, and just before Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the destruction of "eternal fire,"

natural children, but it does exclude others from the promise given to Abraham. Isaac was the result of Divine working. **The reason for Isaac was the promise of God! The promise of God was not because of Isaac.**

A Child Among Children

Isaac was THE son of Abraham among other sons of Abraham. He was the appointed heir of the promise—the one through whom the Messiah and the promised blessing would come. In this, the Lord is showing that a particular household can exist within a greater one.

Others may make a claim to the promise, but only Isaac will receive it. Others may reason that the promise belongs to all of the offspring, but only Isaac will obtain it. Only those coming through Isaac will be reckoned as "children." The edict is clear: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." The Lord announced it ahead of time, then meticulously brought it to pass.

CHILDREN OF THE FLESH VERSUS CHILDREN OF THE SPIRIT

"⁸ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed." It is important to remember that the Israelites, Paul's "kinsman according to the flesh," are the consideration. The

reasoning set before us does not exclude them from the promise, but explains why they have NOT been excluded from it. Within them are a people who are true Israelites.

Because the pillars of reason being put

into place by the Spirit are of such strength, it is especially important that we give due heed to them. This is no series of statements developed by the paltry wisdom of men. The Lord is establishing why the promises of God are sure. He is showing why having great heaviness and

sorrow of heart are not to be equated with hopelessness. He is confirming why Israel has not been rejected as a nation. *“Some did not believe,”* and *“some of the branches have been broken off.”* Notwithstanding, the tree remains!

THE CHILDREN OF THE FLESH

The *“children of the flesh”* are those born in the energy and wisdom of the flesh. They are like Eliezer, in whose birth Abraham had no immediate part. They are also like Ishmael, who was fathered by Abraham, yet was a purely natural child.

More particularly, *“the children of the flesh”* are those Israelites who did **not** *“walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham”* (Rom 4:12). The promises were given to them, but they did not take hold of them. They were isolated from other peoples, yet chose to remain identified with and the tied to the world. In their essential persons, they are not the product of Divine working. They are part of a miraculous nation only outwardly, or *“in the flesh.”*

Is This Relevant to Us

Some people are driven by a *“relevant- to-me-now”* mentality. They discard this whole line of reasoning because they imagine it has nothing to do with them. How wrong they are!

This very truth is briefly expounded by the Spirit in the first chapter of John. There, it is not limited to the Jews, corroborating that we are speaking of a principle that is operative in our salvation. Here is what the Spirit says. *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:12-13). Note that *“receiving”* Christ did not of itself make the people *“sons.”* Rather, because of their reception of the Son, they were given *“the right to become children of God.”*

NIV

Their spiritual birth was as miraculous as that of Isaac. It could never

have happened without the Lord. They were *“begotten of God”* through *“incorruptible seed”* (1 John 5:18; 1 Pet 1:23). Lest men take too much upon themselves, James confirms, *“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures”* ^{NASB} (James 1:18). The New Jerusalem Bible reads, *“By His own choice He gave birth to us by the message of the truth so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all His creation.”*

The *“children of the flesh”* are those not born *“by the will of God.”* These are **not** the ones foreknown by God (8:29).

It should be apparent that no mature individual is accepted by God because of their godly parents. Much less can people be approved of God because of the religious institution to which they belong, or the creed they have adopted. All of that is on the “flesh” side.

They are not the result of His working. They are only natural children.

The nation of Israel was related to God in a sense enjoyed by no other nation. Yet, only a part of them were recognized as the *“true Israel.”* That elite group sanctified the nation as a whole, thereby justifying God in not completely renouncing them.

Let it be clear that *“the children of the flesh”* possess no qualification outside of nature. Their sole assets belong to the realm of nature, not that of the Spirit. Even when the *“flesh”* begetting these children is *“our father Abraham”* (Rom 4:12), that cannot of itself qualify a person to be the child of God. Such a condition does not mean the promises of God will come to the individual because of superior family lineage. They surely will not come because of organizational affiliation.

It should be apparent that no mature individual is accepted by God because of their godly parents. Much less can people be approved of God because of the religious institution to which they belong, or the creed they have adopted. All of that is on the *“flesh”* side.

THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Relation to God--i.e., *“the children of God”*--is not reckoned upon the basis of nature--even the **best** nature. The *“children of God”* not only trace their origin back to Him, they have been especially blessed by Him, and are uniquely the work of His hands. It is said of them, *“we are His workmanship”* (Eph 2:10). While there is a general sense in which all of Adam’s progeny are *“the offspring of God”* (Acts 17:29), that condition does not make people *“the children of God.”*

“The children of God” have a supernatural origin as well as a natural one. They are born *“of the will of God,”* not merely of the will of man.

THE CHILDREN OF PROMISE

“The children of the promise” are the children that God promised. The example under consideration is Isaac. **Were it not for the promise of God, he never would have been born.** It was not possible for Isaac to be produced by natural powers alone. Sarah *“received strength to conceive,”* else she never could have had any children, much less Isaac.

The children of promise, as Isaac, are the result of faith in the ability of God. Concerning the birth of Isaac, it is written, *“And being not weak in faith, he [Abraham] considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Rom 4:19-21). That condition made Isaac a *“child of promise.”*

While there is a breakdown of precision in the application of this to all of

the “*children of God*,” the principle remains the same. In our case, for example, we are not God’s children because of Abraham’s faith, but because of our own. As it is written, “*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*” (Gal 3:26). Whether it is Israelites living prior to Jesus, or our own generation, it is our faith that truly

speaks of Divine recognition of the people. The Psalmist spoke of such a counting, relating it to where a person was born. “*And of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her; And the Most High Himself shall establish her.’ The LORD will record, When He registers the peoples: ‘This one was born there.’ Selah*” (Psa 87:5-6). Among the people God will

Counting, or tallying up, “the seed,” speaks of Divine recognition of the people. The Psalmist spoke of such a counting, relating it to where a person was born.

relates us to Abraham, thereby making us “*the children of promise*.” As it is written, “*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all*” (Rom 4:16).

“*The children of the promise*,” therefore, are those with the faith of Abraham.

COUNTED AS THE SEED

God is very particular on this point. “*The seed*,” in this case, are those who become the recipients of the promised blessing of God. They are numbered much as Israel was in the early times. They were counted according to their tribes, all of which could be precisely traced back to Abraham through Isaac.

Counting, or tallying up, “*the seed*,”

register, or count, will be those believing Jews within Israel “*according to the flesh*.” It will also include those who have been truly born again within the professing church. Those who did not live by faith will not be counted, even though they may have lived amidst an approved people, and among those in Christ.

Whether it be Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or you, the “*children of God*” are individuals. They are not acknowledged because of national distinction, but because of their faith.

CONTRADICTION???

All Of this may appear to be contradictory. After speaking at length about the Israelites and their advantages, why does the Lord now reason that only “*the children of promise*” are considered as true offspring? Does that not confirm that God has repudiated the nation of Israel, no longer acknowledging it?

Not at all! He is showing that there could be no such thing as genuine “*children of God*” within this nation if it had been written off. This is precisely the point made by the Spirit in Isaiah 1:9. “***Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah.***”
NKJV No remnant was left in Sodom or Gomorrah! God removed Lot and his family, then destroyed those ancient cities with “*everlasting fire*” (Jude 7). The reasoning here is powerful! The remnant that remained was not the result of mere human activity. The remnant was “***LEFT***” BY God Almighty! These were the faithful who were left like Noah. They remained after judgment, like Lot. The scathing wrath of God did not touch them, any more than the fiery furnace touched the three Hebrew children.

The fact that God left “*a very small remnant*” substantiates that He did not remove the nation from the tablet of eternal purpose. He is not finished with it, as will be powerfully declared in the eleventh chapter.

Confirming that Israel’s situation is the same since Christ’s exaltation as it was in the days of Isaiah, the Spirit declares, “*Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (Rom 11:6). The word of God, then, has not been ineffective, even though the larger part of Israel has not yet believed. The existence of the remnant justifies God in refusing to remove the nation from the face of the earth. It also confirms the surety and effectiveness of the promise.

THE WORD OF PROMISE

“⁹ ***For this is the word of promise: ‘At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.’***” God plants and tills his garden in the field of impossibility! The Lord has declared that “*the children of promise*” are “*counted*,” or reckoned, “*for the seed*.” Now He will effectively show us what that means. These are the children GOD promised, not children who measured up to a series of

demands.

THE WORD OF PROMISE

Here is a unique thing. The world was created by a Divine fiat, or spoken command: i.e., “*Let there be . . .*” (Gen 1:3,6,14). **But when it comes to His children, they are begotten by a promise, not a commandment!** This is the kind of “*word*” that already has been

declared to be effective: i.e., “*it is not that the word of God has taken no effect*” (v 6).

Let me be clear about what is being said. Israel remains to this day, not because it has arduously fulfilled all of the commandments delivered to it, but because God made a promise to Abraham! He confirmed it to Isaac and Jacob, and later to David. It is “*the word of promise*”

that beget this nation and will fulfill the good pleasure of God concerning it. This will be done without ignoring the rampant unbelief that swept over the nation. Those who refused to believe were, and will continue to be, broken off. But those unbelievers will NOT nullify the promise of God. As it is written, *“For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar”*^{NKJV} (Rom 3:3-4). And again, *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself”* (2 Tim 2:13). Let it be clear, God will not overlook unfaithfulness, and that is not the meaning of these sayings.

What the Lord IS saying is that God’s purpose is bigger than individuals. Those who are unfaithful, or faithless, forfeit the blessing for themselves, but they do not cause the promise of God to be retracted. Now the Spirit will show us the outworking of Divine commitment in the birth of Isaac, the *“child of promise.”*

AT THIS TIME

The promise to Abraham was specific, not general. It was not that some time somewhere Abraham would beget a son through Sarah. It was *“At **this** time.”* The record in Genesis is even more specific. *“But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at **this set time** in the **next year**”* (Gen 17:21). Again it is written, *“At the **time appointed** I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son”* (Gen 18:14). When Isaac was born, his birth was referenced in this manner: *“For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at **the set time** of which God had spoken to him”* (Gen 21:2).

Times and seasons are strictly in God’s control, not that of man. They are things God has *“put in His own power”* (Acts 1:7). He can cause things to happen when He determines, as when Noah entered into the ark by which he would be saved on *“the selfsame day”* (Gen 7:13), and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt on *“the selfsame day”* (Ex 12:41).

Actually, God’s promises assume His control, else they could not be made. First,

faith is convinced of this, that what God has promised He is also *“able to perform”* (Rom 4:21). Second, God has gone on record concerning His commitments: *“Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it”* (Isa 46:11). This is precisely why He can, by promise, make appointments.

I WILL COME

The *“children of promise”* are the direct result of Divine involvement! In the

promise.” It was spoken with both omniscience and omnipotence.

In regards to our text, Israel has not been written off because God has spoken words of promise concerning her. *“And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God”* (Jer 24:7). Again, *“Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob*

What the Lord IS saying is that God’s purpose is bigger than individuals. Those who are unfaithful, or faithless, forfeit the blessing for themselves, but they do not cause the promise of God to be retracted.

case of Isaac’s birth, God did not merely set natural laws in motion, but came in a power transcendent to the law of nature. Nature had passed the verdict of *“barren”* upon Sarah. However, when God came, that verdict was struck down to the ground. As soon as God shows up, the enemy is vanquished. There is no resistance or battle on the part of the foe, only retreat. The glory of the Lord blasts away all inhibition, and will be confirmed at the coming of the Lord.

Just as surely as God promised Sarah would bear Isaac, God has also promised Israel will turn to Him with their whole heart. *“And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart”* (Jer 24:7). Just as surely as Rebekah conceived though barren, the Deliverer will yet come roaring out of Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob!

SARAH WILL HAVE A SON

The power of nature and the wisdom of the world agreed that Sarah could NOT have a child, much less one through whom the whole world would be blessed. But the word of God negated both of them. **“SARAH WILL HAVE A SON!”** That word is what made Isaac a *“child of*

shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished” (Jer 30:10-11).

Even though, from the human point of view, their *“bruise is incurable,”* and their wound *“grievous;”* even though there is *“none to plead”* their cause, and God has Himself wounded her with *“the wound of an enemy,”* and the *“chastisement of a cruel one,”* yet the Lord has promised: *“For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD”* (Jer 30:12-17).

That word is as sure as the one spoken to Abraham concerning Sarah giving birth to Isaac. When God fulfilled His word to Sarah, the *“child of promise”* was born. When God fulfills His word concerning restoring health to Israel, it will be clear that within her circumference are a people who are *“Israelites indeed!”*

Unbelief can write Sarah off because she is barren. Unbelief can also write off Israel because they are presently

unbelieving. **But unbelief is wrong on both counts.** It has judged prematurely

and according to appearance. Furthermore, Divine commitments have

been specifically addressed to Israel as well as Sarah. Such words are sure.

NOT JUST ONCE

¹⁰ ***And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac.***”The Scriptural record is written in such a way as to build hope. There are, therefore, constant reaffirmations of the power of promise and the surety of God’s word. In the first case, children were born with the same father, Abraham. However, they had differing mothers: Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah. The *“child of promise”* came

promises are brought to fruition. He is showing us why Israel has not been written off, and why it is in order to seek her salvation (Rom 10:1). If we will not quench Him, He will ignite the flame of faith and hope.

The Significance

There is significance in bringing up Rebekah. In the case of Ishmael, one might argue that he was the son of a

21:16). *“The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia”* to rebuild Jerusalem, which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed by His command (2 Chron 36:22). He also *“stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people”* to come and work in His house (Hag 1:14). God does have access to the spirits of men!

In the same manner, the heart of Isaac was stirred to pray for Rebekah, rather than give up on God’s promise because she was barren.

Here is the lawful wife. She bears two sons from the same father, the *“child of promise.”* Yet, one of the sons is chosen, and one is not. That choice will be traced back to Divine preference, not to the works of either son.

Why should it be thought incredible that God could again stir the hearts of the Israelites? Who is the person that will dare to affirm He has no remnant among them, or that He cannot *“allure”* them into a place where He can speak comfortably to them (Hos 2:14)?

God’s promises bear children! They produce results! Furthermore, *“the promises”* pertain, or belong, to Israel. It stands to reason, therefore, that even though she presently appears as barren as Rebekah, yet we can beseech the Lord for her in expectation of our prayers being answered – not because we prayed them, but because they are based upon His promises to the ancient people.

OUR FATHER ISAAC

Isaac is *“our father”* upon the same basis as Abraham – because of our faith. In the case of we Gentiles, we have been grafted into the Jewish tree *“contrary to nature”* (Rom 11:24). Notwithstanding that condition, and because of the great power of God, Isaac is still *“our father.”*

We have become part of an *“eternal purpose”* which was announced in Eden (Gen 3:15), declared to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), and confirmed to Isaac (Gen 27:29). The promise of God could not be thwarted! God has not forgotten Isaac, and neither can we.

through a specific mother by the will of God. Now the Lord will show another *“the child of promise”* was distinguished from a child born of the same mother, and at the same time—a twin brother.

THE CASE OF REBEKAH

As with Sarah, Rebekah was also barren. In the case of Abraham, Isaac was selected from the children of three mothers: Hagar, Sarah, and Keturah. In the case of Rebekah, multiple children were conceived *“by one man.”* In these precise situations, God worked all things together for good, fulfilling His promise under impossible circumstances.

Isaac knew of the promise received by his father. When confronted with the barrenness of Rebekah, he did not lose heart. The Scriptures tell us, *“Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived”* (Gen 25:21). Because God had promised the blessing of the world through Abraham’s offspring, we are not to conclude Isaac’s petition was a mere human work. Remember, in these examples God is showing how His

bondwoman, not the legal wife of Abraham. Therefore, flesh reasons, he was rejected upon the basis of law, not Divine choice. That reasoning, of course, is not true. **Ishmael was rejected because he was not the son that was promised.** Notwithstanding, in order to show that promise is hinged to Divine choice, not human works, the Spirit cites the case of Rebekah. Here is the lawful wife. She bears two sons from the same father, the *“child of promise.”* Yet, one of the sons is chosen, and one is not. That choice will be traced back to Divine preference, not to the works of either son. God is showing HOW the children of promise are brought into the world.

Satan Could Not Stop It

I have no doubt that Satan was working to thwart the fulfillment of God’s promise. He knew full well that *“the seed of the woman”* was destined to bruise his head, and thus energetically sought to stop that seed from being born, as pictured in Revelation 12:4. However, the Lord can stir up people to fulfill His will. He *“stirred up an adversary against Solomon”* (1 Kgs 11:14). He *“stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians”* (2 Chron

The Spirit will again show us that the promise of God does not extend to all of the children in the flesh. Even though

they all have the same father AND the same mother, yet a distinction is made among them. That distinction is not made

because of works, but in order that the purpose of God might stand according to His election.

JACOB AND ESAU

“¹¹ . . . (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),¹² it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger.’¹³ As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’”

This is one of most provocative expressions of Scripture. It is not to be mitigated by preconceived notions or stereotyped theologies. This is a Divine statement. It is also the reasoning of the Holy Spirit. It is given as an explanation for why Israel has not been repudiated by God. It is also a confirmation that the promises of God will not fall to the ground, even though contradicted by both circumstance human reasoning.

Eventually, every knee will bow to the One declaring these things. It is on the part of wisdom to bow the knee now, humbly acknowledging that the wisdom and power of God can carry out His purpose when everything seems against it.

THE CHILDREN

In this case, *“the children”* are Jacob and Esau. They had the same father and the same mother. They were born at the same time, after been together in the same womb. If Divine privileges are based upon what is generated within the womb, both of *“the children”* will be accepted by God. If having the same parents is the criteria, both will be received by God.

In the case of Ishmael and Isaac, there was a difference in between them as natural children. They had different mothers. One was free and one was a slave. One was born of the will of the flesh, the other by the will of God. One might suppose, therefore, that God’s choice of Isaac was based upon these

conditions. That is not the case, however, for Isaac was chosen because he was promised.

This will now be confirmed to us, for no such distinctions existed in Jacob and

Eventually, every knee will bow to the One declaring these things. It is on the part of wisdom to bow the knee now, humbly acknowledging that the wisdom and power of God can carry out His purpose when everything seems against it.

Esau. They had the same mother, and were both conceived and born as a result of Divine working. Yet one was chosen as a child of promise, and other was rejected. Both were the seed of Isaac, yet one is loved and one is hated.

We must be careful not to allow these affirmations to confuse us, or lead us to question our own salvation. God is showing us why Israel remains as a nation before Him. He is confirming why there is hope for them.

The Lord is opening His *“purpose”* to us, showing that when we are called in accordance with that purpose (Rom 8:28), He WILL work all things together for our good. If we see that we have no merit of our own, He will show us His workings in us are not based upon our merit. His purpose and His calling are the preeminent matters in this discussion. Elsewhere, the matter of the response of faith is the critical matter, but that is not the subject here.

BEFORE THEY DID ANYTHING

“ . . . for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil.” The purpose is not merely to establish WHEN the Divine choice was made, but WHY it was made. It is to be acknowledged we are now in waters that are deep. Yet, faith can walk on these waters, and safely navigate through them without harm. Because it is the Spirit that is speaking, we are to *“hear”* what He is saying.

The words that are here referenced were spoken to Rebekah. They confirmed Divine intent to her. After she had conceived by Isaac, Rebekah had an unusual experience. The Scriptures inform us that *“the children struggled within her.”* Apparently, the sensations she experienced were most unusual. We have no indication that she realized twins were in her womb. Thus, when they struggled with each other, it may have appeared as though an untimely birth was about to occur. Perhaps thinking the miraculous conception was about to be thwarted, she reasoned within herself. Then she took the matter to the Lord. It is written, *“But the children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If all is well, why am I like this?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD”* ^{NKJV} (Gen 25:22). Our text expounds the answer given to her by God Himself.

The answer was not based upon the foreseen conduct or works of the children. The fact that they had not yet been born confirms the determination of WHO would continue the lineage of Abraham was independent of human merit. Esau was not yet profane, and Jacob was not yet believing. Esau had not yet despised his birthright, and Jacob had not yet prevailed with God.

The Manner of Reasoning

I must continually come back to the reason for this passage. It is the Spirit's extended commentary on Israel "according to the flesh." He is showing this nation was strictly chosen and developed by God. It was done in strict accordance with His own choice, and without regard to human merit. Israel's distinction was not the result of its conduct, but of God's choice. They were favored above other nations because God chose to do so. They did not deserve it.

In this passage, the Lord is expanding on the manner in which He chose and developed Israel. He made critical distinctions between the fleshly offspring of Abraham, "to whom the promises were made" (Gal 3:16).

The point is that He has not done anything to lead us to believe nothing further can happen in this nation. The Prophets delivered words concerning them as a nation that have not yet been fulfilled. There is not a word in Scripture that suggests these promises have been withdrawn from that nation, or that God is even capable of making a promise only to withdraw it.

Although appearance seems to belie the possibility, there is still a preserving remnant in this nation, just as surely as there was a Joshua and Caleb during Israel's rejection of the promised land. That sanctifying remnant remains just as surely as it did on the day of Pentecost, or as surely as it was found within the womb of Rebekah.

PURPOSE ACCORDING TO ELECTION

God did not announce His intentions AFTER Jacob and Esau were born, but while they were yet unborn. The reason for this is, "... **that the purpose of God according to election might stand.**" Other versions read, "in order that God's purpose **according to His choice might stand,**"^{NASB} "in order that God's purpose **in election might stand,**"^{NIV} "so that God's **purpose of election might continue,**"^{NRSV} "in order that **God's purpose and his selection might be effected,**"^{BBE} and "but in order that it should be **God's**

choice which prevailed."^{NJB}

Purpose might not Fail

The "purpose" of God is to be a cornerstone in our thinking. That purpose was conceived independently of the achievements of men, and before the world was created. It is in this sense that "the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb 4:3). Thus it is referred to as "His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself" (Eph 1:9). For this reason, it is called "His OWN purpose" (2 Tim 1:9), and the "counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). That purpose determined the formation of Israel (Deut 7:7-8). It is the basis for our calling (Rom 8:28; 2 Tim 1:9).

Isaiah referred to the firmness of God's purpose in this manner. "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely

The "purpose" of God is to be a cornerstone in our thinking. That purpose was conceived independently of the achievements of men, and before the world was created. It is in this sense that "the works were finished from the foundation of the world"

as I have **thought**, so shall it come to pass; and as I have **purposed**, so shall it **stand**" (Isa 14:24).

The words that follow were not merely foretelling what was going to happen. They are not an analysis of human conduct. Rather, they are the cause for the continuation of Abraham's seed. They are the reason why the nation did not disappear, or was expunged by the devil.

Implemented By Choice

While "choice" is normally ascribed to men (and, indeed, they are to choose), the Scriptures place the greater emphasis upon Divine choice. It is really God's choice that makes the difference.

- God chose the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deut 4:37; 10:15).
- He chose David, taking him from the sheepfolds (Psa 78:70).
- He chose Israel to be a special people (Deut 7:6).
- God chose the priests of Israel (Deut 18:5; 21:5).
- The Lord chose Solomon (1 Chron 29:1).
- He chose Saul to be king (1 Sam 10:24).
- He chose Solomon to build the temple (1 Chron 28:10).
- God chose who should bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7).
- God has chosen us in Christ Jesus before the world began (Eph 1:4).
- The Thessalonians were from the beginning "chosen unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth" (2 Thess 2:13).
- Those in Christ are a "chosen generation" (1 Pet 2:9).
- Jesus chose the Apostles (Luke 6:13).
- Paul the Apostle was a "chosen vessel," separated from the womb (Acts 9:15; Gal 1:15).

The fact of Divine choice cannot be questioned. There are simply too many declarations of it to allow such doubts.

Our text tells us WHY God chooses. It is in order that His purpose according to election might stand. In other words, **God causes His purpose to come to fruition.** If an enemy arises to thwart that purpose, God will cause the enemy to fail. If, through faith, a person embraces that purpose, God will "make him stand" (Rom 14:4). If his purpose is unknown to Rebekah, He will announce to her what is going to happen with the children in her womb. The purpose of God is why she was enabled to conceive, and the purpose of God would be served by the fruit of her womb.

A Practical Application

If you wonder what the outcome of believing God will be, find what God has declared concerning faith. Search out what word He has given concerning those

who believe. Become knowledgeable of His revealed purpose for believers. See what He has determined for those who believe the record He has given of His Son! When you have acquainted yourself with those “*exceeding great and precious promises,*” then believe that “*God cannot lie!*”

NOT OF WORKS

“... *not of works but of Him who calls.*” When it comes to the “*purpose*” of God, the works of men play no foundational role. **God’s “election” is not determined by what men do, but by what God wants!** I understand that men have taken the word “*election*” and developed cold and calculating doctrines. Some of them have created doubts and fears in tender hearts. But these abuses do not remove the fact that God is an electing God!

There are choices He makes that have nothing whatsoever to do with what you have done, just as surely as God’s choice of Jacob was not based upon what he had done! In fact, the promise was given before he was even born, or had done anything. The meaning of the text is that God made his choice without regard to what either Jacob or Esau would do. He was motivated by something higher.

I am quick to again add that this is not speaking of the means through which salvation is wrought. Rather, this is the explanation for the presence and continuance of the nation of Israel, Paul’s “*kinsmen according to the flesh.*” This is a critical distinction to make, lest we make the election of God a stumbling stone instead of a rock of hope.

In Salvation

There is a sense in which this principle applies to salvation, but it must be declared with wisdom. In “*eternal salvation,*” believing is the principle thing. Strictly speaking, believing is not a work of man. In fact, Jesus categorically referred to believing on Him as “*the work of God*” (John 6:29).

Elsewhere we are told that salvation, or justification, is “*not of works*” (Eph 2:9; Tit 3:5). In fact, righteousness is imputed

to us “*without works*” (Rom 4:6).

This does not mean the individual does not work, but that human activity is not **the basis**, or foundation, of Divine acceptance. God’s purpose is the determining factor, not our works. When, by faith, we embrace the salvation He presents to us, He begins to work in us in strict accord with His purpose. As it is written, “*Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.*”

She was carrying twins, and did not know it. But they were no ordinary twins. Two different bodies of people were represented by them. They would be two different kinds of people. One nation would be a stronger and more aggressive than the other.

Amen ^{NKJV} (Heb 13:20-21).

A Brief Explanation

The cursory reader may imagine that I am merely rambling about on this point. These rather lengthy explanations are necessary because of two extreme conditions that exist in the church. First, vast segments of God’s people never hear a single word about Divine choice, election, or the purpose of God. Second, large bodies of believers have adopted a view of Divine choice, election, and the purpose of God, that stifles faith and awakens fear. In some, it even produces lethargy and slothfulness.

When the Spirit justifies the work of God upon the basis of His election, we had best give heed to His words. When the nation of Israel is associated with God’s

election and purpose, we had better take care how we speak of them. It is in order to bring our thoughts into conformity with what God chooses and designs.

THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER

“... *it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger.’*” When Rebekah “*inquired of the Lord*” concerning the activity in her womb, she received an answer. “*Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger*” (Gen 25:23). She was carrying twins, and did not know it. But they were no ordinary twins. Two different bodies of people were represented by them. They would be two different kinds of people. One nation would be a stronger and more aggressive than the other. It would have more of a military bent. The same father, the same mother, yet two manner of people! With Abraham, contradicting children were in the same house. With Rebekah, they were in the same womb at the same time.

Esau became the father of the Edomites (Gen 36:9). Over thirty dukes, or chiefs, came from Esau, and they were all noted for their aggression (Genesis 36). They were the enemies of Israel, even though they descended from Isaac. They were “*stronger than other people.*” Notwithstanding their strength, in the days of David, “*all the Edomites became David’s servants*” (2 Sam 8:14). Their strength gave way to Israel whom God made the “*stronger people.*”

The Elder Will Serve the Younger

The Lord added one other distinctive word. “*And the older shall serve the younger.*” This is a most unique promise. It doubtless refers to the passing of the birthright from Esau to Jacob. Under ordinary circumstances, the family inheritance went to the firstborn. The Scriptures provide the details of the birth of Jacob and Esau, confirming Esau to be the firstborn son. “*And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there*

were twins in her womb. And **the first came out red**, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them" (Gen 25:24-26).

Throughout their lifetime, Esau certainly did not serve Jacob. In fact, as soon as the birthright, in accord with the Divine promise, had been gained by Jacob, he left the home, fleeing from Esau. We have a record of Joseph's brothers bowing to him, fulfilling the dreams God gave him. But there is no record of Esau bowing to Jacob. Instead, Jacob bowed "seven times" to him (Gen 33:3).

The service of Esau to Jacob was not revealed during their lives—at least not outwardly. In the purpose of God, the desires of Esau had to give way to the desires of Jacob when he sought to gain back the inheritance. Isaac told him that was not possible. "And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother" (Gen 27:40). 996 years later, king Nebuchadnezzar put the mountains occupied by the inhabitants of Esau to ruin (Jer 49:16-18; Ezek 25:13-14; Joel 3:19; Mal 1:2-3). All of this was done in the interest of the children of Jacob. Truly, the elder did serve the younger! The benefits of the covenant made with Abraham passed through Jacob and evaded Esau!

All of this was in direct contradiction of the flesh, and even of rules of inheritance established by God. Under the Law, the firstborn could not be disinherited (Deut 21:15-17). Yet, Esau the firstborn lost his inheritance and could not gain it back. It is quite true that he "despised his inheritance" (Gen 25:34). Yet the answer of God to Rebekah was given before Esau was born, or had committed any evil.

JACOB HAVE I LOVED

" . . . As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved.'" This quotation is taken from Malachi 1:2, and is a most powerful consideration. "I have loved you," says

the LORD. Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Says the LORD. 'Yet Jacob I have loved.'"

This is another form of Divine reasoning that makes no sense at all to the flesh. First, it is important to note that Jacob and Esau, while individuals, are not here considered as individuals, but as progenitors and representatives of races: "two nations, and two manner of people." The Spirit is showing us how God made a distinction within the offspring of Abraham, confirming "they are not all Israel who are of Israel."

Malachi's prophecy shows God's preference of Israel, descendants of Jacob, over the Edomites, descendants of Esau. God affirms His love to Israel, and they questioned the affirmation. "I have loved

said, 'We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places,' Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever. Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, 'The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel'" (Mal 1:3-5).

Briefly stated, God's hatred for Esau is seen in the Edomites inability to recover themselves from the devastation Nebuchadnezzar brought upon them. They might built, but God would throw down what they raised up. His indignation against them was "forever," and Israel would see it. The phrase "beyond the border of Israel" signifies that God protected Israel's border, while decimating that of Edom.

God's hatred for Esau is seen in the Edomites inability to recover themselves from the devastation Nebuchadnezzar brought upon them. They might built, but God would throw down what they raised up.

Thus God's love for Israel is confirmed by their recovery!

There was a remnant among them, and they rebuilt the waste places. As Isaiah declared, "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; **but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee**, saith the LORD thy Redeemer" (Isa 54:8). **But Esau He hated!** Although impoverished by the enemy and grievously chastened by the Lord, yet He cried out to them, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again **I will build thee, and thou shalt be built**, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry" (Jer 31:3-4). **But Esau He hated!**

GET THE MESSAGE!

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew! Israel's present condition is anything but good, but it is not hopeless! Some of the cities against which Israel came were so cursed it was said of them, "and it shall be a heap for ever; it shall not be built again" (Deut 13:16). Of the ancient city of Tyrus God said, "And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the LORD have spoken it, saith the Lord

you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast Thou loved us?" (Mal 1:2a). The people had been judged by God, and therefore concluded He had abandoned them. They had concluded "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off" (Ezek 37:11). They were living in the aftermath of Nebuchadnezzar's devastation of Jerusalem and the consequent seventy-year Babylonian captivity. How could God love them? The Lord confirms His love for them by comparing them with the Edomites.

ESAU HAVE I HATED

" . . . As it is written . . . but Esau I have hated." The additional words of Malachi cause the text to come alive. "But Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness. Even though Edom has

GOD” (Ezek 26:14).

Such things were never said of Jerusalem! Though judged, sacked, and decimated, it was rebuilt! Israel was taken out of their land, then bought back to it.

God said of the Amalekites, “*thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven*” (Deut 25:19). Concerning the nations that occupied the promised land, the Lord said through Moses, “*And He shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven*” (Deut 7:24). Again, it is said of the heathen, “*Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever*” (Psa 9:5). But no such word has ever been declared against Israel!

The Lord once threatened to do this—blot out the nation. After Israel behaved themselves wickedly at Mount Sinai, the Lord said to Moses, “*Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation*” (Ex 32:10). In recounting this event to Israel, Moses declared God said He would “*blot out their name from under heaven*” (Deut 9:14). Moses stood in the gap at that time, pleading that He would consider the effect of such a destruction upon the Egyptians, and calling upon Him to remember “*the fathers,*” and the promises He had made to them. In one of those rare occasions, it is written, “*And the LORD repented of*

the evil which He thought to do unto his people” (Ex 32:14). God never again made that threat!

Throughout history, there have been generations of Israelites who were not known for their faith. There have been multitudes of them who have rejected Christ. The word of God has come to pass: “*And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead*

Why was not Jerusalem judged like Tyrus? Why did He not rain “*eternal fire*” upon them as He did upon Sodom and Gomorrah? Why did God not pledge Himself to blot out their name like that of the Amalekites? The tender heart wants to know the answer to these questions.

There are at least two reasons Israel remains until this day. First, it is for the farther’s sake—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Second, it is for the sake of the remnant

There are at least two reasons Israel remains until this day. First, it is for the farther’s sake—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Second, it is for the sake of the remnant that lingers among the people.

thee” (Deut 28:37). Yet the Lord says of this judged nation, “*I will gather the remnant of My flock*” (Jer 23:3). “*I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you*” (Jer 29:14). “*Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath*” (Jer 32:37). “*I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted*” (Mic 4:6).

How is it that God speaks so differently of Israel? Why does He not speak to them as He did to the Edomites?

that lingers among the people.

It is no wonder Paul had such a concern for this people—why he refused to let them go. Like Moses, he knew the promises of the Lord, and His unfailing recognition of the sanctifying remnant. He knew God and the purpose of God. Thus, he remained in the gap, refusing to be moved away from the hope generated by God’s promises. There is no reason why we cannot join in that concern mingled with optimistic hope. It makes more sense for God to receive Israel than that He received the Gentiles.

CONCLUSION

Academically speaking, this passage is difficult to teach. It does not lend itself to the cold approach of human logic, and contains assertions that do not blend with a stereotyped theology. Yet, that condition makes this a most profitable text, for by its very nature, it draws us upward. It gives a lot of glory to God, accentuating His faithfulness, and confirming His power to implement His eternal purpose.

If you have ever fell beneath the crushing hand of the chastening God, this

passage will bring hope to you. Israel stands before you as an example of enduring the chastening of the Lord without being destroyed. It has been unparalleled chastening, extending over a period of two thousand years thus far. Yet, the embers of promise still send forth the spark of hope. Nestled in their multitudes there is a remnant who have seen and embraced the promise. Their very existence is owing to the grace of God. His faithfulness has kept the floods of Divine indignation from drowning

them.

When things loomed very dark at Sinai, and the people turned to idolatry, drunkenness and revelry, Moses stood for the people. When the people fell away from the Lord and asked Samuel to pray for them, he replied, “*Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way*” (1 Sam 12:23). When Elijah thought no one remained but himself, the Lord

replied, *"I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal"* (1 Kings 19:18; Rom 11:4).

I do not know how many powerful intercessors are pleading for Israel in our time, but we do well to aspire to be such. They were the means through which we obtained the Law. Through the prophets, they were custodians of sustaining promises. Through them we have learned of the blessedness of being directed and fed by the Lord. And, above all, our blessed Lord came from them. Who among us does not have a heart for them? They have given us such notables as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. The holy Prophets have come from

their ranks, with such spiritual dignitaries as David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. John the Baptist came from their number, as well as the twelve Apostles, and Paul who labored more abundantly than they all. Who can forget the remarkable women that this nation has yielded: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Miriam, Debra, Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna.

We have no cause for shame in having a heart for them, and no need to imagine we have replaced them. Let no person look upon them with disdain, or consider them irrevocable!

There remains a people who are loved of the Lord. They are the ones He has chosen, and to whom He holds out the

scepter of righteousness and promise. While we do not condone sin, and even hate *"the garment spotted by the flesh,"* we refuse to abandon hope. It extends to the Israelites, as well as to the whole world, which God has pledged will be covered with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). If God can stretch forth His hands to them *"all the day,"* why cannot we?

Wherever there is a promise of God, apply your heart to believe and embrace it. God cannot lie, and you cannot be ashamed if you will believe Him! **The star of hope can shine at the peak of the day, as well as in the depth of the darkness of night.** As our blessed Lord said, *"Have faith in God!"*

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 31



GOD'S RIGHTEOUS WORKING

^{9:14} What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to 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." ¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" ²⁰ 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?" ²¹ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? ²² What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? ²⁵ As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." ²⁶ "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." ²⁷ Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. ²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." ²⁹ 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." – Romans 9:14-29 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Speaking out of His profound fellowship with Christ, Paul confessed he had *"great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart"* for the Israelites, his *"kinsmen according to the flesh."* His desire for their salvation was so great he *"could wish"* himself accursed and cut off from Christ in order that they might be saved. All of the remarkable advantages

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. IS GOD UNRIGHTEOUS? (9:14)
- II. MERCY IS GIVEN BY DIVINE DISCRETION (9:15)
- III. HUMAN WILL AND EFFORT ARE NOT THE FOUNDATION (9:16)
- IV. PHARAOH WAS RAISED UP BY GOD (9:17-18)
- V. FLESH IS CONFUSED (9:19-21)
- VI. VESSELS OF WRATHY AND VESSELS OF MERCY (9:22-24)
- VII. A CHANGE IN STATUS (9:25-26)
- VIII. A REMNANT WILL BE SAVED (9:27)
- IX. THE WORK WILL BE FINISHED (9:28)
- X. THE LORD LEFT A REMNANT (9:29)

had been given to them, including *“the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.”* The *“fathers,”* Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, belonged to them, and the Lord Jesus Himself came from them (9:1-5). Over 1,500 years of Divine investment were focused on this nation. A God who cannot lie made promises to them, yet it appeared it had all been for nought. Throughout the centuries, the Lord held forth His hands to a *“disobedient and gainsaying (contrary) people”* (Rom 10:21). They *“killed the prophets”* (Matt 23:31), and *“killed the Lord Jesus”* (1 Thess 2:15). Because they *“did not know”* the time of their *“visitation,”* their house was left desolate, the holy city ravaged, and the temple decimated (Lk 19:43-44; 21:20-24; Matt 24:1-2).

In all of this, God was impeccably righteous, confirming He *“will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation”* (Ex 34:7). Equally true, God was righteous in preserving a remnant among a rebellious people (1 Kgs 19:18; Rom 11:6). He was right in judging the nation, yet not utterly destroying it. He was right in preserving the nation for the father’s sake. He was also righteous in opening the *“door of faith unto the Gentiles”* (Acts 15:18).

In his idle curiosity, man questions God, doubting His righteousness in all that He does. Thus some become *“angry with God”* when things do not go their way, or they are caused to pass through the sea of trouble and vexation like Job. Others simply ask *“Why me?”*, as though God had not been fair with them, or they deserved a better portion in this life.

We are living in a period of time when the wisdom of man has been unduly exalted—even to the point of questioning the authenticity of Scripture, as well as the righteousness of God. These are truly *“perilous times”* (2 Tim 3:1), for as soon as man begins to question God, he is immediately on shifting sand. One of the purposes of these lessons is to encourage wholesome and profitable thoughts concerning God and Christ. God is *“King over all the earth,”* *“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever”* (Psa 47:2; Rom 11:36). Christ *“is over all, God blessed for ever”* (Rom 9:5).

SALVATION IS THE WORK OF GOD

Throughout this section of Scripture, the Spirit is confirming that, from beginning to end, salvation is the work of God. In the end, when everything has been made clear, ALL of the glory will go to the Lord. The vast body of the redeemed will shout insightfully, *“Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!”* NKJV (Rev 19:1). And again, *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”* NKJV (Rev 7:10). Without a single dissenting voice, the saved of the earth will join in the Psalmic expression, *“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth”* (Psa 115:1). That is something of what is being confirmed in the book of Romans.

Consider What God Has Made In Regards to Redemption

- God MADE us the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor 5:21).
- He MADE many to be righteous by the obedience of Christ (Rom 5:19).
- Christ has MADE us free (Gal 5:1).
- God has MADE us accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6).
- He MADE us sit together with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
- He MADE both Jew and Gentile one

body (Eph 2:14).

- Peace was MADE through the blood of Christ’s cross (Col 1:20).
- God MADE Jesus to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us (1 Cor 1:30).
- We have been MADE nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).
- We have been MADE heirs (Tit 3:7).
- God can MAKE all grace abound to us (2 Cor 9:8).
- God can MAKE us increase and abound in love toward one another (1 Thess 3:12).
- We have all been MADE to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- Believers are a *“new creation”*—MADE by God (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10; James 1:18).

Because this is an aspect of God that is little proclaimed, I feel compelled to further declare what God MAKES. There is a remarkable depth to this facet of Divine activity. I am not stating these things to merely affirm their possibility. Rather, I intend for this to confirm that God is able to fulfill His promises to Israel.

- God **makes** dumb, deaf, seeing, and blind (Ex 4:11).
- He **makes** alive (1 Sam 2:6).
- He **makes** poor and rich (1 Sam 2:7).
- He **makes** a person’s way perfect (2 Sam 22:33; Psa 18:32).
- He **makes** sore and binds up (Job 5:18).
- He **makes** the heart soft (Job 23:16).
- He **makes** the trusting soul to lie down in green pastures (Psa 23:2).

Things God Made or Caused

It is necessary to confirm that God can, and does, intrude into human affairs, causing things to happen. Man is not the governor of his own affairs, and his will is not invincible.

- God MADE everything Joseph did to prosper (Gen 39:3,23; 45:8,9).
- He MADE Israel dwell in booths when they came out of Egypt (Lev 23:43).
- He MADE Israel wander (Num 32:13).
- He MADE the heart of the king of Heshbon obstinate (Deut 2:30).
- He MADE Israel joyful (Ezra 6:22; Neh 12:43).
- He MADE man’s strength to fail (Lam 1:14).

- He MADE Israel's joyful shouting to cease (Isa 16:10).
- He MADE sighing to cease (Isa 21:2).
- He MADE Ezekiel's face strong, or determined (Ezek 3:8-9).
- He MADE David glad (Psa 92:4).
- He MADE David wiser than his counselors (Psa 119:98).
- He MADE Israel to err, and wander from His ways (Isa 63:17).

The purpose for this brief diversion is to anchor our faith in the God who promises, and cannot lie. The fulfillment of His commitments is something that brings great glory to Him. It is also within both His prerogatives and power to bring

about that fulfillment in spite of seemingly impossible circumstances. The creation of the nation of Israel, and the birth of her ultimate offspring, Jesus, were impossible from the human point of view. Why should anyone think the fulfillment of His promises to them is any less possible? Is not the One who gave the promise capable of fulfilling it? Faith replies in the reasoning of our father Abraham: *"And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform"* (Rom 4:20).

Men are often prone to think of God's promises as though they were mere possibilities. There must be a deliverance

from this mind-set if faith is ever to flourish. If we are made *"partakers of the Divine nature"* through the *"exceeding great and precious promises of God"* (2 Pet 1:4), the heart must be persuaded of the commitment of God to fulfill them. It is the prerogative of faith to do this.

Now, the Spirit will show us that God is absolutely righteous in all of His workings. Whatever He causes is RIGHT, whether it is cutting off branches, grafting in wild olive branches, or grafting in again the branches that were cut off. It is vital that we see this truth, in order that our faith might rest confidently in the One who has saved and keeps us.

IS GOD UNRIGHTEOUS?

" 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! (God forbid! ^{KJV})." It is the manner of the Spirit to foresee fleshly doubts and answer them. These are always questions of doubt, erupting from hearts that are not pure or dominated by faith. They are not asked in a quest to find the truth, but are objections to the truth that has been declared. The Lord always answers such questions in a straightforward manner, and with minimal explanation. It is not God's manner to reason extensively with the flesh. The objections raised by the flesh are not valid. Therefore, they are always answered with affirmations, not reasoning.

IS THERE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS WITH GOD?

Flesh erroneously reasons, "There IS unrighteousness with God." While those precise words may not comprise the reasoning, yet they encapsulate how flesh thinks. The Spirit comes to grips with real issues, not the smokescreen reasoning of the carnal man. This is precisely why the flesh refuses to believe and obey God. It is why it is hostile toward the Creator. **It does not believe God is right.**

Jewish flesh reasons that God is not right in cutting off those who did not believe. Gentile flesh reasons that God is not right in keeping Israel beloved for the

father's sake, or in grafting them in again. Both lines of thought are completely wrong. Contemporaries would chide God by saying He was not being "fair," or that the difficulties that came upon them did not make sense, or were even unjust.

To be even more specific, this rhetorical question is asked because of the strong statements the Spirit has made. Ponder some of them.

- Was God unrighteous for restricting

Critical aspects of God's character were introduced in chapter eight. They were associated with His great salvation, and were addressed to our faith. Divine foreknowledge and predestination were declared to be pillars that are prominent in extricating men from sin and conforming them to the image of God's Son

Divine discretion is a fact. Yet it cannot be received by the flesh, which insists on such things as the "unconditional love" of everyone, even though no such affirmation is found in Scripture. It balks at God choosing a people independently of their own worthiness or achievement. Flesh cannot abide a God who actually rejects others who, like many, have an appearance of being good and industrious--like Ishmael and Esau. But God makes such choices, and does so righteously.

the recognized seed of Abraham as those coming through Isaac? (9:7-8)

- Was God unrighteous in loving Jacob and hating Esau before they were born? (9:11a)
- Was God unrighteous in loving Jacob and hating Esau independently of any good or evil they had done? (9:11b)
- Was God unrighteous in determining that the elder Esau should serve the younger Jacob, overriding the rights of the firstborn? (9:12)

Critical aspects of God's character

were introduced in chapter eight. They were associated with His great salvation, and were addressed to our faith. Divine foreknowledge and predestination were declared to be pillars that are prominent in extricating men from sin and conforming them to the image of God's Son (8:29-30). These qualities have also been declared as evident in the choice of the nation of Israel, and the persons of Isaac and Jacob. It is imperative that we acknowledge God was righteous in all of these things, making no attempt to explain them with the mind of the flesh.

I want to draw particular attention to the manner in which the Spirit answers the hypothetical question, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" This will not be the kind of answer a worldly philosopher would want. Nor, indeed, will it satisfy the idle curiosity of the religious "scholar." Nevertheless, this is Divine reasoning, and we do well to adapt our thinking to it.

GOD FORBID!

The KJV and ASV versions reads "God forbid," which is the expression of the sense of the text rather than a literal translation. Sophists object to the use of this expression, saying it is not a proper translation. They allow for the sense of words elsewhere, but not here.

The words from which this expression is translated are μη γένοιτο. This phrase is used fifteen times in the New Testament Scriptures, and is always an extremely strong expression (Lk 20:16; Rom 3:4,6, 31; 6:2,15; 7:7,13; 9:14; 11:1,11; 1 Cor 6:15; Gal 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). It is translated in a variety of ways.

"Certainly not,"^{NKJV} "May it never be,"^{NASB} "Not at all,"^{NIV} "By no means,"^{NRSV} "Out of the question,"^{NJB} and "Of course not."^{NAB}

It is an expression of strong aversion to the very thought that is suggested. The

manner is an imagination to be cast down (2 Cor 10:5-6). This is precisely what the following verses will do. They will throw the notion that God is unrighteous down to the ground, trampling it under the feet of Divine reasoning.

This will not be the kind of answer a worldly philosopher would want. Nor, indeed, will it satisfy the idle curiosity of the religious "scholar." Nevertheless, this is Divine reasoning, and we do well to adapt our thinking to it.

words "God forbid" would be equivalent to saying, "May the Lord stop such a thought from entering my mind!" It expresses the spirit of the text, which is being uttered before the Almighty God, as well as unto finite man. It is best not to attempt to explain the text academically, or from a mere linguistic point of view. It is too strong of an expression to take that approach. **The idea is that God has made no provision whatsoever to entertain such a thought.** It is also that the man of God is repulsed by the very idea, and calls upon the Lord to protect him from such an imagination.

Men are simply not allowed to entertain questions about whether or not God is right. He IS righteous in all of His doings, and there is to be no question about it – particularly from those who "have sinned and come short of His glory" (3:23). The idea that it is possible for God to choose or work in an unrighteous

Whether it is Naaman questioning the propriety of dipping seven times in the River Jordan (2 Kgs 5:10-12), or king Saul questioning the wisdom of totally destroying the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:14-19), questioning the decrees and purposes of God is never right. It will not be tolerated by the all-wise God!

The people of God must exercise themselves to adopt a view of God and Scripture that yields to faith, not to reason. Although men are fond of theological views that promote questions, no such encouragement is found in the Word of God. Scripture promotes faith, for "faith cometh by hearing," not reasoning (Rom 10:17). If this seems strong, it will shortly appear to be extremely mild in the blazing glory of God's answer. He will not reason with flesh, but will strongly affirm the way things really are. We will be called to believe God and not question Him or doubt His righteousness.

MERCY IS GIVEN BY DIVINE DISCRETION

¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

Here is a stirring challenge to those who insist on passing the Word of God through humanly devised filters, or hermeneutics. I realize it is not popular to speak in this manner, and yet it is

necessary to do so. In the past few decades, there has been a remarkable trend toward human philosophizing in religion. The inclination has always been there, but never in such proportions as it has been since knowledge has been deified in the professed church.

The Spirit will simply affirm the truth-truth that has been asserted by God

Himself. He will offer no extended rationale for the statement as men desire, but will declare this is what God does. It is the business of men to bring their thinking into accord with this affirmation. What is more, until they do, they are wrong, and nothing will change that except to acknowledge that God is right in what He does. It is neither right nor safe to think in contradiction of God.

The statement is taken from Exodus 33:19, where God Almighty is showing His glory—His real Person—to Moses, the servant of God. In those days, this was not something everyone heard. But in our day, it is being published throughout the world in Paul’s exposition of the Gospel of Christ. Moses had asked the Lord, “Show me Thy glory.” Here was God’s response. *“I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and **will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.**”*

Notice, God is exposing Moses to His “goodness,” and is proclaiming His own Divine character—His “name.” This is not a novel or irrelevant view, but an essential one. In the very revelation given to Moses, Divine discretion was used. The goodness of the Lord, together with a declaration of His nature, was vouchsafed to Moses **alone**. God was not doing this merely because Moses asked, but because He willed to do so—God WANTED to do this.

The reading of the text appears clumsy, yet the meaning will come home to your heart. The idea expressed is *“I will have mercy on whomever I will [to have] mercy.”* A few versions pick up on this thought. *“I will show mercy to whom I will, I will take pity on whom I will.”*^{NAB} *“I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.”*^{NLT} Whoever receives mercy from God receives it because He wills to show them mercy. Whoever receives compassion from God receives it because He wills to show it to them. He has not been motivated by their need of mercy and compassion, nor because they have sought it from Him. He has been moved by His own beneficent heart.

God chose Israel because He wanted to! He loves them for the fathers’ sakes because He wants to. He chose Isaac because He wanted to! He loved Jacob because He wanted to! If that is not enough for a person, then that person requires too much. It is unwise, indeed, to refuse God the right to do what He wants.

This answer is much like the one given in one of our Lord’s matchless parables. Declaring the Kingdom of God to be like a householder, or landowner, He spoke of that householder hiring groups of laborers throughout the day. He hired some “early in the morning,” some at “the third hour,” some at the “sixth and ninth hour,” and some at the “eleventh hour” (6:00 AM, 9:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 3:00 PM, and 5:00 PM). At the conclusion of the day, “the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire,

agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (Matt 20:1-16). The response reads this way in the NIV. **“I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”** Remember, Jesus is showing us the manner of the Kingdom! He is showing us the Father and His will.

Care must be taken when dealing with this facet of the Divine nature. There must be no provision for the entrance of doubt or unbelief. Nor, indeed, can we allow the tenderhearted to be crushed or bruised. God is not only righteous, He is also good.

The householder declared that his will and nature fully justified what he did. Thus, no fault could be found with it. Besides this, the laborers agreed to work for the wage, and it was none of their affair what other laborers received. That was given purely at the discretion of himself. It was not open for discussion. Further, his wages were an expression of goodness, not injustice.

Thus, no Gentile can raise an objection because mercy is still held out to the Jews. God does what He desires, and that should be good enough for us. We have agreed to receive His salvation, and have absolutely no input on what He desires for others – particularly “the Israelites,” Paul’s kinsmen according to the flesh. Recognizing this circumstance, Paul simply embraced the mind of the Lord concerning the Jews, refusing to question Divine preferences.

NOT A COLD DOCTRINE

Care must be taken when dealing with this facet of the Divine nature. There must be no provision for the entrance of doubt or unbelief. Nor, indeed, can we allow the tenderhearted to be crushed or bruised. God is not only righteous, He is also good. The very fact that He chooses to whom He will show mercy and compassion is an expression of His goodness. To confirm this, the Lord has condescended to reveal to the sons of men those to whom He wills to show mercy and compassion. Ponder what He says.

beginning from the last unto the first.” Beginning at the last and ending with the first, he gave every laborer an identical wage: “a penny,” or “a denarius.”^{NKJV}

The workers had not worked identical hours. Some worked twelve hours, others, nine, others, six, others three, and some only one hour. Therefore, the ones working longer remonstrated at the wages they received. It is written, *“they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.”* I should suppose their objection would be acknowledged as proper by most any labor consultant. But that is not a proper view.

Remembering that this is our Lord’s depiction of the Kingdom of God, consider the answer given to the complainers. *“But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou*

☐ *“ . . . to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite*

spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa 66:2).

- *"The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit"* (Psa 34:18).
- *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise"* (Psa 51:17).
- *"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matt 5:7).

It simply is not possible to be in any of the above categories and God NOT desire to show you mercy and compassion. He is faithful to His Person and Word.

Thus, we will not stumble at what God has said about Himself showing mercy to those He wills. That is His prerogative, and we have no right to question it. That circumstance, however, brings no disadvantage to anyone who desires mercy and seeks to find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:15-16).

The Manner of God's Answer

I cannot leave this point without again drawing your attention to the way in which God answers the objections of the flesh. He appeals to **His nature and will**, not to human reason. He does not dialog with us in the flesh, thereby leaving

us depending on natural resources. In so doing, faith is being promoted. He is leading us to trust Him, knowing He cannot do what is wrong, or conduct Himself unrighteously.

He is also impressing upon us the inferiority and unacceptability of human reasoning. **If we do not believe His words, they will confuse us.** As much as lies within us, we must labor to promote these vital perceptions in our preaching and teaching, never gravitating to the flesh. Whenever possible, we must extend ourselves to not leave men in the flesh, but in the Spirit.

WILL AND EFFORT ARE NOT THE FOUNDATION

"¹⁶ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."

As we proceed through this passage, it will become very apparent to you that the Spirit is eager to justify God. The one who

shows mercy."^{NRSV} *"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."*^{NIB} *"So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."*^{NAU} *"So then, it is not by the desire or by the attempt of man, but by the mercy of God."*

academic level, which is inferior. Even though the Spirit knows the response of flesh to such a teaching, He fairly shouts it out to us, showing that no man can stand before the God of heaven upon the basis of merit.

A POINT OF CLARITY

Before I go further with this matter, allow me to deal with a critical point. It is possible that a person might consider this statement either irrelevant, or beyond any possible comprehension. Such a person might reason, "If this is the case, then what point is there to seeking the Lord, or extending myself to please Him? If receiving mercy all depends upon what God desires, and has nothing to do with my desire or effort, I see no point to being fervent in my quest to lay hold on eternal life."

This is a completely erroneous way of reasoning, and has been provoked by considering the wrong things. Ponder the text while recognizing that in ourselves, that is in our flesh, nothing good resides (7:18). Consider how frail you really are, so that you cannot do the things you desire, but find another law within you, warring against the law of your mind (7:18,23). If these things be true, and they surely are, is it not good to know that receiving the mercy of God is based upon God's desire and not your performance? The very concept of salvation is based upon our helplessness and hopelessness. That is why we need a Savior.

This verse is saying the REASON for our salvation is found in God who has shown us mercy. It cannot be traced to our worthiness. It cannot even be traced to our willingness, or to our effort. Those things are not foundations of salvation, for they are neither consistent nor flawless.

hears what the Spirit is saying to the churches will conclude that *"all things are of God"* (2 Cor 5:18; Rom 11:36), and that God is righteous in all that He does. This verse particularly confirms this to be the case.

Other versions read, *"So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."*^{NASB} *"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."*^{NIV} *"So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who*

"So it depends not upon a person's will or exertion, but upon God, who shows mercy."^{NAB} *"So receiving God's promise is not up to us. We can't get it by choosing it or working hard for it. God will show mercy to anyone he chooses."*^{NLT} *"So it is not a matter of what any person wants or what any person does, but only of God having mercy."*^{NJB}

I have taken the time to list the various translations of this verse to confirm there is no question concerning the wording of the text, even on an

This verse is saying the REASON for our salvation is found in God who has shown us mercy. It cannot be traced to our worthiness. It cannot even be traced to our willingness, or to our effort. Those things are not foundations of salvation, for they are neither consistent nor flawless. To be sure, your will is involved, as well as your effort, but not on the foundational level. They are not what drives the Kingdom of God.

MANY HAVE DESIRED

Jesus once spoke of some noble souls who fervently desired to see the things made known in Himself. *“For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them”* (Matt 13:17). These were not the dregs of the human race. They were *“prophets and righteous men.”* If human will was sufficient to bring the blessing, they would surely have seen Christ’s day. If the effort of men could bring the blessing, these righteous men would have obtained it. However, they lived in spiritually primitive times that had not yet been fully cultivated for the blessing. Thus, they did not see what they desired while they remained in this world.

God’s mercy did not exclude them, of that you may be sure. We will see them in the glorified state (Lk 13:28-30). Christ’s atoning death reached backward, making them fully acceptable before God.

When God willed to bestow the mercy and compassion experienced in salvation, it came to a *“sinful woman”* (Lk 7:37-48), a lowly publican (Lk 19:5-9), and even *“publicans and harlots”* (Matt 21:31). I understand, it also came to godly Simeon, Anna, and Nathaniel. But the point of our text is that it was driven by God’s desire. **That** is what compelled Him to do what He did. Further, it was righteous, and will be openly shown to be so in the day of judgment. At that time, there will be no argument about the reason for our salvation.

THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR

The glory of our time is that this is

“the acceptable year of the Lord.” This is the time when the door of salvation has been thrown open, and the mighty God, in strict accord with His own will, has declared *“Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”* (Rev 22:17). Let no one stand in fear and doubt, wondering whether God desires to show mercy and compassion to them! The Gospel announces this is the time He is receiving all who come to Him.

When Jesus began preaching, He returned to His home town, choosing to

Let no one stand in fear and doubt, wondering whether God desires to show mercy and compassion to them! The Gospel announces this is the time He is receiving all who come to Him.

throw open the door of salvation in a local synagogue. On that day, He read from the book of Isaiah. *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”* Having closed the book, he returned it to the synagogue attendant, and sat down. With the eyes of everyone in the synagogue riveted upon Him, He boldly announced, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”* (Lk 4:18-21). **He had unveiled the heart of God!** He revealed what God wanted to do.

Since the death, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus, the desire of God to show mercy and compassion has been preached throughout the world. It is an honest and truthful message that only requires faith to be experienced.

THE DOOR WILL CLOSE

There will come a time when this

wonderful door will close. Then, if men have not availed themselves of the very real invitation, it will be confirmed to them that man’s will and man’s effort cannot open it. In his parable of the ten virgins, Jesus referred to His own return. It will be a time when some who were invited, and who even made some cursory preparations, will be excluded. Following His return, Jesus said *“the door was shut.”* When those who spurned His revealed will came, *“saying, Lord, Lord, open to us,”* they were told, *“I know you not”* (Matt 25:1-12).

They wanted to come in, but could not. It is *“not of him that willeth.”* They extended effort to go to the door, but it was too late. *“It is not of him that runneth.”* They learned too late, that salvation is *“of the Lord.”* When He opens the door of salvation, no one can shut it. And, when it is finally shut, no one will be able to open it.

It is no wonder the Spirit admonishes us, **“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.’ Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire”** (Heb 12:25-29). Our solemn responsibility is to NOT spurn the words of the Savior who speaks from heaven. To do so will eventuate in sure condemnation.

Our text, then, is designed to provoke us to a firm and unwavering reliance upon, and attentiveness to, the Lord Jesus. Our sensitivity to Him must be raised. We might summarize it this way.

- Rely completely upon the Lord to save you. Do not place confidence in

yourself.

- ❑ Give the glory to the Lord for every aspect of your salvation.
- ❑ Avail yourself fully of the “*acceptable year*”—the time of Divine acceptance, that was announced by Jesus, and which He is now fulfilling.

Because this passage of Scripture is generally neglected, it has a strange sound to many. It also deals with profound Kingdom realities that are not being declared with power and consistency. For this reason many good and sincere believers are intimidated by these things,

thus not regarding them as necessary or important. I encourage you to fight against such tendencies. Like all Scripture, these things have been written for our “*learning*,” and are “*profitable*” for things that equip you for serving God in your life (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

PHARAOH WAS RAISED UP BY GOD

“¹⁷ *For the Scripture says to 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.”¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.*”

Here we come to a text that is most difficult for the flesh. It will not fit into a convenient theology that emphasizes man’s will. Of course, one of the aspects of salvation that must not be overlooked, particularly when considering the Jews, is that the natural desires of men actually excluded them from Divine acceptance. The very presence of a desire for what God offers confirms the presence of His power. As the 110th Psalm prophesied, which is clearly a Messianic Psalm, “*Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power*”^{NASB} (v 3).

Keep in your mind that the Spirit is affirming realities that show God is righteous, and that there is no unrighteousness with Him. If the reasoning appears too difficult, then you must get into the realm from which it is spoken—the “*heavenly places*.” Faith will be able to receive this, even though your understanding lags behind, unable for the moment to see the sense of it all. However, faith will not hold this proclamation long until your understanding will no longer be “*unfruitful*” (1 Cor 14:14).

I want to again emphasize that the Spirit is showing us God is not unrighteous in any of His doings. He will now turn our attention to a key despot in Scripture. He will account for the presence of this despot, and the purpose that he served. You may or may not agree with what is said, but it is the truth, and

is to be acknowledged by you.

FOUNDED UPON SCRIPTURE

The Holy Spirit sends us straight to Scripture to confirm there is no unrighteousness with God: “*For the Scripture says . . .*”.

- ❑ Jesus spoke in the same manner. “*He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:39).
- ❑ When speaking of Judas, He said, “*I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me . . . and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled*” (John 13:18).
- ❑ Earlier in Romans, Paul reasoned, “*For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness*” (Rom 4:3).
- ❑ Confirming the value of faith, it is written, “*For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed*” (Rom 10:11).
- ❑ The Gospel itself is confirmed by Scripture. “*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed*” (Gal 3:8).
- ❑ The guilt of humanity and the appointed means to salvation are

declared by Scripture. “*But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe*” (Gal 3:22).

- ❑ The distinction of the children of promise from the children of Law is confirmed by Scripture. “*Nevertheless*

Of course, one of the aspects of salvation that must not be overlooked, particularly when considering the Jews, is that the natural desires of men actually excluded them from Divine acceptance.

what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free” (Gal 4:30).

Notice that in these texts “*Scripture*” is used in the singular. This is more than a reference to a specific text of Scripture. It speaks of a unified body of articulated truth that is intended to instruct the people of God. Scripture, in this case, is a Divinely orchestrated history of the purpose of God and its outworking among men. It stands for the expression of the mind of God, and is a solid foundation for both faith and hope. There is no chance that it is not true and righteous.

THE PERSON OF PHARAOH

“For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh.”

Pharaoh is one of the principle characters of Scripture. Technically, the term “Pharaoh” is a general word denoting an Egyptian king. Abram confronted a “Pharaoh” in his trip from Ur to Canaan (Gen 12:15-18). Joseph served Potiphar, who was an officer of another Pharaoh (Gen 39:1). Joseph later became ruler of Egypt, second only to that Pharaoh (Gen 41:39-41). Moses was born during the reign of a Pharaoh (Ex 1:22-2:5).

Pharaoh remonstrated, saying he did not know the Lord, and would not let the people go (Ex 5:1-2). The following events encapsulate the activity of this Pharaoh.

- ❑ Following Moses’ order to let the people go, he increased their burden, making them gather their own straw for brick making (Ex 5:6-8).
- ❑ The people were scattered throughout the land of Egypt to gather straw (5:12).

The hard bondage brought on by this Pharaoh caused Israel to cry out in sorrow, and God heard them. The longevity of their tenure in Egypt allowed for a supernatural expansion of their numbers, until they even posed a threat to the Egyptians

The Pharaoh referenced by our text is the one confronted by Moses when the time came for God to deliver Israel from Egypt. Originally, the Israelites went into Egypt seventy strong. They were treated with respect, given a portion of the land to dwell in, and fared very well. However, *“when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph”* (Acts 7:17-18). That Pharaoh turned against Israel, forcing them to work with hard rigor, and enslaving them to build his treasure cities, *“Pithom and Raamses”* (Ex 1:11).

The hard bondage brought on by this Pharaoh caused Israel to cry out in sorrow, and God heard them. The longevity of their tenure in Egypt allowed for a supernatural expansion of their numbers, until they even posed a threat to the Egyptians (Ex 1:7,12,20).

At the right time, God called Moses, who had been raised in Egypt, yet had been keeping his father-in-law’s sheep on the back side of the desert (Ex 3:1-15). He was to appear before Pharaoh and command him in the name of the Lord, *“Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.”*

- ❑ The Lord sent Moses back to Pharaoh, telling Moses he would now see what **He** would do Pharaoh (6:1). God declared He would harden Pharaoh’s heart and multiply His signs and wonders in Egypt (7:1-3).
- ❑ When Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and it became a snake, Pharaoh called for his magicians, who did the same with their rods. When Aaron’s rod swallowed their rods, **God “hardened Pharaoh’s heart”** and he refused to listen to Moses and Aaron (7:10-14).
- ❑ In the first plague, Aaron stretched his rod over the waters of Egypt and they became blood. After the magicians of Egypt did the same with their enchantments *“Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,”* and he did not listen to Moses and Aaron (7:15-22). Pharaoh returned to his house, unmoved by what he saw (7:23).
- ❑ In the second plague, Aaron stretched his rod over the waters of Egypt and frogs came out of them, covering the land of Egypt. When the Egyptian magicians did the same, Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, asking them to entreat the Lord for him, to take away the frogs. Moses did this, the Lord hearkened, and the frogs died out in the houses, villages, and

fields. When Pharaoh saw there was relief **“he hardened his heart,”** refusing to listen to Moses and Aaron (8:1-15).

- ❑ In the third plague Aaron stretched out his rod, striking the dust of the earth. The dust became lice throughout the land of Egypt, covering both man and beast. The Egyptian magicians were unable to duplicate this feat, and were never again able to perform their arts as in the first two plagues. They told Pharaoh, *“This is the finger of God!”* Nevertheless, *“Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said”* (8:16-19).
- ❑ Early the next morning, God told Moses to stand before Pharaoh and demand, *“Let my people go, that they may serve me.”* If he refused, the plague of flies would come. He refused. (8:20).
- ❑ In the fourth plague, swarms of flies came upon the people, filled their houses, and were upon the ground. In the plague, the land of Goshen, where Israel dwelt, was exempted. No flies were there, as God made a distinction between His people and the Egyptians. Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron saying, *“Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land [of Egypt].”* Moses refused, saying they had to go three days journey from the wicked land of Egypt before they could make sacrifice to God. Pharaoh said he would let them go, but they could *“not go very far away.”* He begged that they entreat God for him, and Moses said they would. God heard Moses, removing the flies, so that *“there remained not one.”* Nevertheless, **“Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go”** (8:21-32).
- ❑ Again, the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, telling him to let the people go. If he refused, God would send a terrible plague upon all the livestock of Egypt. Pharaoh refused (9:1-5).
- ❑ In the fifth plague a grievous pestilence was sent upon all the cattle of Egypt—horses, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep. Israel’s area (Goshen) was again exempted. *“All the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.”*

Pharaoh sent to see the condition of Israel's cattle, and *"there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead."* At that time, *"the heart of Pharaoh was **hardened**, and he did not let the people go"* (9:6-7).

- In the sixth plague, Moses took ashes from a furnace (soot), and threw it into the sky before the face of Pharaoh. It became a fine dust that fell upon both man and beast throughout the land. As it fell upon man and beast, festering boils broke out upon them. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for they were upon them as well as the other Egyptians. At that time *"**the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses"*** (9:8-12).
- At this time, the Lord sent a special rebuke to Pharaoh for His obstinance. Our text is found in this rebuke. *"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth. Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. **But indeed for this 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.** As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go"^{NKJB} (9:13-17).*
- In the seventh plague the Lord brought a grievous hail upon Egypt, such as had never before been experienced. Having mercy upon them, God told the Egyptians to gather everything they had in the field, for it would die from the hail if it remained there. Those who feared God in Pharaoh's house got their servants and cattle out of the fields as told. When the hail came, it was mingled with fire. It struck every man, beast, and herb of the field, and *"broke every tree."* This time Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, making a startling confession. *"I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and*

I and my people are wicked." He begged Moses and Aaron to entreat the Lord for him, *"that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer."* Moses said he would do this, causing the thunder and hail to cease, that Pharaoh would know the earth was the Lord's. Yet, Moses added, *"But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God."* It is then noted that only the flax and barley had been destroyed in the plague of hail. The wheat and rye remained, for they were not yet fully grown. When Pharaoh saw that the thunder and hail had ceased, *"he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses"* (9:18-34).

- God then told Moses to go in before Pharaoh, *"for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."* He was to rebuke Pharaoh saying, *"Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory."* The locusts would cover the earth so that it could not even be seen. They would eat every plant that remained, and every tree of the field. They would fill the houses of every one in Egypt, including Pharaoh. When Moses left, Pharaoh's servants said to him, *"How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?"* Pharaoh then called for Moses and Aaron saying, *"Go, serve the LORD your God. Who are the ones that are going?"* Moses informed him all would be going, old and young, sons and daughters, flocks and herds. Pharaoh refused to meet the terms, saying only the men could go. Moses and Aaron were then driven from his

presence (10:1-8).

- In the eighth plague the Lord brought an east wind upon the land. It brought locusts who went all over the land of Egypt, resting on all the territory of Egypt. They were severe, and were a unique kind of locust that had never before, nor since, existed. They covered the land and consumed all remaining vegetation. Pharaoh was so affected he called for Moses and Aaron in haste, saying, *"I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only."* Moses did entreat the Lord, the Lord brought in a west wind, and it carried all of the locusts out of Egypt, depositing them in the sea. Not one locust remained in Egypt. The Scripture then says, *"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go"* (10:9-20).
- In the ninth plague, Moses stretched his hand toward heaven *"that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt."* It was a *"thick darkness,"* lasting for three days. The Egyptians could not see each other, and no one rose from their place for three days. During this plague *"all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."* Pharaoh finally called for Moses and Aaron pleading, *"Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you."* Moses refused, saying the livestock had to go with them, and *"not a hoof shall be left behind."* Even though Pharaoh appeared to be a little sensitive, it is written, *"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go."* The extent of that hardening is seen in Pharaoh's response. *"Then Pharaoh said to him, 'Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!'"* Moses confirmed Pharaoh's doom when he said, *"You have spoken well. I will never see your face again"* (10:21-29).
- In the tenth plague, the Lord made preparation by having all of the people to ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of gold and silver. He then

gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. The Scriptures tell us the Egyptians gave the Israelites what they asked, and they *“spoiled the Egyptians”* (Ex 12:36). The Passover was instituted that night, and was the means of preserving the firstborn of every Israelite family. At midnight, the Lord moved through the land killing the firstborn in every Egyptian house, and of the animals as well. A great cry of despair rose from Egypt, yet not even a dog moved his tongue against an Israelite. When the death of the firstborn occurred, Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron at night saying, *“Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.”*

□ Following the exodus of the Israelites, the hearts of Pharaoh and the people were turned against Israel. Believing they had done the wrong thing, Pharaoh *“made ready his chariot and took his people with him. Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt*

with captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness” (14:6-8).

□ As Israel stood before the Red Sea, fearful of the pursuing Egyptians, God told them He would fight for them. They were not to fear. He would cause them to walk through the Red sea. The Lord then said, *“And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen”* (14:9-17).

□ Stubbornly, the Egyptians pursued the Israelites, attempting to also pass through the sea on dry ground. The Lord looked down upon them through the pillar of fire and cloud, and *“He troubled the army of the Egyptians.”* Still, they moved forward. He even took the wheels off of their chariots, yet they drove on, even though they did so with great *“difficulty.”* Then, when they were all in the midst of the

Red Sea, the Lord commanded Moses to stretch his hand over the sea, causing the waters to return to their full depth. *“Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained”* (14:18-28).

God Hardened His Heart

Because the consideration of Pharaoh is vital to this passage, I have taken the time to provide an unusual amount of

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In the sections just listed, there are fourteen references to Pharaoh’s heart being hardened. Eleven of them declare it was something done TO Pharaoh. These include *“God hardened,” “was hardened,” “grew hard,” “the Lord hardened,” “I have hardened,”* and *“I indeed will harden.”* The first two references to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart refer to the Lord. Three references declare Pharaoh did it himself.

When God called Moses, He told him of the coming obstinance of Pharaoh. He did NOT say Pharaoh would harden his heart. Rather, He declared, *“I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go”* (Ex 4:21; 7:3). These statements were both made in advance of the actual hardening – yet they make no reference to Pharaoh hardening his heart himself. **In fact, the words “he will harden his heart” and “Pharaoh will harden his**

heart” are not even found in the Bible. The words *“will harden”* occur only four times in any version of standard Scripture (Ex 4:21; 7:3; 14:4,17, KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV). In every case they refer to Pharaoh and his relation to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. In every case, it is God who did it.

I say this because some take the position that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart because he had first done so. That is, God ratified what Pharaoh himself had done, casting it, as it were, in stone. I myself once embraced this view, thinking it would present God in a more just and righteous stance. However, there is absolutely nothing in Scripture to support this view. In fact, it completely neutralizes the truth being taught in this text. God said **He** was going to harden Pharaoh’s heart. The first two references to his hardened heart credit it to God. The final observation of the chain of events credit it to God.

It is clear that Pharaoh’s action was the result of God’s work, not Pharaoh’s. Further, there is no reasonable explanation for Pharaoh’s reaction to God’s word and judgments apart from God hardening his heart. There is no form of reason that can explain his obstinance. Of course, this is the very point of the text, and the Spirit will affirm the whole history of Pharaoh was intentional, orchestrated by God Himself. God DID harden Pharaoh’s heart. He not only affirms it, but now erects teaching upon that fact. I understand this raises questions in the minds of some. However, the doctrine is not intended to raise questions, but trust. We do well to allow it to do so.

GOD RAISED PHARAOH UP

“Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up.” The Scriptures, when believed, will leave us trusting in a God whose judgments are *“unsearchable,”* and ways are *“past finding out”* (Rom 11:33). The god who fits neatly into human logic and theological systems is not the true God.

The only explanation for the appearance of Pharaoh is God! God

declares ***"I RAISED YOU UP!"*** He did not say "I used you," but *"I raised you up."* Pharaoh's presence in history is owing to a Divine purpose.

For whatever it is worth, the Greek word from which *"raised"* is translated is *ἐξήγειρά*. Its meaning is "cause to appear in history, call, into being, or raise up." In his Word Studies, Vincent says of the use of this word in our text, "Hebrew, *caused thee to stand*. Sept., *διετηρήθης thou wast preserved alive*. Only once elsewhere in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 6:14, of raising from the dead. The meaning here is general, *allowed thee to appear; brought, thee forward on the stage of events*, as Zechariah 11:16. So the simple verb in Matthew 11:11; John 7:52. Other explanations are, *preserved thee alive*, as Sept., *excited thee to opposition*, as Habakkuk 1:6; *created thee*." Thayer, a renown Greek lexographer, says of the use of this word in Romans 9:17, *"to rouse up, stir up, incite to resistance."* He also says of some of its historical usage, *"I have raised thee up into life, caused thee to exist, or I have raised thee to a public position, set thee up as a king."*^{Thayers Greek-English Lexicon}

These language references are not intended to carry the weight of Scripture. Nor, indeed, are they to be viewed as proofs of the truth of Scripture. I give them only to show that the statement made in our text is clear from any point of view. There may be a wide divergence of opinion on the implications of this text, but there cannot be on the statement of the text itself. Further, our faith must rest upon statement, not implication; upon affirmation, not explanation.

The appearance of Pharaoh is for evil, is as the appearance of Melchizedec was for good (Gen 14:18; Psa 110:4; Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:110-21). Both individuals can only be accounted for in the purpose of God. Neither of them have any significance whatsoever outside of that Divine purpose.

God Has Raised Up People

The notion of God raising up people is not a strange one for those familiar with Scripture. God is said to have *"raised up judges"* (Judges 2:16), *"a deliverer to the*

children of Israel" (Othniel, Judges 3:9), *"David"* (2 Sam 23:1), and *"one from the North"* (Isa 41:25), etc. God raised up Cyrus, stirred up his spirit, gave him all the kingdoms of the earth, and charged him with building the temple (2 Chron 36:22-23). John the Baptist is described as *"a man sent from God, whose name was John"* (John 1:6). God stirred up Hadad the Edomite to be an adversary to Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14). It should not surprise us that God is said to have raised someone up—causing them to appear on the trestle board of eternal purpose.

If we have difficulties correlating this with other affirmations of Scripture, that

If we have difficulties correlating this with other affirmations of Scripture, that difficulty does not justify neutralizing the text. No person is right in forcing the text to mean something other than what God said. Nor, indeed, can we simply ignore the text, hoping that sometime in the future we may be able to see it more clearly.

difficulty does not justify neutralizing the text. No person is right in forcing the text to mean something other than what God said. Nor, indeed, can we simply ignore the text, hoping that sometime in the future we may be able to see it more clearly. Because Divine instruction and argument is based upon this text, we must believe it, even though we cannot understand it to our own satisfaction. If we fail to do this, the teaching that follows at once becomes insignificant.

The Spirit is not presenting us with some novel and inconsequential doctrine. If you are tempted to imagine this has nothing to do with salvation, and is therefore unimportant, ponder that the Spirit is confirming there is no unrighteousness with God. It is not possible for anything to be more closely associated with our salvation than God's righteousness.

THE DIVINE INTENTION

"Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." You may not think that is upright, but the Spirit is, by this very statement, confirming that God IS righteous. **The extent to which God's purpose is being served by people may not be known, but that HIS purpose IS being served, even by despots, MUST be known!**

In this matter, it is confirmed that God alone *"is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased"* (Psa 115:3). Again it is written, *"Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places"* (Psa 135:6).

How appropriate that God has thus revealed Himself. ***"The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them"*** (1 Sam 2:7-8). When God brought the Assyrians to judge Judah, it

appeared as though they were operating in their own strength, and according to their own purpose. Yet God said of them, ***"O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the staff in their hand is Mine indignation"*** (Isa 10:5). They were raised up!

In the case of Pharaoh, the objective was not the same as with the Assyrians, but it was still God's objective. Our text shows that purpose to be twofold.

That I Might Show My Power In Thee

Other translations read, *"to demonstrate My power in you,"*^{NASB} *"that I might display my power in you,"*^{NIV} *"so that I might make my power seen in you."*^{BBE}

Power in Deliverance. In Pharaoh, God made known that the opposition of the greatest ruler upon earth could not

stop Him from delivering His people. They came out of Egypt with a high hand, and at the appointed time, even though the ruler of the land in which they resided said they could not.

Power in Judgment. God revealed His power by judging the gods of Egypt, overthrowing them in the plagues. In the last plague God said, *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD”* (Ex 12:12). The gods of Egypt could not turn the waters from blood to water. They could not get rid of frogs, flies, or lice. They could not heal the plagues that broke out upon man and beast. They could not stop the hail, purge the land of locusts, or cure the cattle. They were powerless to produce light when God brought darkness, and they could not keep the firstborn of their worshipers alive.

Power in overturning the counsel of the ungodly. Pharaoh, the singularly most powerful ruler in the world, determined NOT to release the Israelites as God commanded. Twelve times he asserted his will against the Lord (5:2; 7:14,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,12,35; 10:20,27; 11:10). In an act of Divine judgment, God brought Pharaoh to beg for the Israelites to leave. He moved the Egyptians to give them their gold and silver, pleading with them to leave the land. Pharaoh’s counsel was overturned, and the whole world heard about it!

Power in Eliminating the Enemy. The enemy, Pharaoh and his armies, were superior from every fleshly point of view. They had superior weaponry, chariots, and warriors. But at the very instant God asserted His will, they were drowned in the sea they sought to cross. At one moment, Israel was threatened by an aggressive and pursuing enemy. At the next moment, their own eyes saw all of their enemies dead. Israel did not raise a weapon against them. They plotted no strategy to divert the attack. God did it all, and there was not a thing Pharaoh and his hosts could

do about it.

That My Name Might Be Declared

God is zealous about being known among men. Not only does He desire for His greatness to be acknowledged, He also desires for men to have a personal and profitable relation with Him. This will come when His name is declared, or proclaimed—when what He has done is announced.

After their deliverance from Egypt, and before they arrived at Sinai, *“Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the LORD delivered them”* (Ex 18: 8). Forty years later when they came to possess the land of Canaan, Rahab, an inhabitant of Jericho, told two Israelite spies, *“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt. . . And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in*

wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh” (Judges 11:16). Nearly 1,000 years later, Nehemiah testified how God *“didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; and showedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters”* (Neh 9:9-10). **The name of the Lord was being proclaimed!**

After Jesus had been enthroned in glory, Stephen stood before the Jewish counsel and proclaimed, God *“brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years”* (Acts 7:36). To this very day, the overthrow of Pharaoh in the deliverance of Israel has been the subject of sermons and books. It has been the theme of songs, and even movies. **The name of the Lord is still being proclaimed!**

That is why God raised up Pharaoh. Were it not for the desire of God to have His name proclaimed throughout the earth, Pharaoh would never have been heard of – in fact, he might never have been!

That is why God raised up Pharaoh. Were it not for the desire of God to have His name proclaimed throughout the earth, Pharaoh would never have been heard of – in fact, he might never have been!

THEREFORE . . .

Now, what is the conclusion that must be drawn from these remarkable declarations? It would be interesting to hear the varied opinions of men – at least, if we had not received a word from God on the matter. Here is the word of the Holy Spirit on this subject.

heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Josh 2:10-11). **The name of the Lord was being proclaimed!**

Almost 300 years later, Jephthah reminded the king of the children of Ammon of the time *“when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the*

“Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” Other versions read, *“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires,”*^{NASB} *“Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.”*^{NIV} *“So then He has mercy on whomever He chooses,*

and He hardens the heart of whomever He chooses,"^{NRSV} "So then, at His pleasure He has mercy on a man, and at His pleasure He makes the heart hard,"^{BBE} "So you see, God shows mercy to some just because He wants to, and He chooses to make some people refuse to listen,"^{NLT} "In other words, if God wants to show mercy on someone, He does so, and if He wants to harden someone's heart, He does so."^{NJB}

Whatever you think of God, you must make room for this verse. If this is something you do not believe God can do, then you simply have a distorted view of God. Exercise yourself to believe what He has said.

Not of Works

The Lord has now confirmed that His choices are not made upon the basis of human works or achievements. He chose Isaac because He wanted to! He loved Jacob because He wanted to! He does have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy.

The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart because He wanted to. That is what He affirms: "whom He wills, He hardens!"

Remember, the point is that there is no unrighteousness with God. He is righteous in all of His doings. He was righteous in choosing Isaac above Ishmael. He was righteous in loving Jacob

and hating Esau. He was righteous in hardening Pharaoh's heart, in order that might display His power upon him, and have His name proclaimed throughout the earth.

In a feeble attempt to show that God was not wrong in doing these things, some

He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. Furthermore, His will is always "good, and acceptable, and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

The difficulty encountered in this passage is not owing to any vagueness

The Lord has now confirmed that His choices are not made upon the basis of human works or achievements. He chose Isaac because He wanted to! He loved Jacob because He wanted to! He does have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy.

say there was just cause in all of the cases for His choice. They say Isaac was better, that is why he was chosen, also citing the mocking Ishmael did against Isaac. Again, such men say that God loved Jacob because he sought the blessing, and he hated Esau because he despised the blessing. Pharaoh, say they, was obstinate and wicked, so God simply confirmed his heart was hard.

But all of these are theological puffs of smoke. We do not need anyone to tell us why God made His choice. He has already told us, and with remarkable force. **"Therefore He has mercy on whom**

found in it. It is not because the Lord has not provided a specific reason for what He has done. Rather, it is because His reason conflicts with the wisdom of men. However, it is perfectly acceptable to faith. The person who truly believes will have no compunctions in saying, "Thy will be done!"

There is a great liberty in being able to simply believe the Word of God. What is more, that liberty will bring great satisfaction and peace to the heart, and, in due time, a rich understanding. As Paul once said, "I believe God!" (Acts 27:25). We do well to do so also.

FLESH IS CONFUSED

We are embarking on some of the strongest statements in all of Scripture. It is certainly not comfortable ground for the timorous and unsure. As the reasoning progresses, it actually gets stronger, and more devastating to the flesh. If a person is unbelieving, this passage will have the same effect as described by the prophet Isaiah: "But the word of the LORD was to them, Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little, that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught" NKJV (Isa 28:13). This sort of reasoning utterly devastates the flesh, pummeling it to the ground. Further, that is precisely what it is intended to do. God will have no flesh glory in His presence.

But, for the soul that will humbly believe the Word of the Lord, casting down contradicting thoughts, the working of the Lord will begin to make perfect sense. It will not become the occasion for stumbling, but one of great hope. It will also assist the believer in seeing that salvation is truly "of the Lord," from first to last.

¹⁹ **You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"** ²⁰ **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?"** ²¹ **Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one**

vessel for honor and another for dishonor?"

The Spirit now raises another objection of the flesh. This is how those without the mind of Christ think. I will venture to say you have probably heard people make this very statement. Now, the Spirit will declare how it is to be answered.

WHY DOES HE FIND FAULT?

"You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" As you might expect, this is exactly how the flesh reasons. If God shows mercy on whomever He wants to show mercy, and hardens whomever He wills, how can God blame men? How can

there be such a thing as guilt or transgression if God's will is being done? Of course, this kind of reasoning is not put forward regarding the showing of mercy, for flesh does not account mercy as something of great value.

This is a great moral question that has perplexed many. If it is true that Divine determination drives the purpose of God, what just reason can be cited for the damnation of the wicked or the reward of the righteous. Are not men, in such a case, mere robots, not responsible for their actions? That is how flesh reasons, and it will be interesting to see how the Spirit addresses that matter. We are already painfully aware of how men seek to answer the question.

Who Has Resisted His Will?

The words "His will" refers to the statement, "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens." If God wills to show mercy to Isaac, is there anyone who can thwart that will? If God wills to reject Ishmael, is there anyone who move Him to accept him in the place of Isaac? And, if God wills to love Jacob, who is it that can move Him to hate Jacob? If He wills to hate Esau, who can constrain Him to love Esau? If He hardens Pharaoh, who can make him tender and pliable?

In the question, there is an underlying awareness that God is all powerful. If He determines to make all things work together for good to them that love Him and are called according to His purpose, who is the personality capable of voiding that determination? If God wills to justify, who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? If God says no man will see Him without holiness, what person can cause Him to retract that word?

The issue here is not if God's will is or is not being carried out, but if it exempts men from responsibility. How will the Lord answer this? What will His approach be to human responsibility?

WHO ARE YOU?

The Lord never descends into the arena of flesh to caucus with the carnally

minded! The question is provoked by unbelief, and thus will be answered in strict accord with the Divine nature.

Notice, it has already been affirmed that there is no unrighteousness with God. It is further declared that He is good (Rom 11:22). Yet, the flesh shouts back at God as though He had no right to "find fault" in men like Ishmael, Esau, and Pharaoh, or those who reject His Son.

This is a great moral question that has perplexed many. If it is true that Divine determination drives the purpose of God, what just reason can be cited for the damnation of the wicked or the reward of the righteous. Are not men, in such a case, mere robots, not responsible for their actions?

"On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?"^{NASB}

The question is out of order. God is the one who interrogates man, and not vice versa. You may remember when all manner of questions arose over the experience of Job, God finally interrupted the dialog saying, "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me" (Job 38:3).

When God attributes His actions to His will, we are to understand there is no higher authority than that. Those who object to that will are "talking back" to God.^{NIV} Such an action is most unwise!

THE ONE WHO IS FORMED

"Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'" The NASB reads, "The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" It is difficult for me to conceive of a more strong response to the flesh. Immediately God reminds men of who they are. They are the created, not the Creator. They

have been formed, they are not the One who forms. They have been made, they are not the Maker.

An Explanation

We are not to understand from this that the response of men has nothing to do with how they are formed. The tenderness of David's heart had a great deal to do with how he was shaped. The fervency of Paul had much to do with how he was shaped. This is one reason we are admonished to not "quench" or "grieve" the Spirit of God (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). Our submissiveness, humility, and tenderness, has a great deal to do with how we are shaped – how our character and nature are formed. But if men choose not to be submissive to the Lord, He will form them anyway, shaping and molding them into vessels that will serve His purpose—vessels of wrath.

Power Over the Clay

"Does not the potter have power over the clay . . . ?"

Here the Spirit begins a dialog that represents God as the Potter and the people as the clay. It may be a humbling view, but it is a true one. It is intended to teach us that everything and everyone will ultimately serve God's purpose. Furthermore, His purpose will not be served incidentally, but deliberately. He will MAKE His purpose to be served, whether through Pharaoh or through Moses. He is the Architect of human history, not men. This truth confirms to our hearts the ability of God to work "all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

The word "power" certainly includes the idea of strength and ability, so that God is fully able to override the intentions of men, causing their actions to serve His purpose. Joseph's brother, Potiphar's wife, and Pharaoh are cases in point (Gen 50:20). In our text, however, the word "power" also includes the concept of right or authority, so that what God does is to be considered just and righteous. **Remember, the Spirit is showing us there is no unrighteousness with God, not in any of His workings.**

Isaiah and Jeremiah. In answering the objection of the flesh [that God cannot find fault if men are shaped by Him in the first place], the Spirit appeals to Scripture. At least three times Isaiah uses the figure of a potter and the clay. Jeremiah also uses this parallel.

Isaiah 29:16. Isaiah pronounced woes upon Israel who went about to fulfill their own will, imagining that God was not aware of what they were doing. Like all men who live in ignorance of the Living God, they could not imagine their secret counsels were known by the Lord, or that He could do anything about it. The Spirit therefore moved Isaiah to say, *“Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the LORD, And their works are in the dark; They say, ‘Who sees us?’ and, ‘Who knows us?’ Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, ‘He did not make me?’ Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’”* NKJV

In their thinking, wayward Israel had turned things around, or *“upside down”*.^{NIV} They thought they were carrying out their own will, and determining their own future. But they were not. God was shaping them to fulfill His good pleasure, not their own. He would use their waywardness to serve His purpose and actually throw their own to the ground. They gave no credit to God for what they were doing. Nevertheless, God remained the Potter, and they remained the clay—in His hands! They could not impose their will upon God. Rather, God caused all of their works, including their wickedness, to serve His purpose. He was the Potter, they were the clay.

Isaiah 45:9. This is the specific passage to which our text refers. In it God declares He will pour down righteousness from the heavens, and salvation and righteousness would spring up from the earth. *“Rain down, you heavens, from above, And let the skies pour down righteousness; Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, And let*

righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it. Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ Or shall your handiwork say, ‘He has no hands?’” NKJV

In this passage God is reasoning with wayward Israel, and with those who object to the way in which He works. **Those who argue against God** are quickly told they are nothing more than clay in His hands, and He will shape them as He

Those who argue against God are quickly told they are nothing more than clay in His hands, and He will shape them as He pleases. In fact, the wicked are even like “potsherds,” or broken pieces of pottery, having no significance at all in themselves.

pleases. In fact, the wicked are even like *“potsherds,”* or broken pieces of pottery, having no significance at all in themselves. Like Pharaoh, their ONLY significance is how God uses them to bring glory to Himself.

Although the psychiatrists have attempted to sanctify the act of being angry with God and questioning His intentions, our text shows the wickedness of such a response. A professing Christian who is so irritated by trouble and inconvenience that he grows angry with God, has, in fact, said *“Why hast Thou made me thus?”* Far better to respond like righteous Job: *“Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?”*^{NKJV} (Job 2:10).

Mark it well, that this is applied to those who reply against God, question His intentions, and object to His will. This is

not the way in which He speaks to the humble. Although they also are being shaped by Him, that shaping is for their good as well as His glory. In the case of His enemies, it is not for their good at all.

Isaiah 64:8. When spiritual vision is clear, the people know that God has shaped them—that He is the Potter, and they are the clay. Through Isaiah, such a confession is made. *“But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand.”* Such a response brings glory to God because it is the truth.

Jeremiah 18:4-6. God gave a special lesson to Jeremiah, showing that He was not only the shaper of men, but that He would be mindful of men’s response to that shaping. He can REMAKE people. *“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 Lord raises a weighty question, indeed! Does He not have the right to do with people as He pleases? Is He not the One who has made them? Is it ever proper for man to question God, or challenge His decision, even finding fault with Him?

A modifying thought. Now, lest men imagine their response has nothing at all to do with how God shapes them, the Lord continues with an illuminating thought. *“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”* (vs 8-10).

How marvelously this was demonstrated in both Egypt and Israel. At the first, God used Egypt to bless Israel, caring for them and favoring them in the time of famine. Afterward, when they rebelled, He used them to get great honor for His name. Israel, on the other hand, has been judged harshly by God for its rejection of Christ, yet when they call out *“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,”* they will be reestablished. God has the power to shape AND reshape, and He is always righteous in what He does.

Samson. Samson provides us another example of God’s work as Potter. On one occasion, Samson saw a woman in Timnath, one of the daughters of the Philistines. Being attracted to her, he told his parents, *“I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.”* Knowing God had strictly charged His people not to take wives from among the heathen (Ex 34:15-16; Deut 7:3-4), his parents answered: *“Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?”* Samson insisted they get the Philistine woman for him, for she pleased him. The Spirit then adds this explanation: *“But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD; that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel”* (Judges 14:1-4). **God is the Potter, men are the clay!**

David numbering Israel. On one occasion, David was moved to have Israel numbered. His aim had to do with military strategy, and thus he said, *“Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.”* Joab, sensing that this was not the right thing to do, challenged the command. *“Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?”*^{NKJV} He knew God’s people were not to put their trust in the number of soldiers they had, but in the Lord, who

could increase their numbers and their power. Nevertheless, David’s word prevailed, and the army was counted. The armies of Israel and Judah numbered over one million: an astounding 1,300,000 (2 Sam 24:9).

The outcome of the whole event was a judgement from God in which seventy thousand men died.

The Word of God provides three perspectives of this event – all of them are true. The first is that the idea originated with David himself, and thus he commanded that the count be made (1 Chron 21:2). The second is that *“Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel”* (2 Chron 21:1). The third accredits the whole matter to

Keep in mind that the point being established is not the mere ability of God to do these things. Only a fool would question such ability. The point is that God is RIGHTEOUS in shaping men according to His good pleasure.

God Himself. *“Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah’”* (2 Sam 24:1). **God is the Potter, men are the clay!**

One Source, Two Different Vessels
“... from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” Keep in mind that the point being established is not the mere ability of God to do these things. Only a fool would question such ability. The point is that God is RIGHTEOUS in shaping men according to His good pleasure. Because flesh has questioned the rightness of such working, the Spirit is establishing there is absolutely no unrighteousness to be found in God. He is not doing so by elaborate arguments, but by affirming God does what He wills, and He is incapable of

desiring something wrong.

Here all men are said to come from the same *“lump”* of clay. This is reference to our common origin, Adam. As it is written, *“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings”*^{NKJV} (Acts 17:31). As history has proceeded, however, a vast difference can be seen in the offspring of Adam. Some are righteous, and some are unrighteous. Some are noble, and some are ignoble. **How do we account for this difference?** As asked in First Corinthians, *“For who makes you differ from another?”* (1 Cor 14:7). Our text provides the answer.

As the indisputable Potter, God has the right to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor. Observe the manner in which the Holy Spirit is speaking. The truth with which He is dealing is highly controversial to the flesh, yet He does not tone it down or soften it, as men are prone to do. Instead, He brings the truth to an even higher and stronger level. Men have been deliberately shaped, whether they are Pharaoh or Moses, Ishmael or Isaac, Jacob or Esau! Some men are made to fulfill dishonorable purposes that God may receive the glory. He has given us the specific example of Pharaoh, and has done so with unquestionable certitude.

A vessel of honor is one created for honorable uses—a person who, through holy and righteous involvements, will bring glory to the Lord. **A vessel of dishonor** is one that has been created for dishonorable purposes—a person who, through wickedness and opposition to God bring honor to God by showing He cannot be overthrown. Both are used by God, but the way in which they are used differs.

We must be willing to leave this matter where God has left it. If we do not understand it, that has nothing whatsoever to do with whether it is true or not. As will be developed later, this circumstance is intended to bolster our faith, not demolish it. **God is nowhere**

depicted as forming a vessel of dishonor out of someone who is tender toward Him and seeks His will. Such people must be willing to trust that God will do them good and bring them to glory.

Application to Israel

The application of this teaching to Israel is twofold. **First**, within the same nation God has formed both righteous and

unrighteous people. Some have been for honor, and some for dishonor. **Second**, there have been generations of this people that were shaped for blessing, and generations shaped for cursing. One generation, for example, fell in the wilderness, while another inherited the promised land.

This section of Scripture is showing us that Israel may presently be *"enemies for*

our sake"(11:28). God is able, however, to reshape them on the potters wheel, making a new vessel of them. He has the right to do so, and has pledged Himself to do it. None can charge Him with being unrighteous in the promise made, His tolerance with Israel in their unbelief, the leaving of a remnant, or turning them from their iniquity. From the same mass, vastly different vessels have been formed, with different purposes.

VESSELS OF WRATH AND VESSELS OF MERCY

"²² What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,²³ and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,²⁴ even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

The unrelenting strength of this argument is staggering. It is as though the Spirit refuses to leave this point, hammering it into our conscience with great power. Here He reasons even further with us concerning the nature of God's will, and the extent to which He has gone to make it known. He has objectives that are being served in history. There are things He wants men to see, and He has extended Himself to make them known. Now the Spirit unfolds something of that extent to us, in order that we might stand in awe of the wisdom of our God.

We are entering into an area of consideration that will challenge your mind. It may appear on the surface to be too weighty for you to consider, but you must not yield to such a thought. God's people must come away from overly simplistic views of God, for they do not allow them to consider such passages. Rather than staggering at such lofty Divine utterances, press close to them, taking them into your mind, and pondering them under the administration

of your faith. Trust God that they are true, it only remains for you to see that truth. Make no effort to pit one statement of God against another. Get high enough in your spirit to see that the same God cannot say contradictory things. If

He has objectives that are being served in history. There are things He wants men to see, and He has extended Himself to make them known. Now the Spirit unfolds something of that extent to us, in order that we might stand in awe of the wisdom of our God.

fountains on earth cannot give both bitter and sweet water (James 3:11), much less can the fountain of Divine utterance do it.

WRATH MADE KNOWN

"What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known." While it is true that God *"is **not** willing that any should perish"* (2 Pet 3:9), He **is** willing to make His wrath and power known. The reason for this is not simply that He wants men to know He DOES have both wrath and power. Rather, He desires for men to avoid His wrath, and experience His power for their good. Better to learn of God's wrath in this

world than in the world to come.

The intent of this verse may be expressed this way: *"What if God WHILE willing to show His wrath and make His power known."* The idea that will be developed is this: God's intention was not just to make His wrath and power known. It was ultimately to make His glory known by showing mercy. It was to this end, for this purpose, that He displayed His wrath and great power. The example of this display has been given in Pharaoh and His overthrow.

ENDURING VESSELS OF WRATH

" . . . endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." *"Vessels of wrath"* are those that were fashioned *"unto dishonor,"* of which Pharaoh is an example. This explains why God does not immediately remove the wicked when they rise up against Him and His people. It explains why He endured the whole of mankind in the days of Noah, while He patiently waited for Noah to finish the ark. It explains why He endured the repeated insolence of Pharaoh, while His people were being readied for deliverance. And, it explains why Israel's continued rejection of Christ is being tolerated with much longsuffering. It is in anticipation of their coming blessing.

There are people who are made to be destroyed. Men may balk at this, siting all manner of reasons why it cannot be true. The Spirit faces them squarely and speaks

of “the objects of His wrath--prepared for destruction?”^{NIV} Peter also says of false prophets, using words that jar the soul. “But these, like natural brute beasts **made to be caught and destroyed**, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime”^{NKJV} (2 Pet 2:12-13). Jude also says of such evil men, “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago

make something out of a person, but to remove them, like God removed Pharaoh. The Lord’s glory, however, is intended to lift, bless, and transform. Thus Scripture speaks of “the riches of the glory of His inheritance”(Eph 1:18), being strengthened within by “the riches of His glory”(Eph 3:16), and all of our need being supplied by “His riches in glory”(Phil 4:19).

When It is realized. The riches of His glory are realized when God lifts up “His countenance” upon us (Num 6:26). It

is known when He causes “His face to shine upon us,” looking upon us with favor (Psa 67:1; 31:16). It happens when He lifts up “the light of His countenance upon us” (Psa 4:6). The ultimate experience of this results in regeneration, as described in Second Corinthians 4:6. “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face

of Jesus Christ.”

what it says, and it is the Holy Spirit who said it. There are vessels God prepared for mercy BEFORE they actually received it. He has governed the affairs of this world with these vessels in mind, shaping both men and seasons for what He was going to do with them.

One might prefer that God did not say things this way. However, when it comes to His purpose, God has no regard for human preferences. It is true that the educational trends of our day, especially theological ones, has allowed men to be comfortable in bending the Word of God to suite their preconceptions. But that does not make it right. Higher criticism may stand on the doorstep of revelation and dare to question what God has said. But in the last analysis, it is man that will account for his words, not God.

This same truth is expressed elsewhere in Scripture. A few samples will suffice to show men are not to regard it as strange.

- ❑ “O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and **fix their heart toward You**” (1 Chron 29:18).
- ❑ “And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to **make ready a people prepared for the Lord**” (Luke 1:17).
- ❑ “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, **Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus)**” (Eph 2:4-6).
- ❑ “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath **made us meet** to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).
- ❑ “For God hath not **appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation** by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:9).
- ❑ “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning **chosen you to salvation** through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2

God desired that men know what His wrath and power could do, so He raised up Pharaoh. Even more, He wants to show what the riches of His glory can do, so He abides the insolence of the wicked until such time as those riches will be seen.

were **marked out for this condemnation**”^{NKJV} (Jude 4).

There is no question about the existence of such people. Their presence is only for a time, and will contribute to the magnitude of God showing mercy upon His people. Rest assured, no one is a “vessel of wrath” who has a heart for God, has believed the Gospel, or is pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. We must be willing to let the matter rest there.

MAKING HIS GLORY KNOWN

“... and that He might make known the riches of His glory.” The ultimate reason for God making His wrath and power known, is in order that He might make the riches of His glory known!

The riches of His glory. Because God’s glory is a rich repository of saving resources, the Spirit refers to “the riches of His glory.” The Lord does not refer to “the riches of His wrath,” because His wrath is destructive. It is not intended to

of Jesus Christ.”

God desired that men know what His wrath and power could do, so He raised up Pharaoh. Even more, He wants to show what the riches of His glory can do, so He abides the insolence of the wicked until such time as those riches will be seen.

VESSELS OF MERCY

“... the vessels of mercy...” These are people fashioned to receive His mercy, not His wrath. They are the ones who will be transformed by that glory. In Christ, the Holy Spirit moves them from one stage of glory to another, conforming them to the image of God’s Son (2 Cor 3:18).

PREPARED BEFOREHAND

“... which He had prepared beforehand for glory.” The NIV reads, “whom he prepared in advance for glory.” The NAB reads, “which he has prepared previously for glory.” Whether this text is viewed linguistically or doctrinally, it still reads the same. There is no way to escape

Thess 2:13).

- ***“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”*** (1 Pet 1:2-3).
- ***“According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”*** (Eph 1:4-5).

The point of the Spirit is that God has been righteous in all of this. In accomplishing this preparation of the vessels of mercy, none of His goodness has been suppressed. He has used means, such as the Gospel, the convincing work of the Holy Spirit, and the manipulation of circumstances. But the preparatory work was His, not man’s. HE prepared the vessels for mercy.

Samson, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul are expressly said to have been brought into the world to do God’s work

(Judges 13:5; Jer 1:5; Lk 1:13-15; Gal 1:15). Their presence, together with that of Isaac and Jacob, should enable us to receive this truth without hesitation. Esther’s uncle, Mordecai, knowing of the manner of God’s working, said to her, “who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth 4:14). These are examples of vessels prepared beforehand for mercy. How God accomplished all of this may be difficult to comprehend, but that He DID it must be acknowledged.

EVEN US

“ . . . even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” This is the conclusion of a lengthy question that began in verse twenty-two. The entirety of the thought reads this way in the New International Bible (NAB). *“What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath--prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory--even us, whom He also called, not only from*

the Jews but also from the Gentiles?”

Is it possible that history has been orchestrated for this “day of salvation” in which we live? Could it be that God has raised up holy men like Abraham, Moses, David, and John the Baptist in the prospect of the “acceptable year of the Lord?” Is it too difficult to believe that God has also raised up men like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod, bearing long with them, in the prospect of the day when men would become a new creation in Christ Jesus?

Indeed, this is exactly the point that is being made! Whether the men and their deeds have been good or evil, God has worked them all together for the good of those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose. The godly prior to Jesus “were not made perfect without us” (Heb 11:40), and the wicked were endured with much longsuffering in prospect of those in Christ. God’s intent was to show mercy on chosen vessels, and He managed history so that would happen.

A CHANGE IN STATUS

²⁵ ***As He says also in Hosea: ‘I will call them My people, who were***

can refashion the clay, as well as originate it. Those who appeared to be

them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” Peter also alludes to this text in his exposition of those who are in Christ Jesus. *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Pet 2:9-10).

The Potter can refashion the clay, as well as originate it. Those who appeared to be unacceptable can be made acceptable. God is not only able to do this, He is righteous in the doing of it.

not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.” ²⁶ ***‘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.’***”

Now the Spirit will show us how marvelously God has worked. **The Potter**

unacceptable can be made acceptable. God is not only able to do this, He is righteous in the doing of it.

WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE

Verse 25 is taken from Hosea 2:23. *“And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to*

Verse 26 is taken from Hosea 1:10. *“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.”*

Hosea Was Speaking of Israel

In both of these texts (Hosea 1:10; 2:23), God is speaking about the Israelites. The first chapter of Hosea makes it quite clear that *“the children of Israel”* are the ones to whom it will be said, *“Ye are the sons of the living God.”* The second chapter deals extensively with wayward Israel. In it God declares He will remove them far from idols (2:15-17), make a covenant with them, and betroth them to Him forever (2:18-20). He will sow Israel for Himself in the land, and there (in the land) where He disavowed them, they will again be His people (v 23).

Yet, the Gentiles Are the Subject

Yet, in our text, the reference seems to apply to the Gentiles rather than the Jews: i.e., *“Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.”* In

my judgment, this text is not limited to the Gentiles, or to the Jews. Rather, the Spirit seems to have the real Jew and the true Israel in mind, as related earlier in Romans: *“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly,”* and *“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel”* (2:29; 9:6).

The acceptance of the Gentiles should not take men by surprise, even though they were alienated from the life of God. God had promised He would lift up His hand to the Gentiles (Isa 49:22), and that His glory would be declared among them (Isa 66:19).

The same God who promised to bring in the Gentiles has also promised to restore the Jews. In both cases, He gains great glory, and is shown to be the true

Potter. If we do not stumble at God causing us to be His people, why should we stumble at God turning His hand once more to the children of Israel?

The idea here is not that God changes His mind, but that He changes people! He is the Potter who can reshape the clay, making a new vessel out of it. *“But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?’ declares the LORD. ‘Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.’”*^{NIV} (Jer 18:4-6). The very language should cause our hearts to bend low.

THE REMNANT WILL BE SAVED

“²⁷ Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved.’”

The line of reasoning in this passage is remarkable. It is as though the Lord refuses to let us go until we see the marvels of His great salvation. Now the Spirit calls Isaiah to witness again. He is confirming to our hearts that Israel has not been repudiated by God, and that the light of hope still glows among them.

The passage quoted is found in Isaiah 10:22-23. *“Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been*

decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.”^{NIV} Isaiah’s intention was to bring down the pride of Israel, for they tended to boast in their flesh. Thus he told them only a very small number would be saved, with the vast majority of them being cut off. That *“remnant”* is the means God uses to preserve the nation. From a practical point of view, they are why the nation has not been completely written off.

This *“remnant”* consists of vessels of mercy, which have been prepared to receive mercy. They are foreknown by God, and He has fashioned them for His glory.

God specializes in remnants. They are a means of showing the greatness of His power and His mercy. Ezra spoke of the remnant in this manner, *“And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage”* (Ezra 9:8). Their presence keeps the candle of hope glowing. It enables the humble of heart to revive. It moved Paul to have great heaviness and sorrow of heart for his brethren. This was not an expression of hopelessness, but one hope.

Because *“the remnant”* will be discussed later, I will move from the subject now. It is rich with God’s glory.

THE WORK WILL BE FINISHED

“²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.” Other versions read, **“FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD UPON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY,”**^{NASB} *“For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with **speed and finality,**”*^{NIV} *“for the Lord will execute his sentence on*

*the earth **quickly and decisively,**”*^{NRSV} *“for the Lord will execute His sentence upon the earth with **rigor and dispatch.**”*^{RSV} The point is, what God has determined will be completed righteously.

This verse is alluding to the latter part of Isaiah 10:22, and gives the sense of that text. *“A remnant of them will return; The destruction decreed shall **overflow with***

righteousness.” Isaiah’s meaning is that the judgment of God will appear to have devastated the nation, almost, as it were, eliminating them. Yet, a remnant will be saved, and that because God is righteous.

The meaning is that God’s work upon the earth is not a long and drawn out affair that finds Him reacting to the

intentions and works of men. He is not constantly adjusting His purpose, revising His plan, and doing the best He can to salvage some from among the sons of men. The work, by reason of time, may appear to have been very long. Yet, from the Divine point of view, it has been a “short work,” for only what was necessary has been done. There are no meaningless activities with God. Nor, indeed, does He engage in lengthy experiments.

The work is “short,” lasting only as

long as required, and terminating in absolute righteousness. Whether it is the flood, the overthrow Egypt, or the chastening of Israel, the work has been brief and righteous. Whether it has been the development of multitudinous seed from Abraham, the protection of the remnant during fierce judgments, or the regeneration of men in Christ Jesus, the work has been short and it has been righteous.

We must settle it in our minds that

when God begins to work, matters move swiftly, with dispatch and with righteousness. A nation like Babylon can be deposed in a night (Jer 51:31), or a spiritual nation can be born in a day (Isa 66:8). Whether it is a great awakening and rebirth as occurred on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-38), or a climactic judgment as the devastation occurring at the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk 21:20-22), “He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.”

THE LORD LEFT A REMNANT

“²⁹ And as Isaiah said before: **“Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed [remnant], We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah.”**

Here again, the Potter had power over the clay, leaving a remnant. The “remnant” did not exist because of human effort, but because the Lord “left” it, excluding it from the curse. The New Jerusalem Bible reads, “Had the Lord Sabaoth not left us a few survivors, we should be like Sodom, we should be the same as Gomorrah.”

THE LORD OF SABAOTH

The term “Sabaoth” means hosts, or armies. “The Lord of Sabaoth” is an expression denoting military power: i.e., “the Lord of hosts,” ^{NRSV} “the Lord of armies,” or “the Lord Almighty.” ^{NIV} James also refers to the Lord in the manner (James 5:4). The hosts of God are exceedingly large. On one occasion “They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera” (Judges 5:20). In another instance, God referred to the locust, the cankerworm, the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, as “my great army which I sent among you” (Joel 2:25). He called for lice, flies, frogs, and locusts in the plagues of Egypt (Ex 8:2,16,21). Angels have been summoned to fight against men, executing the judgments of the Lord (2 Sam 24:16; 2 Kgs 19:35). He has summoned the Assyrians or Chaldeans to fight for Him (Hab 1:6). Plagues and pestilence are in His arsenal (Gen 12:17; 1 Chron 21:14).

He can cause the sun to stand still so the battle may be won (Josh 10:12-13), or cause darkness to cover the earth (Ex 10:22). Fire and brimstone can fall from

Isaiah’s Word

The quotation is taken from Isaiah 1:9 where the “remnant” is described as “very small.” “Except the LORD of hosts

There is no hope of surviving the opposition of the Lord – that is, unless HE leaves a remnant! It is not possible for a person or a nation to in any sense survive unless the Lord allows them to do so. Further, as long as a remnant remains, there is hope, for there is no other reason for allowing a remnant to remain.

heaven (Lk 17:29), as well as hail (Ex 9:18) and torrential rain, as in the flood (Gen 7:11). “Fire, and hail; snow, and vapors; stormy wind” are said to fulfill His word (Psa 148:8). He can cause people’s defenses to depart from them (Num 14:9). Truly, He is “the Lord of Sabaoth” – “the Lord of hosts!”

There is no hope of surviving the opposition of the Lord – **that is, unless HE leaves a remnant!** It is not possible for a person or a nation to in any sense survive unless the Lord allows them to do so. Further, as long as a remnant remains, there is hope, for there is no other reason for allowing a remnant to remain. Remember, the Lord makes a short work upon the earth, terminating it in righteousness. There is no such thing as a remnant that is not meeting a Divine objective. The same Lord of hosts who brings devastation, also leaves a remnant!

had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.” The leaving of this “remnant” is what prompted Jeremiah to say, “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed” (Lam 3:22).

Brief Summation

Because I have already dealt with this verse in our previous lesson (Rom 9:8), I will only restate some of those observations here, and make a few additional comments.

No remnant was left in Sodom or Gomorrah! God removed Lot and his family, then destroyed those ancient cities with “everlasting fire” (Jude 7). The reasoning here is powerful! The remnant that remained was not the result of mere human activity. The remnant was “LEFT” BY God Almighty! These were the faithful who were left like Noah. They remained after judgment, like Lot.

The scathing wrath of God did not touch them, any more than the fiery furnace touched the three Hebrew children.

Confirming that Israel's situation is the same since Christ's exaltation as it was in the days of Isaiah, the Spirit declares, "Even so then, at this

to remove the nation from the face of the earth. It also confirms the surety and effectiveness of the promise.

He never leaves a remnant unless there is a future work to be done with that remnant. Only when God has no further purpose for a people does He fail to leave a remnant, as with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The only reason for a leaving a seed is that future growth and fruitage are expected—and they are expected by God Himself. He never leaves a remnant unless there is a future work to be done with that remnant. Only when God has no further purpose for a people does He fail to leave a remnant, as with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The fact that God left "a very small remnant" substantiates that He did not remove the nation from the tablet of eternal purpose. He is not finished with it, as will be powerfully declared in the eleventh chapter.

present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:6). The word of God, then, has not been ineffective, even though the larger part of Israel has not yet believed. The existence of the remnant justifies God in refusing

That "seed," or remnant, is "the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified" (Isa 61:3). And, indeed, He will be glorified through that remnant! Through faith, its existence causes hope to flourish!

CONCLUSION

The matters with which we have dealt have been very weighty. They are not commonly known among believers because they do not conform to the religious mind-set of our day. However, this is the manner in which the Holy Spirit reasons with us. When He speaks of righteousness, and of our need of it, He eventually speaks to us of the Jews. When flesh reasons that God has finished His work with the Jews, the Spirit speaks to us of the remnant. He tells us they have been "left" by God Himself, and that He will finish the work that He has started.

In all of His workings, God is

impeccably righteous. Nothing that He does is wrong, whether it is hardening Pharaoh's heart, or allowing Israel to continue. If He chooses to love Jacob and hate Esau, we need no further word on the matter than that it was His will to do so. His will is what makes it right, not its conformity to the judgments of men.

The point behind all of this is that we must be brought to trust in the Lord, not relying upon our own wisdom. If God knows how to preserve Israel, you can trust Him to preserve you. If He can thwart Pharaoh, bringing him down in utter frustration, He is surely able to deal

with your enemies.

It is never right to question God's demands or His works. It is never wrong to confess He is right in what He does. If His ways are difficult to comprehend now, you must believe the time will come when they will be made more clear to you. Many of us have heard Him say what Jesus said to Peter, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (John 13:7).

Now, go on your way rejoicing. Be glad that God has turned the reins of His kingdom over to Jesus, and not to you!

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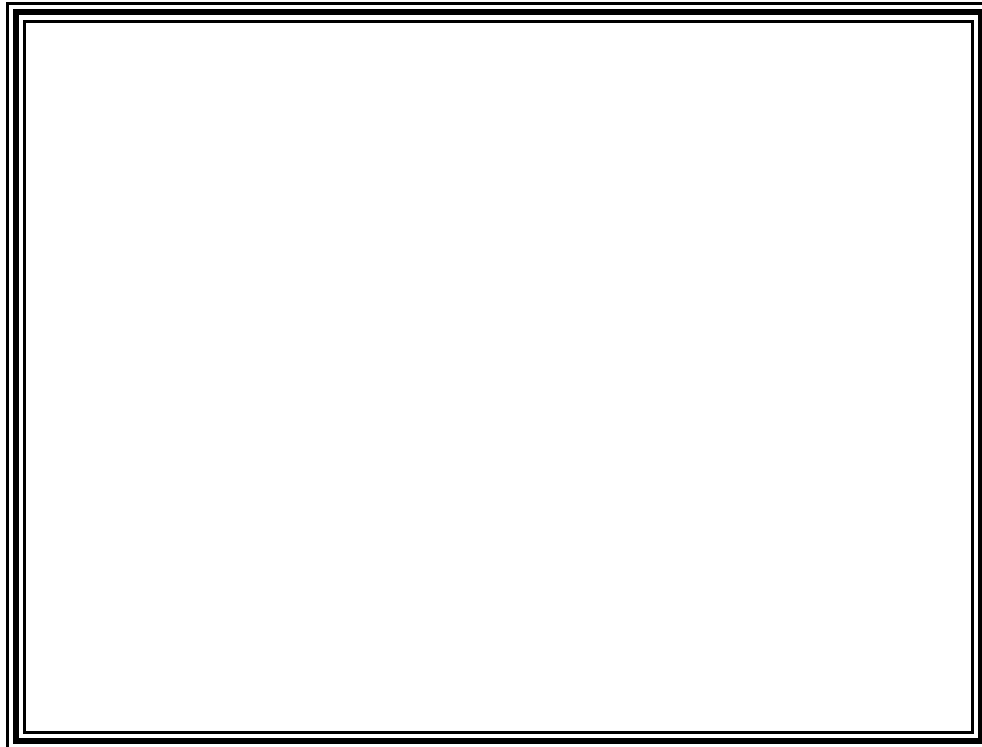
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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 32



ISRAEL'S PRESENT CONDITION AND ITS CAUSE

9:30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² 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. ³³ 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."

– Romans 9:30-33 ^{NKJV} –

INTRODUCTION

The appointed means of becoming righteous is announced in the Gospel of Christ. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one 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 is written, The just shall live by faith"* (1:16-17). Having introduced the subject of righteousness, the Spirit has firmly established our need for it. Righteousness is not a spiritual luxury, nor is it a mere

option. God cannot and will not accept an unrighteous person in His presence.

THE GENTILES

In order to firmly plant this in our thinking, the Spirit showed how the Gentiles plummeted far from God, even though they were in the very midst of a creation that testified to His *"eternal power and Godhead."* They did not grasp enough of the truth to become thankful (1:21). They also stopped short of their appointed vocation, which was to seek the

Lord and find Him (Acts 17:26-27). They actually became idolaters, ascribing the glory of God to all manner of creatures (1:23). To confirm the corruption of their hearts, God gave some of them over to their own desires. Immediately they descended into the depths of immorality, thereby confirming they were NOT righteous (1:24-27). As a whole, God gave them over to their reprobate and depraved minds. Rather than this producing a wave of righteousness, it broke out in all manner of moral and spiritual depravity

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHAT SHALL WE SAY? (9:30a)
- II. THE GENTILES DID NOT PURSUE IT, BUT ATTAINED IT (9:30b)
- III. ISRAEL PURSUED IT, BUT DID NOT ATTAIN IT (9:31)
- IV. WHY DID NOT ISRAEL ATTAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS? (9:32a)
- V. THEY STUMBLED AT THE STUMBLING STONE (9:32b)
- VI. A STUMBLING STONE AND ROCK OF OFFENSE (9:33a)
- VII. THE ONE WHO BELIEVES (9:33b)

(1:28-32). The Gentiles were not righteous. After 2,500 years, not a single righteous person surfaced among their number. The ONLY people who obtained favor with God were those to whom He revealed Himself.

THE JEWS

The Jews fared no better, even though they were given remarkable advantages. Their knowledge was increased, as both right and wrong were revealed to them. This was given to them in the form of commandments and ordinances. They also received strong incentives to obey these commandments. Remarkable blessings were promised if they would obey, and staggering curses were pronounced upon them if they disobeyed. If there was any latent goodness in them, these would surely awaken them to righteousness. However, they became guilty of the same sins as the Gentiles, even though they had been tutored by God himself (2:1-27). They also needed righteousness.

"GUILTY!"

The Divine verdict of "GUILTY" is pronounced upon the entirety of the human race, both Jew and Gentile. No one is righteous, not one is good, and none can be found that seeks after God (3:9-19). It makes no difference what time period you examine, all need a righteousness from God. Regardless of the people group you peruse, all need the righteousness of God. Whether the people are informed or uninformed, they stand before God totally bereft of

righteousness. What is even more, they are incapable of changing their condition.

THE ROLE OF FAITH

Having confirmed the absolute weakness of human nature, the Spirit revealed the essentiality and effectiveness of faith. That is the appointed means through which the righteousness of God will be received (3:21-22). This is demonstrated in the person of Abraham, who believed God and was counted righteous because of it (4:1-25).

The effectiveness of faith is expounded in the chapters five and six. Through it we obtain peace with God, who then begins to work within us. Through baptism into Christ, we are brought into the Lord Himself, becoming dead indeed unto sin and alive to God. In our new state, we are charged with the responsibility of yielding to God and subduing our members that are upon the earth. Every resource needed for this noble work is supplied in Christ Jesus.

REMNANTS OF THE OLD NATURE

To confirm that righteousness has been imputed to us, and not achieved by us, the Spirit points out that the remnants of the condemned nature remain in us. This is "*the flesh*," and is consistently aligned against God, in disagreement with Him, and fighting against Him. The seventh chapter details the fierce conflict that exists between the flesh and the Spirit – a battle that produces great discontent within the believer.

NO CONDEMNATION

Substantiating the effectiveness of the righteousness of God, which is received by faith, it is affirmed that we are not condemned in Christ Jesus. This is true even though the law of sin remains in

our members, fighting against the desires of our renewed hearts and minds. Chapter eight proclaims this with great power.

The Holy Spirit Himself assists us in the battle, leading us to subjugate the flesh (8:13-14). He even makes effective intercession for us because we do not know what to pray for (8:26-27).

Now that we have the righteousness of God, He is working everything together for our good (8:28). No adversarial power is capable of separating us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:35-39).

THE ISRAELITES

Because there is a remarkable tendency in men—even redeemed men—to place confidence in the flesh, the Spirit causes us to consider Israel according to the flesh. Although they had every advantage given to men prior to Christ, it did not produce righteousness in them. What is even more, all of those advantages were given at the discretion of God. They did not ask for any of them (9:1-5).

The successfulness of the Word of God did not depend upon the Israelites themselves. Although it appeared as though His determination had fallen to the ground, a remnant remained among the people. This is traced to Divine choice—a choice that was not motivated by fleshly lineage or the works of men (9:6-13).

In all of this, God remained righteous in all that He did, preserving a remnant among the people, even under the most trying of circumstances. He even raised up Pharaoh to show His great power, and to make His name great (9:17). His choices were motivated by His will, not the people who were favored (9:18-21).

If there was any latent goodness in them, these would surely awaken them to righteousness. However, they became guilty of the same sins as the Gentiles, even though they had been tutored by God himself

God's intention is to reveal "the riches of His glory" on vessels of mercy, prepared beforehand for this purpose. These include both Jews and Gentiles, with the Jews being prominent, and the Gentiles being additions: "not of the Jews only, but **also** of the Gentiles" (9:23-29). The great work God has purposed, and is carrying out with precision, is nothing less than the conferment of His righteousness upon the sons of men. That is the marvelous work being accomplished in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Having laid the foundation for our thought, the Spirit now assesses both the Jews and Gentiles. He does it with God's purpose in mind—the conferment of His righteousness upon the sons of men. This righteousness is absolutely essential, yet cannot be conjured up or produced by men. He will show who obtained it and who did not. He will also tell us Why some succeeded and some did not.

He will now explain why the unbelieving Jews have NOT obtained this

righteousness, and why the believing Gentiles have. He will show this has not happened because of man's will or effort, "it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (9:16).

Knowing that "flesh" will erupt in murmuring against God, the Spirit will show us in a very practical way why Israel has been rejected and the Gentiles accepted. It is NOT because God's word has failed. It is not because God has cancelled His promises, for He cannot lie. What, then, can be said on this subject?

WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

^{9:30a} **What shall we say then?**

When the truth is affirmed, it is imperative that men respond to it. In fact, they WILL respond to it, it only remains to identify HOW they do. In order to assist us in our response, the Spirit asks this question. "What shall **WE** say then?"

This is now the sixth time this very question has been asked.

abound?" (6:1)

❑ **CONCERNING GOD'S HOLY LAW.** "WHAT SHALL WE SAY then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." (7:7)

❑ **CONCERNING GOD'S ACTIONS.** "WHAT SHALL WE SAY then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." (9:14)

what the Lord has said and done, we cannot profit from His words or His deeds.

In the teaching of little children, truth is put into their minds in anticipation of the day when they will ponder and think upon it. While young, their thoughts are few and immature. Thus we structure their minds by teaching them what the Lord has said and done. However, there must come a time when we "put away childish things" (1 Cor 13:11). When that time comes, our minds must wrap themselves around the Word of the Lord. Our rationality must embrace truth, ponder it, and meditate upon it. Then, and only then, is conversion and growth in grace possible.

Much of the religion of our day fails to promote thought. It deals with things too close to the surface of the mind, and too far from the depths of the heart. This is the bane of religious entertainment, much of the popular "Christian music" of our time, and the penchant for brevity in the churches. What is heard is too easily forgotten, for it offers no challenge for the remarkable capabilities of the heart and mind.

However, if we will "hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches," He will engage our minds. We will be challenged to reason upon the truth. God will call upon us to "reason together" with Him (Isa 1:18). In that process, and as our hearts are tender and submissive, He will

By asking these questions, the Spirit is directing our thoughts – leading us, as it were, to consider the things of God. Until our minds are provoked to consider what the Lord has said and done, we cannot profit from His words or His deeds.

❑ **CONCERNING GOD TAKING VENGEANCE.** "But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, **WHAT SHALL WE SAY?** Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)." (3:5)

❑ **CONCERNING OUR FATHER ABRAHAM.** "WHAT SHALL WE SAY then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?" (4:1)

❑ **CONCERNING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO SIN.** "WHAT SHALL WE SAY then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may

❑ **CONCERNING THE REJECTION OF THE JEWS AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GENTILES.** "WHAT SHALL WE SAY then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith." (9:30)

THE ROLE OF THOUGHT

By asking these questions, the Spirit is directing our thoughts – leading us, as it were, to consider the things of God. **Until our minds are provoked to consider**

open the truth up to us, thereby producing growth and conformity to the image of His Son.

How often we are reminded of the role of thought. Our love for God is to be with the "heart" and "mind," as well as our "soul" and "strength" (Mk 12:30). We are exhorted, "think on these things" (Phil 4:8), "meditate upon these things" (1 Tim 4:15), and "consider what I say" (2 Tim 2:7). "Every thought" is to be "brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). There is no better way for this to be accomplished than in the extended consideration of what the Lord has declared – particularly of Himself and His wonderful works.

Thus our minds are called to enter the sacred vestibule of thought. What will we say? What will be our response to what the Lord has declared? What kind of conclusions will we reach?

DIRECTED THOUGHT

As will be confirmed by the answer, the Spirit is not asking for our opinion, but guiding us to a sanctified conclusion. The objective is to point our hearts and minds in the right direction – the area where thought will be profitable and Divine tutelage is experienced.

The conclusion that is delivered to us cannot be appropriated through the wisdom of this world. If the Lord did not

reveal it to us, it would never have been known. However, when the truth is loved and received, the answer will at once become apparent to us when it is revealed.

THE REALITIES BEFORE US

The Lord has set before us certain realities. These are the matters concerning which a revealed conclusion will be given.

- God shows mercy on those to whom He wills to show mercy (v 15a).
- He has compassion upon those to whom He wills to show compassion (v 15b).

- He calls those who were not His people, "My people," and those who were not beloved, "beloved" (v 25).
- The Lord will finish the work He has begun on earth, terminating it abruptly in righteousness (v 28).

It is as though the Spirit knows flesh will use such knowledge to excuse itself from all responsibility. It will reason that God acts without regard for human will or effort, and therefore they are both useless. However, this is erroneous reasoning. It brings no glory to God, and no salvation to men. Thus, the Spirit will throw it down,

Thus our minds are called to enter the sacred vestibule of thought. What will we say? What will be our response to what the Lord has declared? What kind of conclusions will we reach?

- It is not of him that wills, or of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy (v 16).
- He hardens whomever He wills to harden (v 18).
- God can make people vessels of honor or vessels of dishonor (v 21).
- He endured vessels prepared for destruction in the prospect of making known the riches of His glory upon the vessels prepared for mercy (v 22-23).

for such thinking is inhibitive, stunting the soul and blinding the eyes.

The conclusion that follows confirms that human responsibility is not excluded by Divine Sovereignty. While man will not be able to glory in the presence of the Lord, neither will he be permitted to be idle and unreceptive. A lack of response to God is never justified. It will further be shown that certain effort is futile.

THE GENTILES DID NOT PURSUE IT, BUT ATTAINED IT

" 9:30b That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith." This confirms that all along the subject has been obtaining the righteousness of God. There is no hope of being received by God if we do not receive His righteousness. Following this line of reasoning with consistency, the book of Romans mentions "righteousness" thirty-nine times.

- It is revealed in the Gospel of Christ, and is obtained by faith in order to faith (1:17).
- There is a righteousness that comes

- from the Law (2:26).
- Our unrighteousness demonstrates that God is righteous (3:5).
- The righteousness of God for men is now revealed without the Law, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (3:21).
- The righteousness of God is obtained by faith in Jesus Christ (3:22).
- God's righteousness is declared for the remission of sins (3:25).
- Because of Christ's vicarious death, God righteousness is declared, that He might be just and justifier of the one who believes on Jesus (3:26).
- Abraham believed God, and it was

- imputed to him for righteousness (4:1).
- The one who works not, but believes on Jesus, his faith is counted to him for righteousness (4:5).
- David described the blessedness of the man to whom God imputed righteousness without works (4:6).
- Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness (4:9).
- Abraham's circumcision was a sign of the righteousness he had while yet uncircumcised (4:11).
- Abraham became an heir of the world through the righteousness of faith (4:13).

- Because Abraham did not stagger at the promises of God, but was fully persuaded that what God had promised He was able also to perform, his faith was imputed to him for righteousness (4:22).
- Righteousness is a gift, given to us because of Christ (5:17).
- Because of Christ's one act of righteousness, His death, men received justification (5:18).
- Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life (5:21).
- Those who are dead with Christ are to yield their members unto God as instruments of righteousness (6:13).
- The obedience of faith leads to righteousness (6:16).
- Being made free from sin, we have become the servants of righteousness (6:18).
- Being servants of righteousness leads to holiness (6:19).
- When we were the servants of sin, we were free from righteousness (6:20).
- The righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in those who walk after the Spirit (8:4).
- If Christ is in us, the Spirit is life because of righteousness (8:10).
- What God performs is cut short in righteousness (9:28).
- The Gentiles, though they did not pursue righteousness have attained to it by faith (9:30).
- Israel who followed after the law of righteousness has not attained to it (9:31).
- Because Israel was ignorant of God's righteousness, they did not attain to it (10:1).
- Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes (10:3).
- Moses described the righteousness of the law by saying if you kept it you would live (10:5).
- The righteousness of faith does not speak of man doing, but of man believing (10:6).
- With the heart man believes unto righteousness (10:10).
- Righteousness is an essential element of the Kingdom of God (14:17).

I have taken the time to list these references to show the centrality of

righteousness in the Spirit's reasoning. The seeming diversion to the subject of Israel was to show us that righteousness was the issue with them. God did not choose them because of their goodness. Not only were they the appointed means through whom the Savior entered the world, they were also provided confirmation that righteousness cannot come through human effort.

The Spirit will now contrast the acceptance of the Gentiles with the rejection of all but the remnant of the Israelites. Again, it is important to see that the attainment of righteousness is the critical matter.

Rather than pursuing righteousness, their rapid degradation is outlined.

- When they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God (1:21a).
- They were not thankful (1:21b).
- They became vain in their imaginations (1:21c).
- Their foolish heart was darkened (1:21d).
- Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools (1:22).
- They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of man, birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things (1:23).
- When delivered over to the lusts of

The Spirit will now contrast the acceptance of the Gentiles with the rejection of all but the remnant of the Israelites. Again, it is important to see that the attainment of righteousness is the critical matter.

THEY DID NOT PURSUE IT

"That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith." This is the first response to the question, *"What shall we say then?"* The first chapter of Romans dealt with the Gentiles before Christ. This text speaks of them from the viewpoint of after Christ. Here we will find they never did pursue righteousness. It was never an issue with them, which confirmed their deplorable ignorance of the Living God.

THEY FOLLOWED NOT AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Gentiles provide us with an example of people without Divine direction. The Spirit has already revealed the focus of the Gentile's life. Although they occupied the Lord's own creation, and although that creation clearly testified of His *"eternal power and Godhead,"* or Divinity, the Gentiles did not respond to its testimony appropriately. In fact, they sinned grievously. In the words of our text, *"they followed not after righteousness,"* or *"did not pursue righteousness."*^{NIV}

their heart they dishonored their bodies among themselves (1:24).

- They changed the truth of God into a lie, worshiping and serving the created more than the Creator (1:25).
- When given over to their vile affections, they descended into the morass of sodomy (1:26-27).
- They did not like to retain God in their knowledge (1:28a).
- Being given over to a reprobate mind, they were filled with all manner of reprehensible sin (1:29-31).
- Although they knew the judgment of God and that death was the suitable penalty for their conduct, they not only continued in their sin, but approved others who did so (1:32).

They Did Not Know

That remarkable descent of the Gentile world is summarized in our text: *"they followed not after righteousness."* Although they were given the advantage of living in the creation of a righteous God, they did not pursue righteousness. They made no real effort to please the Lord or be found in His favor. Rather, they sought the gratification of their own

sinful desires. Nature could not teach them of the reality or need of righteousness. Neither, indeed, did they have the capacity to discover these things through their own ingenuity.

They did not pursue righteousness because they knew neither the righteousness of God nor their own despicable unrighteousness. As marvelous as the testimony of nature is, it says absolutely nothing about God being righteous or man needing righteousness. Still, the fact that they did not seek the righteousness that comes from God only accentuated their sinful condition. It was no sign of innocence, nor could it be overlooked by the Almighty God.

The Gentiles are certainly a people requiring mercy. God has declared *"I will show mercy to whom I will, I will take pity on whom I will"*^{NAB} (9:15). Will He choose to have mercy on such unworthy wretches? Will they be able to take hold of the righteousness He announces in the Gospel of His Son? Will they be required to go through some sort of orientation class before they can receive mercy and compassion? Will they be required to measure up to some code of morals before they can receive mercy?

THEY HAVE ATTAINED UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Gentiles . . . have attained to righteousness." Here is the wonderful announcement! *"They have attained unto righteousness,"* even though they did not seek it! To *"attain"* righteousness is to obtain or gain it. To *"attain"* righteousness is to actually become righteous. It is to be received by God, made acceptable to Him. It is to be right in His eyes, with no charge of guilt against them.

The Gentiles did not obtain it by their will, nor by their effort, for *"it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy"* (v 16). Further, God was righteous and good in showing mercy unto them. It was His will to do so, and that made it right.

This text does not speak of the whole of the Gentiles, but of a remnant of them. Paul, the writer of this Epistle, was raised up by God to *"bear His name before the Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel"* (Acts 9:15). He was chosen to be a *"light unto the Gentiles"* (Acts 13:47). This gracious provision was not granted in response to a plea from the Gentiles. They were not driven by a deep sense of their need for righteousness to seek the Lord or His righteousness. The words of Jesus were certainly not being fulfilled in them: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matt 6:33). Yet,

As marvelous as the testimony of nature is, it says absolutely nothing about God being righteous or man needing righteousness. Still, the fact that they did not seek the righteousness that comes from God only accentuated their sinful condition.

even though they were not seeking righteousness from God, they obtained it. What a marvelous display of Divine mercy!

Some of the First Gentiles

The Gentiles were not the first to obtain righteousness. Although Peter announced on the day of Pentecost that the promise was to those who were *"afar off,"* some years past before any of their number was actually made righteous. Among the Gentiles who attained this righteousness were the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-8), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39), Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48), and Lydia (Acts 16:13-14).

An Objection

It might be countered that each of the above had been exposed to the truth, and

thus were, in some sense, seeking. The Samaritans were a sort of half-breed. They were the result of the Israelites intermarrying with the Babylonians following the Babylonian captivity. Thus, they might be considered Jewish to some extent. The Ethiopian eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship, and thus might be considered to be seeking favor with God. Cornelius was a devout man who prayed to God always, and gave alms of all he had, and thus might be said to be seeking the Lord. Lydia was praying at a riverside when she first heard the Gospel, obviously engaged in some form of quest for Divine favor.

There is no indication that any of these people were aware of an available righteousness from God until they heard the Gospel. Further, nothing in Scripture indicates they were seeking to be made righteous. That very concept was little known prior to Christ Jesus.

Even if a person chooses to discount the Gentiles just mentioned, there are others who attained unto righteousness who were in no way seeking it. The Philippian jailor is a case in point (Acts 16:27-31). The barbarous people on the island of Melita are another example (Acts 28:1-9). It is possible to name others like some devout Greeks and chief women from Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4), and certain men, Dionysius, and Damaris, from Athens (Acts 17:34). So far as we know, none of these were engaged in any quest for the righteousness of God, yet they attained unto it.

In their cases, the Lord sought them out, and not vice versa. Jesus did say, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). Again He said, *"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd"* (John 10:16). Later, in the tenth chapter of Romans, the Lord will affirm, *"I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me"* (Rom 10:20).

This is a most blessed circumstance which accounts for the salvation of multitudes.

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

“... even the righteousness which is by faith.”^{NASB} The Spirit will now be more specific about His meaning. Righteousness was not simply thrown upon the Gentiles, covering their wretchedness like a blanket. While some may be disposed to imagine this would bring glory to God, it would not.

There is a Divinely appointed means by which righteousness is “attained.” That means cannot be ignored. God will always honor it. As we will see, that means involves both God and the recipient of righteousness. God gives righteousness, but faith appropriates it.

The Gentiles did not climb into

righteousness, they **obtained it**. They did not obtain it because they measured up, but because they had faith. They did not become righteous through their own efforts, but were “**made righteous**” by the “**obedience**” of Christ (5:19). This is the very righteousness announced in the Gospel, in which “*a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last*”^{NIV} (1:17).

Salvation, in all of its aspects, whether of the Jews or the Gentiles, is “*of the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9). It is ever true, “*Salvation belongs to the LORD*” (Psa 3:8). And again it is written, “*But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD*” (Psa 37:39). Particularly regarding becoming righteous, the Lord declares, “*And their righteousness is from Me, says the LORD*”^{NKJV} (Isa 54:17). This righteousness was attained by the Gentiles, who were not seeking after it,

and it was attained through their faith.

In the case of the Gentiles, the working of God was as effective as His choice of Isaac (9:7), and His love of Jacob (9:13). The Lord had mercy upon them because He wanted to, even though they fell short of His glory. He had compassion upon them because He wanted to, even though they were “*not a people.*”

Further Declaration of the Circumstance

- God would justify the heathen **through faith** (Gal 3:8).
- God justified the uncircumcision **through faith** (Rom 3:30).
- The **door of faith** was opened to the Gentiles, even though they were not seeking it (Acts 14:27).
- God **granted** the Gentiles “*repentance to life*” (Acts 11:18).

ISRAEL PURSUED IT, BUT DID NOT ATTAIN IT

“³¹ **But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.**”

Although they were the only elected nation in the world, and although they were given every possible advantage, yet they did not attain to the one thing they needed – **righteousness**. If all the flesh requires is tutelage and direction to attain unto righteousness, the Jews should be able to do it. They were chosen by God, becoming favored of Him “*above all people that are upon the face of the earth*” (Deut 7:6; Ex 19:5). He “*loved*” them, showing them favor, delivering them from bondage, and giving them power over their enemies. He gave them a good and righteousness Law, such as was given to no other nation. Moses told Israel, “*What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?*”^{NIV} (Deut 4:7-8).

Let it be clear, it simply is not possible for flesh to have more of an advantage than was given to Israel. If it is possible

done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?”^{NKJV} (Isa 5:4).

Although they were the only elected nation in the world, and although they were given every possible advantage, yet they did not attain to the one thing they needed – righteousness. If all the flesh requires is tutelage and direction to attain unto righteousness, the Jews should be able to do it.

for flesh to be trained, or schooled into righteousness, Israel will become righteous by this means.

How could God have possibly been more gracious to them? What more could He have done for them? Hear His lament over them. “*What more could have been*

Could He have chastened them more, making them righteous by the administration of His rod? Hear Him reply. “*Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment*”^{NKJV} (Isa 1:5-6). Again the Lord says to them, “*In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion*” (Jer 2:30). Of them He said, “*Because I have cleansed you, and you were not cleansed*” (Ezek 24:13).

Do men dare to speak of advantages, as though they made men better? Is it possible for the Lord to put flesh in a situation

where it will reform itself and suddenly become good? Hear the word of the Lord to Israel. *“Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes”* (Isa 5:1-2).

Those with a penchant for procedures and disciplines must consider their ways. There are countless *Christian* men who are teaching people to pursue uprightness by law. They suppose if people are given enough rules, and if they follow them faithfully, they will be transformed into righteous people. All of this is particularly reprehensible since God has set the nation of Israel before us as an example of the total vanity of this approach. He gave them **righteous** laws. He provided wonderful promises as an incentive to keep those laws. He issues fearful threats and curses to provoke them to faithfulness. He took up their cause, fighting their battles, delivering them from their enemies. He gave them godly judges and kings, and raised up holy prophets to apprise them of His will, and discover their condition to them. He provided them a land in which they could devote themselves to Him, and caused peace for them by changing the heart of their enemies. How is it possible for any more advantage to be given to the flesh?

The Spirit will now reveal why the Israelites did not attain to righteousness. It will not be because they did not try, for they *“pursued”* the law of righteousness.

PURSUING

“... but Israel, pursuing . . .” Other versions read, *“But Israel, which followed after,”*^{KJV} *“but Israel, who did strive for,”*^{RSV} and *“But the Jews, who tried so hard.”*^{NLT} The word *“pursued,”* or *“followed after,”* is a very strong one. It indicates aggressiveness, and is by no means casual. From the standpoint of language, it

means to “pursue, follow after, and seek after.” It is the same word used to describe aggressive persecution (Gal 1:23; Phil 3:6).

These are the words of the Spirit, and they are precise. Men may conclude from the history of Israel that they did NOT pursue after righteousness, but rather neglected the whole matter. The Holy Spirit concludes that they DID pursue it, but did not obtain it. We do well to give heed to these words, for a significant point is about to be made.

There are countless *Christian* men who are teaching people to pursue uprightness by law. They suppose if people are given enough rules, and if they follow them faithfully, they will be transformed into righteous people.

THE LAW OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The righteousness Israel zealously followed after is called *“the law of righteousness.”* The RSV reads, *“the righteousness which is based on law.”* The point is that they tried to measure up to the requirements of the Law. They attempted to do what the Lord told them to do, endeavoring to become righteous by fulfilling the *“law of commandments contained in ordinances”* (Eph 2:15).

Not the Same as the Righteousness of God

“The law of righteousness,” or *“the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law,”*^{NRSV} is not to be equated with *“the righteousness of God.”* This is a righteousness described in the Law, and that was wed to the Law. This righteousness did not depend upon God, but upon men. The Law was precise in its requirements, but its statutes and ordinances were not designed to lead men into a righteous state.

The *“righteousness of God”* is pointedly declared to have been revealed *“without,”* or *“apart from the Law”* (3:21). The Law did testify of the righteousness, but had no ability to produce it. It could not make an unrighteous person righteous, or a sinner a saint. It could not change a person’s character or status, but only define it.

An Objection

The sophist will remonstrate, declaring that Israel did not pursue righteousness. Their hearts were far from God, as both the prophets and Jesus affirmed (Isa 29:13; Matt 15:8). How can such a people be said to have followed after the law of righteousness? Did not the prophets affirm Israel did NOT hearken to His words and had rejected His Law (Jer 6:19)? Did not God set His law before them, and did they not forsake it, refuse to obey His voice, and walk not in it (Jer 9:13). How can such a people be said to have pursued after the law of righteousness?

The point being made is that flesh is incapable of a consistent and effective effort to obtain righteousness.

The Israelites did the best anyone can do in the flesh, our blessed Lord Himself being the single exception. The flesh cannot be cultured spiritually – even by a good, holy, and spiritual law. Men needed to be taught this, and God used Israel to bring this truth home to our hearts. **The nature of the flesh cannot be changed, and hence it cannot be made righteous.** Whatever is born of the flesh *“is flesh,”* and can be nothing more. That is precisely why Jesus said, *“You must be born again”* (John 3:6-7)

What About David?

Someone might cite David, declaring that he was under the Law, yet seemed more successful in his efforts to be right with God. Was he not a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22)? This was, indeed, the case. Yet, David was motivated by faith, not by a mere quest for the law of righteousness. His petitions for grace confirmed he had seen more than the rest of the Israelites. *“Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit” (Psa 51:10-12).

Those are the words of faith, showing David to be different from those who pursued righteousness through the Law. He sought for a new heart – one created by God Almighty (Psa 51:10). The Law chided Israel saying, *“Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deut 10:16).*

The Prophets challenged the people, *“make you a new heart and a new spirit,”* but the law provided neither the direction nor the power to do so.

THEY DID NOT ATTAIN

Having established the essentiality of righteousness, the Spirit is careful to tell us Israel did not attain the righteousness they sought. Israel *“has not attained to the law of righteousness.”* Clarifying that this refers to the righteousness outlined in the Law, other versions read, they *“did not arrive at that law,”*^{NASB} they *“did not succeed in fulfilling that law,”*^{NASB}

and *“who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded.”*^{NLT} All of their efforts were futile – utterly useless.

This circumstance is precisely why it is written, *“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second” (Heb 8:7).* The Law was not flawed in character. Nor, indeed, did it come short in its requirements. It was a holy, just, and good Law (Rom 7:12). **However, it had no power to change men, and men needed to be changed!**

WHY DID NOT ISRAEL ATTAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS?

“^{32a} Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.” The Spirit will not leave us to conjecture about why Israel did not attain to the law of righteousness– why it did not become righteous before God by keeping the Law. He will confirm to us that men cannot be made righteous by procedure.

REFRESHING OUR MIND

Remember, the Spirit is confirming to our hearts that man has fallen too far to recover himself. To confirm this, he will direct our attention to Israel. With the single exception of the Lord Jesus, they were the best of all flesh.

Miraculously Birthed

They were a Divinely created nation, springing forth from a man, whose body was as good as dead, and a woman who had no capacity for giving birth. As it is written, *“Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11).* And again, *“Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable” (Heb 11:12).*

Divinely Cultured

Israel was a Divinely cultured nation. There were benefits applying exclusively to them that would enable them to lift themselves out of the quagmire of sin – if such a thing was possible. The extent of these advantages is staggering to consider. They included *“the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever” (9:4-5).* It simply is not possible to

water from the flinty rock (Neh 9:15). He subdued their enemies, granting them victories that could never have been achieved naturally (Psa 78:53). He gave them judges and kings, and holy prophets as well (Judges 2:16; Acts 13:22). He gave them a land, then blessed the land (Num 20:12; Jer 2:7).

How will a people with such marvelous advantages fair in seeking to attain the law of righteousness? Our text affirms they *“followed after the law of righteousness,”* yet *“hath not attained to the law of righteousness.”* Carefully note, the Spirit does not say they did not seek this righteousness! Rather, they DID pursue the righteousness that comes from keeping the Law.

Now the Spirit will tell us why they did not attain what they pursued.

SEEKING BY FAITH

“Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith . . .”^{NASB} Israel’s quest for righteousness was not driven by faith! They did not seek after righteousness because they believed God, nor did they trust in Him in order that they might become righteous.

The Lesson to be Learned

Here we come to grips with the

Remember, the Spirit is confirming to our hearts that man has fallen too far to recover himself. To confirm this, he will direct our attention to Israel. With the single exception of the Lord Jesus, they were the best of all flesh.

give the flesh any greater advantage.

Protection and Provision

If the flesh can be trained to be righteous, it will occur in Israel. The Lord fed them miraculously with bread from heaven, and satisfied their thirst with

manner in which God instructed the world of their spiritual impotence. He gave Israel 1,500 years to keep the demands of the Law in their own strength. He gave them all of the information they needed. He fortified those demands with promises to lead them, and curses to push them. He devoted Himself exclusively to them, sending them His “servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them” (Jer 7:25). Israel did not want for information. They had all of the incentives possible. They were protected and nurtured to the fullest extent possible. Yet, they did not seek the righteousness of God by faith, and

translations. “However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.”^{NASB} “The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’”^{NIV} “But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.’”^{NRSV} “But the law does not depend on faith; rather, ‘the one who does these things will live by them.’”^{NAB} “And the Law is based not on faith but on the principle, whoever complies with it will find life in it.”^{NJB}

The Law was a system of doing, and depended solely upon the doer. This was clearly stated in the Law. “Ye shall therefore keep My statutes, and My judgments: **which if a man do, he shall live in them:** I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5). This same affirmation is found in Nehemiah 9:29 and Ezekiel 20:11,13. Jesus alluded to this when He told the rich young ruler, “but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt 19:17). Our Lord also affirmed this to a young lawyer whom He questioned concerning

the principle commandments: “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live” (Lk 10:25-28). Earlier in Romans Paul wrote, “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Rom 10:5).

In these texts life (“shall live by them,” or “in them”) is equated with becoming righteous. To be alive unto God is to be righteous before Him. Thus our text refers to “the law of righteousness,” or the Law by which righteousness could be realized.

The Law Spoke as Though It Could be Done

Flesh is confused by the promises of the Law. It imagines it can keep the Law, and thus engages in efforts to do so. To the novice, it may appear as though the

Law encouraged the thought that men could be righteous through their obedience to the Law. A sampling of its promises will serve to confirm this.

- ❑ “Now it shall come to pass, **if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully ALL His commandments which I command you today**, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: Blessed shall you be . . .” (Deut 28:1-3a).
- ❑ “And it shall come to pass, **if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve Him with ALL your heart and with ALL your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full**” (Deut 11:13-14).
- ❑ “Only if thou **CAREFULLY HEARKEN unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as He promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee**” (Deut 15:5-6).
- ❑ “And said, **If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep ALL His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee**” (Ex 15:26).

Not one word is said about believing, only doing! The reward for this doing was sufficient incentive to compel the Israelites to engage in the effort. Their attempts would confirm that the kind of response demanded by the Law simply was not possible. Thus the Law was given

The Law neither demanded or encouraged faith! It was a system of doing, not of believing! You will search in vain for any word under the Law that commanded people to believe God. The Law does not relate to faith nor require it.

therefore did not become righteous.

The Law Is Not of Faith

Here is an arresting consideration that we do well to ponder. “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal 3:12). **The Law neither demanded or encouraged faith!** It was a system of doing, not of believing! **You will search in vain for any word under the Law that commanded people to believe God.** The Law does not relate to faith nor require it. The meaning of the Galatian verse is that righteousness cannot be attained by keeping the Law. It simply is not possible, and that is why Israel did not attain to righteousness. They sought it by an impossible means.

The remarkable strength of this consideration is reflected in the various

“that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19).

THE WORKS OF THE LAW

“ . . . but as if it were based on works.” ^{NRSV} These are not the *“wonderful works of God”* (Acts 2:11), but the achievements of men. These works must be perfect, flawless, and consistent. They cannot be seasonal, sporadic, or inconsistent. ALL of the commandments must be kept ALL OF THE TIME, or *“always.”* The Law did not demand that men TRY to keep it, but that they do so, and that without flaw.

The Lord knew Israel would utterly fail in their attempt to keep the Law, and thus an elaborate system was instituted to address their imperfections. The tabernacle service, the high priests, priests, and sacrifices were all instituted to address Israel’s imperfect obedience. That is why there was an altar, a laver, an altar of incense, and a mercy seat over the ark of the covenant. None of these would have been required if righteousness could be realized by keeping the Law.

When Israel declared *“we will hear it, and do it,”* they meant well, fully intending to do what they said (Deut 5:27). Tragically, they did not realize the weakness of the flesh. However, God did, and when He heard their words He said, *“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and **keep all my commandments always**, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!”* (Deut 5:29).

The Curse of the Law

In His death, Jesus delivered us from *“the curse of the Law,”* liberating us from its condemnation. Thus it is written, *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’”* (Gal 3:13). False prophets of our day have cited this passage, declaring that poverty and disease are the curse of the Law. In so doing, they have thrust their listeners

into a deep sleep, hiding the truth from them.

We do not need men to interpret the curse of the Law for us. The Lord has spoken quite clearly on this matter. An unequivocal curse is pronounced upon all who rely upon law-keeping. *“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who **does not continue to do everything**”*

The Lord knew Israel would utterly fail in their attempt to keep the Law, and thus an elaborate system was instituted to address their imperfections.

written in the Book of the Law” ^{NIV} (Gal 3:10). Other versions read, *“CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.”* ^{NASB} *“Cursed is everyone who does not **observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.**”* ^{NRSV} *“Cursed is everyone who does not **continue to do everything** written in the Book of the Law.”* ^{NIB} *“A curse is on everyone who does not **keep on doing all the things** which are ordered in the book of the law.”* ^{BBE}

The Law demanded that **ALL of the commandments be observed ALL of the time.** Confirming the seriousness of the demand, the curse of God is pronounced upon all who fail to do so. There are no exceptions to the rule. That is why no person, regardless of acumen or discipline, can be justified by the Law. Thus it is written, *“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** [or made righteous]”* (Gal 2:16).

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

This message is certainly up-to-date. In our time, there is a renewal of law-preaching. We do well to beware of it, for it is bringing a snare upon the people.

The Prosperity Movement

The prosperity promises given under the Law are being held out to people as a reality they can possess under Christ. These purveyors of delusion have no regard whatsoever to the curse pronounced against all who attempt to be right before God by *“the works of the Law.”* Fifteen hundred years of Israel’s history are swept under the theological rug as though they did not even exist.

Under the Law, not a single promise of prosperity was offered to those who believed. They were only offered to those who perfectly kept the law (Deut 28:1-13). If they turned aside from any of God’s words, they would be cursed (Deut 28:14-68). The curses were numerous and staggering in content. If Israel did not keep all of God’s laws all of the time, those curses are all they could expect to receive from God.

Justification by Works

On the other hand, others are teaching the works of the Law as a means to becoming righteous before God. They go to the book of James, distorting its message, and preaching it as though it was the Gospel of Christ instead of a rebuke to spiritually indolent people. Taking the words *“justified by works”* (James 2:21,24,25), these teachers approach being righteous precisely as the Law, overlooking that James also added, *“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10).

James is speaking of the **evidence** of justification, not its cause. We know this because James adduces Abraham’s faith

as the cause of his righteousness and his works as the evidence of it. *“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only”* (James 2:20-24).

Between the time Abraham “believed God” (Gen 15:6), and the offering up of Isaac (Gen 22), forty-eight years passed. It is the height of absurdity to say Abraham’s justification did not occur until he took Isaac to the mount chosen by God in Moriah. We are categorically told that Abraham was justified BEFORE he was circumcised, which was a considerable time before God told him to sacrifice Isaac (Rom 4:10). James, therefore, refers to the confirmation of Abraham’s justification. That is, his obedience verified that he had been made righteous.

James reasons in this manner because the people to whom he was writing were not living by faith. They had become friends of the world (4:4), and were living in alienation from God. Thus he showed them that obedience and works DO flow from faith. The “works” of which he spoke were not the “works of the law,” but the works of faith. These are works that are not possible under the Law, for “the Law is not of faith” (Gal 3:12).

Our father Abraham did not depend upon the offering of Isaac to make him righteous. That deed was not the root of his righteousness, but its branch. Abraham responded obediently to God’s command because he was righteous. His obedience confirmed that was the case.

It is important that we learn from the Israelites. Righteousness does not come by the works of the Law, otherwise Israel, cultured by God, would have obtained it. This is the very point that is being made in our text. The Gentiles who did not seek righteousness found it, and the Jews who pursued the law of righteousness did not attain to it. The reason for their failure explains similar failures in our day. They did not seek righteousness by faith, and thus they did not attain to it. Those who do not believe on Christ, seeking righteousness by faith, still fail to attain to it.

might have obtained righteousness.

However, this is not the case at all. The point is that they were seeking for righteousness by an unlawful and ineffective means. The righteousness of God can only be appropriated by faith. Israel did not attain to that righteousness because they did not seek it by faith. They rather sought to fulfill a Law that demanded more than they had to give. Those demands were designed to stop their mouths and render them consciously guilty before the Almighty. In the wake of that persuasion they could have received

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Making An End of the Means

The Law was a Divinely appointed means to an end. The end, or objective, was to define sin and convince men of their guilt, thereby stopping their mouths. Israel made the Law an end of itself, seeking to it for righteousness. In such an arrangement, faith was excluded.

It is possible for men to do the same thing today – to make an end out of something intended to be a means. A classic example is our baptism into Christ. That is the appointed means of inducting us into Christ, securing the remission of sins, and becoming alive unto God. When, however, baptism is viewed as an end of itself, men trust in it rather than in God, thereby nullifying its purpose.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our text is NOT saying that Israel did not pursue the law of righteousness with enough vigor. It is NOT that they were inconsistent in their pursuit of that righteousness. If only, some might reason, they had been more aggressive, they

righteousness just as surely as Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian jailor.

I am chagrined by the popularity of this approach to righteousness in the nominal church. Moral disciplines and routines are being hawked by the false prophets that offer the guarantee of living acceptably before God. However, such a life is only possible by faith, without which it is impossible to please God. If “works” centering in the holy, spiritual, and good Law of God could not attain to righteousness, you may be sure adherence to the demands of lesser laws cannot do so. If men insist on pursuing righteousness through law, it will be said of them as it is said of Israel, they have “not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith.” Righteousness cannot be realized apart from faith. It is simply not possible. Faith takes hold of righteousness. The Spirit will now elaborate on the futile effort of the Israelites, detailing what frustrated their efforts. He is showing us the necessity of faith.

THEY STUMBLER AT THE STUMBLING STONE

“^{32a} For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.” This is the explanation for Israel’s pursuit of

The Means by Which We Become Righteous Is Again Brought to Our Attention--by Given O. Blakely

righteousness by means of the Law. As will be developed in the next verse, the “*stumbling stone*” was the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the appointed means of men becoming righteous before God.

Jesus is only relevant to men if there is no other way to become righteous. If He is viewed as just another teacher, or one who presents some other alternative, He at once becomes a source of offense. This is why Jesus is not preached more zealously. It is precisely why men can be diverted to matters of Law rather than the necessity of a righteousness that is without spot or wrinkle. This is why religious people are easily diverted to domestic, social, and political issues. It is why economic matters are fundamental to some, while organizational issues seem primary to others. Like Israel, such people are stumbling at the stumbling stone.

WHAT IT MEANS TO STUMBLE

Simply put, the Israelites stumbled over Jesus because He was not what they expected Him to be. Isaiah foretold Jesus would not be perceived as critical to men. “*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men*”^{NIV} (Isa 53:2-3). He did not appear to be what men really needed.

When presented as their King, they

replied, “*We have no king but Caesar*” (John 19:15). Jesus depicted Israel’s response to Him in the parable of “*a certain nobleman*” who “*went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.*” When calling his ten servants to himself, he delivered to them his goods, saying, “*Occupy till I come.*”

are made blind, they have stumbled at the stumbling stone. Although such people appeared to be discerning, when they confronted Jesus, they were blinded by the Light of this world rather than illuminated by Him.

The ultimate stumbling occurred

Jesus is only relevant to men if there is no other way to become righteous. If He is viewed as just another teacher, or one who presents some other alternative, He at once becomes a source of offense. This is why Jesus is not preached more zealously.

However, “*his citizens*” hated him, and sent a message after him saying, “*We will not have this man to reign over us*” (Lk 19:12-14). They were stumbling over the nobleman just like the Israelites stumbled over Christ.

In this case, “*stumbling*” is not simply tripping. Rather, it is being so intent upon self-will that Divine provision actually causes the person to fall. Jesus put it this way, “*For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind*” (John 9:39). When those who see

when the Israelites cried out to Pilate, “*Let Him be crucified!*” When Pilate asked what evil He had done, they only cried out the more, “*Let Him be crucified.*” When Pilate sought to wash his hands of all involvement in the matter, the Israelites cried out, “*His blood be on us, and on our children*” (Matt 27:22-25). How could they speak in such a manner? They had stumbled over the stumbling stone! Who Jesus was had brought out who they really were. The One who was intended to bring them advantage, caused them to be cursed. This was because “*they received Him not.*”

A STUMBLING STONE AND ROCK OF OFFENSE

^{33a} **As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense . . .’** When men have wicked hearts, it is God’s manner to expose that wickedness by setting goodness before them. In this way, the wretchedness of self is more clearly seen, as well as the justice of God. The very thing that brings salvation to the believer brings condemnation to the unbeliever. There are several examples of this in Scripture.

□ **THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.** “*And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is*

baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk 16:15-26). The same Gospel that brings salvation to the one believing it, is the occasion of damnation to those who do not believe it. To the unbeliever, it is a stumbling stone.

□ **THE INFLUENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.** “*For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?*” (2 Cor 2:15-16). The same godly influence that promotes life among

the believers, promotes death among unbelievers. To them, it is a stumbling stone.

□ **THE RETURN OF JESUS.** “*And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe*

(because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thess 1:7-10). The same coming that brings glory to the saints, and admiration from them, brings vengeance, punishment, and destruction to the wicked. To them, it will be a stumbling stone.

These texts confirm the effect of a stumbling stone. We will now see that the Almighty God places the stumbling stone so that it will accomplish His purpose and reveal the hearts of men.

PLACED BY GOD

“Behold, I lay in Zion . . . ”

The text is taken from Isaiah 28:16. “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, **I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation.**” Peter also refers to this Divine work. “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, **I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious**” (1 Pet 2:6). The Lord Jesus also referred to this event, citing it as an explanation for the chief priest’s and elder’s rejection of Himself. “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: **this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?**” (Matt 21:42).

God placed Jesus, the foundation stone, where He was accessible to those who were seeking salvation. He also placed Him where He was observable to those who labored to establish their own righteousness.

The Lord Jesus was placed among men by God Himself. That Divine placement proved to be the undoing of all who pursued the law of righteousness – all who sought to become righteous through their own efforts. To aspire to such a thing is like a blind man trying to give himself sight, or a man with a withered hand attempting to make it whole. Lazarus might as well attempt to return from the dead under his own power as for a man to seek to be righteous by keeping the Law. Such efforts are totally futile,

and were revealed to be so when God placed the Foundation Stone among men.

The Stone was laid following His exaltation in heaven. While men were introduced to Him when He walked among them, His role as a Foundation

This was the Stone upon which all valid efforts had to be founded. God will accept no building, or human effort, that is not upon the Foundation of His Son. Those who stumble over Him have refused to accept Him in that ordained capacity. They choose Law over Christ, and works over faith.

became a reality only after He had been “tried” – proven to be adequate for the salvation of His people.

This was the Stone upon which all valid efforts had to be founded. God will accept no building, or human effort, that is not upon the Foundation of His Son. Those who stumble over Him have refused to accept Him in that ordained capacity. They choose Law over Christ, and works over faith.

THE STUMBLING STONE

Isaiah spoke powerfully of this Stone becoming the occasion of stumbling. “Sanctify the LORD of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. And He shall be for a sanctuary; but **for a stone of stumbling** and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken” (Isa 8:13-15).

Notice how the very One established as a sanctuary became the occasion for stumbling. This fulfilled the prophecy

given by Simeon when Jesus was only eight days old. “Behold, this child is set for the **fall and rising again** of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against” (Luke 2:34).

Those who stumble over Jesus do so because they have preferred darkness to light. As Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

THE ROCK OF OFFENSE

“ . . . and rock of offense.”

This expression is used three times in Scripture: Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8. Other versions bring out the strength of this statement. “a rock that **makes them fall**,”^{NIV} “a rock that **will make them fall**,”^{NRSV} “a rock **in the way**,”^{BBE} and “a rock **to trip people up**.”^{NJB}

The Lord will not allow flesh to glory in His presence. The affirmations of the Spirit are unusually strong in this matter. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall **no flesh be justified in his sight**” (Rom 3:20). “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: **that no flesh should glory in his presence**” (1 Cor 1:27-29).

The preaching of Christ throws the Stone of offense in the path of all who are seeking to be righteous through the Law. They will not be able to get around the Stone, and it will bring out their enmity against God. Anyone who refuses to “fall on this Stone” (Matt 21:44) is, by that very circumstance, revealed to be wicked and alienated from God.

The enmity uncovered by the Lord Jesus is so strong it will move Scribes, Pharisees, Saducees, lawyers, and even the high priest, to seek the death of Jesus

(John 7:1; Matt 27:1; Mk 15:1). It will compel religious men to seek the death of Paul, even taking a vow not to eat until they have killed him (Acts 9:23-24; 23:12). It will move the Jewish council to stone Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 7:58-59).

Let it be clear that the declaration of Christ **causes** this enmity to rise, and designedly so. It is in this sense that Jesus is a “*rock of offense*.” He is offensive to all flesh, but never to such an extensive degree as in those who are seeking to be justified by the Law.

AN APPLICATION

Simeon once said of Jesus, “*Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against . . . **that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed***” (Luke 2:34-35).

One of the invaluable ministries of preaching Jesus is the discovery of the hearts of men. The Word of God is said to be “*living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is **a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart***” (Heb 4:12). That is never more true than when the Gospel of Christ is preached! An

excellent example of this is found in the preaching of Christ Jesus in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisida. At that time, the Jews were incensed because of the preaching. They were “*filled with envy,*

stumbling and a rock of offense. To the Gentiles, it was a Foundation Stone upon which their lives could be built.

Thus, the pursuit of righteousness

Let it be clear that the declaration of Christ causes this enmity to rise, and designedly so. It is in this sense that Jesus is a “rock of offense.” He is offensive to all flesh, but never to such an extensive degree as in those who are seeking to be justified by the Law.

and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” (Acts 13:45). On the other hand, the Gentiles, upon hearing the same message, “*were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*” (Acts 13:48).

The condition of the hearts of these people was known to God all along. However, the proclamation of Christ revealed that condition. To put it another way, the Foundation Stone was laid in Zion. To the Jews, it became a stone of

through the Law equates to a rejection of Christ Jesus as the Foundation Stone. In other words, the Jews did not attain unto righteousness because they rejected Christ Jesus. Contrary to the preaching of Law, the Gospel requires faith. It declares a Christ that cannot be seen. It proclaims His accomplishments that cannot be demonstrated in the flesh. It also presumes the deadness and alienation of all people. In such a Gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, and it is refreshing to all who believe it. To them, it chronicles righteousness for all those who believe. What a blessed message!

THE ONE WHO BELIEVES

^{33b} **“And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”** Other versions read, “*He who believes in Him will **not be disappointed***”^{NASB} “*the one who trusts in him will **never be put to shame***,”^{NIV} “*And whosoever believeth in him **shall not be confounded***,” Duoy-Rheims “*he who relies on this **will not be brought to disgrace***.”^{NJB}

The text is a loose quotation, but gives the precise sense, of Isaiah 45:17. “*But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.*” Isaiah 54:4 also reads, “*Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame.*” Speaking of those who put

their trust in the Lord, Joel said, “*Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame*” (Joel 2:27).

BELIEVING ON HIM

Believing on Christ is not mere intellectual assent, or casual agreement. Believing on Christ is trusting Him to save, depending on Him for righteousness. Believing involves the abandonment of self-confidence and total dependency on Christ to do in us what He has been ordained to do.

This is the work of God – to believe on His Son. “*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent*” (John 6:29). No accomplishments have been

achieved until we are brought to believe on Christ! What is more, it is “*given unto*” us to believe (Phil 1:29). When those with tender hearts hear the Gospel of Christ they believe “*through grace*” (Acts 18:27). Those who “*believe on Him*” receive the Holy Spirit (John 7:39). Such will be saved (Acts 16:31). In accordance with our text, righteousness will be imputed to those who “*believe on Him who raised Jesus from the dead*” (Rom 4:24). The end, or objective, of believing on Christ is nothing less than “*eternal life*” (1 Tim 1:16).

To “*believe on Him*” is to take hold of what He says, refusing to let it go. It is to seek refuge in Him for protection, and expect to be “*made the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor 5:21). Believing on

Him is cleaving to Him with “purpose of heart” (Acts 11:23). It is depending upon His guidance and craving His Person.

Believing brings God’s righteousness to us – the righteousness the Israelites missed because they did not seek it by faith. How gloriously and refreshingly this is stated in the next chapter of Romans. “For with the heart one **believes unto righteousness**” (10:10). Others versions read, “For it is with your heart that you **believe and are justified**.”^{NIV} “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.”^{NAU} “For with the heart man has **faith to get righteousness**.”^{BBE} “For it is **by believing in your heart that you are made right with God**.”^{NLT}

Faith, or believing on Jesus, enables the individual to appropriate the righteousness of God now. It also empowers us to “wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal 5:5). This is “the righteousness for which we hope.”^{NIV} We have it now by imputation, we will have it in the world to come by nature, with no competing influences.

NOT PUT TO SHAME

“And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” The word “shame” means dishonored, caused to blush, or confounded. The promise is that no person will be disadvantaged by believing on Christ. Those who choose to trust in Him as He is revealed through the Gospel

will never be confounded or abashed because of it.

Trusting the Lord is never a disappointing experience! God will not allow those who believe on His Son to be put to shame, embarrassed, or confounded

will respond there is no way to know for sure what God is going to do, and therefore we cannot trust Him. But flesh is wrong! We can trust Him! When we trust the Lord to do what He desires, whether in us or in others, we will not be put to shame because of it. **The Lord**

Trusting the Lord is never a disappointing experience! God will not allow those who believe on His Son to be put to shame, embarrassed, or confounded by life’s circumstances.

by life’s circumstances. The idea is that when we trust the Lord, He does in and for us what He has said He will do. We **will** “receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting” (Luke 18:30).

Allow me to be even more specific in this matter. This, I believe, is the sense of the text. The living God has been represented as having mercy on whomever He wills to have mercy. Freely, it is declared that He has compassion on anyone He desires. He hardens whom He wills, even raising up men like Pharaoh in order to make His power known, and have His name proclaimed throughout the entire world.

Can we trust a God like that? Flesh

never works against those who trust in Him! That is something every soul must grasp.

The revelation of God is brought to its peak in Christ Jesus. There God is seen most clearly, and what He declares is understood most precisely. Because the “fulness of the Godhead” dwells in Him bodily (Col 2:9), He most accurately projects the Person and purpose of God.

Therefore, when we believe on Him, God will see to it we are not disappointed, ashamed, or confounded. No one will come short of the righteousness of God who believes on His Son. Of that, you may be sure! God has promised, and He cannot lie.

CONCLUSION

Again, we have plowed in a field that has been left fallow by the professed church. Because of this, many souls have been left impoverished, weak in the faith, and confused by the working of the Lord. The pursuit of righteousness by means of a law is not at all uncommon. Countless believers are relying upon procedures, rule-keeping, and institutional membership for righteousness. But no person can be made righteous, or acceptable to God, by such means.

The Law given to Israel was the best of all moral codes. When it comes to being

regulated by law, there is no better law than the one given to Israel. As it is written, “And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?”^{NIV} (Deut 4:8). If this is the means by which righteousness is attained, it would have come through the Law of Moses. As it is written, “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law” (Gal 3:21).

What men needed was a “better covenant,” not a better law! They needed

“better sacrifices,” not a better law. We needed blood that spoke better things “than that of Abel” – blood that did not cry out for judgment and condemnation but for life and righteousness (Heb 12:24). Praise God, that is precisely what we receive in Christ Jesus. It is what is announced in “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What is the relationship of all of this to the condition of the Israelites, Paul’s “kinsmen according to the flesh”? Much every way! First, we must not be so foolish

as to imagine God has repudiated them. He can have mercy on whomever He wills, and who is willing to say God will never again have mercy upon Israel? Divine acceptance is based upon faith, not achievements. If, therefore, the Gentiles could appropriate righteousness by faith, and without seeking after it, what law of reason would lead men to believe such a blessing is not possible for the Israelites?

This subject will be developed extensively in the next two chapters. A

foundation has been put in place in preparation for that development. The Spirit will build upon the marvelous realities declared in this ninth chapter.

The Lord has revealed things difficult for the flesh to receive, and He will show us greater things. He is calling upon us to trust the Lord – to believe on Him. Throughout this book, faith has been set forth as effectual. It obtains what no law can bring to you. It is always honored and blessed by God. We see it in Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob. It can be seen in the Gentiles, who attained to righteousness by faith. It can also be seen in Paul, who was transformed by the grace of God.

The Gospel of Christ is God's power in order to salvation. It remains that power "to the Jew first." It is laden with good things to be believed, and marvelous promises to be obtained – "to the Jew first." There is no reason why we cannot join Paul in the consideration of Israel. We can also participate in His promises.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 33



A HOPE-DRIVEN PRAYER FOR ISRAEL

^{10:1} Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. ⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." ⁶ 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) ⁷ or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ 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): ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

– Romans 10:1-13 ^{NKJV} –

INTRODUCTION

The mind that is *"controlled by the Spirit"* (Rom 8:6 ^{NIV}) faces the hard realities related to people being alienated from God. It acknowledges that those who have not attained to the righteousness of God have **not sought it** by faith. Yet, this perception does not cause the heart to grow cold and indifferent toward such people. Particularly in the case of Israel, Paul demonstrates what it means to love our enemies and do good to those who despitely use us (Matt 5:44).

OPPOSED BY THE JEWS

The Jews had been aggressive in

their opposition to Paul. Early In his ministry, the Jews in Damascus *"took counsel to kill him,"* watching the gates of the city *"day and night to kill him"* (Acts 9:23-24). In Antioch of Pisidia *"the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul,"* causing him to be expelled from the city (Acts 13:50-51). In Thessalonica, certain Jews stirred up such an uproar in the city, that Paul was forced to leave (Acts 17:4-10). When he came into Berea, *"the Jews of Thessalonica came,"* stirring up the people and forcing him to leave that area

also (Acts 17:13-14). When he preached in Corinth, *"the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat"* (Acts 18:12). When he returned to Jerusalem, *"certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul"* (Acts 23:12).

"Five times" they beat him with *"forty stripes minus one"* (2 Cor 11:24). Jews from Antioch caused him to stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). He declared he was frequently *"in perils by mine own*

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. A HEART'S DESIRE AND PRAYER (10:1)
- II. ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE (10:2)
- III. THE EFFECT OF IGNORANCE (10:3)
- IV. THE END OF THE LAW (10:4)
- V. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW (10:5)
- VI. WHAT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH DOES NOT SAY (10:6-7)
- VII. WHAT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH DOES SAY (10:8-9)
- VIII. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SALVATION (10:10)
- IX. WHAT DOES THE SCRIPTURE SAY? (10:11-13)

countrymen" (2 Cor 11:26). With a tone of grief Paul said of the Jews, "Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men" (1 Thess 2:14).

It would be exceedingly difficult to endure more opposition from your former associates than Paul did from his! When we experience contrariety from those with whom we have traveled, we should run to this passage of Scripture to gain encouragement. There is no need for us to retaliate, or to conduct ourselves against people with harshness and inconsideration. While rebuke and correction are often necessary, and even strong denunciation, our hearts must remain tender and supple.

A CHANGE IN THE MAN

Prior to being in Christ, Saul of Tarsus was aggressive against those who were in conflict with his perception of devotion to God. Confessing to his shameful conduct he said, "I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor 15:9). He is presented as "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,"^{NKJV} even seeking permission to hunt them down like wild animals, bringing them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1). He wrote to the Galatians, "I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy

it"^{NKJV} (Gal 1:13).

In regard to that segment of his life, Paul said he was "a persecutor, and injurious" (1 Tim 1:13). And again, "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). He was convinced he "must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9).

But when Saul of Tarsus knowingly confronted the glorified Christ, he was changed! He did not seek out the Jews to persecute them, but to deliver the Gospel to them. He did not return hatred to his enemies, as he did when a Pharisee. He had received a "heart of flesh" (Ezek 11:19; 36:26), and it was supple in the hands of the Lord. Now he viewed the Jews as Jesus did, whom the Jews had opposed even more than they did him.

Rather than the oppressive hatred of the Jews driving him to despise them, Paul rises into the heavenly realms by the Holy Spirit. He views them with "the mind of Christ," and thus brings himself into harmony with God's eternal purpose. He refuses to write them off, but rather enters into a certain fervency for their salvation. What is more, he is not ashamed to confess to this desire, showing that it is in perfect accord with both the nature and the purpose of the Living God.

THE COMPULSION OF LEGALISM

There is a certain compulsive nature in legalism – a propensity to be justified by Law. When dominated by this mentality, the individual becomes aggressive against those who oppose him, descending into the realm of flesh and blood to do battle. False religion will drive people to do things against other believers that are astonishing.

It moved the Roman Catholic

hierarchy to mandate the death of hundreds of thousands of believers because they did not subscribe to the "laws of the church." It has constrained others to, in the name of Christ, cast faithful believers from their midst because they could not accept the traditions of men. Others have been maligned and their names smeared because they would not embrace the institution as though it was the solitary representative of the living God.

A legalistic mind-set frequently yields a heartless religion. Its constituents become more zealous of conforming people to the manners of the organization than to the image of God's Son. Many of us have drank from the bitter cup of legalism, and can testify to the truth of these observations.

SOVEREIGNTY AND COLDNESS

It is also necessary to briefly comment on another misconception. Many have opposed the teaching of God's Sovereignty, as declared in this section of Romans, because it seems cold and lifeless. Indeed, some who proclaim the Sovereignty of God, and "the election of grace," appear to justify this conclusion. They think nothing of writing off the souls of men as though the Lord delighted in "the death of the wicked" – which He does not (Ezek 33:11). Such individuals often leave people thinking God is actually willing for some to perish, or is not willing that all men be saved. Both of these are complete misconceptions (2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4). God is not heartless, and it is out of order for any of us to be.

Our text will confirm these conclusions. Moved along by the Holy Spirit of God, the same man who spoke of God choosing Isaac, loving Jacob, hating Esau, and raising up Pharaoh, will declare the desire of his heart – that Israel be saved. Lofty truths, when perceived, do

It is also necessary to briefly comment on another misconception. Many have opposed the teaching of God's Sovereignty, as declared in this section of Romans, because it seems cold and lifeless.

not make hearts hard! **Knowing and believing that God has mercy on whomever He wills, and hardens whomever He desires, does not dash hope to the ground!** We will find in this text that the true apprehension of these realities kindles in the heart hopes and desires for others – especially in regard to the Israelites.

It is necessary to thrust from our minds any notion that knowing God does what He desires, creates coldness and a sense of futility in the hearts of men. Doctrines that, when embraced, leave men and women cold and indifferent cannot be true! When known, *“the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). That

freedom involves tenderheartedness, and makes no provision for insensitivity. How gloriously this is seen in the text before us. **Here is a human response that brings great glory to God!**

TWO KINDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

This chapter will develop for us the difference between the righteousness that comes from faith, and that which comes from keeping the Law. It is a critical distinction, for one is possible and the other impossible. One brings Divine acceptance and the other does not. One is the ordained means of becoming righteous, the other is the ordained means of showing righteousness cannot be achieved through human discipline.

It is imperative that the people of God see this distinction. They must not view this as some form of profound theology, intended only for the intellectually elite, or positionally superior. Such distinctions belong to the order of flesh, and have no place among God’s people. Faith is the distinguishing trait in God’s kingdom. That is what gives prominence to the individual, as attested by the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

The uniqueness of the righteousness that comes from faith puts the salvation of Israel within reach, just as it put it within the reach of the Gentiles. That, of course, is the point of this passage. It reveals with wisdom of God.

A HEART’S DESIRE AND PRAYER

“¹⁰¹ Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” These are the not words of the mind, but of the heart. They are not the expression of mere sentiment, but of faith and love. This is the way the Apostle speaks to *“the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10) concerning the Israelites, His *“kinsmen according to the flesh.”* Because he is being moved by the Holy Spirit, we can conclude this is how the Spirit speaks to the churches about the Jews.

The Promise to Abraham

God, who cannot lie, made certain promises to our father Abraham. The following words are included in those Divine commitments. *“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee”* (Gen 12:3). Through Isaac, the child of promise, the promise was repeated to Jacob, *“cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee”* (Gen 27:29). Even Balaam could not refrain from repeating the words to wicked Balak, who sought to have Israel cursed: *“Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee”* (Num 24:9).

Words Through David

Knowing the covenant of the Lord to the houses of Judah and Israel (Jer 31:31-44), David was moved by the Spirit to speak of their chief city. *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee”* (Psa 122:6). In his penitential pray, recorded in Psalm 51, he prayed, *“Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of*

There is no record of Him weeping over any other city, people, or country. When Jerusalem rejected Jesus, He wept. When the Gadarene’s begged Him to leave their country, “He got into the boat and returned”

Jerusalem” (Psa 51:18). The 137th Psalm records these touching words. *“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy”* (verses 5-6).

Jeremiah’s Admonition

Jeremiah admonished those who escaped the sword during the ravages of Jerusalem, *“Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind”* (Jer 51:50).

Jesus Wept Over Jerusalem

Before His death, Jesus came near to the city of Jerusalem, beheld it, and *“wept over it”* (Luke 19:41). There is no record of Him weeping over any other city, people, or country. When Jerusalem rejected Jesus, He wept. When the Gadarene’s begged Him to leave their country, *“He got into the boat and returned”* (Lk 8:37). Jesus went about *“all the cities and villages”* (Matt 9:35), but He only wept over Jerusalem.

Jesus Prayed for the Jews

The Lord Jesus Himself displayed this attitude from the lowest realm ever occupied by a man in the flesh – the cross. From the depths of His spirit He cried out, *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”* (Lk 23:34).

Stephen Prayed for the Jews

Stephen prayed in the same manner

when his life was being pounded out of him with stones: *"he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"* (Acts 7:60). Like that of Paul, his prayer was driven by his acquaintance with Scripture and fellowship with Jesus. At the time he prayed these words, he had witnessed Jesus standing on the right hand of God (7:56), was calling upon God, and asking Jesus to receive his spirit (7:59). It is inconceivable that a human spirit bathed in such glory could pray something foolish or out of harmony with the will of God.

All of this confirms there is an unquestionable foundation for seeking the good of the Israelites, Paul's *"kinsmen according to the flesh."*

A DESIRE OF THE HEART

"... my heart's desire ..." Unless it can be established to be otherwise, this is a desire of Paul's *"new heart."* It surely is not the desire of a stony heart, which was removed in that he might obtain a new heart, tender and supple in the hands of the Lord.

I know of no Word from God that speaks of illegitimate concerns erupting from the renewed heart. Further, if this was a wrong and futile desire, the Word of the Lord would have searched it out, exposing it (Heb 4:12). In such a case, the Holy Spirit would not have allowed Paul's desire to be stated without an explanation of some sort.

This is doubtless one of the results of Paul loving the Lord with all of his heart (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37). I have no doubts that those who deny this is the case will find it utterly impossible to prove otherwise. The textual context of these words allow for no other conclusion. The doctrinal content of the passage demands that we take this view, else the passage is nothing more than the outburst of carnality. I would consider such a conclusion to be blasphemous.

A PRAYER TO GOD

This is more than a mere human

desire. It is a *"prayer to God."* In this case, the desire of the heart has been wed to the purpose of God. Paul is doing more than letting his request be made known to God (Phil 4:6). Knowing the promises of God, he brings his heart into accord with

I know of no Word from God that speaks of illegitimate concerns erupting from the renewed heart. Further, if this was a wrong and futile desire, the Word of the Lord would have searched it out, exposing it.

them. He realizes it is God's manner to divulge His intentions in order that His people might implore Him to do what He has promised. As it is written, *"Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock"* (Ezek 36:36-37).

Jeremiah spoke of the same spiritual reality. *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you"*^{NKJV} (Jeremiah 29:11-12).

This is an aspect of the Kingdom of God that could do with a great deal more exploration. It reveals an aspect of the Divine nature that allows for the

redeemed to become integrally involved in the outworking of God's purpose. While much of contemporary prayer is self-centered, here is a prayer that is totally selfless, swathed with the light of Divine glory and bathed in God's eternal purpose. Paul's desire reflected the mind of Christ and the will of the Father.

THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED

The expression *"be saved"* equates to *"attained to righteousness"* (9:30). Salvation, from this view, is becoming acceptable to God by having His righteousness imputed to us. That is the very theme that is being developed in Romans – the reception of God's own righteousness. While that righteousness does impact upon our conduct [thoughts, words, and deeds] it is not our conduct that constitutes us righteous before God. Our faith is counted to us for righteousness, not our conduct (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3,5). Paul prays that Israel might attain to *"the righteousness of faith"* (4:13). That is salvation!

When Saul of Tarsus was called to the Apostleship, the scope of his ministry was revealed to Ananias. *"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, **and the children of Israel**"* (Acts 9:15). Paul entered into his labors with zeal.

Later in this book, the Apostle to the Gentiles will confess his ardent intention to reach his kinsmen with the Gospel of Christ. He preached to the Gentiles *"inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: **if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them**"* (Rom 11:13-14).

The labors of Paul, therefore, were wedded to his prayers. His prayers were also substantiated and assisted by his labors. Blessed is the person who brings action and prayer together, and does so in strict harmony with the will of God!

ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

“² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” The tenderness and sensitivity of Paul is revealed in this text. Although his kinsmen according to the flesh vigorously opposed him, yet he was able to acknowledge something commendable in them. It was not something that would obtain the righteousness of God. Neither, indeed, was it something that would rescue them from darkness and deception. Nevertheless, it was like a small crack in the door that permitted the light of hope

judge and even remove them, He was careful to cite their comely qualities.

□ **EPHESUS**, who had left their first love. *“I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted . . . But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the*

commendation of any sort to the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-18). But where there was any evidence of hope, the Lord acknowledged it, commended the people, and urged their full recovery.

This is the sort of spirit Paul has when he speaks of the zeal of the Israelites. It is a comely quality, though it was being misdirected.

WHAT IS ZEAL?

“They have a zeal for God . . .” Zeal is more than hype or carnal excitement. It involves a fervent mind, and a certain jealousy for the object of the zeal. It includes pursuing a perceived advantage, and opposing all that is considered against that advantage. Thus, zeal is seen to have two sides. **Ardent affection for and a keen interest in what is sought, and indignation and fierceness toward those opposed to what is sought.**

It is a good thing to be able to see tokens of hope in the individuals for whom we pray. They will help to drive our desires and prayers to be more fervent and consistent.

to shed an encouraging ray upon the heart of the Apostle.

The presence of the quality mentioned causes Paul to be even more ardent in his desire for their salvation. It is a good thing to be able to see tokens of hope in the individuals for whom we pray. They will help to drive our desires and prayers to be more fervent and consistent.

BEARING WITNESS

“I bear them witness . . .” A sectarian spirit cannot acknowledge comely qualities in those of other persuasions. Such an one imagines that to see anything appropriate in those perceived as being in error is to approve everything about them.

When the Paul had to rebuke the Galatians for their reversion to the Law, he was careful to bear witness to comely things they had done. *“For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me”* (Gal 4:15). When the glorified Christ rebuked the wayward churches in Asia, threatening to

Nicolaitanes, which I also hate” (Rev 2:2-7).

□ **PERGAMOS**, who had some among them who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which Jesus hated. *“I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth”* (Rev 2:13-15).

□ **THYATIRA**, who allowed a false prophetess to teach Christ’s servants to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols. *“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first”* (Rev 2:19-20).

□ **SARDIS**, who had a name they were alive, but actually were dead. *“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy”* (Rev 3:4).

Confirming that there are some in which no good can be found, Jesus gave no

In our text, Israel did not simply have zeal, but a *“zeal for God.”*^{NKJV} They were aggressive in their devotion to their perception of Him. They also vigorously opposed those whom they considered to be against Him. Paul knew well of this kind of behavior, for he himself was once zealous in this way. He aggressively sought to serve God. He also energetically opposed and persecuted those he considered to be against God.

One of the dampening effects of a pedantic, or merely academic, approach to the things of God is the diminishing of zeal. In our time, zeal in Christian circles is exceedingly rare. People have grown accustomed to giving only a fragment of their persons to anything pertaining to God. This includes their time, resources, and influence, together with their hearts and minds. Too often, a person who is zealous for the Lord stands out like the proverbial *sore thumb*.

ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

“ . . . but not according to knowledge.” The zeal of the Israelites was not driven by a proper knowledge of God. Nor,

indeed, did it flow from an understanding of the reality and nature of true righteousness. That circumstance removed the effectiveness of their zeal.

Scripture affirms that *“it is good to be zealous in a good thing always”* (Gal 4:18), but only so! **It will never bring advantages to the individual to be zealous for the wrong thing!** Misdirected efforts are never the means of appropriating Divine benefits!

Knowledge = Enlightenment

The *“knowledge”* of reference is not scholastic or theoretical. Rather, this is the knowledge that comes with enlightenment. The NRSV emphasizes this: *“I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened.”*

Here, the word *“knowledge”* comes from the Greek word ἐπίγνωσις, which means *precise and correct, or true knowledge*. This word is used ten other times in Scripture, and always refers to a supernatural knowledge – one that is given by God.

- ❑ *“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Col 1:9).
- ❑ *“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Col 1:10).
- ❑ *“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ”* (Col 2:2).
- ❑ *“And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him”* (Col 3:10).
- ❑ *“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the*

truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

- ❑ *“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth”* (2 Tim 2:25).
- ❑ *“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (2

progress, producing a zeal that is right.

Our new birth is referred to as the time when we *“were illuminated”* (Heb 10:32), or *“were once enlightened”* (Heb 6:4). When *“the eyes of your understanding”* are *“enlightened”* (Eph 1:18), zeal for the things of God is the

Scripture affirms that *“it is good to be zealous in a good thing always”* (Gal 4:18), but only so! It will never bring advantages to the individual to be zealous for the wrong thing! Misdirected efforts are never the means of appropriating Divine benefits!

Tim 3:7).

- ❑ *“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness”* (Tit 1:1).
- ❑ *“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”* (Heb 10:26).
- ❑ *“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 1:8).

The meaning of the expression, therefore, is this: **The Israelites have a zeal for God, but it is not the result of being enlightened by God. It is not the outcome of comprehending Him, or being convinced of the availability of His righteousness in Christ Jesus.**

The Effects of True Knowledge

Among other things, this confirms the impact that new creatureship has upon the person who is born again. The *“new man”* is created in order to the attainment of, and progress in true knowledge (Col 3:10). That knowledge moves the individual along the road of spiritual

result. As never before, that is when men and women will seek *“first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matt 6:33). Examine your own heart and see if this is not precisely what happened to you!

Profitable Zeal

To be profitable, zeal must proceed from spiritual enlightenment. When it is *“not according to knowledge,”* it always comes short of the purpose of God. As you can see, enthusiasm and fervency are not ends of themselves.

INSTITUTIONAL ZEAL

It is not uncommon in our day to find people dominated by institutional zeal, or fervor. They are aggressive to maintain and propagate the party line. Many of us have fallen victims to this approach in the past, and are exceedingly thankful we have been delivered from it. Mark it well, those within an institution created, ordered, and condoned by God Almighty fell short of Divine objectives in their zeal. Therefore, you can rest assured that those giving themselves to mere human institutions have absolutely no hope of attaining to righteousness, particularly the righteousness of God. The level of their zeal is of no consequence whatsoever.

THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF IGNORANCE

“³ For they being ignorant of || God’s righteousness, and seeking to || establish their own righteousness,

have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” The Spirit speaks candidly about the failure of the Israelites to appropriate the righteousness contained in the Law. Remember, they were NOT seeking God’s righteousness, but the righteousness set forth in the Law of Moses. It looked to them as though it was attainable, and thus they pursued it with zeal. The Spirit now makes three pungent observations, confirming why the Israelites did not attain to the righteousness of the Law.

IGNORANCE OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

“For not knowing about God’s righteousness . . .”^{NASB}
Other versions read, “Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God.”^{NIV} “Not having knowledge of God’s righteousness.”^{BBE} “For, in their unawareness of the righteousness that comes from God.”^{NLT} “For they don’t understand God’s way of making people right with Himself.”^{NJB}

Here, what the Israelites did **NOT** know moved them into inappropriate action. The world says, *What you do not know cannot hurt you.* How wrong is that foolish aphorism!

Keep in mind “*God’s righteousness*” refers to the righteousness He GIVES. It is not only His in the sense of belonging to Him. It is also His in the sense of coming from Him to men. The righteousness of which Israel was ignorant was the righteousness God gives to men because of their faith. Had they known about that righteousness, they would have sought it. However, they did not know about it. They were ignorant of it, having no understanding of it.

Why Did They NOT Know?

How is it that the Israelites, chosen and tutored by God, did not know about His righteousness – the righteousness that He gives? **It is because the Law gave no hint about this righteousness!** In regards to righteousness, it spoke only of man’s

doing, never of God’s giving.

Within the code of Law, the Lord spoke of giving commandments (Ex 24:12,22), rest from enemies (Ex 33:14), and the land of Canaan (Lev 20:24). He spoke of giving rain (Lev 26:4), peace in the land (Lev 26:6), and flesh to eat (Num 11:21). **However, He NEVER spoke of giving them righteousness!**

The Lord gave workman for the tabernacle (Ex 31:6), portions to the Levites from the offerings (Lev 6:17), and the gift of the priesthood (Num 18:7). He said He gave them cities (Deut 3:19), and

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a possession to every man (Deut 3:20). **But He never said He had, or would, give them righteousness.**

In the Law, righteousness ALWAYS had to do with what men did. In all of the Law (Exodus 20 - Deut) God never referred to “*My righteousness.*” The phrase “*righteousness of God*” is never mentioned. One time it is said of the Lord, “*Righteous and upright is He*” (Deut 32:4), but there is no hint that it would be given to men.

The Law, therefore, did NOT enlighten men concerning God’s righteousness. It only held forth a righteousness that resulted from men’s doing. Thus it was written, “*And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us*” (Deut 6:24-25).

With all of the words in the Law, there was not sufficient information to conclude there was a righteousness to be received from God! That is precisely why the Israelites were ignorant of “*God’s righteousness.*”

Academically, It Was Plain Enough

Although the Law held out remarkable promises for keeping it (Deut 28:1-14) and frightening curses for failing to keep it (Deut 28:15-68), it gave no hint that its demands exceeded natural abilities. That reality would only be realized by a fervent effort to fulfill the Law, coupled with an honest heart. The blessings were strictly contingent upon perfect conformity to the Law: observing to “*DO ALL His commandments*” (Deut 28:1). The curses would be incurred if they failed “*to observe to DO ALL His commandments and His statutes*” (Deut 28:15).

Notwithstanding this clarity, fallen man overlooks the word “**ALL.**” He insists on viewing the demands as goals to be attempted. Correspondingly, he imagines that a lot of effort fulfills the demands of the Law. But it does not. That is only a delusion of the flesh. The Law demanded perfection, and would take nothing less!

The Bane of Legalism

“*Legalism,*” as I am using the word, is a propensity for Law. It is the result of the misconception that men can become right by doing. While this may appear harmless to the sophist, it is actually a most lethal view. When men look to the Law—any law—for righteousness, they are not able to see the “*gift of righteousness*” (Rom 5:17). **Ignorance of God’s righteousness flourishes in the soil of Law.** Those who seek Divine approbation by a system of doing are, by that very approach, blinded to the righteousness that comes by faith. You will observe a perfect consistency in this wherever Law is preferred over grace.

SEEKING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS

“*. . . and seeking to establish their own righteousness . . .*” The KJV reads, “*going about to establish their own*

righteousness.” By this expression, the Spirit means that the Israelites engaged in a hearty effort to fulfill the Law, which promised life to the doer (Lev 18:5). It is another way of saying, “*For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge*” (v 2). This seeking was not a casual inquiry into the subject of righteousness, but an aggressive effort to do what the Law demanded.

Because of the Law, coupled with their fallen nature, the Israelites were persuaded they could make themselves suitable to God. Armed with information and willpower, they would establish, or originate, their own righteousness. In so doing, they revealed they had overestimated their own strength and underestimated the requirements of the Law. **They did not know how wicked they were, or how righteous God is.**

At the very moment people set out to establish their own righteousness, the righteousness of God becomes inaccessible. It is at once obscured, and the veil of spiritual ignorance is spread over the mind and the heart.

The truth of the matter is, “*There is none righteous, no, not one*” (3:10). That being the case, it is not possible for an unrighteous man to make himself righteous. A sinner cannot “*establish*” his own righteousness, because you cannot establish what does not exist! The only way to become righteous is to have ones sins remitted that the gift of righteousness may be received by faith.

This submission is nothing less than our consent to receive what God gives. That consent is found in the form of our faith, which, as a hand, reaches out to take hold of “*the gift of righteousness.*”

I cannot leave this point without observing that those with a penchant for Law have learned nothing from the Israelites. There remains within the religious community the imagination that men can establish their own righteousness by keeping a code. Like Israel, such individuals are ignorant of God’s righteousness. That is the sole reason why they continue to seek to establish their own.

SUBMITTING TO GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

“ . . . *have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*” To “*submit*” to the righteousness of God is to subject oneself to it, or take a subordinate place to it. More precisely, it is to renounce any claim to self-righteousness, and acknowledge an absolute need for the righteousness of God.

Paul expressed the truth of this verse in regard to his own enlightened desire. He acknowledged that he discarded anything and everything that was of personal gain to him. He did this, he confessed, “*that I may gain Christ and be*

found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” ^{NKJV} (Phil 3:8-9). That is submitting to “*the righteousness of God,*” or the righteousness that comes from God.

This submission is nothing less than our consent to receive what God gives. That consent is found in the form of our faith, which, as a hand, reaches out to take hold of “*the gift of righteousness.*”

It goes without saying that we can only submit ourselves to something that already exists. The Jews were going about to “*establish their own righteousness,*” convinced that was the only way to become righteous. They did not see that righteousness does not come from keeping the Law. Nor, indeed were they aware that God has a righteousness to be given to men upon the basis of their faith. The testimony of such a righteousness was provided in father Abraham, who received it upon the basis of his faith (Gen 15:6). But they did not see it.

THE END OF THE LAW

“ ⁴ ***For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.***” Here there is a divergence in the reading of the various translations. The principle statement involved is “*end of the law for righteousness,*” as represented in the KJV, NKJV, and NASB. Other versions choosing this reading include the 1995 New American Standard, Websters, Darby, BBE, and Young’s Literal. The older ASV reads, “*end of the law unto*

righteousness.” The New American Bible reads, “*end of the law for the justification.*”

Other versions read as follows. “*Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*” ^{NIV/NIB} “*For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*” ^{NR/SV} “*For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.*” ^{RSV} The New

Jerusalem Bible provides yet another twist. “*But the Law has found its fulfilment in Christ so that all who have faith will be justified.*”

Why Mention This?

There is, in my judgment, good reason to point out these readings. Although the true meaning of the verse can be derived from any of the translations, it can be more easily seen in the majority of them. If we read “*end of the Law for*

righteousness,” the meaning is that the Law has been concluded as a means to righteousness. If we choose the other readings, the meaning is that the Law itself has been concluded, and no longer exists. Let us reason on the matter.

CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW

There are two possible meanings of “*end of the Law*.” Men have argued about these views, and even formed whole

Once Paul recognized his own spiritual impotence, and knew the truth of the Gospel, he ceased from trying to establish his own righteousness, which was of the Law. For him, Christ was “*the end of the Law for righteousness.*”

bodies of theology around them.

- The first emphasizes **the fulfillment, or objective, of the Law**. In this sense, Christ is the “*substance*” of which the Law was a shadow (Col 2:17). In this case, once the substance came, the shadow was done away. This is NOT the meaning of the passage. The Law, unlike the shadowy sacrifices, was not done away when Jesus died, rose again, and returned to heaven. It still remains “*for the lawless*” (1 Tim 1:9). The “*knowledge of sin*” still comes from the Law (Rom 3:20). It has not been terminated or rendered totally obsolete or useless. Christ Jesus has not erased the Law of God.
- The second underscores the termination of the Law in a certain capacity. It is no longer the appointed means to a certain end, or objective. While it still remains, it cannot be used to arrive at the following goal: i.e., “*for [or in order to] righteousness.*” This is the meaning of the verse. Christ has concluded the

Law as a means to righteousness.

FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Men cannot become righteous by keeping the Law of God! Although the Law held out that promise, more light has now been shed on the matter of righteousness. In the blazing glory of the Gospel it is now affirmed, “*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight*” (Rom 3:20). And again, “*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified*” (Gal 2:16).

Until Jesus, it appeared as though the Law was “*ordained unto life*”—i.e., that men could become righteous and acceptable to God by simply doing what He said to do, and abstaining from what He forbade them to do (Rom 7:10). Those who take the promise of the Law seriously (“*which if a man do, he shall live in them*”) will soon find what Paul found. “*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*” (Rom 7:10).

Once Paul recognized his own spiritual impotence, and knew the truth of the Gospel, he ceased from trying to establish his own righteousness, which was of the Law. For him, Christ was “*the end of the Law for righteousness.*” That is, he no longer sought to become righteous by keeping the Law. That is the meaning of this text.

EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES

Our text is not speaking of something realized by certain superior people. It does not represent an alternative to becoming righteous, or a way to realize righteousness in a more easy way. This “*gift of righteousness*” is for “*everyone who believes.*”

This very truth has been iterated before. Reasoning upon the marvelous reality of Abraham being made righteous, the Spirit declared, “*For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness*” (Rom 4:3-5). Again it is written, “*And therefore it [his faith] was imputed to him for righteousness. [Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*” (4:22-25).

Our concept of believing must allow for this expression: “*everyone who believes.*” With great zeal, we must avoid stuffing this statement into a theological mold that makes it say something more suitable to stilted and lifeless views. Some would prefer that the Spirit had said, “to everyone who believes **and obeys.**” They could say that more easily. Others would favor the Spirit saying, “everyone who believes and keeps the commandments.” They conceive of that as being more precise. Still others would like it to read, “everyone who believes and remains faithful.” That, they imagine, would be more exact, and would better address the subject.

To be sure, the Holy Spirit knows how to use the words “obey,” “keep the commandments,” and “be faithful.” after all, He is the One who develops those very concepts in Scripture. But he does not use those words here, for they would not be proper. True obedience, the keeping of the commandments, and faithfulness flow out from believing. **But none of them are the foundation of our righteousness.** Rather, they are all the result of it.

The matter to be believed is the Gospel, or good news, of Christ, as stated earlier. “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.*” (1:16). What is there about

those words that would cause any soul to be discontent with them? Ponder the frequency of their mentioning.

- ❑ *“That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:15,16).
- ❑ *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:36).
- ❑ *“And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst’”* (John 6:35).
- ❑ *“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:40).
- ❑ *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life”* (John 6:47).
- ❑ *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:38).
- ❑ *“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”* (John 11:25-26).
- ❑ *“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness”* (John 12:46)
- ❑ *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father”* (John 14:12).
- ❑ *“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins”*

(Acts 10:43).

- ❑ *“And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses”* (Acts 13:39).
- ❑ *“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 9:33).
- ❑ *“Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame’”* (1 Pet 2:6-7).
- ❑ *“Whoever believes that Jesus is the*

familiar expression. It should not sound strange to the people of God to hear of the blessing of the Lord being dependent upon faith. Where it does sound strange and unacceptable, the minds of people have been corrupted with false and erroneous views of both God and His salvation.

Those who imagine that this allows for disobedience and a lack of faithfulness only reveal their ignorance. They also bring dishonor to Jesus who spoke so frequently in this manner. They grieve the Holy Spirit who moved holy men of God to speak of believing in this way.

It should not sound strange to the people of God to hear of the blessing of the Lord being dependent upon faith. Where it does sound strange and unacceptable, the minds of people have been corrupted with false and erroneous views of both God and His salvation.

Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1).

- ❑ *“Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* (1 John 5:5).
- ❑ *“He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son”* (1 John 5:10).

I have taken the time to provide this listing to confirm the Spirit is using a

They also come close to blaspheming God Himself, who inspired them to be both spoken and written.

To allay the fears of the sophist and the qualms of the legalist, **there is no such thing as a faith that does not obey, or a faith that is not faithful.** Disobedience and unfaithfulness both proceed from unbelief, not from believing. When men believe in the sense of Scripture, they **will** obey. They **will** pursue righteousness. They **will** remain faithful. There are no exceptions to these things. Those who doubt this must rethink the matter.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW

“⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’” Although this has been stated before, it is reaffirmed. This is done because of the great difficulty men have in cutting loose from the notion that

righteousness comes by doing. Remember, our text has reminded us that Israel did not attain to the righteousness of the Law—even though they pressed hard after it. Their efforts extended officially over a period of 1,500 years, or until Christ. That was adequate time to accomplish

righteousness by means of Law.

Even now, 2,000 additional years later, they are still engaged in this futile effort. Still, when they read the Law of Moses, their minds are *“blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in*

the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart” (2 Cor 3:14-15). As if this were not bad enough, vast segments of Christendom have joined in the futile effort to obtain righteousness by fulfilling Divine demands rather than believing the record God has given of His Son. Having once been deceived myself on this matter, I know of the futility of trying to be righteous apart from believing. I also know that such a mentality totally ignores the words of this verse.

RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF THE LAW

This is the righteousness that results from the perfect keeping of the Law. It is promised only to those who keep and obey ALL of the commandments ALL of the time (Deut 5:29). Not a single infraction of the Law is allowed. There can be no deviate or wayward thought – not one! The Law makes absolutely no promise of blessing to anyone who fails in but *“one point”* of its demands or prohibitions (James 2:10). The result of perfect and flawless compliance with every jot and tittle of the Law is *“the righteousness which is of the Law.”*

THE MAN WHO DOES THOSE THINGS

Doing the Law is carrying out all of its demands with both perfection and consistency. It is **never** failing to do what is right, and **always** abstaining from what is wrong. This must be done with every aspect of ones being: heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). This includes a preference for God’s Law, as well as a hearty love for it. It includes the marshaling of all thoughts and affections. Zeal is involved, together with strong desire and alertness.

When the Law says *“does,”* it is not referring to mere external conduct, as the legalist imagines. The Law did not consider behavior to be mere bodily actions. The Lord was to be sought *“with all of your heart and with all of your soul”* (Deut 4:29). He was to be loved in the

same way (Deut 6:5; 10:12). God was to be served *“with all your heart and with all your soul”* (11:13). His judgments were to be kept and executed *“with all your heart and with all your soul”* (Deut 26:16).

Any doing that was not so characterized was not “doing” at all! The person who did not *“do”* everything with heart and soul did nothing at all. He was excluded from the promise.

SHALL LIVE BY THEM

In 1816, Robert Haldane wrote this of living by the righteousness of the Law. It is most precise, and expresses the sentiment of our text. *“To live by the Law requires, as Moses had declared, that the Law be*

The Law makes absolutely no promise of blessing to anyone who fails in but *“one point”* of its demands or prohibitions (James 2:10). The result of perfect and flawless compliance with every jot and tittle of the Law is *“the righteousness which is of the Law.”*

perfectly obeyed. But this to fallen man is impossible. The law knows no mercy; it knows no mitigation, it overlooks not even the smallest breach, or the smallest deficiency. One guilty thought or desire would condemn forever. Whoever, then, looks for life by the law, must keep the whole law in thought, word, and deed, and not be chargeable with the smallest transgression.” Haldane’s Commentary on Romans

To *“live”* is to be recognized by God Almighty as righteous. It is to live without the curse of God hanging over your head. To *“live”* is to have your name *“written in heaven”* (Lk 10:20; Heb 12:23), in *“the book of life”* (Phil 4:3; Rev 13:8), which registers everyone who is *“alive unto God”* (Rom 6:11).

And do you hope to be received and recognized by God because of what you have done? Will you stand before God and boast as the Pharisee who *“prayed with himself,” “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess”* (Lk 18:11-12). Do you imagine you will be able to stand before the throne and shout, *“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”* (Matt 7:22).

What you have done will only be a basis for acceptance if you have done all the right things all of the time. It will only count if you have refrained from doing all the wrong things all of the time. You must not have stepped aside from perfect obedience a single time, or for a single moment. Is that not quite a challenge.

Allow me to take the matter one step further. Imagine that it actually was possible for you to be justified by what you have done – by your works. You still could not boast before God. As it is written, *“For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God”* (Rom 4:2).

Further, imagine that in the day of the Lord you shall have managed to do every single thing you were commanded to do. Would that not bring the conferment of life and blessing upon you? Hear the words of Jesus. *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’ But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?’ Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’”* (Lk

17:7-10). That is surely enough to stop the mouths of all boasters.

The very need for Law confirms the need for righteousness. The fact that men had to be told what to do confirmed they were ignorant and

unrighteous. Thus, the Law said “*life*” would be substantiated in the keeping of the commandments, not to show that it was possible, but to confirm we were already dead in trespasses and sins. The “*life*” it promised was not resurrection life, like bringing a spiritually dead man

back to life. It was not speaking of recovery, but of the recognition of someone who was NOT dead. It should be very apparent to us that, apart from Jesus, no such person existed. The Law persuaded us we were dead and in need of righteousness.

WHAT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH DOES NOT SAY

“⁶ *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) ⁷ or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”*

Here is a classic example of the proper use of Scripture. Yet, it sharply conflicts with the notion that “the context” of Scripture is the secret to its understanding. Some very principle thoughts will be established by this remarkable utterance.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

Again, this is the righteousness that is appropriated by faith. Faith is its basis, or foundation, like being “*born of God*” declares God to be the One accomplishing the new birth. Other versions read, “*the righteousness based on faith*,”^{NASB} “*the righteousness that is by faith*,”^{NIV} and “*the righteousness that comes from faith*.”^{NRSV} How does this righteousness speak? How does it compare with the saying of the Law: “*The man who does those things shall live by them*”?

What does “*the righteousness that comes from faith*” have to say about doing? Or, does it have anything to say on that subject? Indeed, it does speak to the subject, and that with great power and conviction.

DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART!

The Spirit first declares what the righteousness based on faith does NOT say. Here an appeal is made to the words of Moses, even though he did not at all mean what our text will affirm. Here is what the Lord said through Moses. “*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 it and do it?’ or 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 it and do it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and

If our doing is to be the basis of our righteousness, then here is what WE must do. We must bring the Savior down from heaven in order that He might take away our sins and reconcile us to God. Then, we must bring Him back from the dead, in order that we might be saved by His life.

multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess” (Deut 30:11-16).

What Was Moses Saying?

Moses was telling the people there was no question about what the Lord demanded of them. They did not need to send an ambassador into the heavens to bring down the Lord’s requirements. Nor, indeed, was the word of the Lord to be found cross the sea, in some foreign land. God brought the word to them, they did not go to Him to receive it. Additionally, both of these places were too difficult for

the people to access. If God did put the word in those realms, challenging the people to go and get it, they would not be able to do so.

Further, what He said was plain – plain enough that they declared they would do it all (Ex 19:8; 24:3,7). The people admonished Moses, “*You go near and hear all that the LORD our God may say, and tell us all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and do it*” (Deut 5:27). That is not, however, how the righteousness of faith speaks! It does NOT say, “Get the word for us!”

Now the Spirit gets to the heart the matter, showing the deeper and more foundational meaning of Moses’ words. Rather than ascending into heaven to get a word from God, it must be to “*bring Christ down from above*.” Rather descending into the abyss to obtain a word, it must be to “*bring Christ up from the dead*.” The righteousness that comes from faith does not demand that you do these things.

WHAT IS REQUIRED

We must not miss the point of this verse! Jesus coming down from heaven was essential to our salvation! He had to willingly come in the form of a man, offering Himself for the sins of the world (Heb 10:5-10). He also had to come back from the dead, leading captivity captive, and ascending back to the Father. If both of these did not occur, it would have been impossible for us to be saved!

The Point

The point is this. If our doing is to be the basis of our righteousness, then here is what WE must do. We must bring the

Savior down from heaven in order that He might take away our sins and reconcile us to God. Then, we must bring Him back from the dead, in order that we might be saved by His life. If we cannot do those things, our works cannot save us, for we are incapable of doing the most critical things, both of which are required if men are to be "made the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21)!

Only God could send Jesus into the world! Men could not climb into heaven and bring Him down. Nor, indeed, could seraph, cherubim, and holy angels compel Him to come into the world. That work belonged to God alone, with no man participating in any way in it. That should not be difficult to see.

Only God could bring up Christ again from the dead. No man could shout Him

Only God could send Jesus into the world! Men could not climb into heaven and bring Him down. Nor, indeed, could seraph, cherubim, and holy angels compel Him to come into the world. That work belonged to God alone, with no man participating in any way in it. That should not be difficult to see.

out of the tomb! No heavenly principality or power could enable Him to come back from the regions of the dead! That work also belonged to God alone, with no man having any part whatsoever in its accomplishment. That also is very evident.

Those who insist that man's works make him righteous must be faced with the responsibility of bringing Christ from heaven, and bringing Him back from the

dead. If they cannot do that, then let them cease to speak of their abilities, for they have none that can effectively change them.

The foundation of becoming righteous cannot and does not rest with men. It is a work accomplished by God Himself! The "wonderful works" belong to Him, and to Him alone. That is the consistent proclamation of the Gospel.

WHAT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH DOES SAY

"⁸ *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):⁹ 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.*" How does "the righteousness based on faith" speak? What kind of appeal is made to the hearts of men? What will it challenge the people to do? The righteousness that comes from the Law demanded that every commandment, precept, and statute be kept flawlessly and consistently. What kind of demands will the righteousness of faith make upon us?

THE WORD IS NEAR

"The word is in you, in your mouth and in your heart." Again, an appeal is made to the words of Moses, with a unique application being made of them. Moses said, "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deut 30:14). The words "in your mouth" refers to the people's confession of the Law. The words "in your heart" means the communication of the Law was so impressive they could

not forget it when they heard it. Through revelation, they had become acutely aware of the commandments of the Lord. It was in their mouth and in their heart when they said, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Ex 19:8). Now the Spirit will show us what words has been brought near to us, and how those words effect us.

Of particular relevance here is Isaiah's prophecy about the appropriation of righteousness. "*I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, For Israel My glory*" (Isa 46:13). Our text will elaborate upon this blessed commitment.

THE WORD OF FAITH

"... that is, the word of faith which we preach." The word delivered through Moses was NOT a word of faith, for "the law is not of faith" (Gal 3:12). That is a matter of revelation. How is it that what we have received is designated as "the word of faith."

This is not a word only delivered BY faith, but one which **produces** faith. It is

a message to be believed, not a message of commandments, as was the Law. "The word of faith" is the appointed means of putting righteousness within reach of the people. It is nothing less than the Gospel of Christ, in which is revealed the righteousness that comes from God through faith (1:17). It is not possible to have true faith without this word of the Gospel, and it is not possible to be righteous without believing it.

Which we Preach

NOT only does the Gospel induce faith in those who receive it, it is spoken in faith by those who effectively preach it. What men preach reveals what they think saves a person. It is the overflow of their inner persuasion. "*We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak*" (4:13). As will be confirmed later, God has ordained the preaching of the Gospel as the appointed means of saving people. To say it another way, this is the means chosen to produce faith, which brings the righteousness of God to us.

The Law of Moses is NOT "the word

of faith.” It is to be believed, to be sure, but it is not intended to produce the faith that saves the soul (1 Pet 1:9). As valuable as they are, the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are not “*the word of faith*.” While both of them are highly instructive concerning wise living, neither of them produce faith. That is a ministry belonging exclusively to the Gospel of Christ! No one should be intimidated or offended by these words. Nor, indeed, should they conclude the books of reference can be neglected. They have come from God, and are profitable. However, they are **not** the means of producing faith in Christ, and appropriating the righteousness of God.

Essentially, “*the word of faith*” is a word of promise – a word of salvation and deliverance to those who will receive it!

CONFESSING WITH YOUR MOUTH

Two critical matters relating to the appropriation of righteousness are mentioned. They contrast sharply with the requirements of the Law. The word under the law is “*DO!*” – do ALL of the commandments. The word given by Moses was in the mouth of the people when they replied, “*All that the LORD hath spoken we will do*” (Ex 19:8). Notice how differently “*the righteousness of faith*” speaks. It brings a unique and superior message to us.

“*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus . . .*” This is the acknowledgment that we have believed “*the word of faith*.” We receive the fact that the Lord has done what was necessary for God to make us righteous! And what is it that is “*confessed*”? It is not that we have done all that was commanded us to do! It is not that we are sinful people. Rather, it is that “*Jesus is Lord*” – not that He will be, but that He is! It is admitting that we see and delight in the fact that God has made Him “*both Lord and Christ*” (Acts 2:36). Furthermore, we are depending on Him, in the capacity of Lord, to save us.

This is a confession “*with the mouth,*”

where what has been received is joyfully acknowledged. This confession is made initially when we come to the Lord. As with Simon Peter, it is the result of God revealing the Son to us (Matt 16:16-18). This confession is not confined to the time when we were delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). This is an ongoing confession, declared when persecution arises, and when conflict with the world erupts. It is made when coming in contact with other believers, and when we approach the throne of all grace.

This is not a casual or lifeless admission. It is a confession that can only be made under the influence of the Holy Spirit. As it is written, “*no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor 12:3). This is the

This is an ongoing confession, declared when persecution arises, and when conflict with the world erupts. It is made when coming in contact with other believers, and when we approach the throne of all grace.

acknowledgment that Jesus is the manager of one’s life. He is not only “*Lord of all*” by the commission of God, but perceived to be the exclusive reason for the life of the one making this confession.

BELIEVING IN YOUR HEART

“*. . . and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead.*” Believing in the heart goes far deeper than admitting with the mind. When the Ethiopian eunuch asked what was hindering him from being baptized, Philip responded, “*If you believe with all your heart, you may*” (Acts 8:37).

To believe “*in your heart*” is to embrace the Gospel at the point where

you are motivated. Your heart is where the issues of life are formed, and from which they are expressed (Prov 4:23). When one believes in the heart, a certain aggressive to obtain the promises of God is realized. That is why those who believed cried out, “*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37), and “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*”

And what is it that is to be believed? Other texts indicate that believing Jesus is the Son of God is the principle thing (Matt 16:16; John 20:31; Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:10). Why is the resurrection of Christ the focus in this text. Simply because His resurrection confirmed He is the Son of God. As it is written, “. . . *His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*” (Rom 1:3-4).

Believing that God raised Jesus from the dead is essential to our salvation because the power to save and keep us is resurrection power. It is “*the power of His resurrection*” that faith constrains us to appropriate (Phil 3:10). That is the power that is presently devoted to believers (Eph 1:19-20), and that is at work in them (Eph 3:20). This truth – that God has raised Jesus from the dead – must not drift from us. Nothing must be allowed to supercede it in our thinking, or rob us of believing it in our heart. Should those things happen, we will not be saved.

YOU WILL BE SAVED

“*. . . you will be saved.*” It is not that you **may** be saved, but that you **WILL** be saved! There is not the slightest chance the confession that Jesus is Lord, and believing in the heart that God has raised Him from the dead, will not issue in salvation!

There is a threefold sense in which we are saved. From the standpoint of our personal makeup, our spirit, soul, and body will be saved (1 Thess 5:23). That takes us from our initial entrance into

Christ through the resurrection of the dead. A salvation that is not this broad is no salvation at all.

Another threefold view of salvation relates to time. It is expressed in the words, *“who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we*

trust that He will still deliver us” (2 Cor 1:10). This includes our deliverance from the guilt of sin, the power of sin, and the presence of sin. It covers our initial deliverance from the clutches of the devil, our daily deliverances by the grace of God, and our final triumph over death. A salvation that does not include all of these

is not a salvation at all. And it is all effected by confessing Jesus is Lord and believing God has raised Him from the dead. As you can see, this word is marked by both simplicity and profundity. The Spirit will now briefly expand on the glory of what has been affirmed. A strong appeal will be made to your faith.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SALVATION

“¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Remember, becoming righteous and being saved pertain to the same glorious reality. One speaks of what we attain (*“righteousness”*), and the other of deliverance from all sin has caused (*“salvation”*).

BELIEVING UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS

“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness . . . ” In a sense, righteousness gets into us. In another sense, we get into it. In the first, righteousness is *“imputed”* unto us. In the second we come into a state of righteousness, or are *“made the righteousness of God in Him [Christ]”* (2 Cor 5:21).

There are some edifying renderings of this verse in other versions. *“For with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness,”*^{NASB} *“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified,”*^{NIV} *“For one believes with the heart and so is justified,”*^{NRSV} and *“For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God.”*^{NLT} Keep in mind that being made righteous is the same thing as being justified. One speaks of **what** is done (righteous), the other of **how** it is done (justified). From the standpoint of being justified, everything against us is removed. From the standpoint of being made righteous, what we need is given to us. These are the two sides of the coin of salvation.

Those who insist that we are justified by works must contend with this expression: *“For with the heart one*

believes unto righteousness.” Faith conducts us, as it were into a state of Divine approval. We believe into

the mind is powerless to change the heart. This is why a fundamentally cerebral religion is not a blessing. It cannot

Those who insist that we are justified by works must contend with this expression: *“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness.”* Faith conducts us, as it were into a state of Divine approval.

righteousness. We do not work ourselves into it.

Believing with the Heart

Note that the belief is *“with the heart,”* not with the mind! When men are hesitant to believe, it is because they are *“slow of heart,”* not slow of mind (Lk 24:25). Jesus said a troubled heart would be offset by a believing in Him. *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me”* (John 14:1).

Some of the things that distinguish believing with the heart from the assent of the mind include, *“the joy of faith”* (Phil 1:25), *“the hearing of faith”* (Gal 3:2,5), the *“shield of faith”* (Eph 6:16), and the *“assurance of faith”* (Heb 10:22). The consent of the mind cannot produce inner joy (*“joy of faith”*), the cognizance of God (*“hearing of faith”*), protection for the soul (*“shield of faith”*), or strong confidence (*“assurance of faith”*).

The heart can sanctify the mind, but

eliminate doubt, questions, or fear. However, when men *“believe with the heart unto righteousness,”* all of these marvelous changes come to pass.

CONFESSING UNTO SALVATION

This is too difficult for the person enslaved to law. Confession is not perceived as capable of inducting one into salvation. However, our text declares this to be a precise statement of the case. “. . . and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Other versions read, *“and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation,”*^{NASB} *“it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved,”*^{NIV} *“and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.”*^{NRSV}

The purpose of this text is not to ascribe to the confession of Christ as Lord the total cause for our salvation. Rather, it is to show us that **the faith that saves always manifests itself in shameless confession.** The confession that saves is prompted by the faith that brings righteousness. Confession is to salvation

what the resurrection of Christ was to His Sonship. The resurrection confirmed Jesus to be the Son of God with power.

The “*confession*” of our text verifies that we have believed unto righteousness. Faith without confession is not possible.

Confession without faith is spurious. Faith always confesses, and confession always follows genuine faith.

WHAT DOES THE SCRIPTURE SAY?

“¹¹ *For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’* ¹² *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.* ¹³ *For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’*” Because the Spirit intends to put the knowledge of salvation well within our reach, He again appeals to the Scriptures. It is by them that the man of God becomes “*perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Tim 3:17). The effect of faith upon both man and the Lord will now be briefly expounded.

WHOEVER BELIEVES ON HIM

“*As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.’*”^{NIV}

Not ashamed to Confess Christ

The person believing on Christ will never be ashamed to confess Him. Whether one is being stoned like Stephen, standing before Ananias the high priest like Paul, or standing before the council like Peter and John, faith constrains shamelessness. It moves the person to confess Christ is Lord – the ONLY Lord.

The multitudes of professing Christians who are ashamed to acknowledge Christ are confessing to their lack of faith. They must have the promise of God shouted in their ears, for it is true: “*WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.*”^{NASB}

Trusting Brings No Shame

But there is another sense in which the believer will never be put to shame. God will never allow faith to prove to be an embarrassment to the believer. It is

never vain to trust the Lord! The one who trusts that God will save, will himself be saved! The one who depends on the Lord to keep him will be kept! Those who depend upon the Lord for their daily bread will not be put to shame. Let no one imagine that faith induces idleness or indifference. Neither, indeed, does it bring shame.

No person who is living by faith will be frightened by the return of Jesus. Those who have counted all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ will not be disappointed when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to give an account for the deeds done in the body

Shame At Christ’s Coming

In yet another sense, the person who believes on the Son will not be put to shame in the day of judgment. Such will not “*shrink away from Him in shame at His coming*”^{NASB} (1 John 2:28).

No person who is living by faith will be frightened by the return of Jesus. Those who have counted all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ will not be disappointed when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to give an account for the deeds done in the body (2 Cor 5:10).

NO DISTINCTION

“*For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.*”^{NIV} Although the Jews were a favored people and the Gentiles a rejected people, yet faith eliminates any lasting differences between them. By the grace of God, and through their faith, believing Jews and Gentiles are made “*one body.*” Faith has removed the distinction between them.

How thoroughly this is stated by the Holy Spirit. “*For he is our [Jew and Gentile] peace, who hath made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us [Jew and Gentile]; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain [Jew and Gentile] one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off [Gentiles], and to them that were nigh [Jews]*” (Eph 2:14-17).

The fact that the salvation of God is appropriated by faith removes the distinction between Jew and Gentile. As it is written, “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal 3:26-28). The fact that believers have “*the same Lord*” makes them “*one body.*” Therefore, in Christ, “*there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.*”

The fact that in Christ “*there is no difference,*” makes division within the

body of Christ a grievous sin. **Wherever there is faith in Christ, division must not be allowed.** If faith makes us acceptable to God, it can do no less for us. That is one reason we are admonished, *“Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them”* ^{NASB} (Rom 16:17).

THE SAME LORD

“ . . . for the same Lord over all . . . ” The truth of the matter is that every person has the same Lord. It is that some know it and some do not. Men speak of having a different faith. The Spirit speaks of having a different master or Lord (Matt 6:24), and serving diverse masters (Rom 16:18).

The particular emphasis here is redemption, or the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. The point is not merely that the Lord is *“over all,”* which He surely is, but that the salvation of God is common to both Jew and Gentile.

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

“ . . . is rich to all who call upon Him.” Salvation is truly life *“more abundantly”* (John 10:10). In it, the Holy Spirit is *“poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior”* (Tit 3:6). The power of God is devoted to those in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:19), and God *“is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us”* (Eph 3:20). The Gospel announces *“so great a salvation”* (Heb 2:3). It brings *“all sufficiency in all things”* (2 Cor 9:8). All of this, and more, is involved in the Lord being *“rich to all who call upon Him.”*

The word *“rich”* does not refer to earthly resources, although the Lord is fully capable of supplying such things. Rather, this refers to the abundant adequacy of salvation. The righteousness that we need is supplied, and the acceptance we require is realized. Our liabilities are removed, and we are granted access to *“all the treasures of*

wisdom and knowledge” that are hidden in Christ Jesus (Col 2:2-3).

From the standpoint of what we need to meet the test of time and stand before the Lord without fault, the Lord is rich toward us. He *“shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Phil 4:19).

All that Call Upon Him

Calling upon the name of the Lord is a most holy activity. Men began to *“call upon the name of the Lord”* in the days of Enos, the son of Seth, whom Adam begat

Men speak of having a different faith. The Spirit speaks of having a different master or Lord, and serving diverse masters.

in his own image (Gen 4:26). David, a man after God’s own heart, said, *“I will call on the LORD”* (2 Sam 22:4). When Elijah engaged in a contest with the prophets of Baal he said, *“you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD”* (1 Kgs 18:24). Joel prophesied of a day when *“it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered”* (Joel 2:32). When the day of Pentecost *“had fully come,”* Peter announced the day Joel promised had begun (Acts 2:21). Those who are in Christ Jesus are described as *“those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”* (2 Tim 2:22). Those who *“call on the Father”* are admonished to *“pass the time of your sojourning here in fear”* (1 Pet 1:17).

Our text boldly announces that God is *“rich”* to everyone who calls upon Him. What does it mean to *“call upon Him?”* Those who call upon the name of the Lord

are casting themselves upon His mercy, seeking to experience by faith what He has promised. Faith sees the Lord as He really is, and moves the believer to seek His promised blessing, particularly His great salvation.

Those who *“call upon the name of the Lord”* search for Him with the *“whole heart,”* and in expectation of finding Him (Jer 29:13). Some of the words used when men called upon the name of the Lord include the following.

- ❑ *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37).
- ❑ *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30).
- ❑ *“Lord, save me!”* (Matt 14:30).
- ❑ *“Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; Save me, and I shall be saved, For You are my praise”* (Jer 17:14).
- ❑ *“Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle”* (Psa 43:3).
- ❑ *“Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity”* (Psa 118:25).
- ❑ *“But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!”* (Psa 22:19).

These are pleas for the Lord to act in our behalf, and in strict accord with His nature. Calling upon the Lord presumes some knowledge of Him, as will be confirmed in the next section of this chapter (vs 14-17). It also reveals a perceived dependency upon the Lord. The one who calls upon Him knows *“My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth”* (Psa 121:2).

Whoever Calls

“For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” This is a marvelous promise. As all Divine commitments, it is to be believed. As will be developed in the next few verses, this has particular reference to deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. To put it another way, it is a promise relating to the imputation of righteousness.

Calling upon the Lord involves a profound desire for what He has promised in Christ Jesus. It reveals a discontent with what the world offers, and a driving compulsion to rise above the flesh.

Because of these realities, this promise guarantees salvation and the righteousness of God to all who desire it. That, of course, is the purpose for the promise. It brings strong confidence to

those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. If you fervently desire the righteousness of God, you can have it. It is well within your reach! The Gospel announces that to be the case.

CONCLUSION

This marvelous section of Scripture justifies Paul's fervent desire for the salvation of Israel. He knows they have received the promises of salvation, and a commitment from God that He will make

a new covenant with them. He also knows why they have not attained to the righteousness of God -- because they are ignorant of it. Therefore, Paul has devoted himself to declaring the righteousness of

God, the Gospel that reveals it, and the faith that obtains it. None of these are popular in the contemporary Christian world, yet all are foundational in the Apostles' doctrine.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 34



THE INDISPENSABLE GOSPEL

^{10:14} 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? ¹⁵ 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!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" ¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ 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." ²¹ But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."

– Romans 10:14-21 ^{NKJV} –

INTRODUCTION

Moved by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle has confessed his *"heart's desire and prayer to God"* for Israel, his *"kinsmen according to the flesh."* This desire has been sparked by the consideration of the *"gift of righteousness"* as revealed in the Gospel of Christ (1:17-18). That Gospel, the Spirit revealed, was God's power in order to effect salvation, *"to the Jew FIRST"*

(1:16). How fitting, therefore, that this knowledge should awaken a fervent desire for the Israelites to be saved! This was not a fleshly desire, prompted by national pride or a mere general interest in their spiritual welfare. This fervent desire was prompted by the new man, fellowship with Christ, and the mind of the Spirit. This is how an Israelite reasons when they have been *"joined to the Lord."* It is

the result of spiritual life, and is not to be viewed as an expression of the flesh.

A MERE TECHNICALITY?

Some might imagine that the phrase, *"to the Jew first,"* is a mere technicality, with no practical implications at all. In such a view, God is seen as obligated to offer this salvation, which includes the imputation of His own righteousness,

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE NECESSITY OF BELIEVING (10:14a)
- II. THE NECESSITY OF HEARING (10:14b)
- III. THE NECESSITY OF PREACHING (10:14c)
- IV. THE NECESSITY OF BEING SENT (10:15a)
- V. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MESSENGER (10:15b)
- VI. OBEDIENCE AND BELIEVING (10:16)
- VII. FAITH COMES (10:17)
- VIII. HAS NOT EVERYONE HEARD? (10:18)
- IX. DID NOT ISRAEL KNOW? (10:19)
- X. THE BOLDNESS OF ISAIAH (10:20)
- XI. GOD'S PATIENCE WITH ISRAEL (10:21)

because of the promises made to the fathers. Those same promises also "pertained" to Israel (9:4). In this view, "the promises" are considered an offer, or an opportunity. But that is not how they are presented in Scripture. **They are a Divine commitment**, based upon the "foreknowledge" of God, and are to be implemented by His unalterable determination.

FIRST IN SEQUENCE?

Others might consider "to the Jew first" to mean they were to be the first to hear the Gospel. While this is true, it is not all the truth. It is true that the proclamation began with them. However, the word "first" also means of first importance – first in place as well as in time. A similar use of the word is found in the description of the various gifts the Lord placed in the church. "And God hath set some in the church, **first** apostles,

secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor 12:28). Here, as in Romans 1:16, the word "first" is more than a sequential term.

As long as the world remains, there will never be a time when the Gospel will cease to be "the power of God unto salvation, **to the Jew first.**"

Paul Preached to the Jew First

In order to confirm this is the meaning of "to the Jew first," consider the nature of Paul's ministry. As soon as he was delivered from the power of darkness and translated into Kingdom of God's dear Son, "Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues" ^{NKJV} (Acts 9:20). When Barnabas and Saul were separated by the Holy Spirit, they immediately sailed to the Gentile island of Cyprus. When coming to the city of Salamis, on the east coast of Cyprus, "they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews" (Acts 13:5). Following their expulsion because of the Jews, they came to Iconium, in the southern part of Galatia. There, "they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 14:1). When coming into Thessalonica, Paul and Silas went into "a synagogue of the Jews," reasoning with them for three Sabbath days (Acts 17:1-2). When they were forced to leave that city because of the Jews, they went to Berea and "went into the synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 17:10).

When Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, he was stirred in his spirit when he saw the city given completely to idolatry. His first response to that stirring is recorded in these words: "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews" (Acts 17:17). When he came into Corinth, Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded

the Jews and the Greeks" (Acts 18:4). When he came into Ephesus, the Apostle, "entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews" (Acts 18:19).

The Gospel, therefore, was not simply preached to the Jews first in sequence. It was not declared first in Jerusalem, and to the neglect of the Jews after that. Paul's not only fervently desired the salvation of the Jews, his preaching conformed to that desire.

NECESSARY CONSIDERATIONS

It is necessary to consider these things because of the religious climate that has been created by Christian sophists. There is a different kind of mentality extant in the professed church. It has placed "the nations," or the Gentiles, ahead of the Jews in Gospel prominence. The result, whether intentional or not, has been the near-removal of the Israelites from the minds of the people.

There are even pretentious ministers who are aggressive against the ancient people, affirming they have been expunged from the tablets of heaven, and are no longer in the heart and purpose of God. Chapters nine through eleven of the book of Romans is a sword from heaven that cuts these spouting imaginations down, dashing them to pieces.

The Holy Spirit provokes the Apostle to write extensively on this matter. He is not only writing as moved by the Holy Spirit, he is unveiling his sensitive heart to us. He integrates it with the Gospel, the conferment of righteousness, and the salvation of God. It is related to the purpose of God, the power of God, and the promises of God. It is not possible for a subject to have more lofty associations. It requires an extraordinary measure of unbelief to deny these realities. Great joy is realized in acknowledging them.

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEVING

^{d10:14a} **How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?"** Here we are exposed to the Divine economy – how the Lord works among men. While it is true that God was

"found of them that sought Him not" (Isa 65:1; Rom 10:20), we are not to conclude there is no human involvement in men finding God. It is also true that the Gentiles "attained to righteousness," even

though they did not pursue it (Rom 9:30). Yet, none of this occurred independently of someone bringing the Gospel to the people. Nor, indeed, did it take place without the people calling upon the name

of the Lord. These two things – bringing the Gospel, and calling upon the name of the Lord – necessitate human initiative and response. We will also see the role of faith, or believing the Gospel, in the obtaining of salvation.

CALLING ON THE LORD

The statement now expounded by the Spirit is this: *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (v 13). This is one of the pivotal expressions of Scripture, standing between hopelessness and a living hope, between darkness and light, between ignorance and illumination.

Calling upon the name of the Lord is the proper response to the Gospel, which announces the salvation of God for man. Thus David, a man ahead of his time, said, *“What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD . . . I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD”* (Psa 116:12-13,17).

In our text, the activity of calling is **not** related to finding relief in outward difficulties. **Rather, it is specifically related to the appropriation of salvation, or the attainment of righteousness.** More specifically, it related to this marvelous phrase: *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness”* (10:10). **Calling upon the name of the Lord is a fervent quest to obtain that righteousness.** That call is provoked by the awareness of two realities.

Calling upon the Lord involves human initiative, and is absolutely essential for salvation. However, our text is going even further than this. It is not representing calling upon the name of the Lord as a requirement. Rather, the affirmation has been that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord *“shall be saved”* (10:13). **No one has ever called upon the name of the Lord who has not been saved!** That is the glorious point of this text.

The Awareness of Unrighteousness

First, that the one calling upon the name of the Lord has an acute awareness of personal unrighteousness. By nature, there is an utter lack within of the righteousness God requires, and the person calling upon the Lord knows it. Such an one correctly views himself as *“a sinner”* (Lk 18:13).

Righteousness Is Available

Second, the heart of the calling one is convinced that the righteousness of God is accessible. Although it is not presently

things, for that is precisely what it is designed to do.

The objective for the preacher is to be a specialist in Gospel, not the supposed state and need of humanity. The psychologist, for example, specializes in the human condition. The sociologist particularizes in the status, trends, and needs of society. The man of God is a specialist in the Gospel of Christ. This is involved in Paul’s admonition to Timothy, and all others who labor in the vineyard of the Lord. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth”* ^{NASB} (2 Tim 2:15). **Nowhere are we admonished to specialize in people, categories of people, or classifications of life’s problems and challenges.** All of that may sound noble to some, but it does not reflect the mind and purpose of God. There are higher and more consequential matters upon which we are to focus. The one who speaks for God must address these matters pointedly and effectively.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (v 13). This is one of the pivotal expressions of Scripture, standing between hopelessness and a living hope, between darkness and light, between ignorance and illumination.

possessed, the Gospel has convinced the individual that there is a righteousness to be had, and that it can be obtained.

THE GOSPEL CALCULATED TO INDUCE THIS CALLING

The Gospel of Christ brings the awareness of these things: i.e.,¹ personal unrighteousness, and ² the availability of a righteousness from God. Where honest and good hearts are not convinced of these things, the Gospel has **not** been declared.

The Aim of the Preacher

Those who speak in the name of the Lord must devote themselves to delivering a message that provokes these perceptions. It is the message itself that accomplishes this, and not the reasoning, or supposed logical conclusions, of the speaker. Technically, the aim of the true preacher is **not** to convince men they are unrighteous, and persuade them that they can be righteous. Rather, it is to preach the Gospel with insight and power. The Gospel of Christ will accomplish these

The Gospel, given by God Himself, is designed to uncover the real human dilemma, and provide an eternal solution to it. Every legitimate area of concern is addressed within the framework of the Gospel. Although all of these are not particularized, the effective remedy for all deficiencies can be arrived at within the perimeter of the righteousness revealed in the Gospel. The salvation of God has left no area unattended. The spirit, soul, and body, are all included in the salvation of God (1 Thess 5:23). A *“preacher”* who does not see this cannot be effective.

HOW???

How can a person call upon the name of the Lord if they have not believed in Him? If the individual is not persuaded that *“God is, and that He is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6), Divine benefits will not be pursued.

The question is pointed. It is not an interrogation to be answered. This is a rhetorical question, designed to show the

indispensability of believing the Gospel. *“How then are they to call on Him if they have not come to believe in Him?”*^{NJB}

The truth of the matter is that men will not call upon God to save them if they do not believe in Him. A petition to the Lord that begins, “O God, if there really is a God,” is vain. It is not a valid call, even though some imagine it is acceptable. As it is written, *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6). In this case, coming to God is equivalent to calling upon Him.

No real quest for God, or what He provides in Christ, will be found where men and women do not *“believe.”* **Where people are not engaged in a fervent**

quest to obtain the righteousness of God, they have not believed in Him.

Where an acute sense of a need of the Lord is absent, souls are not believing in Him! When there is no seeking, there is no believing! When there is not knocking, there is no believing! When there is no asking, there is no believing! That is precisely why Jesus spoke of these activities as He did. *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened”* (Matt 7:7-8). The certitude woven into those words is remarkable. There is not the slightest hint that asking, seeking, and knocking will be in vain. In fact, these words are but another way of saying, *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

The Nominal Church

Anyone who has been in Christ for any length of time has been impressed with the lack of fervency in the professed church. One is hard pressed to find an assembly in which people are calling upon the name of the Lord – asking, seeking, and knocking. Actually, the nominal church is wedded to the world, and the world is its wedded name. The world is not calling upon the Lord, and the average churchmen is not either. That is confirmation that an unlawful wedding has taken place.

The reason for this situation is unfolded in our text. It is because men have not believed in the Lord. That failure to believe has aborted any quest for His righteousness. Thus men stumble on in darkness and despair, not convinced of the accessibility of the righteousness of God.

THE NECESSITY OF HEARING

^{10:14b} ***And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?*** The philosopher may think that believing *“in Him”* can come from introspection, or even by studying nature in all of its marvelous order and complexities. Such a view gives too much credit to man, and makes too little allowance (if any at all) for the Gospel of Christ. Believing in God is not the same as believing God exists, and that is not the intent of this statement. Rather, believing in Him is being assured that He has a righteousness to give – one that is sorely needed, and one that can be obtained. **If a person is not persuaded that God provides a righteousness, and that it can be obtained, there has been no believing in Him.** To put it another way, if one is not convinced God has graciously provided a means whereby man will be accepted by Him, one has not believed in Him. What, then, is the appointed means whereby men will *“believe in Him?”*

There is a message that must be heard. It cannot be obtained by seeing, or

by visions. It cannot be appropriated by pondering the creation, or searching our own hearts. It must be **heard!** That is, **someone who knows the message**

of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). When they heard, *“they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12). Cities cannot believe until they hear!

If a person is not persuaded that God provides a righteousness, and that it can be obtained, there has been no believing in Him.

THE ETHIOPIAN

EUNUCH. Here was a religious man from the African quadrant of the world. He had been to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning to his homeland. He was reading the book of Isaiah, but did not yet believe in the Lord, or know of His *“gift of righteousness.”* If believing can be induced by reading, surely this man will believe. He was, after all, reading a synopsis of the Gospel in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. But he did not believe until the Lord sent Philip to declare Jesus unto him, for individuals cannot believe until they hear.

must bring it within the hearing range of those who do not know it! A few examples will suffice to confirm this.

THE CITY OF SAMARIA.

Although within the proximity of the earthly ministry of Christ, the city of Samaria had not believed in the Lord. Consequently, they had not called upon Him. Thus, *“Philip went down to the city*

CORNELIUS. If Cornelius is going to believe in the Lord, thereby appropriating His righteousness, someone must bring the message to him. God sent Peter to preach the message so Cornelius

could “believe to the saving of the soul” (Acts 10:1-48; Heb 10:39), and directed Cornelius to send for him, for households cannot believe until they hear!

The hearing of reference is nothing less than “the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2,5). That is, the hearing that results in believing. It is the Gospel of Christ that is heard. The fact that it is “the power of God unto salvation” is confirmed by the effects of believing it. It moves people to call upon the Lord, for “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?”

This is the reason why the Gospel must be preached. Jesus declared, “Go ye into all the world, and **preach** the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). This is the message that, when heard, brings men to believe in the Lord.

This hearing is not the mere exercise of natural abilities. There is such a thing as having “ears to hear” and they come from the Lord. As it is written, “The

hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them” (Prov 20:12). This is an ear that is “planted,” or “implanted,”^{NIV} by the Lord (Psa 94:9).

They represent a spiritual capacity to understand what the Lord declares, particularly the Gospel of His Son. They are the appointed means to believing.

There are ears, given by God, which are intended to respond to His Word. They represent a spiritual capacity to understand what the Lord declares, particularly the Gospel of His Son. They are the appointed means to believing.

When Israel failed to effectively hear the Word of the Lord, Moses explained the circumstance in these words. “Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day” (Deut 29:4). This condition is why the Scriptures speak in the following manner: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt 11:15; 13:9,43; Lk 14:35). “He that hath an ear, let him hear” (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9).

There are ears, given by God, which are intended to respond to His Word.

However, until the sound of the Gospel falls upon them, men will not believe, nor will they call upon the Lord. Further the “ears” are granted when the “sound” of saving words come to the person.

Our text will confirm that this is not a one-time hearing of the Gospel. **Believing is sustained by hearing**, as will be declared in verse seventeen. Therefore, the people of God must place an emphasis upon hearing – hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to be the constant theme of exposition.

THE NECESSITY OF PREACHING

“^{10:14c} **And how shall they hear without a preacher?**” A “preacher” is a proclaimer – “someone to proclaim Him.”^{NIV} The word “preacher” means “a herald,” or someone who announces something that has occurred. A “preacher” openly proclaims something that has been done. He publishes things that have been already accomplished, or are readily accessible and profitable to men. The “preacher” is someone who makes things extensively known. That is, he is able to announce and expound things that are realities. In this case, it is what “the Lord hath done,” or “the wonderful works of God” (Psa 126:2; Acts 2:11).

The Word of God often declares what was “preached,” published, or publicly made known. John the Baptist “preached,” or announced, the coming of the Savior (Mark 1:7). Jesus “preached the Word” (Mark 2:2). Jesus sent out His disciples to “preach that men should repent” (Mark 6:12). The Kingdom of God

was “preached” (Lk 16:16). Jesus sent His disciples, affirming that “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). Christ was “preached,” as well as “the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 3:20; 4:2). The preaching of “the Gospel” is preeminent in Scripture (Mark 16:15; Acts 16:10; Rom 1:15; 1 Cor 1:17; 2 Cor 10:16).

The “preacher” in this text is someone with a revealed message. It is a message of accomplishment and access. This message brings the accomplishments of Christ within the range of the hearers, and assures them that eternal benefits have been provided for them.

The purpose of the preached message is not to get people to do something, but to bring them to “believe in Him” who gave the message. If people can be brought to believe in the Lord, they will even ask what they ought to do (Acts

2:37; 16:30). The lack of godly response to the preaching of the Gospel always indicates a lack of faith.

At Sinai, “the voice of God” was heard in the proclamation of the Law (Deut 4:33). But, the Gospel is not preached to men by God, like the Law was given on Mount Horeb! The Law is also referred to as “the word spoken by angels” (Heb 2:2), but no angel ever preached the Gospel to men. An angel directed Cornelius to call for a man who would tell him “words” whereby he and his house would be saved (Acts 11:14). Men will not call upon the Lord until they believe in Him. They will not believe in Him until they hear of Him. And, they will not hear of Him until someone declares Him—someone who knows Him.

Real preachers are “ministers **by whom you believed**, even as the Lord **gave** [or, as our text says it, ‘sent’] to every man” (1 Cor 3:5). The believing that saves

the soul is consistently represented as directly related to hearing. Even when that hearing was attended by confirming signs and wonders, as in the case of Samaria, the preeminence was given to the hearing. *“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did”* (Acts 8:6).

A PREACHER HAS A MESSAGE

The “preacher” of reference has a message. It is a message originated and given by God Himself. True preaching is not flowery oratory, although it may be masterfully spoken. It is not the sounding of an opinion, or the binding of heavy burdens upon men.

Scripture represents preaching as a noun as well as a verb – a message as well as an activity. For example, the Lord told Jonah, *“Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee”* (Jonah 3:2). Other translations read, *“preach to it the message,”*^{NKJV} *“proclaim to it the proclamation,”*^{NASB} *“proclaim to it the message.”*^{NIV} Jesus referred to the preaching of Jonah. Although a different word was used, our Lord also used it in the noun form. *“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here”* (Matt 12:41). The Greek form confirms this is the noun, not the verb, form of the word (τὸ κήρυγμα).

The noun form of “preaching” is also applied to the Gospel of Christ. *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”* (1 Cor 1:18). This does **not** refer to an activity, but a **message, report, or announcement**. The doctrinal thrust of the statement confirms this, as well as the Greek form of the text (ὁ λόγος). A second reference to the message that is preached, or declared, is found in Romans 16:25. The exact wording is used here that Jesus used in reference to the message declared by Jonah (τὸ κήρυγμα). *“Now to Him that is*

of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.”

The same expression is used to declare the appointed means through which God is now making known what He has all along intended for humanity. *“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of*

The “preacher” of reference has a message. It is a message originated and given by God Himself. True preaching is not flowery oratory, although it may be masterfully spoken. It is not the sounding of an opinion, or the binding of heavy burdens upon men.

Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior” (Tit 1:1-3). Note, there is an appointed means through which God reveals, or manifests, “the truth” pertaining to “eternal life.” It is “His word” that is made known, and it is made known “through preaching.” Again, the word used is a noun, not a verb (κήρυγμα). **That is, it is a message, not an activity.** To put it another way, it is **WHAT** is preached, and not the mere exercise of human speech.

The Relevance of This

All of this may appear to be completely irrelevant – a sort of smoke screen that has no bearing on our salvation. However, this is not at all the case. There is an appointed means through which men are brought to believe in the Lord and thereby receive His

righteousness. Neither believing nor the experience of righteousness can occur independently of this designated means. Already that means has been defined as “the Gospel of Christ,” declared to be “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). In the sense of our text, there is no valid “preacher” who does not declare this exclusive and powerful message.

Allow me to show further why this is such a vital point. There are all manner of messages being preached within the professed Christian community. By “message,” I mean the core message, or emphasis that is being declared. As you must know, sectarianism requires different messages. You cannot have different kinds of “churches” without different kinds of messages. It is the doctrinal emphasis, or message, of the denomination that makes it what it is. Remove that **emphasis**, and the pillars of the institution fall to the ground. An emphasis is to doctrine what flour is to bread. It is the bulk of what is taught. An emphasis is to

a church what gasoline is to a car. It is what makes it run. An emphasis is not the only teaching, but it is the fundamental one. It is the touchstone by which both people and groups of people are judged to be acceptable.

For purposes of clarity, allow me to mention some of these emphases that have contributed to the hostile divisions within Christendom. In mentioning them, I do not intend to cast reproach upon anyone. Neither, indeed, can I disgrace the Lord Jesus by imagining that He condones such doctrinal thrusts. I will use the word “gospel” to denote these doctrinal thrusts. However, and make no mistake about this, these are not gospels at all. They are departures from the true Gospel, which is “the power of God.”

❑ **The gospel of the church.** This is a message that focuses on the church, viewing it much like an institution. In this message, being the true church is the fundamental thing. The organization and name of the church is emphasized. By virtue of this

emphasis, Christ and His magnificent accomplishments are relegated to the background.

- ❑ **The gospel of the Holy Spirit.** In this case, the power of the Spirit, together with various experiences purported to be wrought by Him, are the emphasis. Being baptized in the Spirit, slain by the Spirit, and receiving gifts from the Spirit are represented as the fundamental and distinguishing things. This approach, of necessity, puts the Son of God and His great salvation into a secondary position.
- ❑ **The gospel of the Sabbath day.** Those who embrace this gospel make the distinguishing thing the Sabbath day. That is where the line of demarcation is drawn, determining whether what the individual does is fully acceptable to God. While Christ is acknowledged, the Gospel of Christ is not the main thing.
- ❑ **The gospel of good works.** This is the presentation of Divine acceptance from the standpoint of Law. The acceptance of the person by God is

are accented. As a result, there is a decided minimization of the “*eternal inheritance*,” “*eternal life*,” and the “*ages to come*” – all of which are integral to the Gospel of Christ.

- ❑ **The gospel of problem resolution.** Those who embrace this gospel perceive the day-to-day problems of individuals as the most critical area. Jesus is declared as the answer to our problems. He is held forth as the solution to family difficulties, social disturbances, and political deficiencies. Jesus is offered as a solution to troubles that have only to do with this world. Sin is de-emphasized, and Christ’s Saviorhood is consequently greatly obscured.
- ❑ **The gospel of the family.** Here the family is set forth as the principle institution in humanity. Because it was first in institution, it is therefore considered to be preeminent for all time. The structure of the family is giving great emphasis, and the program of the local congregation is structured to give the fundamental advantage to the family unit. All of

this ignores that Christ affirmed following Him required placing the family into a secondary position (Luke 14:26). It also reduces eternity and the world to come, thereby making Christ of less significance.

These observations by no means suggest the relationships mentioned are without significance, or that they are to be ignored. They are not, however, to be the fundamental thing, or the point of emphasis. **At the precise point the stress is placed upon them, for whatever reason, the Son of God is toppled from the throne, salvation is pushed away from the individual, and acceptance with God becomes less critical.**

based upon the works performed in the energy of the flesh. Social issues, political stances, and general disciplines of life are the focus of this gospel. Consequently, only passing references are actually made to the Gospel of Christ.

- ❑ **The gospel of happiness.** In this case, the well being of the individual is emphasized. Life in this world is presented as the ultimate domain of benefit. Health, security, and prosperity are given undue emphasis. Life in this world, together with feelings of elation,

invalid, issues. I know it is not fashionable to say this, and that a certain penalty is exacted by the religious hierarchy for doing so. Yet the penalties for failing to sound this trumpet are infinitely worse.

FURTHER COMMENTS

People will not call upon the Lord unless they believe on Him. Further, they will not believe on Him unless they hear the message He has ordained. Additionally, that message will not be heard until it is declared by someone who possesses it.

Jesus’ Word to the Lawyers

The distraction to other messages, then, has actually stopped people from believing! The same thing is happening in our day that was occurring when Jesus walked among us. Jesus said to the law-experts of His time, “*Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered*” (Lk 11:52). **In our time, that “key of knowledge” is the message of the Gospel.**

A Word to the Scribes and Pharisees

The Gospel unlocks the mystery of obtaining the righteousness of God. Jesus also said to the scribes and Pharisees, “*But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in*” (Matt 23:13). The reference to shutting up the Kingdom of God “*against men*” is represented in this way in other versions of Scripture. “*You shut off the kingdom of heaven from men,*” ^{NASB} “*You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces.*” ^{NIV} **In our day, the entrance into the kingdom of God is shut in men’s faces by placing stress on something other than the Gospel of Christ.** When our attention is moved away from Jesus, we are moved away from salvation.

No one who fails to declare the Gospel of Christ can bring men to believe with the heart unto righteousness. The ONLY preacher recognized by heaven is the one who correctly emphasizes the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ – the good news of the Gospel. You will find this to be the emphasis of all Apostolic doctrine.

At the precise point the stress is placed upon other things, for whatever reason, the Son of God is toppled from the throne, salvation is pushed away from the individual, and acceptance with God becomes less critical.

THE NECESSITY OF BEING SENT

^{15a} **“And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”** Preachers that bring a message that induces faith do not come on their own. They “are sent.” The fact is, there would be no faith-inducing preachers at all unless they were “sent” – sent by God!

These are ministers whom **God has given** to every person who believes. Wherever someone believes on the Lord, a “preacher” has been “sent” to proclaim the message of the Gospel – the message God uses to accomplish salvation. As it is written, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, **even as the Lord gave to every man?**” (1 Cor 3:5). “Preacher” is a category in which both Apostles (Paul) and non-Apostles (Apollos) were included. Yet, both were divine placements.

Of old time, the Spirit established that a valid message had to be the result of a Divine commission. Here are some sober reminders of this reality.

- ❑ “But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak” (Jer 1:7).
- ❑ “Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them” (Jer 7:25).
- ❑ “Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed”

(Jer 14:14).

- ❑ “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied” (Jer 23:21).
- ❑ “For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD” (Jer 29:9).

The Lord said to Moses, “Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Ex 3:12). It was said of John the Baptist, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John” (John 1:6). The Lord said to Ezekiel, “And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the

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children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day” (Ezek 2:3).

When Jesus first sent out “the twelve,” He said to them, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt 10:16). When He sent out the seventy, He said to them, “Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3). When Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, He said to him, “I have

appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee” (Acts 26:16-17). Following His resurrection, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, He said to them, “Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).

Sent with Understanding

No person who takes the message of God seriously will fail to see the necessity of being “sent” by God to declare it. That sending is **accompanied with a measure of understanding, or comprehension**. It is foolish to attempt to declare a message upon which salvation is hinged while being fundamentally ignorant of it. Yet, we are daily confronted with such “preachers” – men who babble before the people in the name of the Lord, yet have not been sent by Him. As the false prophets of old, “*understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm*” (1 Tim 1:7).

Sent with Power

Those sent by God are empowered by Him – endued with abilities and gifts necessary for the effective proclamation of His Gospel. Paul spoke of power, or authority, that had been given to him “for edification, and not for destruction” (2 Cor 13:10). This Divine enablement does not always take the form of signs and wonders. It is my understanding that this is not even the primary evidence of the power. The power, or enablement, of which I speak is a personal sufficiency that makes the “preacher” equal to his commission. Paul spoke of this empowerment in these words. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the

spirit giveth life" (2 Cor 3:5-6). Other versions read "competent ministers,"^{NIV} or "adequate as servants."^{NASB}

Some imagine this only applies to the Apostles. However, the Scriptures are clear that **any** effective proclaimers are gifts from God. Those "gifts" not only include "apostles" and "prophets," but "evangelists" and "pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:8-11).

Sending Is Sometimes Discretionary

During the beginning of the spread of the Gospel, specific direction was given by the Lord. In a general sense, the commission was "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), making disciples of "all nations" (Matt 28:19). However, everything was not left to the discretion of those who labored in the Lord's vineyard.

After Paul and Silas had "gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia," "they were **forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia**" (Acts 16:6). The "Asia" of reference is where the seven churches to whom the book of Revelation was written were located (Rev 1:4). At the time the Spirit forbade them to into Asia, Paul and Silas were ministering in Asia Minor, or the modern peninsula of Turkey.

Still, even there, the Spirit did not allow them to set their own agenda. When Paul and Silas came to Mysia, in the northwestern part of Asia Minor, "they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them"^{NKJV} (Acts 16:7). Bithynia would have led them into the part of world currently occupied by Russia, Korea, China, and India. Instead of allowing the preachers to go into that area, they were led into the Grecian part of the world – Macedonia in particular. Later, the Gospel did get into the Asian section of the world. However, in strictly orchestrating the spread of the Gospel, Paul and Silas were not "sent" there at that time.

How Are Preachers Sent Today?

Some, betraying their sophistry, scoff at the idea of preachers being "sent" in our time. They imagine that the Lord directed

the early activities of the church, but has now abdicated that function, leaving it wholly in the hands of men. In such a case, He would no longer be the "Head of the church" (Eph 5:23), at least not in the ministry of sending preachers. **What kind of reasoning would lead a person to believe holy and gifted Apostles, placed "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28), had to be directed, but men of the twentieth century do not require such direction?**

Mind you, nothing in Scripture suggests that such a time would ever come with Divine approval. No word of God

connection between every member of the body and "the Head" (Col 2:19). It is that connection, held by faith, that is the means through which heavenly direction is realized. Further, that direction is what is referenced by the word "sent."

THE COMPULSION TO PREACH

One of the evidences of being "sent" is a **compulsion** to preach the Gospel. That compelling inner drive is evidence of being "sent." Again, we summon Paul to the witness stand to confirm the truth of this observation. "And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is

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remotely suggests that Jesus is the "Beginning," but not the "Ending," or that He is only "the First," and not "the Last" (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). And, if the Lord begins things He does not finish, how are we know which ones they are? Precisely at what point do we cease to inquire of the Lord and trust that He will "direct" our "steps" (Jer 10:23)? Has the time now arrived when our "goings" are no longer upheld by the Lord (Psa 17:5) – particularly in the matter of preaching the Gospel? Are the "steps of a good man" no longer "ordered by the Lord" (Psa 37:23)? Are the preparations of the heart man's doing, but "the answer of the tongue" no longer of the Lord (Prov 16:1)?

As with all Divine direction, sending is accomplished through faith and tenderness of heart. Such direction falls into the category of Jesus manifesting Himself to those who love Him and keep His words (John 14:21). It is involved in "learning Christ" and being "taught by Him" (Eph 4:02-21). There is a vital and perceptible

written, 'I believed and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak" (2 Cor 4:13). This very circumstance eventually separates the preacher who is "sent" from the one who is not. Solomon put it this way, "A false witness will perish, But the man who listens to the truth will speak forever" (Prov 21:28).

This compulsion is so strong that it overrides competing discouragement or pride. It is written, "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me"^{NIV} (1 Cor 9:16-17).

This frame of mind enabled Paul to endure all manner of difficult and grievous opposition, yet continue to preach. His determination to preach the Gospel could not be stifled by adversity and circumstance. This confirmed that he was "sent." The absence of this

compulsion suggests the person is NOT “sent,” and has been driven by something

other than Divine constraint. There is far too much of this absence in the

modern church. It greatly dishonors God. Preachers must be “sent!”

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MESSENGER

^{15b} *As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’*” Being “sent” by God is one thing. The hearers recognizing this is the case is another thing. The Thessalonians, for example, knew that the ones through whom they heard the Gospel had been “sent.” Thus it is written of them, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13).

THE QUOTATION

The reference is to Isaiah 52:7; “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” In keeping with the thrust of this passage, this text is given to confirm that **preachers cannot preach unless they are “sent.”** It is necessary to note the manner in which the Apostle reasons. Here is an example of being “spiritually minded,” or having a mind “controlled by the Spirit”^{NIV} (Rom 8:6). The way Paul substantiates his point is refreshing. It is challenging intellectually, yet is vastly superior to lifeless pedantics, or academic approaches.

The fifty-second chapter of Isaiah contains a message of Divine summons -- God speaking to people through an appointed messenger. It calls for the people of God to “Awake!” and put on their strength. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are told “henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean” (52:1). A discouraged people are told to shake the dust from themselves, acknowledging they had sold

themselves for nothing. Yet, they would be “redeemed without money” – that is, the Lord would resolve their dilemma. Although their enemies had ruled over them ruthlessly, the Lord promises “My people shall know My name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am He

When the messengers, or “watchmen,” took hold of the message and announced it, the joyful optimism would take hold on the people. They would “see eye to eye,” waste places would break forth into joy, and the people would be comforted.

that doth speak: behold, it is I” (52:6).

All of this would be made known through a message – a proclamation. It would not be beheld in a vision, but brought by a word from God. It would be delivered by God’s messenger, into whose mouth His words had been placed. The core of the message was this: “**YOUR GOD REIGNS**”^{NIV} (52:7b). Isaiah’s message announced an end to the Babylonian captivity – recovery from Divine judgment!

When the messengers, or “watchmen,” took hold of the message and announced it, the joyful optimism would take hold on the people. They would “see eye to eye,” waste places would break forth into joy, and the people would be comforted. Then, couched within this joyful sound, the Lord speaks of the whole world being impacted. “The LORD hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of

our God” (52:10).

Those laboring under great restrictions would be changed by a message! Consequently, a high value would be placed upon the messenger. He would bring the message which, if believed, would bring salvation. He would come, as it were, over restricting mountains and hindrances, being sent by God. Like Philip came to the desert, Paul and Silas to the water and jail cell, and Paul to the barbaric isle of Melita, so the message comes through formerly insurmountable difficulties.

THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

The Spirit now elevates the matter of the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, something foreshadowed by Isaiah’s words, but not fulfilled by them. The Gospel is declared to be a message of peace. It is the announcement of amnesty, the proclamation of peace, and the report of reconciliation! Something has been done in the behalf of mankind that is of such power that heaven itself has been moved by it. Here is a message of Divine conciliation. God will neither destroy nor turn away those who come to Him because of this message!

When Jesus was born the holy angels announced, “*peace on earth!*” (Luke 2:14). Peter declared to the household of Cornelius that there is a “*word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all)*” (Acts 10:36). Following the reconciliation of both Jew and Gentile to God, Jesus is said to have come and “*preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh*” (Eph 2:17). The Gospel is, indeed, “*the Gospel of peace*” (Eph 6:15).

This is the “*glorious Gospel of the blessed God*” (1 Tim 1:11). He saw the travail of Christ’s soul and “*was satisfied*”

(Isa 53:11). Those who, believing this Gospel, come to God through Christ, will find a blessed and jubilant God! His arms will be extended to them in gracious welcome. They will not be met with lightning and thunderings as Israel was at Sinai. The earth will not tremble beneath them as they approach to the Lord, nor will the mountain before them blaze and smoke as Mount Horeb. This is the "Gospel of peace," and it brings calmness to the souls of all who receive it.

A message that does not leave an acute awareness of an accessible peace with God is not Gospel, and it will not save! No message that fails to announce the "Gospel of peace" is the power of God,

A message that does not leave an acute awareness of an accessible peace with God is not Gospel, and it will not save! No message that fails to announce the "Gospel of peace" is the power of God, nor will men be saved by it.

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GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS
Glad Tidings

"Glad tidings" are words that produce gladness in believing hearers. They bring alleviation from the sorrows of life, particularly those related to being sinners in the hands of an angry God. It has been a long time since many precious souls have heard any "glad tidings." Their souls are thirst to hear something that will gladden their hearts. There is such a message, and it is the Gospel of Christ. It fulfills the saying of Solomon, "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country" (Prov 25:25).

The inquirers at Pentecost received good news! They were told their sins would be remitted, and that they would

receive the Holy Spirit of God (Acts 2:38-39). The promise of God was for them! From that day until this, preachers of the Gospel have brought "glad tidings" of peace – a peace with God that also overflows to bring peace among formerly hostile people, like Jews and Gentiles.

You do not want to miss the emphasis of this passage. The Living God effects His great salvation through a message that brings "glad tidings" of peace to the people. It is very true that we must save some "with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 22). The "fear" of reference, however, is not fear induced in the hearer, but in the one snatching them from the fire. Some people are so mired in iniquity that special care must be taken not to allow them to defile us. However, even in such cases, it is the Gospel of peace that enables them to begin moving toward the light. It is "glad tidings" that awakens a desire to be saved within them.

GOOD THINGS

How the people of God must master speaking of "good things." When Joseph sent to bring his father Jacob into Egypt, "he sent after this manner; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way" (Gen 45:23). Will the great God of heaven do less when He sends ambassadors to bring the people home to Him? If the sins of the people have withheld "good things" from them (Jer 5:25), much more does the sacrifice and exaltation of Christ clear the way to send a message of the availability of those "good things" now—"good things" from heaven! If God gives "good things to those who ask Him" (Matt 7:11), then the Gospel is designed to provoke men to ask for them. Christ is now a "High Priest of good things to come," and the Gospel declares it (Heb 9:11). The Law had "a shadow of good things to come," and the Gospel announces they are here, and can be possessed (Heb 10:1).

SOME FLAWED THINKING

With the advent of self-professed religious experts, all manner of flawed thinking sprang up like tares in the field of thought. One of the most harmful of these wicked intrusions is the notion that the "Gospel," or "good news," is only for the person who is alienated from God. Some sophist once said, "No man should hear the Gospel twice until every one has heard it once." That was not only ignorance in seed form, it was a sizeable tree that can never bear good fruit. The truth of the matter is that grace never brings us where we do not need to hear the Gospel! Those who admit to being "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb 11:13) need to hear "glad tidings of good things." Nothing in all of Scripture suggests this good news is to be withheld from the household of faith. In fact, every word of God strongly affirms the opposite to be true. Take, for example, the writings of the Apostles, placed first "in the church" (1 Cor 12:28) for the "edifying of the body" (Eph 4:12). How did they speak? Did they bring "glad tidings of good things?" Ponder the remarkable consistency of their message.

- "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (Rom 5:1-2).
- "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10).
- "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus . . ." (Rom 8:1).
- "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).
- "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ . . . reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them . . ." (2 Cor 5:18-19)
- "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21).
- "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

- ❑ *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us . . . ”* (Gal 3:13-14).
- ❑ *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins . . . ”* (Eph 2:4-6).
- ❑ *“For He is our peace, who hath made both one . . . having abolished in his flesh the enmity . . . to make in Himself of twain one new man . . . that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”* (Eph 2:14-16).
- ❑ *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. . . . ”* (Phil 2:5-9).
- ❑ *“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight”* (Col 1:21).

- sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time”* (1 Tim 2:3-6).
- ❑ *“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Tim 1:10).
 - ❑ *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men . . . our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”* (Tit 2:11-14).
 - ❑ *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Heb 2:14-15).
 - ❑ *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition*

- received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts”* (2 Pet 1:16-19).
- ❑ *“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).
 - ❑ *“For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist”* (2 John 7).
 - ❑ *“Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called”* (Jude 1).
 - ❑ *“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father . . . ”* (Rev 1:5-6).

God has never declared another emphasis or message to be His power unto salvation. When, therefore, men come preaching a gospel of the church, the family, prosperity, or even the Spirit, they have, by that very emphasis, forfeited the power of God.

That is Gospel, *“glad tidings of good things.”* The Gospel of Christ is the hub upon which the salvation of God turns. There is no point in this salvation where the Gospel ceases to be central. There is no level or degree of spirituality where the Gospel of Christ is reduced to obsolescence, or takes a second position to some other emphasis.

- ❑ *“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him”* (1 Thess 1:9-10).
- ❑ *“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace . . . ”* (2 Thess 2;16-17).
- ❑ *“For this is good and acceptable in the*

- from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you”* (1 Pet 1:18-20).
- ❑ *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he*

God has never declared another emphasis or message to be His power unto salvation. **When, therefore, men come preaching a gospel of the church, the family, prosperity, or even the Spirit, they have, by that very emphasis, forfeited the power of God.** Their message may sound good, but it is not, for it is not underwritten by God! It does not contribute to the salvation of men, and God will not bless it. When His Son is pushed into the background, His empowerment abruptly ends.

OBEDIENCE AND BELIEVING

¹⁶ ***But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'*** Simplistic souls may conclude from Paul's argument that faith always follows the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. After all, it is *"the power of God unto salvation."* "Surely," the naive soul reasons, "nothing will be able to hinder God." Some creeds of Christendom have even spoken of "irresistible grace," as though that expression was contained in

principalities and powers in the heavenly places. How any person could conclude that salvation was simplistic, or that it was accomplished independently of human involvement is a great mystery. That those who are being saved could be the only ones uninvolved in the process is an absurdity so great that only the devil himself could have concocted it.

All of this is to say that men do not automatically believe when they hear the Gospel – even though it was God Himself who sent the messengers to them. This is true even though the message declared by the preacher is unquestionably the *"power of God unto salvation."*

The word "obey" does mean submit to, hearken to, or yield to. The idea is that the individual adjusts his life to suit the message he has heard. Where this does not occur, the Gospel has not been obeyed.

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

"But they have not all obeyed the Gospel." Other versions read, *"However, they did not all heed the glad tidings,"*^{NASB} *"But not all the Israelites accepted the good news,"*^{NIV} and

"But in fact they have not all responded to the good news."^{NJB}

The word *"obey"* does mean submit to, hearken to, or yield to. **The idea is that the individual adjusts his life to suit the message he has heard.** Where this does not occur, the Gospel has not been obeyed. Keep in mind, those who do not obey the Gospel will be condemned, forthrightly, and without remedy. As it is written, *"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thess 1:7-8).

BELIEVING THE REPORT

The Spirit is specific about what it means to *"obey the Gospel."* This involves more than fulfilling a list of demands – although faith never balks at

Divine demands, or commandments.

Here an appeal is made to the prophet Isaiah. The text of reference is Isaiah 53:1. *"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?"* Notice the form of reasoning. First the Spirit declares, *"They have not all obeyed the Gospel,"* even though it is the *"glad tidings of good things."* The confirming word from Isaiah, however, does not say *"They have not all obeyed the Gospel."* Rather than making a statement, the prophet asks a question: *"Who has believed our report?"* A contemporary way of saying this would be, *"Has anyone believed our report?"*

Isaiah speaks with astonishment at the fewness of those who truly believed. It was so few, indeed, that he wondered, as it were, if any one believed. It certainly was not because the people had not heard good news – good news from the Almighty God Himself. The fifty-second chapter of Isaiah boldly announced.

- "Therefore My people shall know my name" (52:5).*
- "They shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion" (52:8).*
- "The LORD hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem." (52:9).*
- "The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (52:10).*
- "For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward" (52:12).*

Add to that the marvelous prophecies of the coming Savior in the fifty-third chapter. Yet, for all of those *"good things,"* the prophet exclaimed, *"Who hath believed our report?"*

With great power, the Spirit will now show us that **great proclamations must be attended by great power,** else they will not be believed. The reason for making this point should be obvious to us. If men do not believe – such as Israel

Scripture.

Those who find it easy to speak in such lifeless ways betray their fundamental ignorance of the salvation of God. It is, after all, wrought out in the arena of conflict. All of heaven is involved in the enterprise, thereby confirming its remarkable complexity. God the Father Himself is involved, never withdrawing from any aspect of His salvation. Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, is administering the entirety of salvation, even interceding daily in order to its accomplishment. The Holy Spirit works to woo men through the truth, set them apart for God, even empowering them and interceding for them. An innumerable company of strong and wise angels have been dispatched to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. Inimical forces upon the earth are controlled, as well as

after the flesh – it is because a veil is over their eyes. If that veil is mercifully lifted, the condition of the people will suddenly change (2 Cor 3:16). Thus, Paul continued to desire and pray that Israel would be saved, knowing the power of the Lord.

If this seems to difficult to receive, consider how Isaiah elaborated on his own statement. *“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?”* When Divine power does not attend preaching, it does not yield favorable results. Who is the person willing to affirm that a man can speak into the soul of another, penetrating into the inmost being of a person? Is this not specifically declared to be the peculiar prerogative of the Word of God? *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart”*^{NASB} (Heb 4:12). This is the process in which the arm of the Lord is revealed.

The point of this passage is not to produce all manner of doubts in the hearts of the saints. Rather, it is to kindle the fire of hope within the human breast. When the *“arm of the Lord”* is *“revealed,”* men **will** respond to *“the report.”* The *“arm of the Lord”* has been *“revealed”* when men receive the Gospel as a true declaration of Divine intent. The message exposes the dire need of humanity, else so much would not have been done for them. It also makes known the deep and compassionate heart of God, else He would not have paid such an awful price.

However, this association does not come from word studies and researching parallel passages. Rather, it is when the Lord reveals His *“arm”* – when He shows the tender heart *“what great things God hath wrought.”*

What person is capable of

one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:15-16).

THE POINT

The point is that God has ordained the salvation of men through a message – a

Men are not to take it upon themselves to wrest the message in a feeble attempt to get results. Nor, indeed, are they to cease to declare it because the masses do not believe it. This is a word that is always in order, always timely, always powerful.

prognosticating when, or if, the Lord will *“reveal His arm.”* Or who would dare to say it will never again be revealed, or that Israel, or someone else, has passed beyond any hope of it being revealed? This is an area controlled by God alone.

The flesh takes this statement and uses it to justify NOT declaring the good news. After all, good results are the most important thing – at least that is what we are told. But is this really so? What of the preaching that reveals the unbelief and obstinance of people? What of a commission from God that was calculated to cause people to *“fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken”* (Isa 29:13)? Is it not written, *“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the*

God-ordained message. Men are not to take it upon themselves to wrest the message in a feeble attempt to get results. Nor, indeed, are they to cease to declare it because the masses do not believe it. This is a word that is always in order, always timely, always powerful.

The Gospel of Christ is truly good news, and it is the exclusive message by which men are saved. Men cannot believe on the Lord until they hear this Gospel. They cannot hear this Gospel unless it is preached or declared to them. That preacher will not preach unless he is sent by God. What is more, those who hear such an one with the hearing of faith will highly regard the messenger, esteeming his feet as beautiful, for they have carried good news upon the mountains of grace.

FAITH COMES

“¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” I love these Divine conclusions! They differ so radically from the sophistry of the flesh. This is a conclusion drawn from the affirmation of Isaiah: *“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”*^{NASB}

Without a doubt, this is one of the most profound utterances of Scripture. Yet there is a glorious plainness about it

that is within the reach of every humble and contrite spirit.

FAITH COMES

“So then, faith comes . . .” This is the spiritually logical conclusion to the foregoing argument: i.e., 1 – No one can call upon the Lord unless they believe on Him. 2 – No one can believe on Him unless they have heard about Him. 3 – No one can hear about Him unless His message has been declared to them. 4 – His message cannot be declared unless a messenger is

sent. Therefore, the Spirit concludes, *“faith comes,”* or is experienced through an appointed means.

While it is the responsibility of men to believe the Gospel, and while they will be condemned if they do not believe it, they do not believe on their own. Faith *“comes.”* It comes TO them. But it comes from outside of them. Believing the report is not a natural response. A latent ability that lies dormant within the unregenerate

is not awakened. Faith “comes,” it is not revived or awakened. It is not the vivification of a natural ability.

This is another way of saying we “have obtained” or received, “like precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1), or have “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27). It means it is “given unto” us “to believe” (Phil 1:29), and that faith is “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23). It is for this reason that those who believe “the report” are said to have had “the arm of the Lord revealed” to them. The total glory for the process of moving from darkness to light belongs to God. Those who would rob Him of this glory are in serious jeopardy, for He will not allow any flesh “to glory in His presence” (1 Cor 1:29). Salvation is precisely structured in all of its facets so that it “belongs to the Lord” (Psa 3:8; Rev 7:10; 19:1).

Faith Through Hearing

The appointed means through which faith “comes” is “hearing.” It comes “from hearing,”^{NASB} or “from hearing the message,”^{NIV} or “from what is heard.”^{NRSV}

Faith does not come by seeing, else there would have been a deluge of it on the banks of the Red Sea. If men and women are going to believe they will have to hear – hear the message God has appointed as the means to faith. As you must know, this accounts for the rarity of faith in our times. **When the Gospel becomes sparse, faith becomes rare.** When people are fed a diet of Law – even God’s Law – faith will not “come,” for “the Law is not of faith” (Gal 3:12).

HEARING BY . . .

The implication of the text is that “hearing” also “comes.” This is not merely hearing with the natural “ears,” like Israel did at Sinai (Deut 5:1). Although what is heard is articulated in human speech, the hearing through which men believe is not merely being subjected to the sound. This will be confirmed in the verses eighteen and nineteen.

Etymologically, the word “hearing” comes from ἀκοή, which primarily means

“the ability to hear.” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon gives the primary meaning as, “to be endowed with the faculty of hearing.” Frieberg’s lexicon gives the primary meaning as “the ability to hear.” The word used here is a noun, not a verb.

“Hearing,” therefore, as used in this text, is not an activity, but a capacity. It is used elsewhere in Scripture in this manner, i.e., “the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2,5).

The Scriptures are clear on this matter, namely that hearing is a capacity granted to men by the living God. I briefly

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The Scriptures are clear on this matter, namely that hearing is a capacity granted to men by the living God.

covered this under the second section of this lesson, **THE NECESSITY OF HEARING.**

The means by which the capacity to “hear” is received is “the word of God.” Some versions read, “the word of Christ.”^{NASB/NIV/NRSV} This can be viewed from different perspectives. All of them have some merit.

The Word of the Gospel

First, “the word of God” can be understood to be what God has said. In this case, that word would be the Gospel, for faith cannot come by hearing the Law, or the Proverbs. Those are not the life-giving message, nor are they “the power of God unto salvation.” That in no way diminishes the truth declared in the Law, nor does it reduce the responsibility for people to be obedient and moral. But when it comes to the matter of believing

“unto the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39), the “Gospel of Christ” is the exclusive means of inducing faith. It alone is “the power of God unto salvation.”

Christ’s Own Word

Second, and more likely the meaning, “the word of Christ” means the command of Christ. Vincent says “Belief comes through the message, and the message through the command of Christ.”^{VINCENT’S WORD STUDIES} That, in my judgment, comes close to the meaning. Yet, it can be stated more precisely. Some have felt that “the command of Christ” refers to His commission to “preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). However, this cannot be the meaning, for Isaiah testified that most who heard the word sent to them did not believe. The command of Jesus to the messenger, therefore, is not the root of faith, else those who heard good news from Isaiah would have believed.

The meaning is this: the capacity to hear comes by the authoritative word of Jesus. **He speaks the ability to hear into those with tender hearts.** This should not sound strange to us, for Jesus spoke of this very process when He walked among men. Our Lord referred to two different resurrections that would be effected by His voice. The first was a spiritual resurrection that began while He was yet among us. The second is the resurrection of the dead. Both will be facilitated by His voice.

Here is what He said. “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given im authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*” (John 5:25-29). What a marvelous statement of power!

The Spirit reminded the believers in Ephesus that they had experienced the very spiritual awakening to which Jesus referred. They had “heard” Jesus, being given the capacity to so hear as to believe on Him. “*But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have **heard Him**, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus*” (Eph 4:20-21). In this text, not only had they been quickened from the dead (2:1,5), spiritual advancement was also brought about by the teaching of Jesus.

I am affirming this to be the meaning of this verse. Namely, that faith comes to the individual by means of the capacity to “hear,” or being given “ears to hear.” **The capacity to hear comes through Christ’s own awakening voice.**

Confirmed by Ezekiel
Ezekiel spoke of this means of

bringing life to people – namely speaking life into them. His words foreshadowed the truth of our text, as well as the words of Jesus in the fifth chapter of John (5:25-29). “*And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, **I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’** Yes, I said to you in your blood, **‘Live!’ I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful . . .**” (Ezek 16:6-7).*

In doing this, man’s volitional capacity is not obviated. However, his spiritual impotence is terminated by Christ’s word in order that an appropriate response can be given to the Gospel of Christ. This is precisely what happened when Lydia believed the report. While she was listening to the word of the Gospel, “*the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul*” (Acts 16:14). That is also what happened to you, moving you

to call upon the Lord. The Gospel was declared to you, and as it was declared the Lord gave you ears to hear. When you heard with those ears, you believed, called upon the name of the Lord, and were saved. Because you believed, you gladly received the Word and were baptized, just as those who believed on that memorable day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

A FINAL WORD

Faith will neither “come” nor “increase” where the Gospel is not preached and heard with “*the hearing of faith.*” **When men embrace a religion that moves the Gospel into the background, unbelief comes into the foreground.** God will not allow faith to be authored or finished, to begin or be brought to maturity, independently of hearing and believing the “*record He has given of His Son*” (1 John 5:10-11). Those who believe are glad it is this way.

HAS NOT EVERYONE HEARD?

“¹⁸ *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.’*” The Spirit will now move Paul to make a rather technical point, yet one that must be made. He has already reminded us that the Lord was found of the Gentiles who attained unto righteousness, even though they did not seek after it (9:30). In their case, did God dispense with the hearing of

respond in faith to it. **The difference, as Paul has declared, is the Divine factor, not the human factor!**

HAVE THEY NOT ALL HEARD?

Early in my new life, I was subjected to a continual flood of statements affirming that most of the world had never heard the Gospel. This was used to lay a great burden of responsibility upon the people for taking the Gospel to those

have been in the first century, when the Gospel was beginning to be preached. The Spirit, however, reasons quite differently than man. “*But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed!*” Other versions read, “*But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have,*”^{NASB} and “*But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did.*”^{NIV}

He will now show that the Gospel had, indeed, been preached extensively. To the Colossians, Paul made reference to “*the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven*”^{NKJV} (Col 1:23). The NIV reads, “*This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.*” Every version reads essentially the same, confirming there is no reason whatsoever for not taking the words precisely as they are stated. One may argue from an academic or mathematical point of view, stating that such a thing is not possible. Whatever arguments may be introduced to the contrary, the Spirit has spoken clearly and concisely. His point is not a mathematical one, but that the preached Gospel had, in fact, reached into all the world. We dare not begin with a

The point He will make here is this: hearing of itself will not produce faith in the hearers. Men can, indeed, be exposed to the glad tidings of good things, yet utterly fail to respond in faith to it. The difference, as Paul has declared, is the Divine factor, not the human factor!

the Gospel? Not at all! The point He will make here is this: **hearing of itself will not produce faith in the hearers.** Men can, indeed, be exposed to the glad tidings of good things, yet utterly fail to

who sat in darkness. While the intention of such teaching may have been noble, it was sorely lacking in spiritual substance.

If ever such a time existed, it would

theological hypothesis that denies the truth of that statement.

THEIR SOUND

To begin with, there were *“devout men from every nation under heaven”* present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5). The extensiveness of their representation is detailed for us (2:9-11).

- Parthians, from of Persia.
- Medes, from Asia and close to Armenia.
- Elamites, also from the vast Persian empire.
- Those dwelling in Mesopotamia, a part of Syria.
- Those dwelling in Judea, the area around Jerusalem.
- Those dwelling in Cappadocia, a region in Asia Minor, who spoke a mixed dialect of Greek and Syriac.
- Those dwelling in Pontus, another province in Asia Minor, dominated by the Romans.
- Those dwelling in Asia, which covered the vast Eastern world of Russia, China, and India.
- Those dwelling in Phrygia, a province in Asia Minor.
- Those dwelling in Pamphylia, another province in Asia Minor.
- Those dwelling in Egypt, the vast area watered by the Nile.
- Those dwelling in parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, known as Africa to us.
- Visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, from Italy.
- Cretans, from an island in the Mediterranean.
- Arabs, from the great peninsula bounded by Syria on the north.
- By the fifth chapter of Acts, the Apostles were charged with having *“filled Jerusalem”* with their doctrine (Acts 5:28).
- Later, the treasurer of the Candace queen of the Ethiopians, returned home from worshiping in Jerusalem. He came back different than he had left, having been baptized into Christ and receiving the Spirit of God (Acts 8:27-39).
- Paul’s preaching took him from Greece to Arabia, and Italy to Asia

and Syria. Cities and areas in which he ministered included Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Pisidia, Attalia, Antioch in Syria, Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Samothracia, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Cenchræa, Ephesus, Caesarea, Antipatris, Sidon, Myra, Cnidus, Fair Havens, Melita, Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, Appii Forum, and Rome.

Add to that the travels of the other Apostles and kindred laborers that have been confirmed by church history.

- Simon Peter** – Britain, Gaul (France and Germany), Rome.

gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.” We will find, however, that it takes more than the *“sound”* to turn men from darkness to light, and the power of Satan unto God – even though the *“sound”* is imperative.

THE QUESTION

If it is not possible to call upon Him of whom men have not heard, and if it is not possible to hear without a preacher, and if it is not possible for the preacher to preach if he has not been sent, **does that not justify the unbelief of the world?**

Indeed not! God *“has not left Himself without witness”* (Acts 14:17). At the very threshold of the *“day of salvation,”* He

If it is not possible to call upon Him of whom men have not heard, and if it is not possible to hear without a preacher, and if it is not possible for the preacher to preach if he has not been sent, does that not justify the unbelief of the world?

- Andrew** – Armenia (Turkey, Russia), Scythia (Central Asia), Asia Minor.
- James** – Martyred early after impacting Jerusalem.
- John** – Asia (Including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Arabia, Egypt, Bangladesh, India, China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Mongolia).
- Philip** – Britain, Greece.
- Bartholomew** – Armenia (Turkey, Russia), India, Africa.
- Thomas** – Babylon, Persia, India.
- Matthew** – Persia, Ethiopia, Greece.
- James the son of Alphaeus** – Jerusalem.
- Lebbaeus** – Armenia (Turkey, Russia).
- Simon the Canaanite** – Armenia (Turkey, Russia), Britain, Egypt, Cyrene, Africa, Lybia.
- Matthias** – Armenia (Turkey, Russia)

THE SEARCH FOR THE TWELVE APOSTLES,

William Steuart McBirnie

And that is only a cursory review! Indeed, **the sound** of the Gospel *“has*

assembled devout men from every nation under heaven to hear the glad proclamation of repentance and the remission of sins. The aggressive preaching of the Gospel fulfilled the word of the Psalmist, *“The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it”* (Psa 68:11).

God Almighty has been aggressive to get the Word of His Son into the world. He did not depend upon men to send messengers, but sent them Himself, endued with power as well as the message. In the end, when we see all of the *“preachers”* God has sent into the world, it will be even more apparent how devoted He is to our salvation.

Those who have ears to hear *“know the joyful sound.”* They have the capacity to recognize it, rejoice in it, and are blessed because of it (Psa 89:15). When those with ears to hear, HEAR, they are always advantaged by the sound of the Gospel, and God is always glorified in them. It is never in order for those with

ears to hear to refuse to do so.

Settle it in your mind, the Gentiles have

heard the “*sound*” of the Gospel. They have heard it because God has sent preachers, or proclaimers, to them. Yet,

they have not all believed or obeyed that Gospel. That is a most sobering circumstance to consider.

DID NOT ISRAEL KNOW?

¹⁹ *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.’ Herein is a mysterious thing – at least mysterious to the flesh. How is it that the Gentiles found righteousness, receiving the Gospel, but the Jews, who were prepared for it, were unbelieving? There is a Divine strategy behind it all, and it is “*past finding out*” by human knowledge (11:33). Even after it is revealed, it will stagger the human intellect.

DID NOT ISRAEL KNOW?

The question being asked relates to the acceptance of the Gentiles: **Did not Israel know the Lord would turn from them to the Gentiles, thereby provoking them to jealousy?** Was all of this an unplanned reaction to Israel’s unbelief? Did they take the Lord by surprise by their rejection of the Gospel?

Early on, the Lord revealed what He was going to do. Before Moses completed his ministry, the Lord told him what He would do because of Israel’s provocation. Moses included the words in a song he sang to them before he left the terrain of battle. The Spirit now refers to that prophesy. “*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*” (Deut 32:21).

The provocation of which Moses spoke occurred when they “*provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger*” (Deut 32:16). The Psalmist referred to it as the time when they “*provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images*” (Psa 78:58). But never was the Lord more jealous than when Israel beheld their own Savior, and

“*received Him not*” (John 1:11).

I WILL PROVOKE THEM!

Now the Divine strategy begins to unfold. The Spirit will continue to expound it through the eleventh chapter, and it is marvelous! The “*foolish nation*” to which He refers is the Gentiles. They were “*foolish*” because they did not know the Lord, and were not seeking His righteousness.

The Lord had frequently spoken through the Prophets concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles. “*And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek . . . I have put My spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles . . . I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles . . . I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles . . . I will lift up Mine hand to the Gentiles . . . thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles . . . the Gentiles shall come to thy light . . . their seed shall be known among the Gentiles . . . the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness . . . I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream . . . they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles . . . the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth . . . My name shall be great among the Gentiles*” (Isa 11:10; 42:1,6; 49:6,22; 54:3; 60:3; 61:9; 62:2; 66:12,19; Jer 16:19; Mal 1:11). What a staggering array of Divine commitments!

And, indeed, that did happen. It happened at the house of Cornelius. It took place in Philippi with Lydia and the Philippian jailor. Gentiles in Europe, Asia, and Africa heard and embraced the Gospel. Yet that acceptance of the Gospel angered the Israelites, just as the prophet said it would. They saw no correlation between the acceptance of the Gentiles, the prophecy of Moses, and the testimony

of the Prophets.

And why were the Jews so angry about all of this? Why did they do vigorously oppose, hound, and even persecute Paul for preaching to the Gentiles? **It was because God made them angry through the acceptance of those they deemed foolish.** That is what the Lord said He would do: “*by a foolish nation I will anger you*” (10:19b). Moses said it this way, “*I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation*” (Deut 32:21b).

These were the nations that were “*as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance*” (Isa 40:15), yet they found the righteousness of God before the Jews.

Herein is a perfect picture of how God saves people. The Gentiles were “*not a people*,” having no status whatsoever before God. They were a “*foolish nation*,” devoid of wisdom, and stumbling in moral and spiritual darkness. Yet, a message of good news was sent unto them – a message through which the capacity to hear was granted by the Lord. That faith propelled them out of a state of rejection into one of Divine acceptance.

O, that men could see it! That is how salvation comes to men. It does not come to them because they have been trained to receive it – else the Jews would have obtained it. It does not come because people are suitable, having the right name and bathed in the right culture – else the Jews would have possessed it.

No! Salvation is for the unworthy, the foolish, and those lost in the darkness! That is why it is called “*salvation*.” In it a Divine rescue is accomplished. The transfer to a new realm is realized. Very real sins are cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Transgressions are blotted out like a thick cloud (Isa 44:22). A provocative circumstance, indeed!

THE BOLDNESS OF ISAIAH

²⁰ ***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.'***” On a much smaller level than our text, I have often seen the principle declared in it. I have witnessed the dregs of society, unimaginably filthy and depraved, perceive the truth of the Gospel before those who have long been surrounded with the sound of truth. I have witnessed the provocation caused within stilted churches by the new and irrepressible life of a “*newborn babe*.” How often those with no religious culture at all have taken hold of the truth, sprinting past seasoned churchmen, leaving them far behind. That is the very principle being declared in this text.

VERY BOLD

And why does it say Isaiah was “*very bold*”? His words are found in Isaiah 65:1. *“I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not: I said, Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by My name.”*

It took boldness to declare the message because of the effect it would have upon the pretentious Israelites. It would be like telling a Baptist that a Mormon had suddenly come into the knowledge of God – a knowledge far

greater than any Baptist had ever experienced. Or, more to the point, it would be like telling a member of the Christian Church or Church of Christ that a Christian Scientist had far surpassed the entirety of the Restoration Movement in the appropriation of the blessing of God. Perhaps it would be like reporting to those thinking themselves to be “the one true church” that a greater degree of spiritual insight and fervor was being experienced in the local drunk tank than in the stately cathedrals of the city.

Those who imagine themselves to hold exclusive rights to the truth are incensed when they hear of those whom they despise having more than they do. It is hard for scribes and Pharisees to learn from Galileans, whom they deem to be “*unlearned and ignorant*.”

WHAT CAUSED THE DIFFERENCE?

Why was the Lord found by the Gentiles who did not seek Him? How is it that He was manifest, or made known, to those who did not ask for Him? This was the effect of the preached Gospel! On the wings of that glorious message came gifts and abilities that could never be generated at Sinai! The Jews worked hard to attain to the righteousness of the Law. The Gentiles acknowledged their deficiencies

and worked on believing God!

The Jews devoted themselves to the commandments. The Gentiles gave heed to the promises of the Gospel. The outcome was that faith took the Gentiles further than works took the Jews.

This is the appointed manner in which men and women are saved. It is how the shackles of sin are broken and slavery to sin and Satan terminated. It comes through a message that is “*the power of God unto salvation*.” Believe that message, and regardless of your past, you will obtain the favor of God! You may not have sought the Lord in the past, but you will find Him! You may not have asked for Him, but He will make Himself known to you. This is the heritage of all who will believe the Gospel.

How marvelously the Spirit states it! *“I said BEHOLD ME, BEHOLD ME, to a nation that was not called by my name!”* Do not imagine for one moment that this is not still happening. The voice of the Lord that breaks the cedars of Lebanon, shakes the wilderness, and even makes the hinds to calve, can shout a person to spiritual alertness through the Gospel! It is His “*power unto salvation*.” Blessed are the feet of those who bring it to us!

GOD'S PATIENCE WITH ISRAEL

²¹ ***But to Israel He says: 'All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people.'***” Israel was a chosen people, a cultured people, and a highly favored people. Through the Prophets the Lord left no question about His desire to bless them. He warned them with strong warnings, and drew them with great promises. Yet, in spite of all of this, they spurned the advances of their God.

Hear the Lord Himself lament their condition. *“I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoketh*

Me to anger continually to My face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick; which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day” (Isa 65:2-5).

How can such a favored people yield such abominable results? And why does God hold out His hands to them, beckoning them to come. Hear Him cry out: *“Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon*

you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever” (Jer 3:12). *“Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings”* (Jer 3:22).

You see, dear reader, that is what sin does to people – the sin that entered into the world with Adam's transgression (Rom 5:12). The effects of sin cannot be trained out of people. It cannot be extricated by commandments. Unrelenting patience at the hand of the Lord, and continual pleas from Him do not alter the human character or change the heart of sinners. Laws cannot change men, nor can specific directions and meticulous routines. As it is written, *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the*

leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23).

The hands of God are not being held

out to Israel in futility. There is a marvelous purpose and determination behind it all. He will yet reap a harvest from the seed He has sown. It will not come

at the expense of His holiness, nor will it require that man be bludgeoned into submission. In due time, His glory will be revealed in the salvation of the Jews.

CONCLUSION

I cannot overemphasize the indispensability of the Gospel of Christ. It has been vastly underrated in the professed church, often being treated as though it no longer has a place of prominence. Sleeping souls have allowed other themes and issues to upstage the Gospel, thereby relegating Christ Jesus to a subordinate position. But Jesus will not take a back seat. He will cast down those who attempt to dislodge Him from the throne upon which He has been seated. He said it this way, *“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ;*

the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes”? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed”^{NIV} (Matt 21:42-44).

I understand that some will affirm the place of Israel in the Divine economy has been finally removed. The Kingdom, so to speak, has been taken from them and given to another *“who will produce its fruit.”* However, let no soul imagine for a solitary

moment this means all hope for Israel has been irremediably thrown to the ground! The next chapter will powerfully develop this aspect of things, warning us not to become complacent about our standing with God, or despising those of the house of Israel.

The absurdity of a dead Gentile church boasting of the cutting off of Israel is the epitome of ignorance! Do such boasters think God cannot take the Kingdom from them, giving it to *“a people who will produce its fruit?”* How solemnly the Spirit will begin to speak to us!

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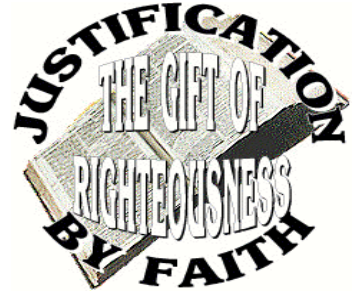
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The Gospel Preached is the Appointed Means by which Men are Saved--by Given O. Blakely



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 35



ISRAEL IS NOT TOTALLY REJECTED

11:1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³ "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? ⁴ But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. ⁷ What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. ⁸ Just as it is written: "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." ⁹ And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them." ¹⁰ Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always." (Romans 11:1-10 ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

The nation of Israel is the subject of a remarkable amount of revelation. Beginning with the twelfth chapter of Genesis, the focus of Divine attention is centered on Abraham and his offspring. The Word of God never leaves that focus. Jesus Christ Himself, together with those who are in Him, are the

grandest expression of that concentration.

From the creation of man until the calling of Abraham (then, Abram), approximately 2,100 years passed – about one third of all of time, through the current year of 2001. During that time, as confirmed by various archeological digs, a

significant number of things occurred.

- 3600 Sumerian city-states were in existence.
- 3500 Cuneiform writing system was developed by the Sumerians.
- 3378 The SED Festivals had their origin in Egypt.

The Spirit substantiates to our hearts that Israel has not been totally rejected. Hope remains.--by Given O. Blakely

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. TELLING THE TRUTH (9:1a)
- II. THE WITNESS OF THE CONSCIENCE (91b)
- III. THE COMPULSION OF GODLY CONCERN (9:2)
- IV. THEN CAPACITY OF A HEART IN FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST (9:3)
- V. THE ISRAELITES (9:4a)
- VI. REMARKABLE ADVANTAGES (9:4b-5)

- ❑ 3300 MENES united Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt.
- ❑ 3100 BARAT founded the first Phoenician dynasty. The first Egyptian dynasty was founded.
- ❑ 2686 The third Egyptian dynasty was founded by NEBKA.
- ❑ 2613 The fourth Egyptian dynasty was founded by SNEFERU.
- ❑ 2589 CHEOPS (KHUFU) ruled Egypt for 23 years.
- ❑ 2570 The Great Pyramid of CHEOPS was built at Gizeh in Egypt.
- ❑ 2500 The Hurrians, originating in Armenia, moved into the Near Eastern area, settling in the Euphrates Valley.
- ❑ 2494 The fifth Egyptian dynasty was founded by USERKAF.
- ❑ 2425 The cult of OSIRIS spread over Egypt.
- ❑ 2400 Babylon was ruled by SUMU-ABI.
- ❑ 2344 The Hebrew date of the Deluge, as well as the Chinese date in their "Epoch of Fu-Hi", Babylonian and Egyptian records.
- ❑ 2341 The sixth Egyptian dynasty was founded by TETI.
- ❑ 2286 China was ruled by Emperor YAOU. 6
- ❑ 2285 Babylon was invaded by KUDUR-NANKHUNDI of Elam.
- ❑ 2267 The city of Tyre was built.
- ❑ 2264 The Akkadian Empire was founded by SARGON of Agade.
- ❑ 2250 Babylon was ruled for 55 years by HAMMURABI I.
- ❑ 2181 The seventh Egyptian dynasty was founded by NEFERKARE the Younger.
- ❑ 2180 The Semitic empire of Akkad was overcome by the Guti

invasion.

- ❑ 2173 The eighth Egyptian dynasty was founded by WADJKARE PEPYSONBE.
- ❑ 2160 The ninth Egyptian dynasty was founded.
- ❑ 2133 The tenth Egyptian dynasty was founded.
- ❑ 2130 The eleventh Egyptian dynasty was founded by MENTUHOTEP.
- ❑ 2060 The third dynasty of Ur was founded.
- ❑ 2020 Mari became independent from Ur
- ❑ 1991 The twelfth Egyptian dynasty was founded by AMMENEMES I.

..... Taken from Ushers Chronology

None of these events are mentioned in Scripture because they had no direct bearing upon the eternal purpose of God. **In a way, they were all incidental.**

PRIOR TO THE FLOOD

Some passing references are made to certain cultures prior to the flood. Cain dwelt in the "land of Nod," and there "built a city" (Gen 4:16-17). Those with expertise in key areas lived in those early times. Tent dwellers and those who handled cattle were present (Gen 4:20). There were those who were adept with musical instruments (Gen 4:21). Craftsmen in bronze and iron existed (Gen 4:22). Men are said to have "multiplied on the face of the earth" (Gen 6:1). "Mighty men," and "men of renown" sprang up throughout the world (Gen 6:4).

AFTER THE FLOOD

By the time of Noah, in the earth's 1536th year, it "was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6:11). In the flood, "all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died" (Gen 7:21).

Nothing in Scripture remotely suggests that the earth's population at that time

was small. The whole of humanity was so corrupt its only distinction before God was that "all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Gen 6:12), and "the earth is filled with violence through them" (Gen 6:13). The remains of many of the civilizations destroyed in the flood have been discovered. They were remarkably advanced, as attested by many of their works, from tools to cities.

Noah's sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth, were the progenitors of the "coastland," or "maritime," nations (Gen 10:5). "Languages, lands, and nations" came from them (Gen 10:20). Nimrod formed a "kingdom" (Gen 10:10). Egypt is mentioned as in existence for some time when Abraham headed for Canaan (Gen 12:10-14).

SCRIPTURAL THRUST

Even though socially and politically advanced nations existed prior to Israel, no extended commentary is given of them in Scripture. The rise and development of Egypt is not the focus of Scripture. The impressive empires of Babylon, the Medo-Persians, Greeks, and Romans, are all given very little space in revelation. Even then, they are only mentioned in their relationship to the purpose and people of God. Apart from that, they have no true relevance.

When it comes to nations, God's focus has always been upon the Jews. They are the only ones to whom He gave His righteous law. All of His prophets were primarily for them, testifying to other nations only occasionally, and never primarily. His promises were given to them, and the blessing of the world was to be through them. The vast bulk of Scripture was given to them and

When it comes to nations, God's focus has always been upon the Jews. They are the only ones to whom He gave His righteous law. All of His prophets were primarily for them, testifying to other nations only occasionally, and never primarily.

pertained to them. The details of their history are provided, together with the impact they had upon God. His dealings with them were extensive and prolonged.

It is difficult for me to comprehend how any honest person can read the Scriptures and conclude that God has forgotten the Jews. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is establishing to our hearts in this very passage that nothing can be further from the truth. Because of his closeness to the Lord, Paul is constrained to pray for their salvation (10:1). That, of course, would be the height of absurdity if they had been summarily written off. It is true, there were some generations of the Jews that were cut off. In fact, God told Jeremiah not to pray for the Jewish generation of his day (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). No such injunction, however, has ever been given concerning the entirety of this nation. God never directed any Apostle to admonish the church NOT to pray for the Jews – even though there have been times when such direction was given to others (Ezek 14:14)! If they had “sinned unto death,” so to speak, all prayer for them would be futile (1 John

leads us to consider this people as a whole. Ponder what He directed Paul to say.

- ❑ With the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit, Paul had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart over Israel (9:1-2).
- ❑ He was willing to wish himself accursed from Christ for them (9:3).
- ❑ The adoption, glory, covenants, giving of the law, service of God, promises, fathers, and ancestry of Christ belong to them (9:4-5).
- ❑ They were the national womb within which the elect were found (9:6-8).
- ❑ God will have mercy upon whoever He wills (9:15).
- ❑ Salvation is not of him who runs, or of him who wills, but of God who shows mercy (9:16).
- ❑ Concerning Israel, God promised, “*in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God*” (9:26).
- ❑ Isaiah prophesied, “*Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for He will finish the work, and*

Although men should be able to conclude this from the undeniable emphasis given to them in Scripture, together with the Divine commitments concerning them, flesh is prone to flawed thinking.

The importance of Israel in the grand scheme of things demands that we have a fruitful understanding of them. If we imagine they are utterly hopeless, how will we be able to account for the salvation of the Gentiles, who plummeted even lower than nature allows (Rom 1:26)? If the Lord has completely rejected Israel because they did not believe, how will we be able to explain the Gentiles attaining righteousness, when they sought it not?

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

The matter of God’s sovereignty, or absolute independence from the government of others, has already been introduced.

- ❑ God **causes** everything to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. “*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*”^{NASB} (Rom 8:28).
- ❑ The aim of salvation is traced back to His determination. “*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*”^{NKJV} (Rom 8:29-30).
- ❑ God’s determination concerning Jacob and Esau was made before they were born. “*And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*” (Rom 9:10-13).*
- ❑ Those who experience the mercy and compassion of God do so because of His will. “*For He saith to Moses, I will have*

The reasoning of this chapter is to be seen through the background of chapters nine and ten. After substantiating that the Gospel announces a righteousness that comes from God through faith, the Spirit has confirmed that all men sorely need that righteousness.

5:16). But God has given no such directive, and woe be to that presumptuous person who leaves the people of God thinking He has!

THE BACKGROUND: ROMANS 9-10

The reasoning of this chapter is to be seen through the background of chapters nine and ten. After substantiating that the Gospel announces a righteousness that comes from God through faith, the Spirit has confirmed that all men sorely need that righteousness (chapters 1-3). This includes the Israelites, Paul’s “*kinsmen according to the flesh*” (9:32). Beginning with chapter nine, the Spirit

cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth” (9:27-28).

- ❑ Isaiah declared Israel had **not** been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah, who could never again rise (9:29).
- ❑ Paul’s heart’s desire and prayer for Israel is that they would be saved (10:1).
- ❑ The Gospel of Christ is God’s power unto salvation “to the Jew **FIRST**” (Rom 1:16; 10:14-16).

The Spirit will now establish not only the reasonability of Israel being saved, but the surety of it.

mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom 9:15-16).

- God raised Pharaoh up to display His power in him. "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Rom 9:17).
- God has the power to shape people as He desires. "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Rom 9:21-24)
- In strict accord with His purpose, God terminates His works in righteousness. "For He will finish the

work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Rom 9:28).

- God Himself placed Jesus in the world as the Stone – a Foundation Stone for some, and a Stumblingstone for others. "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 9:33).
- The Lord has provoked Israel to anger

them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me" (Rom 10:20).

Whatever one may choose to believe about these affirmations, it cannot be denied that they declare the working of the Lord. They are **not** a declaration of what men did, but what the Lord did! He did these things in spite of the opposition of Satan and the condition of men. All of nature declared that they could not be

Whatever one may choose to believe about these affirmations, it cannot be denied that they declare the working of the Lord. They are not a declaration of what men did, but what the Lord did! He did these things in spite of the opposition of Satan and the condition of men.

through the Gentiles. "But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you" (Rom 10:19).

- God made Himself known to the Gentiles who did not seek after Him or His righteousness. "But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of

done, yet they were! That is what the Sovereignty of God involves.

Now the Spirit will show how Divine determinations are being brought to bear upon the Israelites. The arguments set before us are powerful, and are designed to bring glory to our God. They are not intended to support man's theology.

HAS GOD CAST AWAY HIS PEOPLE?

^{41:1a} ***I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not!***" Other versions read, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!"^{NASB} "I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means!"^{NIV} "What I am saying is this: is it possible that God abandoned His people? Out of the question!"^{NJB} "So I say, Has God put His people on one side? Let there be no such thought"^{BBE}

CAST AWAY

To "cast away" is to discard, with no prospect of the status changing. It means to push aside, or reject. It means to get rid of something that is useless and unpleasant, to remove, or throw into the scrap heap. The renown lexicographer, Thayer, says of the word used here, "(1) to

thrust away, push away, repel, 2) to thrust away from one's self, to drive away from one's self, 2a) repudiate, reject, refuse."

This is a status Paul the Apostle feared, and zealously sought to avoid. Therefore he made his body his slave instead of serving it, lest, after preaching to others, he himself should be rejected, or cast away (1 Cor 9:27).

The question is whether or not God has pushed the Israelites away from Himself, never to look toward them again. Has God's covenant with Abraham been abrogated? Are the Jews now utterly hopeless, like the Gentiles were before them? Are the promises made to them no longer applicable to them? Have the Gentiles taken their place? Is that what

God has done?

It should not surprise you that no small number of self-acclaimed teachers say that God has, in fact, totally rejected the Jews. However, we have no regard for them or their flawed words. Rather we will hear what the Lord has said on the matter.

Their House Left Desolate

When Jesus lamented over Jerusalem, He declared He "often" would have gathered its children together under His protective wing. However, they refused, or "would not." Therefore, He said, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." What a saddening announcement! Yet, our Lord did not end there, but left the door of hope open. "For I say unto you, Ye

The Spirit substantiates to our hearts that Israel has not been totally rejected. Hope remains.--by Given O. Blakely

shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt 37-39). Luke limited the time of desolation with these words, "until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 13:35).

Nothing in our Lord's words suggest this judgment was permanent. In fact, everything about it suggests a future change in status.

Jerusalem Trodden by the Gentiles

Toward the close of His ministry, Jesus spoke very specifically concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and His own coming. In those words He included the following concerning the holy city. "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). The word "until" draws a line of demarcation that cannot be denied.

Rather than unlearned Gentile teachers declaring that God has "cast away" Israel, they should be considering the implications of "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled. Some, unwilling to allow the Word of the Lord to shape their thinking, affirm that the fulfillment of the times of the Gentiles is actually the end of the world. Such a postulate, of course, requires an extraordinary imagination. That would make "the day of salvation" a Gentile day, which it is nowhere declared to be. It would also negate the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation to "the Jew first." It would

also make the heart's desire and prayer of Paul for his kinsmen nonsensical.

HIS PEOPLE

The phrase "His people" does not refer to the church, as will be clearly established in the following verses. And, if "His people" does not refer to the church, the only other possibility is Israel. No less than eighty-four times, the Holy Spirit refers to Israel as "His people." No less

eliminating the Israelites, Jesus broke down the middle wall of partition between them and the Gentiles (Eph 2:11-15).

CERTAINLY NOT!

Has God "cast away His people?" Certainly not! God forbid! ^{KJV} May it never be! ^{NASB} By no means! ^{NIV} Far be the thought! ^{DARBY} Let there be no such thought! ^{BBE} Let it not be! ^{YLT} Of course not! ^{NAB} Out of the question! ^{NJB} **The**

Rather than unlearned Gentile teachers declaring that God has "cast away" Israel, they should be considering the implications of "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled.

than nine times. They are called "His people Israel" (Judges 11:23; 1 Sam 27:12; 2 Sam 5:12; 1 Kgs 8:56,59; 1 Chron 14:2; 2 Chron 7:10). They are referred to as "a people of inheritance" (Deut 4:20; "the Lord's portion" and "the lot of His inheritance" (Deut 32:9).

God is referred to as "the God of Israel" no less than 203 times! Zacharias' great prophecy of the day of salvation also referred to God in this way (Lk 1:68).

Rather than believing Gentiles replacing the Jews, they are referred to as having been made "fellowheirs" with them (Eph 3:6). This compares with their former status of "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." Rather than

Spirit does not allow such an absurd conclusion! It is out of place in heavenly places. It is out of order among the sons of men! The mind of the Spirit will not lead men to such a conclusion!

Even though the Spirit has spoken with such firmness, yet multitudes of professed preachers and teachers continue to affirm God **has** cast off "His people." But they are wrong – seriously wrong! In this text, the Holy Spirit will reason extensively on this matter. Paul will aggressively confront the notion that God has cast away Israel, showing from every vantage point how utterly false it is. Men may allow for contrary views on this matter, but God does not! When God has spoken, men must keep silence.

PAUL IS AN EXAMPLE

^{41:1b} **For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.** Before proceeding further, the Apostle presents himself as proof that God has not "cast away His people."

SOME HAVE BEEN CAST AWAY

Keep in mind, there are groups of personalities that **have** been "cast away." Not the least of these is the devil and his angels, for whom the lake of fire is

reserved (Matt 25:41). Not a single one of them has been retrieved! None of their number have been excluded from the curse. Sodom and Gomorrah are another example, who "suffered the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). None of their number were salvaged. If one imagines that Lot was an exception, let them consider that he was really not a citizen of Sodom, but a "sojourner" (Gen 19:9). The Amalekites are another example, whose

remembrance God blotted from the face of the earth (Ex 17:14; Deut 25:19).

The presence of a remnant proves the whole has not been cast away! Paul will now cite himself as an example of the point being made. He will develop this at length, justifying his heart's desire and prayer for Israel.

AN ISRAELITE

The Spirit substantiates to our hearts that Israel has not been totally rejected. Hope remains.--by Given O. Blakely

If Israel has been cast away as a whole, Paul could not have been saved – to say nothing of the other twelve Apostles. He was an Israelite – and he IS talking about his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3). Paul was not a proselyte, or a convert to Judaism. He is not speaking of himself in the spiritual sense, although he was of that spiritual number (2:29; 9:6). By saying “Israelite,” Paul means he was descended from Jacob, or Israel. He also refers to this fact in Second Corinthians: “Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I” (11:22). He also referred to himself as “of the stock of Israel,” and a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil 3:5).

SEED OF ABRAHAM

In particular, this is the fleshly seed of Abraham, for Paul is confirming that such seed has not been “cast away” by God. He also confessed, “Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I” (2 Cor 11:22). Before his accusers he acknowledged, “I am a man which am a Jew” (Acts 21:39; 22:3). He referred to the Israelites as “mine own nation” (Acts 26:4). All of this was stated in confirmation that his fleshly lineage could be traced back to Abraham.

TRIBE OF BENJAMIN

It is true that some spiritual application could be made of the words “Israelite” and “seed of Abraham.”

Confirming this is not the thrust of his argument, Paul traces his lineage back to the “tribe of Benjamin.” He also refers to this tribal descent in Philippians 3:5.

The tribe of Benjamin only holds distinction in the fleshly lineage of Abraham. It was a very little tribe, and was nearly destroyed in the time of the Judges (Judges 20-21). Christ, as you know, was of the tribe of Judah, not of Benjamin (Heb 7:14). Thus, the salvation of a member of the tribe of Benjamin proves God has “not cast away His people.” This is beyond all controversy! Paul himself was living proof of that, and thus reminds of his own salvation.

GOD HAS NOT CAST AWAY THOSE HE FOREKNEW

“^{2a} **God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.**” The Spirit will now establish the Sovereignty of God in relation to Israel. He was not caught off guard by the unbelief of the Israelites, nor was He moved into a course of action that contradicted His first and eternal purpose.

In this statement, the Spirit is allowing for the judgment of God against the nation of Israel, and the appointed desolation of their house. However, He is also showing the rejection of the ancient people was not total, nor were they moved beyond the boundary of hope, as was Sodom and the children of Amalek.

GOD HAS NOT

Again, the affirmation is made, “God has not cast away His people!” Having already cited himself as sterling example, the Spirit now moves Paul to be even

more particular.

In order for God to “cast away” the Israelites, He would have to nullify His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 12:7; 15:5,18; 17:7; 26:3; 35:12). The marvelous promises He gave through the prophets would also need to be abrogated (Isa 1:25-27; Jer 3:18; 31:31-34; Ezek 37:16-22; Hos 2:14-23; Mal 3:4).

WHOM HE FOREKNEW

The matter of God’s foreknowledge was introduced in chapter eight. It is a driving principle in His great salvation. “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (8:29). **What form of reasoning would justify the conclusion that some among the decadent Gentiles were foreknown, but none among the Israelites? What**

Divine affirmation will lead one to believe there was line of demarcation in Israel’s history after which God foreknew no more people among them?

The Spirit will now elaborate upon this line of reasoning, showing that there remains a remnant among the Israelites. He will confirm that their present condition does not differ from former times. **The presence of a remnant validates the fact that God has NOT cast away “His people.”** There can be no “remnant” among a people that have been totally rejected!

In the most simplistic terms, we are to understand that God’s choice of Abraham and his seed was undergirded by His foreknowledge. Not only did He see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He also saw those of succeeding generations whom He would conform to the image of His Son.

THE WORD TO ELIJAH

“^{2b} **Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³ ‘LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life’? ⁴ But what does the**

divine response say to him? ‘I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’”

The Spirit now summons a Scriptural incident for our consideration. The point

He is making is that things are not what they seem to be to the flesh. **Seemingly hopeless times do not confirm Divine abandonment!** If men are insistent upon formulating theologies, they should be based upon the Word of God. They should also be seen in the various incidents of

Scripture, and justified by the sayings of God. Remember, this line of reasoning is proving that God *“has **not** cast away His people”*— those He has foreknown among the Israelites.

DO YOU NOT KNOW?

“Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah . . .” One of the great tragedies of our time is the Scriptural illiteracy that dominates the professed church. It has occasioned the spreading of many erroneous and harmful views, not the least of which is the casting away of Israel.

Among other things, this confirms the absolute centrality of Scripture in spiritual reasoning. While it may seem very apparent that this is the case, it is not at all acknowledged in the humanly structured religious thinking of our times. It is not unusual to find *Christian* teachers basing their thinking upon statistics, psychological principles, linguistic expertise, and other forms of human wisdom. Many a discouraged soul regularly hears sermons, and other forms of religious communication, that are solely based upon things not found in Scripture. However, the Holy Spirit will not allow such reasoning. Thinking that is not based upon Scripture is flawed to core. It makes no difference how wise it may appear, if it is not categorically supported by Scripture, it is not to be preached, and it is not to become a foundation for thought or reason. **A contemporary message that puts Scripture into the background is too modern.**

ELIJAH PLEADS AGAINST ISRAEL

“ . . . how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³ LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?” Here is a memorable occasion from the life of one of the singular people of all time. Elijah had just confronted the prophets of Baal in a contest of contests. The purpose was to make known the real God. The times were not the best. The prophet had just passed through a long famine. Wicked Jezebel had *“cut off the prophets of the LORD,”* although

“Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water” (1 Kgs 18:4).

After many days, Elijah confronted Ahab, charging him with troubling Israel with his iniquitous acts, forsaking the commandments of the Lord, and following the idol Baalim. Elijah told Ahab to gather all Israel together, with 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 “prophets of the groves, which ate at Jezebel’s table.” They met on Mount Carmel. The record is found in the eighteenth chapter of First Kings. The outcome of it all was that God was shown to be God, and Baal a dumb god of stone. Elijah personally slew the prophets of

It is not unusual to find *Christian* teachers basing their thinking upon statistics, psychological principles, linguistic expertise, and other forms of human wisdom.

Baal by the brook Kishon.

Word of the prophet’s exploits got back to Jezebel, and her wickedness erupted. She send this word to Elijah. *“So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time”* (1 Kgs 19:2). Upon hearing this threat, Elijah *“arose and ran for his life,”*^{NKJV} heading for Beersheba (19:3).

After going a day’s journey into the wilderness, prophet of God sat under a juniper tree *“and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers”* (19:4). Some foolish teachers have derided Elijah, charging him with being weak and running at the threat of a mere woman. One might as well fault Paul for *“despairing of life,”* and having *“fears”* within (2 Cor 1:8; 7:5). Rather than rebuking the prophet, the Lord sent an

angel to him, who prepared a special meal for him and sent him on his way to *“Horeb the mount of God”* (19:8). It was there, while in a cave, that Elijah *“made intercession against Israel.”* The account is found in First Kings 19:10.

Our text states that Elijah pled with God *“against Israel.”* Other versions read, *“maketh intercession against Israel,”*^{KJV} *“appealed to God against Israel,”*^{NIV} and *“says words to God against Israel.”*^{BBE} Here are his words. *“I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away”* (19:10). He repeats these exact words again in verse 14. Formerly, when Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal, he said *“unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men”* (18:22). No one stood with him against the prophets of Baal. At that time, he stood alone. Now, Elijah reminds the Lord of that grievous circumstance.

Notice, Elijah does not speak in a railing manner against Israel. He does not plead with God to destroy them, or even to punish them. What he does do, however, is suggest that the whole of the nation was defiled, and he alone remained. And, it surely appeared to be that way. However, there was more to the circumstance than was seen by Elijah.

THE DIVINE RESPONSE

“But what does the Divine response say to him?” God does not ignore wrong assessments! If He did not with the mighty prophet Elijah, you may be sure He will not with the pretentious theologians of our day.

Ungodliness was prevailing throughout the land. The prophets of God were being slain (1 Kgs 18:4). The altar of the Lord had been torn down, for Elijah had to personally repair it before he could offer a sacrifice to God in the presence of Baal’s prophets (1 Kgs 18:30). But that was not all that had happened. God was

still at work in the land!

We are apprized that Obadiah had taken a hundred holy prophets, hiding them in two groups of fifty in a cave, and sustaining them with bread and water (18:4). Now the Lord reveals an even larger number of men who had not yielded to the worship of Baal.

I HAVE RESERVED FOR MYSELF

"I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." This reference is found in 1 Kings 19:18, which reads, *"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."*

This was something the Lord Himself did: *"I have left,"* or *"reserved."* **This was a work of God, not the recognition of**

the work of men! The presence of these men is traced to the activity of the Lord. You cannot account for them in any other way. In fact, the Spirit will found an argument upon this circumstance.

The fact that all of Israel appeared to be totally reprobate by no means suggested that it was. We know of at least 100 prophets that were preserved, and seven thousand persons who refused to abandon God in favor of Baal. This was NOT the result of a statistical analysis. It was a revelation.

Do not miss the significance of this text! Here was a situation unknown to one of the mightiest of all prophets. It was during a time when the people of God were ruled by wicked people: Ahab and Jezebel. The worship of God was not apparent. The prophets of God were not

visible or vocal. The altars of the Lord had been torn down, and the people had launched no effort to repair them. Yet, in the midst of all of this, one godly man found one hundred prophets of God, hiding and sustaining them. Further, God had left seventy times more righteous people than there were prophets, reserving them for Himself.

The Relevance of This Occasion

Men must not be hasty to write off the Israelites, imagining that because a godly remnant is not perceived among them, none exists. The sophists who reason that Israel has been cut off must hear the word of the Lord to Elijah, ponder it, and repent of their ways. Here the mind and ways of the Lord are revealed. This text fairly shouts to men, demanding that they refrain from making judgments that conflict with revelation.

THE ELECTION OF GRACE

"⁵ Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Other versions read, *"In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice."*^{NASB} *"So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace."*^{NIV} *"In the same way, then, in our own time,*

His people." There is no room in the Divine vocabulary or purpose for such a thought or expression. Therefore, those who say such things are entirely out of order. Their speech is out of synch with both the Word and purpose of the Almighty.

On a practical note, if God does not

proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge"^{NIV} (Rom 3:4).

We ARE dealing with the sayings of God here. In particular, *"the answer of God"* to Elijah, and the word of the Spirit regarding that answer. I find it exceedingly difficult to understand how men can so blatantly contradict these words, but they do. Of course, that is one of the reasons this strong line of reasoning is being brought to our attention by the Holy Spirit.

AT THIS PRESENT TIME

This expression is not limited to the period during which Paul was writing. Nor, indeed, is the expression *"this present time"* a strange one. It is mentioned two other times (Luke 18:30; Rom 8:18). While it does refer to the immediate time – i.e., right now – it is not intended to mean a fixed point in time. Its use in Scripture lends itself to the idea of ANY point in time. It is as though the Spirit embalms these words in holy writ in order that every generation might read them and apply them to its own time. That is how Jesus used the words. *"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or*

The fact that all of Israel appeared to be totally reprobate by no means suggested that it was. We know of at least 100 prophets that were preserved, and seven thousand persons who refused to abandon God in favor of Baal. This was NOT the result of a statistical analysis. It was a revelation.

there is a remnant, set aside by grace."^{NJB}

These words confirm that the incident with Elijah revealed a Divine principle, or manner of working. It was not an isolated incident, but indicative of the way in which the Lord moves among people – in particular how He works with Israel. The Spirit has already refused to allow the words or thought that God has *"cast away*

allow for such expressions, neither must we. **The people of God must refuse to allow men to teach that God has abandoned Israel, when He affirms He has not.** It is not a light matter, or a mere matter of opinion. God has spoken on this subject, and no person who contradicts Him will be excused. It is still true, *"Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: 'So that you may be*

The Spirit substantiates to our hearts that Israel has not been totally rejected. Hope remains.--by Given O. Blakely

wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in **this present time**, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:29-30). It is also how Paul used the expression in chapter eight of this book. "For I reckon that the sufferings of **this present time** are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (8:18). Neither of these passages remotely suggest that there will ever be a time in this world when the revealed benefits will cease to be. Jesus, for example, did not suggest that a time was coming when the person abandoning all for the sake of the Kingdom of God would no longer receive manifold more in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. Nor, indeed, did Paul intimate that some future period of time would occur in this world when the sufferings being experienced would transcend the glory to be revealed in us.

By the same token, our text does not suggest that the stated condition would cease to be at some future date. Some, failing to see this, acknowledge that a remnant did exist in Paul's day. They affirm, however, that commensurate with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Israelites were summarily cut off, with no hope of recovery. The text before us violently throws that bit of theological nonsense down to the ground, where it belongs!

A REMNANT

The presence of a remnant proves the preservation of the people. Where there is no remnant, there is no people. However, where a remnant exists, a people exist. That is precisely the meaning of Isaiah's words, "Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isa 1:9). This very passage was mentioned earlier, in chapter nine, together with the promise that a remnant of Israel would be saved. "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto

Gomorrah" (9:27-29).

Our text makes this affirmation: "there is a remnant!" **However, you can have no remnant among a people who have been totally rejected, like Sodom and Gomorrah.** In fact, the "remnant" is often counted as the whole, being the reason for its preservation. It was so in Elijah's day, and it is so "at this present time."

Throughout the history of Israel,

Were it not for the remnant, there actually could be no new covenant. Both prophets and Apostles declare the new covenant is made "with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8). Nowhere is it affirmed that this promise was abrogated and the new covenant made with another people – nowhere! **It is the presence of the "remnant" that has allowed for the righteous fulfillment of that promise.**

What is more, the church is NEVER

Throughout the history of Israel, God spoke of a "remnant" within it – a residue that would be blessed. Frequently hope for the people was founded upon the presence of a "remnant."

God spoke of a "remnant" within it – a residue that would be blessed. Frequently hope for the people was founded upon the presence of a "remnant." Ponder these references.

- "The remnant of Israel" (Isa 10:20-21; Jer 6:9; 31:7; Ezek 11:13; Mic 2:12; Zeph 2:13)
- "The remnant of His people" (Isa 11:11,16)
- "The remnant of my flock" (Jer 23:3)
- "the remnant of the house of Israel" (Isa 46:3)
- "The remnant in Judah" (Jer 40:15)
- "the remnant of Judah" (Jer 43:5; 44:12,14,28)
- "The remnant of the house of Judah" (Zeph 2:7)
- "The remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15)
- "The remnant of Jacob" (Micah 5:7-8)
- "The remnant of His heritage" (Micah 7:18)
- "The remnant of My people" (Zeph 2:9)
- "The remnant of this people" (Zech 8:12).

These expressions are acquainting us with the ways of the Lord. This is how He works. It is how He has preserved the nation of Israel without condoning its unbelief. This is what allowed the Lord to severely punish Israel without utterly destroying it.

referred to as the "remnant" of Israel. There IS a remnant within the church; i.e., "the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17). Even that reference can be considered a reference to Israel. At any rate, the church itself is never called a "remnant."

THE ELECTION OF GRACE

"... there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Other versions read, "according to God's gracious choice," ^{NASB} "chosen by grace," ^{NIV} "marked out by the selection of grace," ^{BBE} "God's kindness in choosing them," ^{NLT} and "set aside by grace." ^{NJB}

The Spirit now accounts for the presence of the remnant among the Israelites. **It is strictly a Divine prerogative, as in the time of Elijah.** The word "election" comes from ἐκλογήν, and means "a choosing out, selection, election." This word, in this precise form, is used five times in Scripture.

- "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" (Rom 9:11).
- "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:5).

- “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes” (Rom 11:28).
- “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of [by ^{NKJV}] God” (1 Thess 1:4).
- “Therefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pet 1:10).

The word “election” is never used to describe the choice of men. It is strictly a Divine prerogative, and is used in that way with no exceptions. To confirm this is the case, the Spirit nails the matter down by saying it is “the election of grace.”

The presence of the remnant, therefore, is traced to the gracious and benevolent choice of God. I acknowledge that this does not readily fit into certain theological molds. However, the Spirit is not defending the theological stances developed by men, and neither can we. **The declarations of Scripture are not to be filtered through our understanding. Rather, they are to be the basis for forming our understanding!** Those who have a higher regard for human understanding than for Divine affirmation are occupying dangerous ground. **God will not overlook man’s insolence, particularly when He has extended Himself to make His ways known.** There is no reason to question what this text has declared. Nor, indeed, is there reason to view it as inconsequential. There is every reason to embrace it and join Paul in a prayer for Israel’s salvation.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

If one judges by appearance, which Jesus forbids (John 7:24), Israel looks hopeless. Indeed, from one perspective, Paul’s assessment of them remains true: “*the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God,*

so far as to say no person of an honest and good heart will dare to contend that making Scripture logical to fallen men is a responsibility with which we are charged. It is the declaration, or preaching, of the Word that is our aim. It is the objective of men to believe that

The responsibility of men does not include weaving texts of Scripture into a theological tapestry that is palatable to the human intellect and meets with the approval of self-acclaimed theologians.

and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess 2:15). But that is not the whole of the story, and Paul did not intend for it to be.

In the very midst of this morass of guilt and defilement, “*there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*” It is a matter of Divine choice. That choice has been motivated by His grace. **It exists in spite of the circumstances, not because of them.** You may rest assured God has not acted in contradiction of any aspect of His character, or any portion of His revelation. But that is not the point of this text. It is correctly assumed that whatever God does is righteous and, beyond any doubt, holy.

The responsibility of men does not include weaving texts of Scripture into a theological tapestry that is palatable to the human intellect and meets with the approval of self-acclaimed theologians. Any person who would contend that such is the case has only betrayed their unbelief and ignorance. **In fact, I will go**

Word, without wavering..

I have taken the time to say these things because of the nature of this text. Divine reasoning is based upon these affirmations. The prayer for Israel’s salvation is solidly justified by them. In them, the focus is placed upon God Himself, thereby igniting hope and strengthening faith. **We cannot afford to be wrong about such texts!** Expressions like “*there IS,*” and “*ACCORDING to*” make this clear.

INVOLVED IN DENIAL

In order to affirm that Israel has been written off, and is irrecoverable, several things must be denied. **First**, the fact that God foreknows some among them must be denied. **Second**, that God CAN choose a remnant among them must be denied. **Third**, that there IS a remnant among them must be denied. **Fourth**, that God has NOT cast away His people must be denied. Those are most serious denials!

THE CONFLICT OF GRACE AND WORKS

“⁶ **And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.**” This is an unusually strong affirmation!

Here is a passage that has caused no small controversy among professed believers. This circumstance is not the result of honest searching, but is evidence

of the working of the “*wicked one.*” This verse is not a mere theological tenet. Rather, it is an explanation that justifies God’s choice of a remnant and the consequent preservation of Israel. No child of God can afford to be confused about statements like this. **If Divine reasoning and purpose are supported by such statements, then failing to comprehend them causes what is revealed to become**

mysterious and unknowable. Who is the person that can hope to find advantages in such a situation?

A FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENT

Men have long sought to mingle the works of men and the grace of God. Finely tuned views have been developed that appear to have accomplished this admixture – at least to the satisfaction of those “*understanding neither what they*

say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).

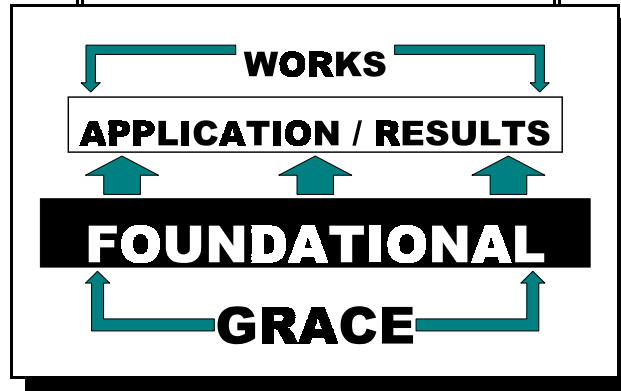
It should be evident to you that this text does not allow for the combining of “works” and “grace.” They are clearly declared to be antithetical, or contrary, to each other. The subject being developed by the Spirit will not allow “works” and “grace” to be joined together. The presence of one cancels out the validity of the other. “Grace” and “works” simply cannot coexist in this matter. It is therefore utterly futile to attempt to forge such a unity.

The Spirit is developing a foundational view – something upon which all valid response is based. **When it comes to the matter of foundations, man’s work is never a factor.** Faith rests upon foundations, and therefore nothing of man can be in them. Here we are dealing with causes, not effects – and **causes are always traced back to God.** Of Him alone it is written, “*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*” (Rom 11:36). And again, “*And all things are of God*” (2 Cor 5:18). When it comes to the foundation, or basis, of salvation, “*Salvation is of the LORD*” from beginning to end (Jonah 2:9). That is precisely the intention of the following ascriptions given to Jesus. “*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*” (Rev 1:8). And again, “*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last*” (Rev 22:13).

Because of this, it is out of order to force the role of “good works” into this text. **The expression “good works” is used sixteen in the Scriptures, and NEVER in a bad sense** (Matt 5:16; John 10:32; Acts 9:36; Rom 13:3; Eph 2:10; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10,25; 6:18; 2 Tim 3:17; Tit 2:7,14; 3:8). **All of those references, with no exception, deal with the effect of salvation, never its cause!**

To take these passages and attempt to wed them to our text only pushes the truth beyond our grasp. Such attempts do not clarify “the election of grace,” but

only serve to obscure it. **Such explanations are not from God, and they do not serve His purpose or assist His people.**



The Spirit will now take us down to the foundation of Divine working. He will explain to us WHY God does what He does, and WHY there is hope for Israel. He will account for the presence of a remnant at “this present time.” For those with ears to hear, His explanation will also account for their own salvation, which will bring glory to God and great joy and satisfaction to their hearts.

IF BY GRACE

“... if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” **See, grace cannot coexist with works at the foundational level.** Either a remnant exists because of God’s grace, or because of man’s works – but it cannot be because of both. It must be one or the other. Other versions read, “*But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*”^{NASB} “*And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*”^{NIV}

Grace presumes the absence of satisfactory works. That absence is the very reason for the necessity of grace. The kindness of God is not found in recognizing the goodness of man, which, in the first place does not even exist (Rom 3:12). Rather, it is revealed in His benevolent provision for man in spite of the absence of such goodness.

If God’s choices are based upon His

grace (i.e., “the election of grace”), then we need not look to the worthiness of the chosen ones as the cause for that choice. It is therefore absurd to say that Israel has been totally rejected because of their works. This is not mere conjecture, for God has spoken most precisely to this point.

It Is A Matter of Revelation

“*Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the LORD of hosts is His name: if those ordinances depart from before Me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD*” (Jer 31:35-37).

It is difficult to conceive of a more precise and powerful statement of Divine intent. It clearly accents the grace of God, else Israel would have been totally rejected “for all they have done.” Rather, however, than this being the case, the Lord calls upon us to consider the stability and consistency of the creation. Are there any doubts about the creations absolute consistency? He then affirms that His commitment to Israel is even more firm than that!

A Remnant and Total Rejection Cannot Exist Simultaneously

This is a marvelous picture of the statement of our text: “... if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” The “election of grace” is not possible if Israel has been completely rejected because of what they have done. This in no way ignores their unbelief. Nor, indeed, does it exclude the necessity of hearing and believing the Gospel of Christ.

What About the Gentiles?

If God has, in fact, abrogated all of promises to the Jews **because of what they have done**, how can we account for the acceptance of the Gentiles? They

spurned the revelation of nature (Rom 1:19-20) and the testimony of their conscience (Rom 2:15). They changed the glory of God into an image like unto man, birds, beasts, and creeping things (Rom 1:23). They changed the truth of God into a lie, worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). They were not thankful (Rom 1:21), and refused to retain God in their knowledge (Rom 1:28). They knew the judgment of God, yet continued in their iniquity, approving others immersed in sin (Rom 1:32).

If you speak of being rejected, what of the Gentiles? God *“also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves”* (Rom 1:24). He *“gave them up unto vile affections”* (Rom 1:26). He even *“gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient”* (Rom 1:28).

Yet, who is the person who will affirm the Gentile world was totally rejected by God? Let them step forth and do their best to defend such an imagination! **The grace of God reached them in spite of what they did!** They were not received because of their works, but because of His grace. How else can you account for the marvelous description of their acceptance. *“The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith”* (Rom 9:30). And again, *“I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me”* (Rom 10:20).

There you have the acceptance of the Gentiles on the precise basis of our text: *“if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.”* Let no person imagine this privilege has been formally withdrawn from the Israelites!

IF IT IS OF WORKS

“ . . . if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.” If the righteousness of God is conferred upon men because of what they have done, it cannot be received through grace! It is not that such a condition is

improbable. **It is impossible!** When the works of men enter into the foundational equation, defilement spreads throughout, and grace is at once obviated!

Foreshadowed Under the Law

The truth of this statement was foreshadowed under the Law – namely, that man’s work cannot have a part in the foundation of salvation. In the building of an altar to Himself, the Lord was very specific. Nothing fashioned by man could be a part of the altar itself. Thus it was written, *“And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it”* (Ex 20:25). Later, Moses reviewed this for the people. *“And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God”* (Deut 27:5-6). When they came into the land of Canaan, Joshua once again stated this

(Heb 13:10). Just as human works would defile the ancient altar of sacrifice, so they contaminate the salvation of God, nullifying the grace of God. Of course, this is even more precisely stated in Galatians 5:4. *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”*

Thus, after all arguments for the mingling of grace and works have been heard, let the Lord have the final word on the matter. He is not ambiguous about it. *“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.”*^{NKJV}

Foreknowledge and Works

Among other things, this confirms that God’s foreknowledge was not of men’s works, else works and grace would have been blended. This is a critical distinction to be seen! If those foreknown by God were those He saw would be obedient, then salvation is necessarily by works. In such a case, God was motivated

There you have the acceptance of the Gentiles on the precise basis of our text: “if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” Let no person imagine this privilege has been formally withdrawn from the Israelites!

requirement. *“As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings”* (Josh 8:31).

This prohibition was given in anticipation of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus *“with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). Nothing of man can be found on the altar of God – the *“altar”* from which we *“eat,”* enjoying the benefits of salvation

by men, which is precisely what salvation by works is.

However, Scripture represents men as being drawn, motivated, and changed, by God Himself. This is a consistent representation, and cannot effectively be negated. **Divine foreknowledge blends with grace, not with works.** The works of men are precisely what requires the grace of God. It is **HIS** works that are the focus of foreknowledge, not the works of men (Acts 15:18). A shout of praise should rise from us all because of it!

THE EXPLANATION

“⁷ What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.⁸ Just as it is written: ‘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.’⁹ And David says: ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them.’¹⁰ Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.’”

Those who are satisfied with simplistic and juvenile explanations of Scripture will certainly find no solace in this passage! Of course, there is nothing at all simplistic about salvation, even though grace has placed it within our reach.

Here we will see that both insight and blindness are from God. God can give eyes to see, or eyes **not** to see! He can cause the spirit of man to be alert and illuminated, or He can put it to sleep. This, of course, is what the Spirit affirms, and there is no room for questioning these realities. Their affirmation accounts for the present blindness of Israel. They also explain why they still **can be** illuminated. Armed with an understanding of these things, a godly person can expectantly entertain a heart’s desire and fervent prayer for Israel, that they might be saved. A failure to perceive this might very well eventuate in a fulfilment of this very text within the objector.

ISRAEL HAS NOT OBTAINED

“What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained. . . .”^{NASB} This has already been affirmed. *“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness”* (Rom 9:31). Now the Spirit nails it into our hearts and consciences.

Only Two Ways to be Righteous
Keeping the Law

The subject at hand is the obtaining of righteousness. **There are only two ways to be righteous.** The first is to fully measure up to the requirements of God’s holy, spiritual, and good Law. Such a righteousness is the result of keeping all of the commandments all of the time (Deut 5:29).

In order to confirm this was an impossible task, God chose a nation through whom this could be shown. He provided them with all of the incentives required, both blessings and curses. He gave them all of the details of that Law in written form. He also allotted a sufficient

Those who are satisfied with simplistic and juvenile explanations of Scripture will certainly find no solace in this passage! Of course, there is nothing at all simplistic about salvation, even though grace has placed it within our reach.

period of time for that righteousness to be developed – no less than 1,500 years.

At the conclusion of that period, the pronouncement was made: *“What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain.”^{NIV}* The idea is that they did not obtain it on their own, or through their own efforts – another way of saying, *“not of works.”* **Righteousness was sought, but it was not obtained!** Why not? From a previously stated perspective, because it was not sought by faith (Rom 9:32). Righteousness through the Law is not possible. The edict has gone forth from the Throne, *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight”* (Rom 3:20). And again, *“for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified”* (Gal 2:16). Further, *“if righteousness come by the law, then*

Christ is dead in vain” (Gal 2:21). **The book is closed on this matter.**

Imputed Righteousness

The other means of obtaining righteousness is to have it imputed, or credited, to you. What is more, this must be God’s own righteousness. It cannot be imaginary or fictitious. This is the righteousness that is announced in the Gospel (Rom 1:17). It is also the righteousness of which Israel was ignorant (Rom 10:3). The result, *“Israel has not obtained what it seeks.”* They could not measure up to the righteousness of the Law, and they were ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God.

THE ELECT HAVE OBTAINED IT

“. . . but those who were chosen obtained it”^{NASB} Other versions read, *“the election hath obtained it,”^{KJV}* *“the elect have obtained it,”^{NKJV}* *“but the elect did,”^{NIV}* *“those of the selection got it,”^{BBE}* *“the chosen did obtain,”^{YLT}* *“the ones God has chosen,”^{NLT}* and *“those who were chosen found it.”^{NJB}*

A Brief Word

Before proceeding further, I would like to make a cursory observation about *“the elect,”* or *“the election.”* The concept of election itself is not the result of human reasoning, but of Divine revelation. In fact, I am persuaded such a lofty concept could not even be imagined by man. The fact that **God chooses** is taught with remarkable clarity and abundance in His Word (Deut 7:6; Deut 18:5; 21:5; 1 Chron 29:1; Neh 9:7; Rom 16:13; 1 Cor 1:27-28; Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13-14; 2 Tim 2:4; James 2:5; 1 Pet 2:9). **In our text, the words “the elect” refer to those whom God has chosen.** It is not necessary to join these words to all manner of human explanations. Taken as they are, they blend perfectly with everything God has said regarding Himself and His offspring, humanity. They are not in conflict with the truth, even though they do contradict the traditions of men. It is comely for the

people of God to accept them as they are stated. If this is not done, they will have no edifying or comforting power for us.

These are words *“taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”*^{NASB} (1 Cor 2:13). This is how the Spirit explains the presence of righteous people within an unrighteous nation. He accounts for their righteousness by saying they were *“elect,”* chosen and picked out by God. Men may not prefer to say it this way, but this is how the Spirit says it. For some, this is exceedingly difficult to receive, but God **will be “justified in all of His sayings”** (Rom 32:4), of which this is one. The explanation is not only stated correctly, it is articulated precisely! It is our business to receive it as it is said, thrusting from us any conflicting form of reasoning.

Subjectively, *“the elect”* were within the nation of Israel. There were *“Israelites indeed”* (John 1:47), Jews *“inwardly”* (Rom 2:29a), and circumcised in *“heart”* (Rom 2:29b). They, and they alone, obtained the righteousness of God! The first of record was the progenitor of the nation, our father Abraham (Gen 15:6). There were also David, the holy prophets, Zecharias and Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist, the twelve Apostles, the 3,000 who believed on that memorable day of Pentecost, Paul, Timothy, Titus . . . etc. They were all Jews, but it only proved to be an advantage for them when they believed.

“The elect” were a “remnant,” like the 7,000 whom God reserved for Himself in the days of Elijah the prophet. All the angels that fell perished, but all of Israel did not! All of Sodom suffered the vengeance of eternal fire, but Israel did not.

God did not destroy the nation because the bulk of them did not obtain his righteousness. This should not surprise us. You have a precise parallel in Israel obtaining Canaan. The mass of the people who received the promise, were not allowed to realize it. In fact, they were

excluded. Yet, as with our text, the elect *“obtained it”* (Num 14:26-31; 26:55; 32:11-12).

If God was willing to spare Sodom for the sake of ten righteous souls, will He blot out Israel among whom were infinitely more than ten righteous? The very thought that He would such a thing, betrays a fundamental ignorance of the nature of God and the glory of His promises.

The word “elect” includes the concept of Divine intervention. Salvation is the consequence of God’s work, not man’s. While men are surely involved in the process – hearing, believing, and obeying – it is the work of God that produces the result.

An Emphasis In “Elect”

The word *“elect”* includes the concept of Divine intervention. Salvation is the consequence of God’s work, not man’s. While men are surely involved in the process – hearing, believing, and obeying – it is the work of God that produces the result. If He did not send the Word to us, we would never have heard (Rom 10:15). If He did not open our hearts, we would not have believed (Acts 16:14). If He did not make us alive, we would forever have remained dead (Eph 2:1,5). He is the One who put us into Christ, making Him to become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). Jesus *“made”* us free (Rom 8:36; Gal 5:1). God *“made us accepted”* (Eph 1:6). He *“made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Eph 2:6). It is the Father who has *“qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light”* (Col 1:12). He, and He alone, has *“washed,” “sanctified,”* and *“justified”* us (1 Cor 6:11). There is no question about this among believers.

The word *“elect”* throws the spotlight upon the Lord, where it should be. It accounts for the attainment of righteousness by declaring what **He** has done. No child of God should be offended with this emphasis. It is one which the Lord Himself has chosen.

Without becoming distracted, it would be well to remind you that Divine election does not eliminate human responsibility. In fact, it even imposes responsibility upon men. It is written to those who *“have obtained like precious faith,” “give diligence to make your calling and election sure”* (2 Pet 1:1,10).

THE REST WERE BLINDED

“. . . and the rest were hardened[blinded]^{KJV}.”^{NASB} Prior to this, the failure of the Israelites to obtain righteousness was traced to at least two factors.

- They sought it not by faith (9:32).
- They were ignorant of the righteousness of God (10:3).

Now an even higher reason is adduced: *“the rest were blinded.”*^{KJV/NKJV} Later versions read *“hardened.”* The blindness of reference pertains to the heart, so that a person is rendered incapable of understanding. More was involved in this than the Israelites closing their minds. They were *“blinded,”* or *“hardened,”* by God. This will be abundantly confirmed in verses 8-10.

In a sense, the same thing happened to *“the rest”* of Israel that took place among the Gentiles. Though surrounded by all manner of evidence concerning the Living God, the Gentiles were given over to *“uncleanness,” “vile affections,”* and *“a reprobate mind”* (1:24.26.28). In other words, God did not intervene, opening their eyes and hearts. God *“blinds”* men by simply withholding understanding, as He did the ostrich when He *“deprived her of wisdom, neither hath He imparted to her understanding”* (Job 39:17).

This is a form of Divine judgment. As I am given to understand it, spiritual blindness is never imposed on those of tender heart, or who are seeking the

truth. However, we must recognize that holy and godly people have, in the past, desired to understand mysteries of the Kingdom, yet were not allowed to do so. As it is written, *“For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them”* (Matt 13:17). In their case, defective hearts were not the issue. Rather, it was not the appropriate time for such understanding to be obtained.

There are people who cannot believe because God has blinded them. *“Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him”* (John 12:39-41).

This is precisely what happened to *“the rest,”* that is, those who were not *“the elect.”* In the end, we will find their hearts were neither honest nor good. **As such, God would not allow them to see His saving truth, else He would have been obliged to convert and heal them.** That, of course, is precisely what He says. Only God is able to identify *“the rest,”* and we do not well to attempt to make such judgments.

Notice, the Spirit divides the Israelites into two groups, *“the elect”* and *“the rest.”* That is the same sort of division mentioned in the ninth chapter. *“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel”* (9:6). One body of people, yet it was comprised of two separate groups.

In a sense, Israel is also a threshing floor upon which both wheat and chaff are found (Matt 3:12). Like fish, they were all enclosed in the net of Divine Sovereignty, yet some were good and some were bad (Matt 13:47-48). They are a sort of miniature cosmos.

Actually, the same classifications can

be applied to the world, and even of the professed church. There are *“the elect,”* and *“the rest.”* **In both cases, the action of God was the deciding factor.**

A RESTORATION QUOTATION

I have been identified with the Restoration Movement for over fifty years.

In a sense, Israel is also a threshing floor upon which both wheat and chaff are found (Matt 3:12). Like fish, they were all enclosed in the net of Divine Sovereignty, yet some were good and some were bad (Matt 13:47-48). They are a sort of miniature cosmos.

As of 2001, forty-eight of those years have been spent in focused and continual labors for the Lord. As a rule, the subject covered in this section of Romans is studiously avoided by modern members of this movement. However, that stance is not the one historically taken by those associated with it. I am taking the liberty of sharing a quotation taken from Moses Lard’s commentary on Romans. While not an exhaustive work, it did provide a typically accepted overview of Romans within the movement. His commentary is generally held in high regard among members of The Restoration Movement. The following are brother Lard’s remarks on the first part of Romans eleven.

“Paul concluded chapter ten with a quotation from Isaiah describing the nation of Israel as “a disobedient and contrary people.” Paul begins chapter eleven by giving several examples to show that despite this rebellion God has not totally rejected His people (1-6). What God has done, however, is harden the hearts of the rebellious Israelites (7-10). But the outcome of this “hardening” led to salvation coming to the Gentiles, which in turn God was using to provoke Israel to jealousy in an attempt to win them back to Him. This is also why Paul magnified

his ministry to the Gentiles, hoping to save some of his countrymen by provoking them to jealousy (11-15).”
MOSES LARD’S COMMENTARY ON ROMANS

Although such comments are not a sufficient reason to shape our thinking, it is important to know that sound perspectives are given to saints of every age. The truth of God is never novel, and always pertinent. **Wherever hearts are supple in the hands of the Lord, similar conclusions will be reached concerning difficult passages of Scripture.** That, of course, is due to Divine influence, just as surely as a failure to see the truth is the result of Divine judgment.

The Spirit will now elaborate upon this truth, showing that it has been demonstrated in the past.

GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR

“ . . . just as it is written, “GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.” ^{NASB} Other versions read, *“God gave them a spirit of slumber,”* ^{KJV} *“God gave them a sluggish spirit,”* ^{NRSV} *“God hath given them the spirit of insensibility,”* ^{DOUAY-RHEIMS} *“God has put them into a deep sleep,”* ^{NLT} and *“God has infused them with a spirit of lethargy.”* ^{NJB} I give these various translations to confirm the absolute absence of any vagueness of expression. The Spirit speaks *“expressly.”*

Isaiah’s Prophecy

The quotation is taken from Isaiah 29:10-12. *“For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath He covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.”*

A Spirit of Stupor

This was a judgment poured out upon Israel. Because they had chosen to maintain a religious shell without substance, **God rendered them incapable of knowing the truth.** They were honoring Him with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. For this reason, He caused the wisdom of their wise men to fail, so that they became totally ignorant of the very truth they sought to teach. Here is how the Lord said it through Isaiah. *“The Lord says: ‘These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish’”*^{NIV} (Isa 29:13-14). They were *“blinded!”*

An Application

The remarkable parallel to our times is so evident it is staggering! The regulatory approach to serving God has actually brought His judgment upon the people. This is why the wisdom of the wise has failed, and the intelligence of the intelligent has vanished. With all of the purported experts in the professed church, it is in worse shape than it has ever been. The shawl of death is draped over it, and the reproach of spiritual ignorance fills its halls. And why so? **Because God will not allow such people to know and handle His sanctifying truth!** They will not be able to benefit from it, or realize its fulfillment within them!

God will neither convert nor heal those bent away from Him. He has shown this to be the case in Israel of old. Those who refused to believe were not allowed to enter the promised land! Further, because a spirit of stupor was poured out upon them, it made no sense to them to believe. In such a case, the promises of God seemed foolish, inaccessible, and contrary to sound thought. Thus, they rejected them.

So it is with *“the rest”* whom God has *“blinded”* or *“hardened.”* **They are**

controlled by spiritual ignorance and cannot profit from the Gospel.

Eyes and Ears

Natural capacities are not enough to bring conversion and healing! Ordinarily, men are naturally endowed with a degree of intelligence – the ability to comprehend and understand. However, these abilities are not sufficient to save the soul. They cannot take hold of the Gospel, or open the mysteries of redemption.

When it comes to the things of God, special capacities must be received. The *“things of the Spirit of God”* cannot be received by *“the natural man.”* In fact, they do not make sense to the person who is not born again – who does not have spiritual capacities. Thus it is written, *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can*

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he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

Our text describes these spiritual capacities as *“eyes”* that can see and *“ears”* that can hear. These come from the Lord, who makes them *“both”* (Prov 20:12). *“The rest were blinded”* by God withholding these spiritual capacities. He did, however, give them *“eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear.”* That is how the Lord *“blinded”* them; i.e., by withholding the ability to understand, and **imposing capacities incapable of understanding.**

It is possible to so provoke the Lord that He will not grant the ability to hear and understand His word. The knowledge of this should provoke hearty repentance and a fervent quest to receive the love of the truth -- for unless it is received, it is not possible to be saved. As it is written, *“Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2 Thess 2:9-12).

DAVID’S TESTIMONY

This perspective is so vital to the salvation of the soul, that the Spirit continues to elaborate on it. *“And David says, ‘LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER.’”*^{NASB} This language is so strong it captures the minds of those who ponder it!

The quotation is taken from the sixty-ninth Psalm, which is a Messianic Psalm. The laments of the suffering Christ are articulated in language that stirs the heart. *“Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered My face. I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto My mother’s children. For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me”* (vs 7-9). These statements are expressly said to relate to the Lord Jesus (John 2:14-17; Rom 15:3). The Psalm continues, *“Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave Me also gall for my meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink”* (vs 20-21). These sayings are also related to the Lord Jesus, particularly as He

suffered for us (Matt 26:37; Mk 14:37,38; Matt 27:34,48).

The picture is that of Israel's rejection of their Christ! The result of that rejection is stated in David's next words, which are quoted in our text. *"Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake"* (vs 22-23). **Those who imagine there are no penalties for rejecting the Lord Jesus** – particularly while holding to a "form of godliness" (2 Tim 3:5) – **need to seriously ponder this text.**

Their Table Becomes a Snare

"Their table" stands for the means through which God sustained the people of Israel – **the revelation of His law and will.** It was given to them to bring certain advantages, namely to define sin and show how utterly helpless they were to avoid it. As it is written, *"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Rom 3:19-20). In this way, the Law was a *"schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (Gal 3:24). The Law was, in this sense, *"their table."* However, this is not how it served *"the rest"* who were *"blinded."*

"Their table" actually became the means of their stumbling. **It became a "snare and a trap" to them – a means by which they were caught by and confined in sin!** Their religion thus became the means through which they fell and were blinded to the truth of God! The point here is that this did not simply occur by chance. It was a judgment from God. It was God's reaction to their hard and calloused hearts.

If this is an explanation of the condition of *"the rest"* of the Israelites

who did not attain unto righteousness, does it not also clarify the times in which we live? **Could it be that the spiritual obtuseness that dominates much of Christendom is actually a judgment from God for their lack of love for the truth?** Could it be that religion has actually become the occasion for falling and being ensnared and entrapped by sin?

It was religion that caused the Jews to crucify Jesus! It was religion that provoked the early persecution of believers. It was religion that brought on the stoning of Stephen and the persecution of and opposition to Paul. For

It was religion that caused the Jews to crucify Jesus! It was religion that provoked the early persecution of believers. It was religion that brought on the stoning of Stephen and the persecution of and opposition to Paul. For those instigating these oppositions, "their table" had become a "snare and a trap."

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God will not allow living waters to flow from a dead church! To do so would be to dishonor His own name. If Israel lost the battle when sin was found in its camp (Joshua 7), are there any so naive as to think God will give victory to the church while sin is found in it? A form of godliness that denies the power thereof will not be used to dignify the truth or expound the Gospel of Christ. Rather, such will become a *"stumblingblock,"* never a foundation stone.

Let Their Eyes Be Darkened

When *"eyes"* are *"darkened,"* men become incapable of understanding the things of God – particularly the means by which we are made righteous. On one occasion, Elymas the sorcerer withstood

the preaching of Paul, seeking to turn a local official *"from the faith."* Paul, however, *"filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.'*" It is written that *"immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand"* (Acts 13:8-11). **His eyes were darkened!**

This is what happened to *"the rest"* who were *"blinded."* They became incapable of seeing the truth of God – not by chance, but by Divine judgment! Elymas did not become blind because of an infection, or some debilitating disease. **His was a blindness of judgment, imposed upon him by the Living God.**

"Let their eyes be darkened" is the opposite of *"Let there be light."* Both are brought on by God, and neither can be induced without Him. Neither one can be simulated or fabricated. In this case, even the wisdom of the religious authorities dried up, becoming vain and useless. *"The wisdom of their wise men,"* and *"the understanding of their prudent men"* were cursed by God, and thus they withered, becoming fruitless. **Their eyes were "darkened."**

To put it another way, God said, **"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"** (1 Cor 1:19-20). In such a state, it is utterly impossible to know the things of God – i.e., to comprehend them and gain advantages from them.

If it is true that spiritual blindness exists in the professed church, it is true that the judgment of God is upon it. God has deprived its leaders of wisdom. That is why they do not know. He has said, *"Let their eyes be darkened!"* The ONLY

solution to the dilemma is to fervently seek the Lord. Then, and only then, will He be found. As it is written, *“And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart”* (Jer 29:13).

Bend Their Backs Forever

The Psalm from which this is quoted says *“make their loins continually to shake”* (Psa 69:23b). Our text says, *“bow down their back always,”* or *“bend their backs forever.”*^{NASB}

Both expressions refer to the same experience – **that of an unbearable burden**. It is so heavy the loins, or muscular center of the body, tremble or convulse. It is also so heavy that the back is bent forward, the person being unable to stand erect.

In this experience, the individual is brought to realize his own lack of strength. What he is required to carry is more than can be borne. In particular, the very religion placed upon the Jews – the Law of commandments contained in ordinances – was more than they could bear. The yoke of the Law was not easy, and its burden was not light – not for *“the rest.”* Only Jesus can bring true relief! Only His yoke is easy!

It is very true that men like David found great delight in the Law. *“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day”* (Psa 119:97). Jeremiah expressed similar joy. *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called*

It is still true: the very truth bringing delight to *“the elect,”* is an unbearable burden to *“the rest.”* While both may be in the same group, they are of radically differing orders. One is blessed, and one is being judged. One can understand, and one cannot. To one, true religion is found

It is still true: the very truth bringing delight to *“the elect,”* is an unbearable burden to *“the rest.”* While both may be in the same group, they are of radically differing orders. One is blessed, and one is being judged. One can understand, and one cannot.

by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer 15:16). However, these were *“the elect,”* and thus found delight and relief in the good word of God. *“The rest,”* however, *“were blinded.”* The very table which brought nourishment to *“the elect”* became a trap and a stumblingstone to them. What delighted David was a sorrowful burden to them. They were blinded!

to be delightful and liberating. To *“the rest,”* it is a burden grievous to be borne. In nearly every church and religious setting, these two classes remain: *“the elect,”* and *“the rest.”* To which class do you belong? If you believe the report, and are living by faith, you belong to the latter – *“the rest.”*

CONCLUSION

There are many factors that are brought together in the salvation of an individual. Many of them have to do with the activities of people themselves.

- The Gospel of Christ is preached (Rom 10:14-15).
- That Gospel is heard with a degree of discernment (Rom 10:17).
- The record of God’s Son is believed (1 John 5:10).
- There is a repentance from sin and a turning to the Lord (Acts 2:38).
- The convicted one calls upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13).
- There is a public confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16-18; Rom 10:9-10).
- The believer is baptized into Christ, dying, buried, and raised with Him (Rom 6:4-17).
- A walk in the newness of life begins (Rom 6:4).

These are marvelous realities, **but they are not the only realities**. While all of them are tied to the salvation of the soul, **none of them are the basis, or foundation, of salvation!** There are Divine involvements that guarantee the effectiveness of these things.

- The Lord sent the Word that is preached or published (Psa 68:11; 107:20; Acts 10:36).
- The Father draws people to the Son (John 6:44,65)
- The Lord sends the preachers, or ministers, through whom we believe (Rom 10:15; 1 Cor 3:5).
- The Lord opens men’s hearts so they can respond appropriately to the Gospel (Acts 16:14).
- We believe through God’s grace (Acts 18:27; 1 Tim 1:14).
- The Lord gives repentance (Acts 5:31;

- 2 Tim 2:25; Acts 3:26; 11:18).
- Men cannot say Jesus is Lord except through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).
- Through the Spirit we are baptized into one body (1 Cor 2:13).
- God puts us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30).
- God makes us righteous (2 Cor 5:21).
- God raised us from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-5).
- God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).
- The Lord works in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure (Phil 2:13).
- We are being changed from glory unto glory by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24).

The most prominent factors about salvation are those accomplished by God! In the end, the saved from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, will

shout, “*Salvation belongeth unto the LORD*” (Psa 3:8), and “*Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*” (Rev 7:10; 19:1). In the holy conclave of the saved, none will be pointing to themselves, or even to those through whom they believed. All eyes will be upon the Lord, and all glory will go to Him! **His involvement in our salvation will be perceived as the most prominent and effective factor.**

This is precisely the point that is being made in this chapter. Since salvation is of God, and is effected through His power and wisdom, the salvation of the Jews is not beyond possibility.

Their salvation will require no more Divine working than the salvation of the Gentiles – for that matter, than your own salvation! The Gentiles had nothing to recommend them to God! They had rejected the revelation given to them. The fact that it was comparatively crude to what was given to Israel only accents why it should have been received.

Add to this the many commitments God has made to Israel, and the fact that in them, God was incapable of lying. Now you have every reason to pray that Israel will be saved! You are in fellowship with the Lord Himself when you do so.

A BRIEF SUMMARY

- ❑ God has NOT cast away His people, as He twice affirms in our text (11:1,2).
- ❑ Paul himself is proof that Israel has not been totally rejected (11:1).
- ❑ That God reserves a remnant among the ancient people is confirmed by the events of Elijah’s time (11:3-4).
- ❑ The preservation of the remnant is God’s own work. The presence of the remnant cannot be confirmed by appearance, and can only be accounted for by God’s intervention (11:4).
- ❑ At the present time, there is still a remnant among Israel (11:5a).
- ❑ The remnant is there because of God’s gracious choice (11:5b).
- ❑ On the foundational level, grace and works cannot mix (11:6).
- ❑ Those who were elected obtained the righteousness God provides (11:7a).
- ❑ “*The rest*” were blinded by God, given a spirit of stupor so they could not

believe (11:7b).

- ❑ In their blindness, their table—the means through which they were to be sustained—became a snare to them (11:8-10).

THE FOLLY OF INDIFFERENCE

There is a vital lesson to be learned in this text. Those who are indifferent to the Gospel of Christ place themselves in a most jeopardous situation. The same God who opens the eyes of men can shut them, pouring out the spirit of deep sleep upon them. He can render men incapable of believing, as confirmed after the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (John 12:39).

ENTIRE GENERATIONS

There have been entire generations that have suffered this kind of judgment from God. This is a sobering reality to consider. It also promotes humility. One such generation lived when Jesus “*dwelt among us.*” Jesus said of that generation, “*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with **this generation**, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with **this generation**, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here*” (Matt 12:41-42).

When Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem He said, “*Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon **this generation**. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*” (Matt 23:36-38).

Again, He said of the people of His time, “*Why doth **this generation** seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto **this generation***” (Mark 8:12). And again, “*That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of **this generation**; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished*

*between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of **this generation***” (Lk 11:50-51). And again, “*But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of **this generation***” (Lk 17:25).

Yet, Some Believed – A Remnant!

Although, as a whole, that generation rejected Christ, yet the rejection was not total. The twelve Apostles, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdelene, other devout women, the woman at the well of Samaria, Simeon, Anna, Elizabeth, and an unnamed group who were waiting for redemption, came out of that very generation. Three thousand souls turned to the Lord on the day of Pentecost from that very generation. Shortly after that, five thousand more men were delivered from that generation. **There was a remnant!**

There Is Still a Remnant

There is still a remnant according to the election of grace! Yes, there are generations such as our own, where the knowledge of God is sparse and lifeless religious professionals appear to be in dominance. However, God has not abdicated the throne. He is still working among men through the Gospel of His Son, taking out of a godless generation a people for His own name (Acts 15:14).

In the Days of the Judges

As far back as the time of the Judges, this very condition was chronicled. “*And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose **another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel***” (Judges 2:10). During that time “*the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim.*” They “*forsook the God of their fathers,*” serving “*Baal and Ashtaroth*” (2:11-13).

It was during that very time that God raised up a righteous remnant, calling them “*the Judges*” (2:16-18). Men like Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Gideon, and finally Samuel, surfaced during those despicable times. God also raised up a righteous woman (Debra), making her the only woman judge in history – and all during spiritually decadent times. **There has always been a remnant!**

LIFT UP YOUR EYES

It is the persuasion of many godly people that we are living in spiritually impoverished times. These are times when God has sent a famine of hearing the Word of God upon the land, in accord with the prophecy of Amos (Amos 8:11-13). It can be a discouraging time if a proper understanding is not possessed.

Just as in the times of the Judges, the

Babylonian captivity, and the days of the Lord Jesus, there remains a remnant according to the election of grace. That remnant is not only among the Jews, though they is the principle subject of our text. It also exists among the Gentiles, as it did in the city of Corinth when everything appeared hopeless. Of that Gentile city, the Lord Jesus said to Paul, "*Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am*

with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

See, "*There is a remnant according to the election of grace!*" That means there is hope for you and your ministry, just as surely as there was for Paul and his ministry!

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 36



THE REJECTION THAT IS NOT FINAL

11:11 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. ¹² Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 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. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ 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? ²⁵ For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;" ²⁷ For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." ²⁸ Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. ³³ 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! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. – Romans 11:11-36 – NKJV

INTRODUCTION

DIVINE PURPOSE

God works according to His own established purpose. The "great salvation" of men is itself referred to as God's "eternal purpose which He **purposed** in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11). The

culmination of that glorious salvation, of which we have been made partakers, is called "His good pleasure which He hath **purposed** in Himself" (Eph 1:9). In Christ Jesus, "we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated

according to the **purpose** of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). When the Holy Spirit challenges us to consider our own participation in this salvation, He reminds us that God "hath saved us, and called us

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. HAVE THEY STUMBLERD IN ORDER TO FALL? (11:1)
- II. RICHES THROUGH THEIR FALL (11:12)
- III. THE MINISTRY OF PAUL (11:13-14)
- IV. RECONCILIATION THROUGH CASTING AWAY (11:15)
- V. THE FIRSTFRUIT AND THE LUMP (11:16)
- VI. ONLY SOME WERE BROKEN OFF (11:17)
- VII. DO NOT BOAST! DO NOT BOAST! (11:18-19)
- VIII. THINK AGAIN (11:20-21)
- IX. GOODNESS AND SEVERITY CONSIDERED (11:22)
- X. GOD IS ABLE (11:23)
- XI. DIVINE GRAFTING (11:24)
- XII. BLINDNESS IN PART (11:25-27)
- XIII. ENEMIES, YET BELOVED (11:28-29)
- XIV. DISOBEDIENCE AND MERCY (11:30-31)
- XV. THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY (11:32)
- XVI. AN EXPRESSION OF PRAISE (11:33-36)

with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own **purpose** and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim 1:9). When Jesus came into the world, it was according to God's "purpose" more than according to our need! From this perspective, it is written, "For this **purpose** the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

When referring to the demise of the Assyrian empire, God declared His irrevocable purpose. "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is **the purpose** that is **purposed** upon the whole earth: and this

is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath **purposed**, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isa 14:14:24-27). The withering of Egypt was also related to Divine purpose (Isa 19:12). When He spoke of the doom of Tyre, He said He had "**purposed**" to stain its pride (Isa 23:9).

God declares that what He purposes, He does (Isa 46:11). He hurls this challenge into the face of His enemies: "I work and who can hinder it?" ^{NRSV} (Isa 43:13). When He purposes something He declares, "I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isa 46:11). Again He affirms, "Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Isa 14:24). Even that mysterious prophet Balaam could not help but speak the truth on this matter. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Num 23:19).

Scripture anchors us to the purpose of God. Through Moses and the Prophets the Lord acquaints us with this Divine manner, namely that of purpose. When He purposed to make a great nation of Abraham, He did. When He purposed to deliver His people from Israel, He did. When He purposed the Babylonian captivity it came. When He purposed the end of that captivity, it came at precisely the right time. When He purposed to send His Son into the world, destroy the works of the devil, and open a way to Himself, it came to pass. He has purposed the end of the world, and it will come. He has purposed that all men will stand before Him to be judged, and they will. He has purposed that whoever comes to the Son will not be cast away, and they will not. God's "purpose" cannot be annulled by men!

IS THIS REALLY RELEVANT?

It may appear as though all of this has little relevance to our subject. **However, this chapter is bathed in the language of Divine purpose!** When God announces His intentions, and declares His purpose, we must set our hearts to anticipate its fulfillment. Ponder

these expressions, all of which declare Divine intent. None of these things could occur independently of God. All of them rely upon His ability, and His alone.

- "They stumbled" (11a). ^{NKJV}
- "Salvation has come to the Gentiles" (11b). ^{NKJV}
- "Provoke them to jealousy" (11c). ^{NKJV}
- "Their fall" (12a). ^{NKJV}
- "Riches for the world" (12b). ^{NKJV}
- "Their failure" (12c). ^{NKJV}
- "Riches for the Gentiles" (12d). ^{NKJV}
- "Their fulness" (12e). ^{NKJV}
- "Their being cast away" (15a). ^{NKJV}
- "The reconciling of the world" (15b). ^{NKJV}
- "Their acceptance" (15c). ^{NKJV}
- "Life from the dead" (15d). ^{NKJV}
- "The firstfruit is holy" (16a). ^{NKJV}
- "The lump is also holy" (16b). ^{NKJV}
- "The root is holy" (16c). ^{NKJV}
- "So are the branches" (16d). ^{NKJV}
- "Some of the branches were broken off" (17a). ^{NKJV}
- "You, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them" (17b). ^{NKJV}
- "With them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree" (17c). ^{NKJV}
- "You do not support the root, but the root supports you" (18). ^{NKJV}
- "Because of unbelief they were broken off" (20a). ^{NKJV}
- "You stand by faith" (20b). ^{NKJV}
- "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in" (23a). ^{NKJV}
- "God is able to graft them in again" (23b). ^{NKJV}
- "How much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (24). ^{NKJV}
- "Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (25). ^{NKJV}
- "All Israel will be saved" (26a). ^{NKJV}
- "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (26b). ^{NKJV}
- "For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins" (27). ^{NKJV}
- "Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake" (28a). ^{NKJV}
- "Concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (28b). ^{NKJV}
- "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (29). ^{NKJV}
- "You were once disobedient to God,

yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience” (30).^{NKJV}

- *“Even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy” (31).^{NKJV}*
- *“For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all” (32).^{NKJV}*

Not a recap of history

This chapter is not a mere recap of history. It is not an academic record of what happened among men. This is the language of Divine purpose, and it recounts what God has done. Whether it was the cutting off of some of the Jewish branches, or the grafting in of some Gentile branches, it is God that has done it! None of these things could have happened without the Lord. All of them are, by their very proclamation, related to His purpose, which is woven throughout them. In this passage God is revealing how He is executing His purpose.

Not the suggestion of possibilities

This section of Scripture is not the expression of philosophy, or the suggestion of mere possibilities. If it were not for the “*eternal purpose*” of God, none of these things would have taken place, and none of the events would have been put into writing. In these words, we are beholding the working of the Lord!

SCRIPTURE ANCHORS US TO GOD’S PURPOSE

It is fundamental to a valid understanding that Scripture anchors us to the purpose of God. It all begins in Genesis when God announced WHY man was made (Gen 1:26-27). It continues by telling us WHY the curse of God came and man was expelled from the Garden (Gen 3:14-19). God told Noah WHY the world was going to be destroyed (Gen 6:13). He told Abraham WHY He called Him (Gen 12:1-3). It is God’s manner to not only purpose, but to announce that purpose.

When you read the Word of God with His purpose in mind, you gain such profit and understanding as is not otherwise possible. This is one of the great

ministries of the Apostles and Prophets, who are related to the foundation upon which we are built (Eph 2:20). Their role was not simply to outline the duty of men. Rather, they opened up what God had intended and how it was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It is the comprehension of that purpose that produces maturity in the believer. Thus it is written, “*that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth*

This is the language of Divine purpose, and it recounts what God has done. Whether it was the cutting off of some of the Jewish branches, or the grafting in of some Gentile branches, it is God that has done it!

and height; to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge”^{NKJV} (Eph 3:71-19).

Salvation in all of its aspects is “*according to His purpose*” (Rom 8:28). It is “*the purpose of God*” that stands (Rom 9:11), and is being brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself. He “*works all things according to the counsel of His will*” (Eph 1:11).

Does Not Make Salvation Impersonal

Let no one imagine that all of this makes salvation impersonal. It does not exclude the desires of men, nor does it suggest they will be blessed independently of their involvement. The very fact that God has revealed these things confirms our involvement in them, else there would be no reason to make them known to us. Knowing of the Lord’s purpose and His intent to fulfill it, builds our faith and gives us reason to hope in Him.

A PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL

Before beginning the exposition of this section, it is necessary to confirm that God has revealed His intentions for Israel.

It is against the backdrop of this revelation that our text obtains significance.

God will gather the remnant.

“And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase” (Jer 23:3).

They will find the Lord.

“And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive” (Jer 29:14).

God will bring them again.

“Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be my people, and

I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer 32:37-10).

They will come with weeping.

“Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and

ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he” (Jer 31:8-11).

God will circumcise their hearts.

“That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: and the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day” (Deut 30:3-8).

God will give them one heart and a new spirit. “Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh” (Ezek 11:17-19).

God will not hide His face from

them any more. “When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek 29:27-28).

Never again will they be pulled out of their land. “And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God” (Amos 9:15-15).

God will make them a name and praise among the people of the earth. “Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD” (Zeph 3:19-20).

HAVE THESE PROMISES BEEN ABROGATED?

Some teach that all of these promises

(and many more) have been abrogated because of the unbelief of Israel. However, if this is true, the thread of Divine promise has been broken, and we are thrust out upon the sea of uncertainty. The words of the Prophets have then failed. The promises of God have tumbled to the ground, and the door of doubt has been opened wide.

Under such a circumstance, we are faced with a God whose purposes are frustrated, **even though He has revealed such a thing is not possible.** Thus God would have been misrepresented to us by the holy prophets. The absurdity of such a postulate is revealed in the pivotal promise spoken by Peter at the threshold of the “day of salvation.” “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, **whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began**” (Acts 3:19-21).

Those who affirm Israel is totally rejected have, by virtue of that affirmation, said the Jews are unrelated to “the restoration of all things.” Thus, they have carved out for themselves a gargantuan task they cannot fulfill. Yet, they are under obligation to prove what they say, for they have spoken for the Almighty. Our text will reveal how foolish such a postulate is. It will relate Israel to the revealed purpose of God, affirming that they will yet be delivered from their sin, to the glory of God.

HAVE THEY STUMBLERD IN ORDER TO FALL?

“^{11:11} 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.**”

The present condition of Israel has been vividly described.

It has not obtained what it sought for

- (11:7).
- Apart from “the elect” among them, “the rest were blinded” (11:7b).
- God has given them “the spirit of slumber” (11:8a).
- God has given them eyes that “they should not see” (11:8b).
- God has given them ears “that they should not hear” (11:8c).

- Their table has become “a snare and a trap to them” (11:9a).
- Their table has become a “stumbling block and a retribution to them” (11:9b).
- Their eyes are “darkened so they cannot see” (11:10a).
- Their backs “bowed down always” (11:10b).

To some, this is the language of utter hopelessness. And, indeed, if you take God and His purpose out of the picture, these words do paint a vivid portrait of hopelessness and futility. However, God is not out of the picture. **What is more, the Spirit will show us there is Divine strategy in the present condition of Israel.**

WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED!

We should not be surprised by the line of reasoning to which we are now subjected – particularly we Gentiles. Were we not in a hopeless state? Ponder again what the Spirit said of the Gentile world.

- When they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God (1:21a).
- They were not thankful (1:21b).
- They became vain in their imaginations (1:21c).
- Their foolish hearts were darkened (1:21d).
- They became fools (1:22).
- They changed the glory of God (1:23).
- God gave them up to uncleanness (1:24).
- They changed the truth of God into a lie (1:25a).
- They worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator (1:25b).
- God gave them up to vile affections (1:26).
- Their women, in sodomy, conducted themselves “against nature” (1:27a).
- Their men burned in their lust toward one another, committing what is shameful (1:27b).
- They did not like to retain God in their knowledge (1:28a).
- God gave them over to a reprobate mind (1:28b).
- They became filled with all unrighteousness (1:29-31).
- They knew the judgment of God was against such things, but did them anyway, approving of others who did the same (1:32).

Is there a Christian person in the world who is willing to affirm the bleak condition of the Gentile world meant there was not salvation for them? Such a

postulation is evidence of gross stupidity that even fools are unwilling embrace.

And if there was recovery for the Gentiles, for the depraved Gentiles, delivered over to a reprobate mind by God Himself, what spirit will move a person to affirm there can be no recovery for the Israelites, Paul’s kinsmen according to the flesh? Where did such a notion originate? What is the source of a doctrine that is a glaring contradiction of both Divine reasoning and revelation? How is it that any person would speak of the Israelites

We have before us a rather lengthy passage that builds a case for the recovery of Israel. It does not set before us mere possibilities, but a Divine purpose. All of this is presented within the context of the Gospel of Christ, justification by faith, reconciliation to God, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers.

as a former people, yet would allow for the continuance of the Gentiles?

Why Am I Saying This?

It may appear as though I am expressing a pet peeve or riding a theological hobby horse. But that is not the case at all. We have before us a rather lengthy passage that builds a case for the recovery of Israel. It does not set before us mere possibilities, but a Divine purpose. All of this is presented within the context of the Gospel of Christ, justification by faith, reconciliation to God, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers. It was introduced by a refreshing reminder that God foreknows, predestinates, calls, justifies, glorifies, and makes everything work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (8:28-30). We were reminded of the Divine choices of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We were even given an explanation for the rise of wicked Pharaoh (9:9-17). An evident direction in reason is established.

It is not possible to have a more lofty context. It is all tied together with the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – all of whom are depicted as intensely active. We cannot blot these things from our mind when we view this text, for it has been placed in the golden socket of those realities.

STUMBLING DOES NOT MEAN MADE EXTINCT

“I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?” Other versions read, *“Have they stumbled that they should fall?”*^{KJV} *“... they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?”*^{NASB} *“Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?”*^{NIV} *“Have they stumbled in order that they might fall?”*^{DARBY} *“Was this stumbling to lead to their final downfall?”*^{NJB}

Let it be clear, this is not a call for human speculation.

The Holy Spirit is not inviting the theologians and philosophers to provide their thoughts on the subject of Israel. Neither, indeed, are we remotely interested in human speculations on this subject. Let us rather hear what the Lord declares, throwing in the theological garbage can any human contradictions.

God has already told us Israel has stumbled: *“they stumbled at that stumbling stone”* (9:32). The question now posed is whether or not this is a permanent condition. Is Israel beyond recovery? Have they plummeted deeper than grace can reach? Have they moved beyond the perimeter of Promise? Will they ever be able to get up again?

Remember, the Spirit is speaking of the nation, not of individuals. He has already declared there has always been individuals among the nation who were accepted by God. They are the remnant, and there is still a remnant among the nation, even though the Israelites as a whole are blind and their back bowed. **However, the presence of the remnant proves the people as a whole still are recognized by God.**

Certain men will tell us that Israel

has, in fact, fallen beyond recovery. They are no more a people, and their place has been filled by another – on a permanent basis. We will now put such affirmations to the test.

The Answer

“Certainly not!” Other versions read, *“God forbid,”*^{NASB} *“May it never be!”*^{KJV} *“Not at all,”*^{NIV} *“By no means,”*^{NRSV} *“Far be the thought.”*^{DOUAY} *“In no way,”*^{BBE} *“Let it not be!”*^{YLT} *“Of course not!”*^{NLT} **“Out of the question!”**^{NJB} **Faith makes no provision for the conclusion that Israel has fallen beyond recovery!** For those who have been justified by faith, God has not allowed place for the thought that Israel is no longer a people, or that there is no hope for their salvation. For that matter, the heavens will not support such a conclusion from any of the sons of men, be they reconciled to God or not.

When such a thought comes, cast it down with your spiritual weaponry, for it is nothing but an imagination – a thought that is exalting itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:4-5). If that appears to be too strong, keep in mind that the expression *“God forbid!”* or *“Certainly not!”* is infinitely stronger than my weak words.

The meaning of the statement before us is this:

Israel’s stumbling does not mean they are beyond recovery. It does not mean the promises made to them have been voided, or that they cannot be saved.

SALVATION TO THE GENTILES THROUGH THEIR FALL

“But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.” Other versions read as follows. *“But rather, through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles,”*^{KJV} *“But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles.”*^{NASB} *“Because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles.”*^{NIV} *“But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles.”*^{NRSV} *“His purpose was to make His salvation available to the Gentiles.”*^{NJB}

This is the language of Divine

purpose. It is not the announcement of an alternative plan, or the reaction of God to Israel’s unexpected rejection of Christ. Here is an example where God has caused something remarkably good to happen out of something noticeably bad.

Gentile Acceptance

Salvation coming to the Gentiles is not generally appreciated among professed believers. It is too often taken for granted, as though it was only a small thing. This is not, however, the way those who are spiritually minded think.

It is true that the acceptance of the Gentiles was foretold by the holy prophets.

Israel’s stumbling does not mean they are beyond recovery. It does not mean the promises made to them have been voided, or that they cannot be saved.

- ❑ The uttermost part of the earth to be given to the Messiah (Psa 2:8).
- ❑ All the ends of the world will turn to the Lord, and all families of the nations worship before Him (Psa 22:27-31).
- ❑ All nations would flow into the Lord’s house (Isa 2:2-5).
- ❑ The Messiah would bring justice to the Gentiles (Isa 42:1).
- ❑ The Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles (Isa 42:6).
- ❑ The Gentiles would come to the light given to Israel (Isa 60:3).
- ❑ The forces of the Gentiles would come to the Lord (Isa 60:5,11).
- ❑ God’s glory would be declared to the Gentiles (Isa 66:19).
- ❑ The Gentiles would come to the Lord from the ends of the earth (Jer 16:19).

- ❑ God’s name would be great among the Gentiles (Mal 1:11).

The glory of these promises was generally unrecognized among the Jews. Even when they were delivered by the Prophets, there was a sort of vagueness about them that tended to make them obscure to those without faith.

Jesus alluded to the coming acceptance of the Gentiles. *“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd”* (John 10:16). When the day of Pentecost was fully come, Peter referred to the Gentiles. *“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”* (Acts 2:39). Still, the matter was not seen with any degree of clarity.

Part of this was owing to the Lord’s words to His disciples, and others. When He first sent out the twelve He said, *“Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matt 10:5-6). To a certain Gentile *“woman of Canaan”* who sought His help He said, *“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,”* referring to the Gentiles as *“dogs”* (Matt 15:24-26). These things appeared to further lead the disciples to look with disdain upon the Gentiles.

It was not until 10-12 years after the day of Pentecost that the first Gentiles were brought to salvation (Acts 10). At that time, the Lord wrought a special sign to Peter, showing him that the Gentiles would be received (Acts 10:9-48). Even then, the Gentile to whom Peter was sent (Cornelius) was commended to Peter in these words: *“Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews”* (Acts 10:22). That event was accounted as a most remarkable working of the Lord. When the event was reported to the early leaders of the church, they responded, *“Then hath God also to the*

Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Later, when the church of Antioch gathered together to hear of the conversion of the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas *"rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles"* (Acts 14:27). A significant event, indeed!

The Lord did not reveal by the prophets the means through which the Gentiles would be brought to Him. It remained for the Apostles, particularly Paul, to make that means known. Our text declares it in these words: *"by their [the Jews] transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles."*^{NASB}

It would be presumptuous, indeed, for the Gentiles to boast about finding the Lord, even treating the Jews as though they had been rejected. After all, the Gentiles were the rejected people all along. Salvation came to them only because the Jews had stumbled over the Stumbling Stone. Even then, the Gospel was first presented to the Jews, and that

for several years.

It was in Antioch of Pisida that Paul and Barnabas *"waxed bold"* before a group of antagonistic Jews. *"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"* (Acts 13:46). That is a most vivid portrayal of the truth of this text.

THE REASON FOR GENTILES BEING SAVED

"To provoke them to jealousy." Other versions read *"to make them jealous,"*^{NASB} *"to make Israel envious,"*^{NIV} *"to make Israel jealous,"*^{NRSV} *"that they may be emulous of them."*^{DOUAY} *"so that they might be moved to envy."*^{BBE} *"to arouse them to jealousy,"*^{VLT} *"and then the Jews would be jealous and want it for themselves."*^{NLT} and *"in order to stir them to envy."*^{NJB}

The Holy Spirit is making a significant point: namely, that the Jews have not

fallen so as never to be recovered. Thus He tells us why salvation was brought to the Gentiles. It is most humiliating to Gentile flesh, but it does need to be declared. The salvation of the Gentiles was not the real point. Rather, it was to make the Jews envious, so they would more earnestly desire the salvation of God!

This provocation was announced by Moses before he died, and before Israel entered the promised land. *"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"* (Deut 32:21).

The idea behind the word *"jealousy"* is not related to anger or foolish conduct. Rather, it means to arouse to imitation, or to provoke them to seek the salvation that was offered to them, yet experienced by the Gentiles. Who but the Living God could entertain and implement such a lofty purpose!

RICHES THROUGH THEIR FALL

"¹² Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" I am deeply impressed with the zealotry of the Holy Spirit in addressing this matter. It is as though the very heart of God is being opened to us, showing us Divine intentions that had not been clearly seen for centuries. Even to this very day, the things of which the Spirit is speaking are largely unknown within the professed church. We are being exposed to the wise and effective workings of the Lord – His *"wonderful works."* If you question whether or not God can bring good out of the evil things that are all about us, consider what glorious things have been produced by the fall of Israel – a fall that is not beyond recovery.

RICHES FOR THE WORLD

Remember, it is God who induced the fall of the Jews by placing a stumbling block before them, and making their table a snare and a trap. It is also God who has caused true riches to be *"for the world"*

and *"for the Gentiles."* In this, God is working out His purpose.

The point that will now be made is that the salvation of the Gentiles does not depend upon the fall of the Jews. It is not that only one group can be saved: either Jews or Gentiles. The Spirit will show us that both Jews and Gentiles are to be saved.

The *"riches"* refer to the bounty of salvation. Jesus referred to these as the *"true riches"* (Lk 16:11), that is, riches that transfer into the world to come. These include the *"riches of His goodness"* (Rom 2:4), the *"riches of His glory"* (Rom 9:23), and *"the riches of His grace"* (Eph 1:7). There are the *"unsearchable riches of Christ"* (Eph 3:6), the *"riches of the full assurance of understanding"* (Col 2:2), and the richness of both mercy and faith (Eph 2:4; James 2:5).

When Israel fell, the treasures of salvation were opened to the Gentiles. The rich promises made to Israel became

available to them, including the circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6), the writing of God's laws upon the heart and mind (Jer 31:33), and the remembering of their sins no more (Jer 31:34). A new heart and a new spirit was offered to them (Ezek 36:26). They would all be taught by God (Isa 2:3), and with joy would draw water from the wells of salvation (Isa 12:3). Riches indeed!

THEIR FULLNESS

The Spirit rises even higher, bringing the believer into lofty realms upon the wings of faith. If Israel falling and losing the blessing brought salvation to the Gentiles, *"how much more their fullness"* will bring? Other versions read, *"how much more will their fulfillment be!"*^{NASB}

A source of richness

"How much greater riches will their fullness bring!"^{NIV} *"How much more will their full inclusion mean!"*^{NRSV} *"How much greater will be the glory when they are made full?"*^{BBE} *"Think how much*

greater a blessing the world will share when the Jews finally accept it."^{NLT} "How much greater a gain will come when all is restored to them!"^{NJB}

"Their fulness" refers to a period of time when they will not be noted for having a "remnant" among a mass of unbelievers. When they are made full, the majority of them will turn to the Lord, not the minority as now.

The prophets spoke of such a marvelous time. "And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart" (Jer

24:7). ". . . and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid" (Jer 30:10). "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them" (Jer 32:39).

Because this matter is going to be developed extensively in this passage, there is no need to here deal with the many prophecies relating to Israel's "fulness," or restoration to favor.

The Point

The wonderful point is that if the cutting off of all but a remnant brought Divine riches to the world, what will the

inclusion, or re-grafting, of them bring! If God can bring riches from a curse, what will He bring from a blessing!

A Significant Point

Because of the antagonism of many toward this subject, it is necessary to say something more about it. **Sound reason cannot be established upon absurdity!** If Israel has been totally rejected, and has fallen beyond recovery, the Spirit would not speak in this manner.

It would be an insult to the Lord and a reproach to the very idea of inspiration to speak of the "fulness" of Israel if such a thing was not possible. This should be very evident.

THE MINISTRY OF PAUL

"¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and

God (John 8:28,38; 12:49).

It is fashionable in a generally free society to mention freedom of speech, and to create an arena in which a free

"I am speaking to you who are Gentiles."^{NASB} While this word is intended for all believers, and, like "all Scripture," is "profitable," it is particularly addressed to the Gentiles. That means this is something Gentile believers need to know. It is something that God raised up a special messenger to declare. It is not something to be withheld from "the Gentiles," and that is why it is spoken.

Rather than offering fleshly explanations for Israel, its condition, and its future Paul has woven the revelations given to him with the words of Moses and the Prophets. This is a message Gentiles need to hear, and all of the Word of God strongly supports that fact.

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you know full well that there are untold multitudes of churches that have never been told these things. Some have even heard such things denied with enthusiasm, and those who declare them derided and maligned. If the saints are scheduled to "judge the world" (1 Cor 6:2), it seems fitting to me that the Apostle to the Gentiles would have a role in judging those pretentious preachers and teachers who have contradicted what he has so strongly affirmed in this passage.

save some of them." Paul is very deliberate in unfolding this rather sensitive and far-reaching subject. He is addressing this discourse to the Gentiles, and doing so with an acute awareness of the stewardship that had been assigned to him. He is not simply sharing his heart, although that is involved. Jesus did not call Paul into the apostleship because of any particular expertise he had. Neither, indeed, was He providing Paul with a forum in which he could put forth his personal convictions. That has never been the agenda through which the Lord of glory operates, and it is not now. Like Jesus Himself, **the servant of God is only licensed to speak the words of**

exchange of thought can take place. While there be some measure of nobility in such efforts, they have nothing whatsoever to do with Christ's administration of the will of God. The "government" has been placed exclusively upon His shoulder (Isa 9:6-7), and He is executing His rule with strict regard for the purpose of God. The will of man does not drive this Divine government, or enter into the agenda by which it is governed.

I SPEAK TO YOU GENTILES

"For I speak to you Gentiles." Paul is not simply addressing a crowd. He is focusing in his remarks, saying things that are intended for the ears of Gentiles.

Rather than offering fleshly explanations for Israel, its condition, and its future Paul has woven the revelations given to him with the words of Moses and the Prophets. This is a message Gentiles need to hear, and all of the Word of God strongly supports that fact.

I AM AN APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES

Although Paul's Apostleship was not limited to the Gentiles, it was primarily to them. When directing Ananias to go to penitent Saul of Tarsus, Jesus said, *"Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel"* (Acts 9:15). When the Holy Spirit began to use Paul in the ministry, He instructed the early church, *"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them"* (Acts 13:2). Paul wrote to the Galatians, *"when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood"* (Gal 1:15-16).

God revealed His hidden purpose to Paul – a purpose that had not been so revealed before (Eph 3:3-5). He was endowed with *"the gift of grace"* and the *"effectual working"* of His mighty power (Eph 3:7). He was to *"preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery"* (Eph 3:8-9). Even heavenly *"principalities and powers"* would be shown the *"manifold wisdom of God"* as a result of his ministry (Eph 3:10).

The point to see here is that the words of our text are associated with that purpose. They are intended for the church, and are not to be despised. They relate to God's *"eternal purpose"* (Eph 3:11) and are of interest to angelic hosts.

How ministers of the Word can learn from Paul's example! Too often they are driven by the agendas of men, or even by personal preferences. No laborer in the vineyard of the Lord is allowed such liberty. If men are unwilling to preach what God wants said, they should immediately withdraw from the ministry.

MAGNIFYING HIS MINISTRY

"I magnify my ministry." Other versions read, *"I magnify mine office,"*^{KJV} *"I make much of my ministry,"*^{NIV} *"I glorify my ministry,"*^{NRSV} *"I honor my*

ministry,"^{DOUAY} and *"I lay great stress on this [ministry]."*^{NLT} He ministered with an overwhelming sense of the One who had called and commissioned him. That is what drove him to say these words. Woe be to the person who tampers with them as though they were optional, or an opinion of Paul, or some inconsequential word. **These are not sayings to be conveniently adapted to favored**

As an Apostle, Paul is not at all like a President of the United States, or the King or Queen of England. In his ministry Paul did not magnify his person, but his "ministry" – "an Apostle to the Gentiles." He does not speak for the people, or a movement, but for God.

theological views, or positions that distinguish one believer from another.

As an Apostle, Paul is not at all like a President of the United States, or the King or Queen of England. In his ministry Paul did not magnify his person, but his *"ministry"* – *"an Apostle to the Gentiles."* He does not speak for the people, or a movement, but for God. In speaking as an Apostle, Paul brings glory to the One who placed him in that office.

PROVOKING TO JEALOUSY

"... if by any means I may provoke to jealousy..." Other versions read, *"If by any means I may provoke to emulation,"*^{KJV} and *"in the hope that I may somehow arouse."*^{NIV}

There is a marvelous strategy – preaching to one people to have a calculated effect upon another people! This was not a self-conceived strategy, but a revealed one. Around 1,500 years before Paul was called to the Apostleship, God revealed through Moses what He intended to do. *"I will move them to jealousy with*

those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation" (Deut 32:21). The Lord would not do this, however, independently of means. He would not mysteriously move upon the people, or show them a vision of what was coming. Instead, He would move them to jealousy through the preaching of one of their own who was born again.

I do not question that God still uses means like this, provoking those who are confident they have a monopoly on the truth by unveiling great truths to, and marvelously changing, those whom they despise. We should seek grace to be alert to this Divine manner.

Those Who are of My Flesh

Some sophist might suppose Paul is speaking of awakening spiritual Jews. In order to dispel such a notion, the Apostle is very precise concerning whom he seeks to challenge. *"Those who are my flesh"* refers to all whose fleshly lineage could be traced back to Abraham. They were, as Paul earlier affirmed, his *"kinsmen according to the flesh"* (9:3).

Paul's Apostleship to the Gentiles was Divinely intended to awaken the Jews Godward. For those inclined to believe the Jews have been totally repudiated, this fact alone should dispel such inclinations. No person or group of persons who have been consigned to an irremediable state can be the target of awakening or of salvation.

Might Save Some of Them

We must not allow ourselves to equate *"some"* with the word *"few."* Already, the Lord has shown us that *"some"* can well refer to the majority, and to vast numbers (Rom 3:3; 1 Cor 10:7,8,9,10). Here, the word *"some"* does equate with *"a remnant according to the election of grace"* (11:6). It is a view that takes the entirety of the nation into account, not just a specific generation. Again, if Israel had been totally ejected, as was Sodom and Gomorrah, none of them could have been saved. Therefore, the very inspired intention of Paul confirms Israel has not been finally consigned to reprobacy.

Might Save

It is of more than passing interest that Paul refers to himself as saving “some of them.” This is a difficult saying for many, but there is no need for it to be. Frequently the Word of God refers to believers saving people.

- ❑ “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt **save thy husband**?” (1 Cor 7:16a).
- ❑ “. . . or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt **save thy wife**?” (1 Cor 7:16b).

- ❑ “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means **save some**” (1 Cor 9:22).
- ❑ “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, **and them that hear thee**” (1 Tim 4:16).
- ❑ “Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall **save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins**” (James 5:20).

- ❑ “And **others save** with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23).

It is quite true that there is “One . . . who is able to save” (James 4:12). Yet, in Christ Jesus, the saved join together with God in that holy work. They not only participate in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), but in the Divine work. Thus, they become “laborers together with God” in a most remarkable and refreshing way (1 Cor 3:9). God works in us, “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

RECONCILIATION THROUGH CASTING AWAY

“¹⁵ For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” Once again, the Spirit will reason with us concerning the glory of Israel’s restoration to the Lord. If their rejection of Christ brought a blessing to the world, what will their acceptance of Him bring? Of course, this type of reasoning is purposeless if there is no possibility of them being restored. If Israel is beyond recovery, it is utter foolishness to speak in this manner. In such a case, this would be mere fleshly wishfulness.

CAST AWAY

“For if their being cast away . . .” Other versions read, “If their rejection,” NASB “If their loss,” DOUAY and “If their putting away.” BBE

The rejection of the Jews is to be considered within the context of Christ Jesus and the Gospel. It was not until they “received not” (John 1:11) their own Savior that this rejection took place.

This is the rejection of which Hosea prophesied: “Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God” (Hos 1:9). The name “Lo-Ammi” means “not my people.”

This is now the seventh description of Israel’s judgment.

- ❑ They stumbled at the Stumbling stone (9:32).

- ❑ God gave them the spirit of slumber (11:8-9).
- ❑ Their table was made a snare and a stumbling block (11:9).
- ❑ Their eyes were darkened so they could not see (11:10).
- ❑ They fell (11:12a).
- ❑ They were diminished, or failed (11:12b).
- ❑ They were cast away (11:15).

Thus the Gospel, together with its advantages, was taken from among them. Although they were the exclusive custodians of the promises of salvation, now a believer among them would be the exception, not the rule. As a nation, they lost their advantages, and only a remnant among them now finds grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Being “cast away,” a veil is now upon their hearts when they read their own Scriptures (2 Cor 3:14; Acts 13:27). They are unable to make an association between Jesus of Nazareth and the very Scriptures that were given to prepare them to receive Him.

This veil will only be lifted when they turn to the Lord. “Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away” (2 Cor 3:16). Or, as Jesus said, “Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matt 23:39). No amount of academic discipline can bring an end to being “cast away.” Only turning to the Lord will accomplish that.

RECONCILING OF THE WORLD

“. . . is the reconciling of the world.” When the Jews were “cast away,” the great salvation of God was not abandoned. From that awful judgment came the reconciliation of the world!

The meaning of this passage is that ONLY after Israel rejected the “word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19) was it preached to the rest of the world. For 1,500 years, messages from God had been confined to the Jewish world. But now, when, as a whole, they thrust the word of the Gospel from them, the “door of faith” was glorious opened to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). Paul and Barnabas stated it well in Antioch of Pisidia. “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. For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:46-47). This is the precise truth expressed in the words of our text.

Now the Spirit will rise on the wings of Divine reason, confirming not only the possibility of Israel’s conversion, but what will occur when it takes place.

THEIR ACCEPTANCE

“. . . what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” The KJV reads, “the receiving of them.” This refers to God’s acceptance, or receiving, of them in Christ Jesus. Note with care, the text does not

suggest the mere possibility of Israel being received or accepted. Rather it speaks of it as a reality – something that is going to take place. Various versions refer to “*their acceptance*” in this way. “*The receiving of them,*”^{ASV} “*their reception,*”^{DARBY} “*their coming back again,*”^{BBE} “*the reception,*”^{VLT} “*their re-acceptance.*”^{NJB} There is not the slightest hint of ambiguity in those words – no suggestion that they cannot or will not be received. In fact, the Spirit bases His reasoning upon their return, something that would be absurd to the extreme if it was not possible.

Keep in mind, “*their acceptance*” is the same occasion as “*their fulness*” in the

previous verse. From the standpoint of Israel it is “*their fulness.*” From the Divine view, it is “*their acceptance.*”

The Reasoning

If such remarkable benefits resulted from Israel’s rejection, what advantages will come when they are accepted? This is in keeping with the very nature of the Kingdom of God, which is to increase, expand, and become greater. It is said of the Lord Jesus, “*Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*” (Isa 9:7). If that Kingdom expanded when Israel was rejected, what will happen when they are received?

LIFE FROM THE DEAD

“*. . . but life from the dead.*” Every major translation reads precisely the same way: “*life from the dead.*” The language is that of resurrection – living people coming from the region of the dead!

The meaning of the text is that a great spiritual resurrection will occur. This will not only be among the Israelites, but throughout the nations of the world. The great blessing came to the rest of the world when Israel was cast away, what magnitude of blessing will take place when they are again accepted. It will be like Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones (Ezek 37) and his vision of the waters (Ezek 47). There will be a global impact – it will be “*life from the dead!*”

THE FIRSTFRUIT AND THE LUMP

“*16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.*” Here are two different symbols. The first is to a batch of dough, and the second to a tree. Other versions read, “*And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too,*”^{NASB} “*If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches,*”^{NIV} and “*If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.*”^{NIB} The New Living Translation offers an interpretation of the text that is based upon the context. “*And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their children will also be holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.*”

THE PRINCIPLE OF FIRST FRUITS

The principle of “*first fruits*” was instituted under the Law (Ex 23:16,19; 34:22,26; Lev 2:12; 23:10,17,20; Num 18:26; Deut 26:10). The “*first*” of everything belonged to God, from mankind to the grains of the field.

The specific reference of this text is to the fifteen chapter of Numbers. Here the Lord gave procedures to be followed after the people entered into Canaan. Included in those procedures was the offering of the

first fruits of the harvest of the land. It was something to be followed in all of their generations. “*Of the first of your dough ye shall give unto the LORD an heave offering in your generations*” (Num 15:21).

The idea Divinely developed was that the offering of the first fruits sanctified the remainder, rendering it holy, acceptable to and blessed by God. This principle finds its highest fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is called, “*the first fruits of them that slept.*” and “*Christ the first fruits*” (2 Cor 15:23). By virtue of that role, He sanctifies and makes acceptable all who are in Him.

THE FIRSTFRUIT AND THE ROOT

The “*firstfruit*” is taken from the Law, “*the root*” is taken from nature. Both of them stand for the whole. What is said of “*the firstfruit*” and the “*root,*” is also true of the “*lump*” and “*the branches.*” That is the point of the statement. Admittedly, the flesh will object to this form of reasoning, because it does not fit into the theological molds created by men. Yet, these are the words of the Spirit, and no person is wise or strong enough to resist them without impunity. This is “*the mind of the Spirit*” (Rom 8:27), and words “*which the Holy Spirit teaches*” (1 Cor 2:13).

Both the “*first fruit*” and the “*root,*” in this case, is Abraham specifically, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, generally. There is no question about them being “*holy,*” chosen and accepted by God – a point that has already been made (4:1-9,16; 9:7-10,13). They are the “*first fruit*” in the sense of being first of a special people who were accepted by God. They are the “*root*” in the sense of being progenitors, or forefathers, of the Israelites.

THE LUMP AND THE BRANCHES

“*Lump*” and “*branches*” are terms denoting the people coming from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – Paul’s “*kinsmen according to the flesh*” (9:3), or “*Israelites*” (9:4).

It is important to remember that “*lump*” and “*branches*” do not refer to individuals, but to the nation. The point being developed is that the nation of Israel has not been totally rejected. They have been, so to speak, sanctified by the “*firstfruit*” and “*root*” of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later in this passage the Spirit will clearly affirm, “*they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes*” (11:26). We are not dealing with a theological novelty, but with an aspect of God’s eternal purpose.

“*Holy,*” in this case, does not mean

that all of the Israelites have partaken of the righteousness of God. It does not mean they are personally devout and filled with faith. Nor, indeed, does it mean that God has reckoned righteousness to them, thereby making them "holy."

Here, "holy" means the nation is not completely cast away, for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom the promises were made. The situation is similar to an unbelieving spouse being sanctified by the believer: i.e., "For the

unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (1 Cor 7:14). "Holy" is also used in same sense as the children of such a divided home being "holy" because of the believer. This does not mean that the children are, by virtue of the believing spouse, personally pure and righteous before the Lord. **Here the idea is that of legitimacy, not moral or spiritual purity.** Even though one spouse is a believer and one an unbeliever,

yet the marriage is legitimate, and the children resulting from it are legitimate, or not "bastards" (Deut 23:2).

The Point

The point is that God still recognizes the nation of Israel because of the fathers. The promises are still in place, and they are not without hope. These comments will suffice at this point. This very subject will be further developed in verses 28-31. It is essential, however, that we bring our minds into accord with this revelation.

ONLY SOME WERE BROKEN OFF

"17 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 . . ."

Now the Spirit further elaborates on the reality of the situation, thereby liberating us from any tendency to speculate. Having affirmed that the nation still stands accepted before God because of the fathers, the Spirit now deals with the fact of unbelief, that still is dominant among them. He will show that the present condition of Israel is not a permanent state. Some of the people have been thrust aside, but not all of them.

SOME OF THE BRANCHES

If it is true that the Israelites as a whole have not been totally rejected, it ought to be clear that only "some" of them were removed, or "broken off." However, the Spirit does not simply leave it to the reader to draw that conclusion, even though it should be perfectly clear to the uncluttered heart. This point is too important for it to depend upon the conclusions of men.

There are at least two things being accomplished in this teaching.

First, the Gentiles are being humbled, so they will not imagine themselves to be better than the Jews, either individually or collectively. If The Gentiles are compared with the Jews as a

whole, there is no comparison. The Jews outshine them in every respect, being a special people chosen unto the Lord.

Second, the Jews are offered hope, lest they be tempted to believe they are beyond recovery. They remain scattered and do not have their ancient glory. This could lead them to conclude what was revealed to the prophet Ezekiel. "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (Ezek 37:11).

15:2,6).

The Psalmist portrayed the nation of Israel as "a vine brought out of Egypt." The Lord "cast out the heathen," and "planted" it. It "made room" for it, causing it to "take deep root" and "fill the land." Yet, that very vine was eventually pillaged by the heathen, "burned with fire," and even "cut down." Still, the Psalmist prayed that God would "look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch

Having affirmed that the nation still stands accepted before God because of the fathers, the Spirit now deals with the fact of unbelief, that still is dominant among them. He will show that the present condition of Israel is not a permanent state.

You will recall that God revealed through Ezekiel that He would put His Spirit into Israel, causing them to live and to again come into their land (37:12-14). Our text is showing the redemptive side of that promise.

Some of the Branches Broken Off
"And if some of the branches were broken off . . ." This kind of reasoning should not take us by surprise. Jesus said the same thing takes place among those identified with Him (John

that thou madest strong for thyself" (Psa 11:5-16). He knew, and we ought to know it better, that only "some of the branches were broken off!"

"Some" does not mean "few." To this point, "some" constitutes the majority, like the "some" who did not believe among the Israelites who were delivered from Egypt (Rom 3:3). Those people were like branches that "withered," and were thus "broken off" (Isa 27:11). The reason for stating it in this manner is to assure

our hearts that the tree was not plucked up by the roots. The roots remain, as well as the tree. It is only “some of the branches” – original branches – that have been cut off.

A WILD OLIVE TREE

“ . . . and you, being a wild olive tree . . . ” This is the Divine view of the Gentiles: “a wild olive tree.” It speaks of a people who grew up without Divine attendance. No special attention was paid to the Gentile world. From this point of view, the nations experienced no favorable Divine intervention. While they remained under the government of God, and were often used by Him for sundry intentions

of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12b), and dead in “sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh” (Col 2:13). What a contrast with the Jews, “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:4-5)!

GRAFTED IN AMONG THEM

And how is it that the Gentiles receive a blessing? Are they granted to have their own tree, so to speak? Does God replace the Israelites with them? Indeed not.

FATNESS

“ . . . and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree.” Other versions read, “now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,”^{NIV} “sharing in God’s rich nourishment of his special olive tree,”^{NLT} and “and were given a part with them in the root by which the olive-tree is made fertile.”^{BBE}

It is “the blessing of Abraham” that has “come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14). The glorious Gospel we have received was first “preached unto Abraham” (Gal 3:8).

The splendid covenant in which we have found acceptance is the one that was made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Heb 8:8).

The “root and fatness” is the blessedness of identity with God, and it is traced back to Abraham. Jesus, after all is the true promised “Seed” of Abraham. As it is written, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy Seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16).

In a sense, we have only **taken the place** of those who were “broken off.” Some versions convey this idea in their rendering of this verse. We were “were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree,”^{NRSV} and “were grafted in their place and have come to share in the rich root of the olive tree.”^{NAB} This thought will be more fully developed in the eighteenth verse.

Israel cannot, then, be totally rejected, for we that are in Christ Jesus have been taken from a wild olive tree and grafted in among them. What we are enjoying was committed to them, and belongs to them. That is still the case, and we are still “among them.”

God did not create a new thing for the Gentiles. The promises made to Abraham were not abandoned, nor was the Abrahamic tree that He planted uprooted. We have been added to them, placed among those faithful offspring of Abraham who were received and made righteous by God.

related to His “eternal purpose,” they were “wild,” developing outside of the circumference of Divine care.

Other versions read, “a wild olive shoot.” From the standpoint of language, this means a sprout, or shoot, from an uncultivated olive tree. Unlike the Jews, the Gentiles had no special revelation from God – no Divine cultivation. No prophets were given to them, no righteous judges, and no godly kings. No covenant was given to them or promised to them. They were a “wild olive tree.”

As a “wild olive tree,” the Gentiles were “afar off” (Acts 2:39), “sinners of the Gentiles” (Gal 2:15), and “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph 2:12a). They were “strangers from the covenants

Instead, in Christ, the Gentiles are grafted into the Jewish tree – the cultivated olive tree. The Gentiles were “were grafted in **among them.**”

The “them,” in this case, is the “remnant” in particular, and the Israelites in general. The point is that we find acceptance “among them,” and not vice versa.

God did not create a new thing for the Gentiles. The promises made to Abraham were not abandoned, nor was the Abrahamic tree uprooted. We have been added to them, placed among those faithful offspring of Abraham who were received and made righteous by God.

PARTAKER OF THE ROOT AND

DO NOT BOAST! DO NOT BOAST!

“¹⁸ . . . do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support

the root, but the root supports you.” In a sense, those who declare Israel has been altogether cut off are boasting. They

imagine that the Divine attention has now been turned to them, and away from Israel. The Spirit now corrects that

perverse way of thinking, showing that frame of mind to be seriously flawed.

BOASTING AGAINST THE BRANCHES

“ . . . do not boast against the branches!” Other versions read, “do not be arrogant toward the branches,”^{NASB} “do not boast over those branches,”^{NIV} “Do not be uplifted in pride over the branches,”^{BBE} “But you must be careful not to brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off,”^{NLT} and “then it is not for you to consider yourself superior to the other branches.”^{NJB}

False approaches to religion tend to breed arrogance. Thus, Jesus told of a Pharisee who stood and prayed with himself, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men” (Lk 18:11). His religion made him pray in this manner. Earlier in Romans, our attention was drawn to those took confidence in being a Jew. “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God” (Rom 2:17).

The religious world has always had to contend with those who boasted they were

better than others. Such boasting, however, is brought to its most foolish and harmful level when Gentile Christians, as a group, consider themselves better than the Israelites **who were broken off**, or the ones who remain, with whom we have been made one in Christ (Eph 2:15). Rather than boast over them, we Gentiles should lament that any branches were broken off of their tree, and pray that they may be restored to Divine favor.

REMEMBER! REMEMBER!

“But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.” Other versions read, “You do not support the root, but the root supports you,”^{NIV} “It is not you that sustain the root, but the root that sustains you,”^{NJB} and “Remember, you are just a branch, not the root.”^{NLT}

There are some important things to remember about our situation as Gentiles.

- ❑ The Jews were the first to be the people of God.
- ❑ All of the Prophets and Apostles were Jews.
- ❑ The Lord Jesus Himself came from their stock.
- ❑ The first who were inducted into

Christ were from Israel.

- ❑ The Gospel is God’s power unto salvation to “*the Jew first*” (Rom 1:16).
- ❑ Glory, honor, and peace are promised to every person who does good, “to the Jew first” (Rom 2:10).
- ❑ The Old Testament books, thirty-nine in number, were all written by Jews, and faithfully kept by them for our edification.
- ❑ Of the twenty-seven New Testament books, only two were written by a Gentile. Luke, who is understood to be a Greek, wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. The rest of the books were written by Jews.

The truth of the matter is that **the Jews have received no advantages from the Gentiles whatsoever.** It has all been the other way around – the Gentiles have profited from them: from their Law, their Prophets, their promises, their covenant, And their Messiah.

From the standpoint of lineage, It is through Abraham that the whole world is being blessed! Indeed, the root is bearing us, and not we the root! If you trace Gentile origins, they are not good.

THINK AGAIN!

“¹⁹ You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’²⁰ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.”

Do not miss how tenacious the Holy Spirit is on this subject. He refuses to let it go, leaving conclusions in the hands of men. Whatever you may think of human reasoning and logic, it is not sufficient to come to the right conclusions and implications of things revealed.

YOU WILL SAY

“You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’” From this view, the removal of “some” of the branches was a means of making room

for we Gentiles. The clear implication is that if “some of the branches” were not “broken off,” there would have been no room for we Gentiles.

However, this is not intended to be an insightful response, but one of Gentile arrogance. The supposition is that such a high value was placed upon the Gentiles, that place was made for them by removing some of the natural branches. Too, the assumption is that the removal of some of the branches was due to their vileness and unworthiness. This, then, became a source of pride to unthinking Gentile believers.

WELL SAID

“Well said . . .” Other versions read, “Quite right,”^{NASB} “Granted,”^{NIV} “This is so,”^{NAB} “Truly,”^{BBE} and “That is true.”^{NRSV} Although the observation of verse nineteen was technically true, it was not

a thorough explanation of the situation, nor did it contribute to an excellent spirit among those espousing it. The Spirit will confirm the Gentiles had no merits that constituted them better than the Jews. Nor, indeed, were they to regard themselves as superior because they took the place of others.

BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF

“Because of unbelief they were broken off. . . .” While some element of truth was found in the observation that some Jewish branches were removed that the Gentiles might be grafted into their tree, this was not an appropriate way to think. It was not conducive to godliness, and diminished the value of the grace of God.

Thus we are reminded that the Jewish branches were broken off “because of unbelief,” not because of a cold and

calculating purpose. This truth is made abundantly clear in Scripture.

- ❑ *“Some did not believe” (Rom 3:3).*
- ❑ *“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” (Acts 13:46).*
- ❑ *“And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).*
- ❑ *“And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:18-19).*
- ❑ *“Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief” (Heb 4:6).*
- ❑ *“Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb 4:11).*

It is the way of God to never ignore or honor unbelief! We have the Jews as a premier example of this, and it is to be duly noted. Had the branches that were broken off not been unbelieving, they would not have been broken off, Gentiles or not!

YOU STAND BY FAITH

“ . . . you stand by faith.” Here is a facet of the truth that the Gentile church has not proclaimed with any degree of acceptability. There are vast numbers of professed believers who rarely entertain such a thought. *“You stand by faith!”* The idea is that our standing before God is in strict accordance with our faith. We are not accepted because we attend the right church, or hold to the right beliefs. There is certainly nothing wrong with those things, but they are not in the same category as faith. There is no salvation part from faith – present faith! There can be no experience of grace apart from faith,

for salvation is ever *“by grace through faith”* (Eph 2:8). There is no point in salvation where this word becomes obsolete, *“without faith it is impossible to please him”* (Heb 11:6).

Standing by faith is another way of saying, *“The just shall live by faith”* (Rom

We are living in a religious culture that actually makes it easy to become “haughty,” presumptuous, or arrogant. Finely tuned theologies and systems of religious thought are being perpetrated that do not require faith in God.

1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:39). Our safety is not in our position, but our faith! It is not in what we have done in the past, but in our faith!

FEAR, DO NOT BE HAUGHTY

“Do not be haughty, but fear.” And why is it that those who are aligned with Christ should shun haughtiness and embrace fear? For some, this is too hard. We are living in a religious culture that actually makes it easy to become “haughty,” presumptuous, or arrogant. Finely tuned theologies and systems of religious thought are being perpetrated that do not require faith in God. It is enough to embrace these views, and the people who do so are taught they are safe because of it. Some imagine if they have the right “church” name, call themselves by a technically correct term, and do things by the rules they think are in place, they can stand before God. But all of this is a total misrepresentation. There is not a spark of truth in it. Our ONLY confidence is in the Lord. That is something of what it means to *“stand by faith.”* It is to *“live by faith,”* shaping our entire lives by unseen things, exceeding great and precious promises, and the joyful expectation of our Lord’s return. It

is to be governed by unseen realities.

Honest people know these things are not common in the churches. But they are absolutely essential.

HE MAY NOT SPARE YOU

“For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.” This is a particularly relevant word to those who strenuously object to any thought of God again having mercy upon the Israelites, Paul’s *“kinsmen according to the flesh.”*

Who is the person in all of Christendom willing to affirm things are anything near ideal in the Gentile church? Where can a soul be found that will say that faith is a dominating trait in the churches? The plague of unbelief is streaming through the churches like a defiling watercourse. Some are caught in the stream unwillingly, and yet are overwhelmed by institutional propaganda.

Here the solemn warning of the Holy Spirit! *“For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.”*^{NIV} By this the Spirit means God will not spare us if unbelief is found in us! **If God were tolerate an unbelieving Gentile church, He would have to apologize to the Jews who were cast off because of their unbelief!** He would, in such a case, be proved a respecter of persons.

There are some remarkable likenesses to unbelieving Israel that are found in the Gentile church. The irony of the situation is that these conditions are regularly acknowledged by preachers and teachers who say “we are just like Israel.”

Not going into the promised land. When Israel did not go into the promised land as directed, they were excluded from it (Num 20:24). There are also exceeding great and precious promises given to those in Christ Jesus. They involve going on to perfection (Heb 6:1-8), seeking the things that are above (Col 3:1-3), and pressing toward the mark (Phil 3:14-15). Solemnly we are told to

“Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). Do not imagine for a fleeting moment that these admonitions can be ignored and acceptance with God still be maintained. Some of Israel’s branches were cut off because of unbelief. Unbelief in the church will result in the same judgment! *“For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.”*^{NIV}

Coveting the goods of Jericho.

When Israel entered the promised land, they were forbidden to take any of the *“cursed”* things for themselves (Josh 6:17-18). Achan, who had successfully passed through the wilderness and arrived in the promised land, chose to disobey that Divine injunction. He coveted and took a Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold. As a result, he not only lost his own life, but the life of all of his family (Josh 7:24-26). God has equally warned those in Christ to take care not to become meshed with this present evil world (Col 3:3; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Pet 2:11). Those who ignore those warnings will be judged just as surely as Achan was judged. *“For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.”*^{NIV}

Despising the bread sent from heaven.

When Israel was led through the wilderness for forty years, God gave them *“bread from heaven”* (Ex 16:4; Neh 9:15; John 6:31). It was good food, and readily adapted for their journey through the wilderness. It was both adequate and consistent. Yet, Israel was discontent with the Divinely-given diet. They cried out, *“our soul loatheth this light bread”* (Num 21:6). As a result of their discontent, God sent venomous snakes among them, and *“much people of Israel died”* (Num 21:6). The Lord has also provided a good

spiritual diet for those who are in Christ Jesus. It consists of *“all things that pertain unto life and godliness”* (2 Pet 1:3). Those who refuse this diet for the inner man in preference of the wisdom of this world will not escape the judgment of the Lord. *“For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.”*^{NIV}

Wanting a king like other

nations. There came a time when Israel rejected the leading of the Lord, choosing to emulate the heathen nations about them. They made a petition of one of the greatest of all judges, Samuel. *“Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations”* (1 Sam 8:5). While the saying greatly displeased Samuel, and the Lord as well, He instructed Samuel, *“Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them”* (1 Sam 8:7). Their choice took a heavy toll upon them. The new king would take their sons and daughters, and appoint them for himself, to serve his own interests. He would cause them *“to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants”* (1 Sam 8:12-18). Heavy taxes would be leveled against them, and they would have less than they had before. Likewise, there are those within the Gentile church who have preferred the educators, psychiatrists, organizers, etc., to the Lord Jesus Christ. They have chosen to be led by mere men rather than by God and those whom He has placed in the church.

Such choices will not go unnoticed by the Lord of glory. *“For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.”*^{NIV}

Any representation of God and His love that has Him tolerant of unbelief, the failure to appropriate His promises, and sinful indulgence among His people, is nothing less than a boast against the branches. If we learn anything from Israel, it is surely that God will not ignore unbelief and indolence in His people.

SOBER REFLECTIONS

When the condition of the church is considered with the natural olive branches who were cut off in mind, it has a significant impact upon the heart and mind. God has not changed. He is no more tolerant of unbelief today than He was when Israel refused to enter the promised land. The Gospel has not mellowed God, so to speak. Rather, it has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, allowing them to enter into favor with God *“by grace through faith.”*

Gentiles believers do well not to boast against the branches. They also do well to zealously avoid any doctrines that create comfort in a state of alienation. Some have taken upon themselves to construct doctrines that diminish the enormity of sin and unbelief. They speak of an *“unconditional love,”* the impossibility of being rejected once you are accepted, and God keeping people independently of their faith. Still others see no need for the love of the people of God, and seeking things above.

These are all views that boast against the branches, supposing that God will treat unbelief with favor and longsuffering. But that is not so.

GOODNESS AND SEVERITY CONSIDERED

“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.” Rarely will you hear a challenge for Christians to consider these

things – *“the goodness AND severity of God.”* These are two facets of the Divine character. Neither of them will ever become obsolete. No covenant of God has voided either of them.

False religions present God as either

good or severe, but never as both. This reflects a marked tendency in men to distort the concept of God. This disposition even exists in the Christian community where people are often prone to forget or minimize one of these Divine characteristics. This can be readily seen in

the hackneyed expressions “modernist” and “legalist.” The “modernist,” as ordinarily understood, finds it difficult to consider “*the severity of God.*” The “legalist” has trouble beholding “*the goodness of God.*” However, if our thoughts are to be acceptable to God, we must learn to dwell upon both of these traits, pondering them in faith.

This text will show us that neither God’s “goodness” nor His “severity” are arbitrary, or disassociated from men’s response to Him. **While God’s primary motivation is His will, He cannot be moved by that will to be good toward those who choose to ignore that goodness. Nor, indeed, can His will move Him to be severe toward those**

were cut off because they did not believe. They are the ones who stumbled at the stumbling stone. **Consider God’s reaction to them.**

- They could not enter the promised land (Psa 95:10-11).
- They died in the wilderness (Heb 3:17).
- He abhorred His own inheritance (Psa 106:40).
- He gave them up to “*their own heart’s lusts*” (Psa 81:12).
- He “*gave them up to worship the host of heaven*” (Acts 7:42).
- “*God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear*” (Rom 11:8).

Gentiles are urged to ponder the goodness of God toward us. On the moral scale, the Gentile world had descended very low, being marked by sins and attitudes of the worst sort. Yet, God was good toward us. Ponder that goodness.

- We obtained righteousness even though we did not seek for it (Rom 9:30).
- God was found of us, even though we did not seek for Him (Rom 10:20a).
- God was manifested to us even though we did not ask (Rom 10:20b).
- We were granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).
- Jesus brought Divine favorable judgment to us (Isa 42:1).
- God gave Jesus as a light to us (Isa 42:6; 49:6).
- God lifted up His hand of acceptance to us (Isa 49:22).
- We were made “*fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*” (Eph 2:19).
- Though from a wild olive tree, we were grafted into the cultured olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:17)
- Although to Israel belongs “*the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came,*” yet we have been made partakers (Rom 9:4-5).

Think about the severity of God – think about it long enough, and with understanding enough, that you will do anything and everything to avoid it!

who willingly accept His goodness. This is fundamental to sound theology, as will be shown.

The word “*consider*” is not a cursory word. It does not refer to surface or shallow thinking. This involves extended thought, where the heart and mind dwell on a matter, seeking to understand it. The KJV and NASB use the word “*behold.*” Other versions use the word “*see,*”^{BBE} “*notice,*”^{NLT} and “*remember.*”^{NJB}

Coming from the Greek word *ἵδω*, this word means to perceive, become aware of, or come to know something. It is a term denoting understanding and perception. The Spirit is not merely telling us to look at God’s goodness and severity, but to ponder them until we gain some understanding of them – **understanding that will assist us in avoiding God’s severity and obtaining His goodness.**

CONSIDER THE SEVERITY OF GOD

“... on them which fell, severity.” Those who “fell” are the branches that

- Their own table was “*made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense unto them*” (Rom 11:9).
- Their eyes were “*darkened*” and their backs bowed down with weighty burdens (Rom 11:10).
- Their house was left desolate (Matt 23:38).
- He has allowed Jerusalem to be “*trodden down of the Gentiles*” (Lk 21:24).

None of these judgments were arbitrary. There was a cause for them all—a cause that was induced by human unbelief, indifference, and even obstinance. This is a revelation of God’s reaction to unbelief and rejection. No amount of fanciful theology can change that reaction. Think about the severity of God – think about it long enough, and with understanding enough, that you will do anything and everything to avoid it!

CONSIDER THE GOODNESS OF GOD

“... but toward thee, goodness.” We

How good it is to ponder “*the goodness of God!*” It is not some abstract trait that we are considering, but something that has been experienced by the Gentile world through Christ Jesus.

PONDER THE POSSIBILITY

“... if thou continue in His goodness otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” The Spirit is careful not to leave the door open for the entrance of presumption. The fact that this dreadful sin – the sin of presumption (Psa 19:13) – is so dominant in the Gentile church is not due to any neglect on the part of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is the outgrowth of corrupted theology that has given human explanation the precedence over Divine articulation. The fact that the things we are considering are generally unknown among professed believers is a remarkable commentary on the conduct of their

shepherds. It is inexcusable!

Continuance in the goodness of God is NOT automatic! If it was, such a word would never have been spoken. **God is not good to people regardless of what they do!** If He was, the unbelieving Israelites would have been allowed to enter into Canaan, and Jerusalem never would have been given over to the Gentiles. It does not require unusual insight to comprehend this.

There is a circumference within which men experience God's goodness, and they are to remain in it. This is expressed in a variety of ways in Scripture. All of these are addressed to those who are in Christ.

- ❑ *"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live"* (Rom 8:13).
- ❑ *"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:21-23).*
- ❑ *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:1-2).*
- ❑ *"While it is said, To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation" (Heb 3:15).*
- ❑ *"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet 1:10).*
- ❑ *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal 6:9).*

- ❑ *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim 2:12).*
- ❑ *"But Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb 3:6).*
- ❑ *"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Heb 3:14).*
- ❑ *"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).*
- ❑ *"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10).*

What kind of theology would permit "Christians" to ignore these admonitions and still remain in God's goodness? Such notions only come by failing to consider the "severity of God," demonstrated extensively in Israel, His chosen people.

These requirements are not to be shouted from Sinai, or approached as harsh and condemning Law. They declare how we may remain in God's goodness, not provoking Him, but bringing pleasure to Him (Col 1:10; 3:20; 1 Thess 2:4; 1 John 3:22; 1 Cor 7:32).

Otherwise . . .

"... otherwise thou **also** shalt be cut off." Consider the unavoidable result of not remaining in God's goodness! Just like the stubborn Israelites, you will be "cut off." It appears to me that the gravity of this text has not registered on the Christian community. Provocative and displeasing conduct is not at all uncommon among those wearing the name of Christ. This unbecoming conduct is not limited to immoral involvements. That is too obvious. Before a Christian can become immoral, a great deal of neglect and hardness of heart

must take place.

The failure of professed believers to seek the things that are above, add the virtues of grace to their lives, and fight the good fight of faith, is evidence they are about to be cut off! No person can remain in God's goodness who does not "go on to perfection." It simply is not possible to occupy the place where His goodness is experienced if we neglect His salvation, do not keep the rejoicing of the hope, or are not steadfast unto the end. Those who suggest such a thing is possible have simply lied, doing great damage to the people of God. If the spiritual condition of the modern church can be truthfully justified, the first thirty-nine books of our Bible can be ripped out and thrown away. In such a case, they would have no message for us. The irony of the situation is that some forms of stunted theology have actually done this, saying that God has obviated the first thirty-nine books of the Bible. The postulate is too foolish to dignify by further discussion.

ARE THESE WORDS TOO HARSH?

Admittedly, these are hard words. They sound unusually harsh to those accustomed to words of fleshly culture, but spiritual depravity. Should your mind imagine that what I have said is too coarse or severe, consider the following.

- ❑ How serious is it to be "cut off?"
- ❑ How serious is it to be deprived of God's goodness?
- ❑ What is worth being subjected to the severity of God?
- ❑ Why does the Spirit issue such a stern warning if the matter is really inconsequential?

No person of sound spiritual mind will object to stern warnings that come from heaven! They will become an incentive to press relentlessly toward the goal, refusing to be anchored to this world.

GOD IS ABLE

"²³ And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in

again." Here is a most wonderful affirmation concerning Israel. Again, the words are meaningless and pointless if

Israel has been totally cut off, so as never again to be restored. **Just as surely as God is always severe toward those**

who do not believe, just that surely He is good toward those who do believe!

Those who suggest that Israel has been irremediably cut off have affirmed that God has consigned them to reprobacy, from which they cannot recover. Were God capable of dealing with masses of people in this manner, the Gentile world would never have been offered salvation.

The point is that the present condition of Israel is precisely the same as that of we Gentiles prior to coming into Christ. They are dominated by unbelief, and so were we!

THEY ALSO

By saying *“they also,”* the Spirit means that God will honor faith in the Jews just as surely as He did in us. Both Jew and Gentile are received on the same basis – **faith**. Both Jew and Gentile are rejected on the same basis – **unbelief!**

IF THEY DO NOT CONTINUE IN UNBELIEF

The *“unbelief”* in the Israelites relates to their rejection of Jesus Christ. Of all of the benefits that were given to them, the greatest was their *“time of visitation,”* when Jesus *“came unto His own”* (Lk 19:44; John 1:11). As long as they *“continue in unbelief,”* the *“severity of God”* will be toward them.

Yet, in this expression, the Spirit pushes open the door of hope, allowing for Paul’s prayer for Israel, *“that they might be saved”* (10:1). It is important to remember the people as a whole are under consideration, not merely individuals. The Spirit has already established that God has never rendered it impossible for individuals within Israel to be saved, Paul himself being a chief example. Our text is speaking of the nation as a whole. The Spirit suggests it is quite possible for them NOT to *“continue in unbelief.”* Why would any man dare to say this was not possible?

WILL BE GRAFTED IN

As a people, if they do not continue on in unbelief, they will be placed again into the tree that grows from the root of

Abraham. They will again partake of the root and fatness of their own olive tree.

Some will imagine that because the re-grafting of Israel is represented as conditional, that it is not a promise – only a possibility. But this is a total misrepresentation of the case. The Spirit will show this is a promise. What He is revealing here is that sound reason fully supports the Divine intention. The ONLY thing that presently excludes Israel from the blessing is their unbelief. Of course, that is the only thing that excludes any one from it!

The Prophets often spoke of this grafting, using different language that referred to Israel’s restoration to favor. The new covenant He would make *“with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”* would involve a change of nature, fellowship with God, and the remission of sin (Jer 31:31-34) – all aspects of being grafted into the natural olive tree. They would receive a *“new heart and a new spirit,”* the *“stony heart”* would be

The possibility affirmed in our text is given against the backdrop of the promises of God. If this is not the case, the statements are mere philosophy and conjecture, something in which God does not indulge, particularly when speaking of His great salvation.

removed from them, God’s Spirit would be put within them, and they would walk in His ways (Ezek 36:26-27) – all aspects of being grafted into the natural olive tree.

Even Moses promised Israel, *“the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live”* (Deut 30:6) – all aspects of being grafted into the natural olive tree.

The possibility affirmed in our text is given against the backdrop of the promises of God. If this is not the case, the statements are mere philosophy and conjecture, something in which God does not indulge, particularly when speaking of His great salvation.

GOD IS ABLE!

“... for God is able to graft them in again.” The Spirit immediately points us to the power of God, for there is no other way that Israel can be again grafted into their own tree.

Not Theorizing

The Spirit never points us to the ability of God unless what is said can be accomplished. He never theorizes about Divine ability! God is able to make the believer with a weak conscience *“to stand”* (Rom 14:4). He is *“able”* to make grace so abundant to us that we will always have sufficient resources, and be able to *“abound unto every good work”* (2 Cor 9:8). He is *“able to subdue all things unto Himself”* (Phil 3:21). Ponder how He is *“able to keep”* what you have committed unto Him until the last day (2 Tim 1:12), or how the Lord Jesus is *“able to succor them that are tempted”* (Heb 2:18). Think how Jesus is *“able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him”* (Heb 7:25), and how God *“is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24).

Is there anything about those affirmations that suggest they will NOT take place, or that we cannot rely upon them being fulfilled? Indeed not! And, that is the category of Divine affirmations into which the grafting in of Israel is placed! **The ability of God is never introduced for mere speculation, but to induce both faith and hope.**

The grafting in of Israel does require the power of God. It certainly cannot be accomplished by the fervent desires of godly men, else Paul’s own desire would have brought it to pass. This is the kind of power it takes to raise up a valley of

scattered with bleached bones, making them a great army (Ezek 37). It is the kind of power that Jesus employs when He speaks, raising people from death in trespasses and sins (John 5:25-27).

The statement, “*God is able to graft them in again,*” forbids men to imagine that He will not do it! **Nowhere are we urged to trust in a God who can do something, but will not!** God’s ability

does not violate His nature or His promises. It is always employed to accomplish His purposes. This should be evident enough, without need of further discussion.

DIVINE GRAFTING

“²⁴ ***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?***” This is a section of Divine reasoning that reveals the absolute reasonableness of Israel being restored to favor. When believed, it will produce humility among the Gentiles, and hope among the Israelites.

WILD BY NATURE

Unlike the Israelites who were “*cut off,*” or “*cast away,*” the Gentiles were not withered branches lying on the ground—branches coming from a good tree. Rather, we were growing on a rejected tree, one which was “*wild by nature.*” It was an uncultivated tree, not not being tended by the God of heaven. It had neither the Law nor the prophets, and received neither promises nor blessings from the Lord of glory. This tree was an “*corrupt tree,*” and could produce no “*good fruit*” (Lk 6:43). **Unlike Israel, it was not the result of Divine promise.**

Those on this tree are described as “*sinners of the Gentiles*” (Gal 2:15), “*children of wrath*” (Eph 2:3), and “*having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). **How likely is it that such people could be removed from their corrupt tree and grafted into one blessed and cultivated by God?** Those who love to think of possibilities from a human point of view should ponder this! As Gentiles, what person or system could have changed our condition?

Yet, the great God of heaven cut us out of the “*olive tree which is wild by nature,*” and grafted us into “*a cultivated olive tree.*” What is more, this was done “*contrary to nature,*” **wholly unsupported by any**

natural laws, whether of probability or reason. You cannot account for the acceptance of the Gentiles apart from God Himself! He did it independently of any natural process, and in stark contradiction of anything and everything having to do with temporality.

In view of this, the Gentile church should be in a state of constant praise, moving on to perfection, and bringing forth fruit to God! I will go so far as to say that where the truth of this text is perceived, those things will take place. Where the fruit of praise and growth are not found,

read, “*He will be far more eager to graft the Jews back into the tree where they belong,*”^{NLT} and “*how much easier will it be for them, the branches that naturally belong there, to be grafted on to the olive tree which is their own.*”^{NJB}

Speaking as a man, it is more likely for Israel to be restored than for Gentiles to be saved at all. There is a greater likelihood of Israel being saved than of the Gentile world! From the standpoint of possibility, it is easier for God to restore Israel than to open the door of faith to the Gentiles. From the standpoint of

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this truth is not being perceived. I know of no exceptions to this observation. The existence of lethargy and ignorance within the Gentile church is a sin of the greatest magnitude. In my judgment, it is not possible to overstate its seriousness.

NATURAL BRANCHES

“... *how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*” The possibility of the Gentiles being saved confirms the possibility of Israel being saved! If the promises of the Gentiles being saved were fulfilled, “*much more*” the promises of Israel being restored will be fulfilled!

“***How much more!***” Other versions

probability, it is more likely that He will do so.

That is the reasoning of this verse, and it is absolutely impregnable! It demolishes bastions of thought that deny the restoration of the Jews, showing them to be the products of unbelief and spiritual insanity. To say Israel has been cut off without remedy is to deny both the power and promises of God. I cannot begin to imagine how God will regard those who have perpetrated doctrines that exclude, and even deny, that He will recover His people Israel. He has said so much on this matter, that the mouths of such men must be stopped. They reproach God, Jesus, the Prophets and the Apostles.

BLINDNESS IN PART

“²⁵ For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;’²⁷ For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’”

AVOIDING IGNORANCE

Other versions read, *“I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery,”*^{NASB} and, *“I want you to be quite certain, brothers, of this mystery.”*^{NJB}

In the Kingdom of God, ignorance concerning the revealed will of God is never justified. This is particularly true in the matter of His dealings with the people of Israel. No man of God will be content when ignorance dominates the people of God on this matter. Understand that Paul is speaking through the inspiration of God, being constrained by His fellowship with Christ, and motivated by His knowledge of God. This being the case, it is proper to say God does not want us ignorant of the matter being considered, else He would not have moved Paul to write about it.

WISE IN YOUR OWN OPINION

The reason for dispelling any ignorance on this matter of Israel is to deliver men from the vanity of human opinion: *“lest you should be wise in your own opinion,”* or *“wise in your own estimation,”*^{NASB} or *“to save you from congratulating yourselves on your own good sense.”*^{NJB} **While religious men tend to vaunt human wisdom, there is no place for it in the Kingdom of God.** It is something from which we must be delivered at all cost!

Here the Lord seeks to stop the Gentiles from glorying over the Jews. It is also designed to awaken those who were

slumbering in the full light of the Gospel, imagining they were excepted by God while committing the very sins that brought Israel’s present condition upon them.

BLINDNESS IN PART

“... blindness in part has happened to Israel.” Other versions read, *“a partial hardening has happened to Israel,”*^{NASB} *“Israel has experienced a hardening in part,”*^{NIV} *“a hardening has come upon part of Israel,”*^{NRSV} and *“part of Israel had its mind hardened.”*^{NJB} I cannot conceive of a statement being any clearer! All of Israel has not been blinded, or hardened, but only a part of it! All of them

The thought occurs to me that some might not believe God can fix, or appoint, times and epochs. This trait of God, however, has been clearly revealed, so there is no justification for doubting it.

have not been cut off, but only a part of them. The whole nation has not been rejected, but only a part of it.

Let it be clear that God is not speaking here of, what is called, “spiritual Israel,” a term that is not used in any standard version of Scripture. Our text is still dealing with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – Paul’s *“kinsmen according to the flesh.”*

The idea is not that their blindness was partial, but that the number blinded was partial. All of the nation was not blinded. Of course, that indicates they are, in fact, still a nation, else this statement would make no sense. There is still, in God’s eyes, a body of people called Israel. He will now show that He has a purpose for them that will not be frustrated.

THE FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES

The partial blindness that has *“happened to Israel”* is only *“UNTIL”* a Divinely appointed event or time. That point is *“the fullness of the Gentiles,”* a most intriguing term. Other versions read, *“until the full number of the Gentiles has come in,”*^{NIV/NRSV/NJB/NAB} and *“until the complete number of Gentiles comes to Christ.”*^{NLT}

The word *“fullness”* is slightly ambiguous, which seems to me to be intentional. It denotes a filling up, completeness, or sum total. It refers to the accession of the Gentiles into the body of Christ – being *“added to the church,”* so to speak (Acts 2:47). I do not understand this to mean that God has determined a fixed numbers of Gentiles to be added to the church. Rather, He has appointed a juncture in time when Gentiles coming to Him will not be the principle activity. At that point in time, (for *“times”* or *“epochs”* belong to God alone, Acts 1:7) Israel’s blindness will end. **The God who imposed blindness upon them can cause it to cease.** That is the point of this text.

Not A Strange Thought

The thought occurs to me that some might not believe God can fix, or appoint, times and epochs. This trait of God, however, has been clearly revealed, so there is no justification for doubting it. *“It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority”*^{NASB} (Acts 1:7). Speaking of humanity, the Spirit said through Paul, *“He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live”*^{NIV} (Acts 17:26).

- God appointed the precise day when the flood would come (Gen 7:13).
- The birth of Isaac was at an *“appointed time”* (Gen 18:14).
- The exact day of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was Divinely appointed (Ex 12:41).
- Joseph’s time in prison was appointed (Psa 105:17-19).
- The exact duration of the Babylonian

captivity was arbitrarily appointed by God (Jer 29:10).

- God revealed to Daniel things pertaining to “the appointed time of the end” (Dan 8:19; 11:27,29,35).
- Jesus was born at an appointed time – “the fullness of the time” (Gal 4:4).
- The day of Pentecost came at an appointed time – “when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (Acts 2:1).
- The precise time of the day of judgment has been “appointed” (Acts 17:31).

Why should any person be stunned by a point in time called “the times of the Gentiles?” God has revealed sufficient about His Person and purpose that this should not take us by surprise. There is a point in time called “the fulness of the Gentiles,” and it is a line of demarcation that will change the partial blindness of Israel. It is our business not to question it. Among other things, this shows that the Gentiles are not the focus of the salvation of God. While the determination has been made to “preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19), God has revealed that it is in order to provoke Israel to jealousy.

Jesus Speaks

The Lord Jesus Himself declared this limitation from the standpoint of time. “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk 21:24). With His heart heavy, Jesus unveiled somewhat of the future to His inquiring disciples. He spoke of dark and bleak times – times of fierce judgment and punishment. The holy city, where God had placed His name, and where holy associations had been developed, would be devastated. But in the midst of it all, He revealed things would not remain that way. It would only be “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” He gave no indication that there would ever be a point prior to those “times” when it would be inappropriate to speak of that fullness.

ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED

“And so all Israel shall be saved . . .” Other versions read, “and thus all Israel will be saved,”^{NASB} “And so all Israel will get salvation,”^{BBE} and “and this is how all Israel will be saved.”^{NJB} It is never out of order to say these words: “all Israel shall be saved.” These are revealed words. They are words taught by the Holy Spirit. At some point, they should find their way into our mouths, whether we comprehend the fullness of their scope or not.

The Reasoning

The reasoning is this. Israel’s rejection has always been partial, and never total. However, there is a point in

For centuries, there remained a small remnant within them, while the mass of them remained in the grip of unbelief and spiritual slumber. But a point in time will come, as appointed by God, when the mass of them will turn to the Lord and no longer be dominated by spiritual blindness.

time when their salvation will be total, and not partial. This should not be taken too far, viewing it from the standpoint of mathematical counts. The emphasis is that the general condition of Israel will be reversed. For centuries, there remained a small remnant within them, while the mass of them remained in the grip of unbelief and spiritual slumber. But a point in time will come, as appointed by God, when the mass of them will turn to the Lord and no longer be dominated by spiritual blindness. If that seems like an impossible thing, “with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26).

Is the Whole Church in Reference?

While the word “Israel” can also include Gentiles who have been grafted

into their tree, the focus here is the nation itself. However, the sense of the text is in no way altered whether we think of “Israel” as the whole of the redeemed, or of those from the nation itself. If the former, salvation shall not reach its culmination until Jews and Gentiles are brought together into one grand family. If the latter, God’s work with Israel will not be completed until He who poured upon them the spirit of deep sleep causes the light to shine upon them.

While I do allow for both views, it seems to neutralize the text to suddenly introduce the whole of the church at this point. From the beginning of the ninth chapter, the spotlight has been shining on Paul’s “kinsmen according to the flesh.” The Spirit has accounted for their distinction. He has also explained their spiritual obtuseness. He has told us of God’s intention to provoke them to jealousy through the Gentiles. The possibility of them being turned has been declared, as well as its probability. The Spirit has affirmed their blindness is partial, and that a time has been appointed when their condition would change. Further, following this verse He will continue to elaborate upon Israel.

It seems to me to be something less than reasonable that He would here turn our attention to the whole of the body of Christ, using the words “all Israel.” If this refers to both Jews and Gentiles, we must ponder that He is speaking of the future. That would mean He was referring to Gentiles presently blinded like Israel, yet who would eventually be illuminated – something I do not believe those who contend “Israel” refers to the church are willing to affirm.

The Deliverer Will Come

“. . . as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’ David prayed for this to take place. ‘Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad’ (Psa 14:7).

Isaiah’s Prophecy

Isaiah declared this would come to pass. *“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD”* (Isa 59:20). This differs slightly from our text. Isaiah said the Redeemer would come *“to Zion.”* Our text says He will come *“out of Zion.”* Isaiah said the Redeemer would come **to** those who turned from transgression. Our text says He would come to *“turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”*

There is no conflict in the passages, and we do not do well to attempt to cause such a conflict. The Spirit is providing a New Covenant view of an Old Covenant promise. Isaiah spoke of Jesus coming to His people, and being perceived by those who were discontent with transgression. Paul speaks of the Savior working from within them, forgiving their sins, and *“banishing ungodliness”^{NR^{SV}}* from among them. In other words, their sins would be remitted and they would receive a new heart and spirit.

Zion

“Zion” refers to the place of God’s dwelling, particularly as it relates to the Jews. The name was frequently applied to Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:6-9). It appears from the Prophets that it was also the place where the temple was built (Isa 4:5; 8:18; Jer 31:6; Mic 4:7).

The meaning of the prophecy is that the Savior will become apparent to the Israelites from within their own land.

The Glorified Deliverer?

While some are persuaded this

prophecy will be fulfilled by a fleshly, or external, appearance of Jesus to the Jews, I cannot concur with that opinion. That would require the merging of the eternal order with the temporal order, a glorified Christ with a people in the body. I do not believe this is possible. The impossibility of such a thing is precisely why God only allowed Moses to see His *“back.”* God explained, *“Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live”* (Ex 33:20,23). Flesh is simply not adapted to behold the unveiled glory of God.

Jesus is presently glorified (Acts 3:13). For Him to appear among men without destroying them, saved or not, would require a diminishment of His Person, if not a total hiding of His glory. There is not a syllable of Scripture that remotely suggests Jesus will ever do such a thing. Nor, indeed, is there a solitary word that suggests men will ever be able to behold the full glory of Christ while they remain in the body. Nowhere does the Spirit indicate that the temporal and eternal orders will be merged. Rather, when the new heavens and earth appear, the old will be done away (Rev 21:1). Both of these events are associated with the appearance of Jesus (2 Pet 3:10-13).

The Deliverer coming out of Zion, therefore, cannot refer to a bodily return of Christ.

This is God’s Covenant

“For this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.” Immediately, the Spirit shows us that this is in strict keeping with God’s covenant with Israel – a covenant He has not forgotten. This cannot refer to the Gentiles, for God made no covenant to take away

their sins. That covenant belonged exclusively to Israel. *“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them . . .”* (Isa 59:20-21).

Who can forget the marvelous promise of Jeremiah – and it is related to the covenant God would make with the houses of Israel and Judah: *“for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jer 31:34).

This is not the only time this covenant is mentioned. Let us hear what Paul is promising would be fulfilled.

- ❑ *“But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end”* (Isa 45:17).
- ❑ *“In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory”* (Isa 45:25).
- ❑ *“In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve”* (Jer 50:20).
- ❑ *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you”* (Ezek 36:25).

Remember, God speaks with the panorama of His eternal purpose before Him. He does not make vain promises, or declare things that will only be abandoned at some point in time. Israel’s restoration is a matter of covenant! He has said He would take away their sins!

ENEMIES, YET BELOVED

“²⁸ Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” You will notice how relentless the Holy Spirit is in establishing this point. Sometimes I marvel that I could ever have been so

blinded as to contend Israel has been totally rejected. Among other things, such a contention reveals how utterly unreasonable the flesh is. It simply cannot agree with God. To put it in words that the Holy Spirit teaches, *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they*

are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

Now, in a few words, the Spirit will spread the working of God before us. He will show how Israel is viewed from the heavens. He will also affirm what God has determined cannot be revoked. While it is apparent, I feel compelled to remind you that these are words from God. As such,

they are precise, and are not to be questioned.

VIEWED FROM THE GOSPEL

“From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake.”^{NASB}

Once again, the Spirit points out that the Gentiles have received the Gospel because the Israelites rejected it. Presently, they are enemies of the Gospel itself, alienated from God, and opponents of Christ – all because they do not believe. Yet, from an even higher vantage point, this has occurred in order that the Gospel might come to us Gentiles. A Divine purpose is being fulfilled by the enmity of the Israelites. They are enemies for the sake of the Gentiles! How foolish, therefore, for Gentiles to boast against the Jews as though they had been permanently rejected and replaced by the Gentiles. Nothing could be further from the truth!

VIEWED FROM THE ELECTION

“... but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.”^{NASB} The Gospel view is not the only view! Or, to put it another way, **the marvelous salvation of the Gentiles, or the nations, is not the only purpose of God.** God has something larger in mind than reaching the nations, or heathen, and we do well to remember it.

There is the matter of *“the election,”* or *“God’s choice!”* This represents the highest consideration of things. It is the most precise context in which God’s workings are to be considered. Men may steer away from God’s election, or choice, but the Spirit does not. I understand this subject can be corrupted, but we ought not shun to declare it simply because wicked men may corrupt it. This is the way in which the Holy Spirit speaks about this matter.

And what of *“the election,”* or *“God’s choice?”* How is Israel considered within that context? *“They are loved on account of the patriarchs,”*^{NIV} or, *“beloved for the sake of the fathers.”*^{NASB} The *“father’s”* are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom the promises were made.

It should not surprise us that the Israelites are loved because of their progenitors. In your own case, *“God for*

Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). Abraham, the chief of the patriarchs, knew God would spare many

preservation of the sons of Jacob, or Israel, upon this basis. *“For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are*

Those who declare Israel has been utterly forsaken, and are no longer a people, demean the fathers. They make it appear as though God has forgotten what He promised them. Or, worse yet, that He has abrogated His promises to them.

for the sake of a few (Gen 18:29,31,32). Even though Solomon greatly displeased the God, He did not rend the kingdom from Solomon *“for David thy father’s sake”* (1 Kgs 11:12). This, then, is a Divine manner, and ought to be embraced with great joy.

Those who declare Israel has been utterly forsaken, and are no longer a people, demean the fathers. They make it appear as though God has forgotten what He promised them. Or, worse yet, that He has abrogated His promises to them.

GOD’S GIFTS AND CALLING

“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”^{NKJV} Here is a word that has puzzled theologians. Such men ought to believe Divine utterances rather than making vain attempts to blend them with the theologies they have invented.

Other versions read, *“for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable,”*^{NIV} *“For the gifts and the calling of God are not repented of,”*^{ASV} *“Because God’s selection and His mercies may not be changed,”*^{BBE} *“For God’s gifts and His call can never be withdrawn,”*^{NLT} and *“There is no change of mind on God’s part about the gifts He has made or of His choice.”*^{NJB} From a linguistic point of view, then, there really is no question at all about what the Spirit has said.

Like it or not, it is true that God does not change. That is precisely why His gifts and calling cannot be changed or revoked. In fact, God Himself accounts for the

not consumed” (Mal 3:6). Even the mouth of Balaam, who prophesied for wages, spoke this truth. *“God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?”* (Num 23:19).

“Gifts “ and “Calling”

“Gifts and calling” refer to Divine favors that are not based upon merit or worthiness. That, of course, is why they are irrevocable – because they were not given because of the worthiness of those receiving them.

It is important to consider that the Spirit is not speaking of every gift provided by God. For example, He said of giving Israel a king (Saul), *“I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath”* (Hos 13:11). Here He is speaking of *“gifts and calling”* as they relate more specifically to His eternal purpose as wrought out through Abraham. The Lord promised Abraham, *“And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God”* (Gen 17:7-8). That is *“the gifts and calling”* of reference, and they *“cannot be revoked.”*

The point is that the choice of, and promises to, the Israelites as a whole

cannot be revoked. They were not made because of their attainment, and they cannot be revoked because of the

deficiencies of some of them. All of this allows for the existence of a sanctifying remnant, and the cutting off of those who

did not believe. This should not confuse us, for the aim of the text is to convince us of the future restoration of Israel.

DISOBEDIENCE AND MERCY

“³⁰ For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.” The Spirit will now pull back the curtain that obscures God’s eternal purpose, revealing Divine deliberation. These are high and lofty vistas, and will challenge stilted views of the Lord and His workings. But we should not shun to take them into our minds and hearts. Far too much time is being spent by the religious masses in the lowlands of human reasoning and explanation. It has not produced a good group of Kingdom thinkers.

GENTILE DISOBEDIENCE

“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience.”^{NIV} This is a most appropriate description of our former state. The Spirit vividly describes our condition. *“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another”* (Tit 3:3).

In our text, the Spirit takes the entirety of our former lives and refers to it as *“disobedient to God.”* Older translations read, *“have not believed God.”*^{KJV/WEBSTERS/DOUAY} There is no conflict in the expressions, for unbelief is the epitome, summation, and quintessence of disobedience. All disobedience, or sin, springs from unbelief. Thus Jesus said of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, *“And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin . . . of sin, because they believe not on me”* (John 16:8-9). How sorely we needed mercy.

And, praise God, we Gentiles did receive mercy! Right here, it is good to

remember how gracious God has been to us. We Gentiles had not received a Law from God, and had no prophets. We were abysmally ignorant of God, even though we were living in His universe. Some have concluded this to mean God could not condemn us because we did not know. But that is a very distorted view. God did not save us out of pity, but by His mercy. As it is written, this was done that *“the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy”* (Rom 15:9). After accounting for our former state – one of *“disobedience”* – the Spirit continued, *“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Tit 3:5). A constant stream of praise and

now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you.”^{NIV} As a rule, professing believers are so distant from God that this utterance sounds like insanity. **A people can gauge their proximity to God by how reasonable the Word of God sounds.**

Like it or not, the Spirit gives us a reason for Israel’s disobedience. It is a high reason, but it is intended to be comprehended. That is why it is proclaimed. When we were disobedient, God had mercy upon us because of Israel’s disobedience. Now, they have become disobedient to the Gospel in order that they may receive mercy through the mercy shown to us Gentiles.

The meaning is that the promises

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thanksgiving is in order from the Gentiles, for great mercy has been shown to them!

Why have we Gentiles received mercy? The Spirit calls us to consider the Israelites. *“Yet have now obtained mercy through their (Israel’s) disobedience.”* It is apparent from this passage that this is a foregone conclusion, and is not open for discussion. From this perspective, we Gentiles owe our salvation to the disobedience of the Israelites. God turned **to** us only when He turned **from** them!

ISRAEL’S DISOBEDIENCE

“So they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may

made to Israel would be accomplished through Divine mercy – in full recognition of their defiled state. **They would not be saved because they were His people, but because God had mercy!** If this were not the case, it would have appeared as though they deserved salvation because they were distinguished as God’s people.

The argument presented is simply this. If we Gentiles have been saved by the mercy of God, even though we were disobedient, why will not God do the same for the chosen people, to whom the promises of salvation were given? What form of reasoning would seek to deprive Israel of what we ourselves have received? A lofty consideration, indeed!

THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY

“³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.” From beginning to end, “*Salvation is of the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9). In this verse we have yet another affirmation of this fact. Again, it is a high consideration. This is not something men would say – not even some devout religious men. It is, however, what the Lord of glory has said, and it is completely out of order to reject it.

COMMITTED TO DISOBEDIENCE

“*For God has committed them all to disobedience . . .*” Other versions read, “*For God hath concluded them all in unbelief,*”^{KJV} “*For God has shut up all in disobedience,*”^{NASB} “*For God has bound all men over to disobedience,*”^{NIV} “*For God has imprisoned all in disobedience,*”^{NRSV} “*For God has consigned all men to disobedience,*”^{RSV} “*For God delivered all to disobedience.*”^{NAB}

First, note this is something God has done, not man! It is the result of Divine activity, and it has been done with a beneficent purpose in mind. Because God has determined to unveil the magnitude and power of His grace throughout the ages to come (Eph 2:7), He has purposed to save men through His mercy. That salvation will not be realized through a system, a Law, or a series of routines. He will, therefore, enclose men in disobedience, so they will be unable to extricate themselves. He will confine them to that state, so that only His mercy will be able to disengage them.

Now, this confinement to disobedience will not be accomplished without means. He will not, as it were, cause men to be disobedient, for that would bring no glory to His Person.

Rather, He will shut them up to disobedience, imprisoning them in it.

This has been done in two ways: one for the Israelites, and one for the Gentiles. Both ways confirm that the entirety of humanity has been corrupted in Adam. Both declare that man cannot save himself, regardless of the tools or advantages given to him.

In summary, the Israelites were “shut up” to disobedience by the Law. The Jews were given a holy, spiritual, and good Law. It defined sin, told what was to be avoided, and what was to be done. Sufficient promises and curses were given to provide the proper incentive to fulfill that Law. However, the “*strength of sin*” proved to be that very Law (1 Cor 15:56). It demanded more of them than they were able to give, offered no mercy, and provided no strength. They were thus “*bound over*” to disobedience.

The Gentiles were “*shut up*” to disobedience by ignorance (Eph 4:18). God withheld Divine illumination from them. He gave them no Prophets, and left them to themselves. They were in His world which yielded an unwavering and consistent testimony of His “*eternal power and Godhead.*” Yet, they stumbled on in their ignorance, being disobedient to the testimony of nature and their conscience as well. They did not have sufficient moral or spiritual resources to extricate themselves from their dilemma. Thus, God had also “*imprisoned them*” in disobedience.

MERCY ON ALL

God had gracious intentions in this arrangement. It was that “*He might have mercy on all.*” Eventually, through the

Gospel of Christ, the “*record that God gave of His Son*” (1 John 5:10), men are brought to realize their impotency, and “*call upon the name of the Lord.*” The Lord is then able to show mercy to Jew and Gentiles alike, lifting them from the morass of sin, and placing them on the foundation of His Son. There is no different Gospel for the Israelites, as some affirm. There is only One salvation, and one Gospel that declares it. There are no other Saviors, and hence can be no other real Gospels.

The idea is not that God will surely have mercy on every Jew and every Gentile. Rather, it is that both Jew and Gentile will be saved through His mercy. The Jew will be so saved even though he did not keep the Law. The Gentile will be so saved even though he refused to honor the testimony of nature and his own conscience.

Both Law and nature have this in common: they prove mankind is spiritually impotent. They confirm that the malignancy of sin cannot be avoided outside of Jesus Christ.

Those who minimize the mercy of God push salvation away, judging themselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). Those who see their need of mercy are sure to receive it, for they have learned the truth God seeks to teach them.

This passage has shown us that the Jews have not been excluded from the salvation of God that was promised to them. They will, however, receive it in such a manner as will destroy all fleshly boasting and pride of life. In this, the Gospel will be primary.

AN EXPRESSION OF PRAISE

“³³ 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!³⁴ For who has known the mind

of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?³⁵ Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to

whom be glory forever. Amen.”

Here is a befitting doxology to the teaching the Spirit has placed before us. He has traced all things back to God, and

now He moves the Apostle to break forth in insightful praise. Keep in mind, what has been said about the Israelites, Paul's *"kinsmen according to the flesh,"* has prompted this outbreak of praise.

THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! God's dealings with and purposes for the Jews are the outworking of His wisdom and knowledge. Both are deep and rich. They are deep in the sense of being profound, far beyond the narrow boundaries of human wisdom and knowledge. That is why it is such a serious thing to take what has been made known in this section of Romans and pour it into a theological mold. This is like new wine that will shatter the brittle wineskins of human theology.

The Wisdom of God

If the salvation of Israel seems beyond the border of possibility, think of the wisdom of God. Consider how deep and profound it is, and what richness comes from it. This is the wisdom by which the heavens were made (Psa 136:5). God founded the earth by His wisdom, and maintains all of its precise movements and activities (Prov 3:19). How can it be that the fulfillment of His promises to Israel could prove too challenging for His great wisdom? What is there about their conversion that demands more wisdom than He possesses?

The Knowledge of God

If you stumble at the idea of Israel having ungodliness turned away from them, ponder the *"knowledge of God."* What is it that God did not know when He called Abraham, chose the nation of Israel, and made marvelous promises to them? Were His promises shouted off the top of His head, so to speak, without regard to His knowledge, which sees all things? Indeed not! God always speaks with what He knows and purposes in mind. No Word of God is every uttered, and no purpose ever conceived, independently of His wisdom and knowledge.

Rather than stumbling at the declarations of this text, stand up and praise God for the depth and riches of His wisdom and knowledge! That is the only acceptable response to these teachings!

THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD

"How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! Other versions read, *"How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"*^{NASB} and *"How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"*^{NIV} **What God determines is not subject to human analysis.** His judgments and ways extend far beyond the small perimeter of man's powers of

"knows the thoughts of man" without having to be told them (Psa 94:11). But where is the man who knows the thoughts of God without having to be told what they are? Let such a person step forth! Who can decipher what God is thinking by looking to nature? What person is there who can figure out the purposes and intents of God by surveying the heavens or analyzing rocks and mountains? The question put before us is a Divine way of saying such a person will not and cannot be found! Nothing – absolutely nothing – of God's mind can be known unless He tells it. What is more, He has told us His mind concerning Israel.

Who is a counselor to Him?

"Who has become His counselor?" Or, *"who has taken part in His purposes?"*^{BBE} At what point is God ever lacking in understanding, so that another must give Him advice? In recent years, some have affirmed that God really does not know everything. David spoke of such people. They say, *"How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?"* (Psa 73:11). These people imagine their ways are hidden from God, but they are not. The Divine assessment of such people is this: *"Behold, these are the ungodly"* (Psa 73:12).

Knowing these things, how foolish to doubt, or even disbelieve, the revelations of the Lord! Those who balk at what He declares Himself to have determined are taking the role of counselors, seeking to instruct the Lord. He will not hear them!

Knowing these things, how foolish to doubt, or even disbelieve, the revelations of the Lord! Those who balk at what He declares Himself to have determined are taking the role of counselors, seeking to instruct the Lord. He will not hear them!

Who puts God in obligation?

"Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" Or, *"Who has given anything to him, so that His presents come only as a debt returned?"*^{NJB} What person has moved God into debt? Who is the person who has **initiated** dialog with God, moving Him to reply. What person has brought a gift to God without being moved by Him to do so? Where is such a person? The answer ought to be obvious. No such person exists, or can exist!

The Lord asked Job, *"Who has given*

perception. If God does not tell us something about His ways and judgments, they will never be known. They cannot be discovered through academic disciplines, or be discerned simply by frequent exposure to their effects.

WHO IS THERE?

*"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?"*³⁵ *Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?* These are principles relating to God – similar to laws that can be neither fully comprehended nor contradicted.

Who has known the mind of the Lord? That is, *"who has knowledge of the mind of the Lord?"*^{BBE}, or *"who can know what the Lord is thinking?"*^{NLT} God

to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine”^{NASB} (Job 41:11). The idea is that no person has ever given God an advantage. No one has ever increased His wealth, or added to His Person.

Is it not reasonable, therefore, that God can do what He has declared in this section of Scripture? Can He not conclude all in unbelief so that He can have mercy upon all? Can He not pour out the spirit of sleep upon Israel that He might open the eyes of the Gentiles? Can He not provoke the Jews to jealousy through the mercy He has given to the Gentiles? Was He not true and righteous in the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Were the promises of restoration given through the Prophets a departure from the character of God?

OF, THROUGH, AND TO

“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” Another version reads, “Everything there is comes from him and is caused by him and exists for him. To him be glory for ever! Amen.”^{NJB} What a sweeping statement and fitting conclusion to this remarkable passage! It puts the glory where it belongs! It is as though the Spirit led the Apostle to conclude abruptly, not engaging in endless explanations. Enough has been revealed to saturate the capacities of man. Any further explanations would extend further than we can reach. What the Spirit now says is applied to “all things,” or “everything.” Nothing is excluded, particularly in regard to the salvation of Jews and Gentiles.

“Of Him.” That is, “because of Him,”^{YLT} or “from Him.”^{NASB} God is the Originator, the Beginning, and the First of everything! In the matter of the

reconciliation of the world to God, “all things are of God” (2 Cor 5:18). This is another way of saying His will is the origin of all things, and nothing can exist independently of it. If that is too difficult to receive, think of it this way. When God is finished with the present heavens and earth, He will simply dispense with them (2 Pet 3:7). There will be no conflict with those who are otherwise minded. When He is finished with the devil and his angels, he will have them cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). There will be no war, no resistance, or any opposition. He will simply do it. Even they existed only by the will of God, for when He desires for them to be taken away, they will instantly be removed.

This truth especially applies to the salvation of men, whether Jew or Gentile. **However a person may choose to think of salvation, the cause of it can only be traced back to God Himself.** That is another reason why “All Israel will be saved.”

“Through Him.” Things not only originate with God, they are carried out by Him. He has not set laws in motion to fulfill His good pleasure independently of His involvement. Everything was made “through Him” (John 1:3). The world was “made through Him” (John 1:10). The saints are being saved from wrath “through Him” (Rom 5:9). God carries out His own will, causing it to come to pass. That is another reason why “All Israel will be saved.”

“To Him.” That is, everything accrues to His glory, and will ultimately serve His purpose. If God “works all things together for the good” of those who love Him, and are “the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28), you may be sure all things will work together for His glory

and good! A similar thing is said of the Lord Jesus. “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him”^{NKJV} (Col 1:16). All crowns will be cast before the throne of God, for everything is “to Him” and “for Him” (Rev 4:10). That is another reason why “All Israel will be saved.”

“Glory forever.” In Christ, we are part of an “eternal purpose.” This is no passing fancy, no fading work, no sun that sets. When all is said and done in the grand redemptive enterprise, all of the glory will go to God. All of the credit and honor will be His through Christ Jesus. Over and over we are reminded of this reality.

- ☐ “To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen” (Rom 16:27).
- ☐ “To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Gal 1:5).
- ☐ “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:21).
- ☐ “Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Phil 4:20).
- ☐ “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:17).
- ☐ “To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 5:11).
- ☐ “To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen” (Jude 25).

That, child of God, is another reason why “All Israel will be saved.”

CONCLUSION

We have walked in the high places, and I trust you had “hinds feet” so you could safely navigate in them. These can be your high places, where you feel at home, and the wonderful things of God make sense to you and comfort you. I

know we have dealt with highly controversial matters. But it is man that has made them controversial, not God. These things have been revealed to clarify the things of God, not to mystify them. I urge you to join the growing number of

believers who have a heart’s desire and prayer for Israel, that they might be saved. There is a sense in which you owe your salvation to them. See to it that you do not despise them, do not forget them, and seek for their blessing.

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A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

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COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

GROWTH OF THE JEWISH POPULATION IN ISRAEL		MILITARY BALANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST					
		A report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (1997)					
		COUNTRY	Regular Troops	Reserves	Total	Tanks	Fighter Aircraft
1880	24,000	EGYPT	440,000	254,000	694,000	3,390	505
1914	90,000	JORDAN	133,650	0	133,650	1,051	101
1931	174,000	IRAQ	382,000	650,000	1,032,000	2,700	330
1939	450,000	IRAN	513,000	250,000	763,000	1,440	318
1948	650,000	SYRIA	421,000	500,000	921,000	4,600	520
1950	1,200,000	SAUDI ARABIA	105,000	57,000	162,000	1,055	322
1958	1,800,000	TOTAL	1,994,650	1,711,000	3,705,650	10,096	2,096
1992	4,250,000						
2000	5,150,000	ISRAEL	175,000	430,000	605,000	4,300	780

WHERE DO THE JEWS LIVE?											
It is estimated that there were 14,6000,000 Jew in the world at the end of 2000, dispersed as follows											
COUNTRY	COUNT	COUNTRY	COUNT	COUNTRY	COUNT	COUNTRY	COUNT	COUNTRY	COUNT	COUNTRY	COUNT
United States	5,900,000	Moldova	30,000	India	6,000	Norway	1,500	Netherlands	400	Venezuela	35,000
Israel	5,150,000	Azerbaijan	30,000	Lithuania	6,000	Guatemala	1,200	Virgin Islands	400	Uruguay	33,000
France	600,000	Holland	30,000	Slovakia	6,000	Finland	1,200	Jamaica	300	Panama	7,000
Russia	500,000	Iran	25,000	Columbia	6,000	Paraguay	1,200	Singapore	300	Czech Rep	6,000
Canada	370,000	Turkey	25,000	Greece	5,000	Turkmenistan	1,200	Zaire	300	Tunisia	2,000
Ukraine	350,000	Switzerland	20,000	New Zealand	5,000	Ireland	1,200	Dominican Re	250	Tajikistan	2,000
Argentina	260,000	Sweden	18,000	Kyrgyzstan	4,000	Cuba	1,000	Philippines	250	Ethiopia	400
Brazil	120,000	Georgia	17,000	Bulgaria	3,000	Ecuador	1,000	Syria	250	Kenya	400
South Africa	110,000	Chile	15,000	Estonia	3,000	Monaco	1,000	Thailand	250	LESS THAN 100 IN	
Australia	110,000	Kazakstan	15,000	Peru	3,000	Portugal	1,000	Armenia	200	Guyana	Haiti
Hungary	80,000	Romania	14,000	Puerto Rico	3,000	Zimbabwe	1,000	Bahamas	200	Honduras	Indonesia
Germany	60,000	Latvia	14,000	Costa Rica	2,500	Yemen	800	Surinam	200	Malta	Martinique
Belarus	50,000	Spain	14,000	Hong Kong	2,500	Bosnia	600	South Korea	150	Mozambique	Myanmar
Mexico	40,000	Austria	10,000	Yugoslavia	2,500	Luxembourg	600	Iraq	120	Nambia	Nicaragua
Belgium	40,000	Poland	8,000	Croatia	2,000	Gibraltar	600	El Salvador	120	New Caledoniatt	
Italy	35,000	Denmark	8,000	Japan	2,000	Bolivia	400	Tahiti	120	Sloveniatt	Swaziland
"And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive." (Jeremiah 29:14)										Taiwant	Trinidad
										Tobango	Zambia

The Reasoning Behind Israel's Ultimate Salvation is Presented with Great Power...by Given O. Blakely

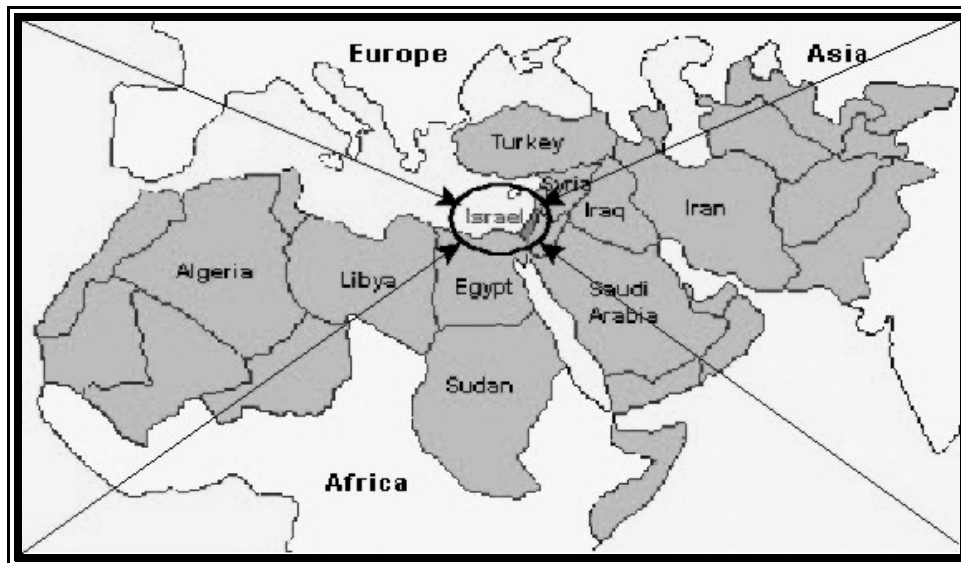
SURROUNDED BY HOSTILE MOSLEM NATIONS

COUNTRY	POP	COUNTRY	POP	COUNTRY	POP	COUNTRY	POP	COUNTRY	POP	COUNTRY	POP
Afganistan	26,000,000	Algeria	31,200,000	Azerbaijan	8,000,000	Bahrain	700,000	Egypt	67,300,000	Guinea	8,000,000
Iran	71,000,000	Iraq	24,000,000	Jordan	4,600,000	Kuwait	2,000,000	Kyrgyzstan	4,600,000	Lebanon	3,600,000
Libya	6,000,000	Mali	10,500,000	Mauritania	10,500,000	Morocco	30,000,000	Niger	10,000,000	Oman	2,500,000
Pakistan	139,000,000	Qatar	800,000	Saudi Arabia	21,600,000	Senegal	9,00,000	Somolia	7,200,000	Sudan	34,500,000
Syria	17,300,000	Tajikistan	6,200,000	Tunisia	9,600,000	Turkey	66,000,000	Turkmenistan	2,400,000	Utd Arab	2,400,000
Uzbekistan	24,200,000	Yemen	17,000,000	Palestine Aut	4,000,000	Isr Arabs	1,000,000	684,700,000, 95% Moslem, to Israel's 5,150,000			

Other Moslem nations: Indonesia @ 217,000,000, 87% – India @ 1,000,000,000, 14% – Bangladesh @ 130,000,000, 83% – Nigeria @ 115,000,000, 50% Ethiopia @ 60,000,000, 35% – Malaysia @ 22,000,000, 53% – Kazakstan @ 17,000,000, 47% – Ghana @ 20,000,000, 30% Philippines @ 80,000,000, 5%

Total world Moslem population, 1,200,000,000, consistently against Jews, who number 5,150,000 in Israel

WHERE EUROPE, ASIA, AND AFRICA MEET





The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 37



LIVING SACRIFICES TO GOD

12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

INTRODUCTION

The chief benefit gained by the truth is salvation – *“salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). We receive *“the love of the truth”* that we might *“be saved”* (2 Thess 2:10). Salvation begins with extrication from sin, and will be brought to its culmination when Jesus returns and we are gathered to Him.

No aspect of spiritual life is divorced from salvation. To put it another way, there is no such thing as moving on to higher things after we have been saved. If something is separate from salvation, we must be delivered from it. God has nothing good to give us that is not integral to His great salvation. This consideration is fundamental to sound thought.

In salvation we are delivered from both the guilt and power of sin. We are freed from the penalty of sin and released from the wicked one who promotes it. We

are moved from the “power of darkness” into the marvelous “kingdom” of God’s “dear Son” (Col 1:13).

All of this relates to *“the righteousness of God”* that is announced in the Gospel, and *“imputed”* to us by faith (Rom 1:17; 4:22-24). As you know, this righteousness has been the matter of exposition from the first chapter of Romans through the eleventh chapter. A brief recap of the relevance of this righteousness will serve to set the background for our text.

- ❑ **1:16-17, A righteousness from God.** The Gospel reveals a righteousness that comes from God through faith.
- ❑ **1:18-3:18, A righteousness that is needed.** Both Jew and Gentile stand in unquestionable and consistent need of this righteousness.

- ❑ **3:19-20, The need confirmed.** The Law was given to confirm man was totally unrighteous.
- ❑ **3:21, Without the Law.** The righteousness of God is now revealed without the law, although it was witnessed to by both the Law and the Prophets.
- ❑ **3:22-23, By faith, for all.** This righteousness is realized by faith for all who believe.
- ❑ **3:24-25, Justification.** Justification, which is the Divine act whereby men are made righteousness, comes freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
- ❑ **3:26-26, Just and Justifier.** Because of Christ’s propitiatory death, God is both just and the Justifier of the one believing in Jesus. That is, He Himself is righteous in pronouncing men righteous.
- ❑ **3:27-31, Apart from the Law.**

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE (12:1a)
- II. THE PRESENTATION OF YOUR BODIES (12:1b)
- III. PRESENTED TO GOD (12:1c)
- IV. IT IS ONLY REASONABLE (12:1d)
- V. THE CONFORMITY THAT IS CONDEMNED (12:2a)
- VI. T H E R E Q U I R E D TRANSFORMATION (12:2b)
- VII. PROVING THE WILL OF GOD (12:2c)

Justification comes independently of the Law.

- **4:1-5, The example of Abraham.** Abraham is the initial and premier example of God justifying men by faith.
- **4:6-8, Confirmed by David.** David confirms that God imputes righteousness to men independently of their works.
- **4:9-25, Imputed righteousness.** The imputation of righteousness to Abraham shows that righteousness comes before acceptable works, and not because of them.
- **5:1-11, Spiritual life.** The realization of this righteousness from God introduces spiritual life, which is sustained by our relationship to Him through faith.
- **5:12-21, Only two men.** Both sin and righteousness are ultimately traced to one man: sin to Adam, and righteousness to Christ.
- **6:1-5, Baptism into Christ.** In our baptism, we are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.
- **6:6-23, Presentation required.** This unity with Christ demands the presentation of our whole persons to God.
- **7:1-25, Inner warfare.** Justification, or being made righteous by God, has created a fierce inner conflict in the believer. The flesh wars against the spirit, and the old man against the new man.
- **8:1-4, Justification confirmed.** The inner warfare confirms that we have been justified by faith, and are not condemned.

- **8:5-8, The liability of flesh.** Our condition demands that we refuse to listen to the flesh, or old man, for his dominance over us will condemn us.
- **8:9-27, The ministry of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is given to assist us in subordinating the flesh. He does this by leading us in the fight, and by interceding for us when the infirmity of ignorance plagues us.
- **8:28-39, The overall purpose.** The entirety of salvation is of God, who purposed it, implements it, and will bring it to a glorious consummation.
- **9:1-11:36, The example of Israel.** Israel is given as an example of the total working of the Lord. In them, salvation is seen to be of the Lord, yet involve the participation of those who are saved. In them we see that *“of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.”*

AN UNDENIABLE EMPHASIS

In chapters one through eleven there has been an undeniable emphasis upon Deity. **God** is seen as the one who has purposed salvation in all of its aspects. **Jesus** is declared as the One through whom that purpose is being implemented. His atoning death satisfactorily and justly addressed all of the liabilities inducted by sin. His present ministry ensures that our faith is not in vain, and that the purpose of God will be brought to its intended conclusion. **The Holy Spirit** works with the believers, directing, interceding, and empowering them to live in harmony with God’s purpose and for His glory.

The work of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are central in all of these considerations. In view of these things, to point the hearts and minds of men toward the capabilities and contributions of men becomes an utter absurdity. The absolute impotence of men is what necessitated the total involvement

of Deity in their salvation. This was satisfactorily demonstrated in four thousand years of human history. Two thousand five hundred years without Divine direction confirmed the Gentiles were incapable of correcting their condition. One thousand five hundred years with Divine direction corroborated the Jews were equally incapable of correcting their condition.

It is, therefore, a sin of the greatest magnitude to rely upon human wisdom or power to initiate or maintain spiritual life.

THE MATTER OF FREEDOM

There is also the matter of the freedom which is experienced when we *“know the truth.”* As our blessed Lord said, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). That freedom involves freedom from sin, delusion, and Satan’s power. It involves ultimate deliverance from corruption, the grave, and the wrath of God. To put it another way, we do not need the world’s input to sustain spiritual life. In fact, it cannot be sustained by that means. We have been liberated from the dominance of the temporal order because it consistently tends to death, not life.

Whatever was impotent to bring you to Christ, is equally powerless to keep you in Christ. The order from which we have been liberated can in no way promote life in the *“heavenly places,”* to which we have been raised and in which we have been placed (Eph 1:3; 2:6).

SALVATION’S PRACTICALITY

Although this is not its greatest advantage, **sound doctrine is practical.** It interfaces with every aspect of life. There is no facet of life that is not impacted by the salvation of God. It empowers and moves the saints to

Whatever was impotent to bring you to Christ, is equally powerless to keep you in Christ. The order from which we have been liberated can in no way promote life in the “heavenly places,” to which we have been raised and in which we have been placed

separate themselves from defilements. It also constrains them to appropriate all things pertaining to life and godliness, given to them by the Lord. This great salvation impacts upon private, domestic, and social life – to say nothing of spiritual relationships.

The Devil's Strategy

One of the most effective strategies employed by the “old serpent” involves the undue exaltation of academics. In this approach philosophy, speculation, and formalism spring forth and demand dominancy. All of them are offered as adequate guides for “practical” matters, which appear to be the stress of the contemporary church. Faith is thus relegated to the background, and profession is equated with possession.

Under this arrangement, reconciliation to God is taken for granted, and the wisdom of men is employed for the correction or improvement of personal, domestic, and social aspects of life. The preacher or teacher who deals with the practical aspect of life in Christ is thus thought to be the most profitable. Conversely, the preacher or teacher who deals with justification, sanctification, reconciliation, etc., is considered to be impractical – a sort of theological oddity that is beyond the capacity of the masses. There is hardly a place in the Western world where this imagination is not prominent.

Dreadful Complacency

Few professed Christians challenge this approach to life because of its remarkable popularity. Problem solvers and counselors have been added to church staffs, and even exalted to places of prominence, often supplanting those who preach and teach the Word of God. Religious organizations are filled with frolicking youth and spiritually indifferent

adults, nearly all of whom are abysmally ignorant of both the Person and ways of God. Such people have been brought into the “church” by entertainment programs, shallow teaching, athletics, and self-help programs.

The number of religious organizations that are contributing to this situation is staggering. They include music, publishing, career development, motivational direction, education, and a staggering array of entertainment specialists. The number of *Christian* businesses operating for profit boggles the mind.

All of this may appear quite innocent, and those who raise questions about it are often viewed as negative, and even cultist, in their objections. After all, it appears as though these thrusters have been highly successful. Who would dare to question them. However, hardly any of them could exist in a strong godly environment. They would soon die out were the people of God conversant with Divine manners, intent on laying hold of eternal life, and determined to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. **A sterile spiritual environment has enabled such groups to surface and appear successful.**

THE TEXT BEFORE US

Our text, verses one and two of the twelfth chapter, are **not** the thrust of this book. Nor, indeed, is it the loftiest doctrine. It is **not** the heart of the Gospel, or where we are to place our emphasis. Here is where the human spirit intersects with the purpose of God. It is where faith is revealed and eternal life made known. **If we have ingested what the Spirit has said in the first eleven chapters, it will be evident to our hearts that this text is the only proper**

conclusion, and the only appropriate response.

This is an exhortation that is based upon the solid foundation that has been put in place. That foundation is, from one view, the Person of Christ (1 Cor 3:11; Acts 4:12). It consists of His accomplishments and present ministry. From another point of view, that foundation is the fact that we have been “made righteous” by the God of heaven, because we have believed the record He has given of His Son.

As individuals who are in Christ, we ourselves are the “workmanship” of God (Eph 2:10). The exhortation that follows is a summons to bring our lives into conformity with that work. The Spirit has informed us that we have been brought into Christ, and that our “members,” or human capacities, are to be presented to God (Chapter 6). He has already dealt with the fierce inward struggle that has been induced by faith (Chapter 7). He has further shown us that men cannot be made acceptable to God by their own independent efforts. They must hear and embrace the Gospel (Chapter 10).

Now the Spirit will admonish us to formally and determinedly present our bodies to God. **This is not an option, but is necessitated by the very nature of salvation.** The text will further confirm to our hearts that unless this is done, the will of the Lord cannot be known.

God will not bring us to glory while we allow our bodies to dictate the manner in which we live. Such a stance contradicts both the nature and power of salvation. It denies the effectiveness of salvation, and reveals that sin yet dominates the individual. This is a most sobering passage.

I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE . . .

“^{12:1a} ***I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God . . .***”

THEREFORE

Here is an impassioned plea – an exhortation – that is spiritually logical. It

is in the nature of a conclusion to the doctrines that have been affirmed, namely those related to the appropriation of the righteousness of God. This means that the matters unveiled in the previous chapters are, in fact, designed to bring us to this

conclusion. Sound exhortations must be based upon the truth of God, not upon human reasoning or raw emotion. When that truth is seen, the heart will be powerfully motivated to yield a response that will bring glory to God.

In this regard, the New Covenant differs significantly from the Old Covenant, which was founded upon Law. Under the Old Covenant, the word “*beseech*” most often is used of men speaking to God. Frequently men pled with God to spare them, preserve them, hear their prayers, and a few times for God to reveal Himself (Ex 33:18; Num 12:13; 14:17,19; 1 Sam 23:11; 2 Sam 24:10; 2 Kgs 19:19; 20:3; 1 Chron 21:8; 2 Chron 6:40; Neh 1:5,8,11; Psa 80:14; 116:4; 118:25; 119:108; Isa 38:3; 64:9; Dan 9:16; Amos 7:2,5; Jonah 1:14; 4:3; Mal 1:9).

Under the First Covenant, “*beseech*” is rarely used to urge people to walk acceptably with God. Through Moses and Joshua God did urge His people to “*choose life*” (Deut 30:19), and whom they would serve (Josh 24:15). Once God spoke of the eunuchs who did “*choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant*” (Isa 56:4). You will search in vain for repeated admonitions of choice under the Law. They simply are not there.

statement that immediately precedes the exhortation. “*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*” (11:36). Faith can take hold of that word, being convinced of both its truth and relevance. When that is done, an immediate and favorable response will take place. Fulfilling the word is thus seen as possible as well as necessary.

Circumstances Unveiled

Also consider the things the Spirit has unveiled to us. Some of Israel were blinded and cast away because of their unbelief (11:20). What is more, we Gentiles will also be cut off if we are guilty of unbelief (11:22)). When men cease to theorize about those statements, choosing to embrace them, they will enter into the activity toward which we are now exhorted.

God’s Predestination

Contemplate the many preceding references to God’s foreknowledge, predestination, and election.

- ❑ “*Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth*” (9:18).
- ❑ “*Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*” (9:19).
- ❑ “*Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?*” (9:21).
- ❑ “*Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha*” (9:29).
- ❑ “*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (11:6).
- ❑ “*God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day*” (11:8).
- ❑ “*As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes*” (11:28).
- ❑ “*For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*” (11:29).
- ❑ “*For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all*” (11:32).
- ❑ “*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*” (11:36).

These are unquestionably powerful statements. Some have taken them and formed a rigid theology that has neither heart nor sense. They imagine such words mean those in Christ cannot possible lose their status. Others are convinced human responsibility is totally unreasonable – that God will do what He has determined without any regard whatsoever for those with whom He deals.

This is certainly not the place to deal with such absurdities. It is enough to note the nature of the exhortation before us, and to acknowledge it is given against the backdrop of the above declarations. **Among other things, that means Divine foreknowledge, predestination, election, and purpose do not exclude the fact that there are things for which we are responsible.** It means that it is not only in order, but it imperative, that we plead with the people of God to engage in such

You will search in vain for repeated admonitions of choice under the Law. They simply are not there.

Things are quite different in redemption. A change has been wrought in those who are in Christ Jesus, so that they may now be exhorted to give themselves more fully to the Lord. Fourteen times the Epistles use the words “*I beseech thee,*” or, “*I beseech you*” (Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 2 Cor 2:8; 10:2; Gal 4:12; Heb 13:19,22; 1 Pet 2:11; Phile 10; 2 John 5).

In Christ, it is reasonable to urge believers to become active in the will of the Lord. They have received the capacity to do so, and their reconciliation to God demands that they do so.

God and All Things

In this particular text, ponder the

- ❑ “*Whom He did foreknow*” (8:29a).
- ❑ “*He also did predestinate*” (8:29b).
- ❑ “*He did predestinate*” (8:30).
- ❑ “*God’s elect*” (8:33).
- ❑ “*The purpose of God according to election*” (9:11).
- ❑ “*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy*” (9:13).
- ❑ “*I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*” (9:15).
- ❑ “*It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy*” (9:16).
- ❑ “*For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth*” (9:17).

holy activities as God requires.

All of this is in the word *“therefore.”* This means that failing to do what is said is totally unreasonable – it is a form of spiritual insanity. The lack of response to this exhortation reveals a corrupt heart, the presence of unbelief, and imminent danger.

BRETHREN

This is not an exhortation for sinners, but for saints. It is a word to those who have been justified, and have peace with God (5:1). It is addressed to those who are dead to sin and alive unto God (6:11). This is a word to those who are not condemned and are in Christ Jesus (8:1). Those who imagine that those in Christ Jesus can be ignored are in serious error. When no words of comfort are addressed to the saints, and no words of exhortations given to them, they are harmed, not helped.

Many a local congregation rarely hears a word of admonition to the believers. Sermons are prepared for those who are alienated, and appeals are made to those who are at a distance from the Lord. From whence does such a propensity come? Certainly not from Scripture. The words before us are addressed to people whose faith had been spoken of *“throughout the whole world”* (1:5). They form a reasonable transition from the doctrinal to the practical. They are a spiritually natural conclusion to what has been said.

BESEECHING

“I beseech you . . .” Other versions read, *“I urge you,”* ^{NASB/NIV} *“I appeal to you,”* ^{NRSV} *“I call upon you,”* ^{YLT} and *“I plead with you,”* ^{NLT}

Beseeching assumes reconciliation to God, and a sensitivity to His will. It does **not** mean that what is urged will take place without further impetus. The perceptive minister knows God works in His people both to will and do of His own good pleasure (Phil 2:13). He is confident that God will *“perform”* a good work in them *“until the day of Christ”* (Phil 1:6).

He also realizes the Lord does this, among other things, through admonitions, exhortations, and beseechments.

There is a sense of urgency and immediacy in beseeching. This is not something to be put off, or thought upon for a lengthy period while hesitating to do what is said. *Beseeching, urging, or pleading,* are presented in the contexts of both danger and blessing. The danger is that the hearers will not engage in the action that is urged, thus putting themselves in jeopardy. The blessing is that the intended activity will produce spiritual results that can be realized in no other way.

BY THE MERCIES OF GOD

“. . . by the mercies of God.”

Other versions read, *“in view of God’s mercy,”* ^{NIV} and *“by the compassions of God.”* ^{DARBY} Some versions refer to the

of the Lord” (Psa 89:1), *“great mercies”* (Isa 54:7), and *“sure mercies”* (Isa 55:3). Our great God is also referred to as *“the Father of mercies”* (2 Cor 1:3).

“The mercies of God” refer to the **plentitude** of God’s mercy as well as its **frequent expression**. His tender consideration and pity are neither sparse nor infrequent.

What Does This Mean?

What is the meaning of this expression? Is the exhortation given because of the mercies of God, as though Paul said, *“Because of God’s mercies, I am pleading with you to . . .”*? Has the mercy of God prompted the Apostle to plead so strongly with the people? I do not doubt that the awareness of God’s rich mercies constrained the Apostle to so write. However, that is not the meaning of this passage.

Many a local congregation rarely hears a word of admonition to the believers. Sermons are prepared for those who are alienated, and appeals are made to those who are at a distance from the Lord.

The meaning is that the exhortation is to be carried out through *“the mercies of God.”* That is, what believers are asked to do, [i.e., present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God], is to be accomplished *“in view of God’s mercy.”* ^{NIV} It is to be accomplished *“through the compassions of God.”* ^{YLT} One version says to make the offering while *“remembering the mercies of God.”* ^{NJB} Still, the expression seems a bit vague to some.

“mercies of God” in the singular: i.e., *“in view of God’s mercy.”* ^{NIV} The plural form is, however, the correct one: [οἰκτιρημάτων] *“mercies.”* This word emphasizes the abundance of God’s mercy, and is used several times in Scripture. Jacob confessed to God, *“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant”* (Gen 32:10). David declared *“for His mercies are great”* (2 Sam 24:14). Solomon prayed, *“remember the mercies of David thy servant”* (2 Chron 6:42). Nehemiah spoke of God’s *“manifold mercies”* (Neh 9:19), and the Lord’s *“abundant mercies”* (Neh 9:27). There is also reference to the Lord’s *“tender mercies”* (Psa 25:6), *“the mercies*

The *“mercies of God”* have been declared in the previous chapters. They have to do with His gracious intentions and activities toward us. They reveal His desire to bless us.

- The saints are beloved of God (1:7a).
- God called us to be saints (1:7b).
- Grace and peace come to us from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:8).
- God has provided the Gospel as the power to accomplish salvation (1:16).
- God’s righteousness has been revealed (1:17).
- God revealed Himself in His creation (1:19).
- God is rich in goodness, forbearance,

and longsuffering, which lead men to repentance (2:4).

- ❑ There is no respect of persons with God (2:11).
- ❑ In spite of man's total unworthiness, the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from Law (3:21).
- ❑ The righteousness of God is given to all who believe (3:22).
- ❑ Justification is free to those who have sinned and come short of the glory of God (3:24).
- ❑ God set Christ forth, evidently and effectually, as a propitiation for sin (3:25).
- ❑ God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (3:29).
- ❑ God imputes righteousness without works (4:6).
- ❑ God quickens the dead (4:17).
- ❑ The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5).
- ❑ God commended His love to us in Christ's death for us while we were yet sinners (5:8).
- ❑ God reconciled us to Himself through Christ's death (5:10).
- ❑ The gift and grace of God has abounded to many (5:15).
- ❑ In Christ God condemned sin in the flesh (8:3).
- ❑ God provides for our needs through the interceding Holy Spirit (8:26-27).
- ❑ God works everything together for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose (8:28).
- ❑ God has determined that all in Christ will be glorified (8:29-30).
- ❑ God has provided a constant Intercessor for us in heaven (8:34).
- ❑ God shows mercy (9:16).
- ❑ God makes vessels for honor (9:20).
- ❑ God endured with much longsuffering vessels suited for destruction (9:22).
- ❑ God has not cast away Israel (11:1-2).
- ❑ God concluded all in unbelief and disobedience that He might have mercy on all (11:32).

All of these are evidences of Divine mercy. From His longsuffering toward Israel to the conferment of righteousness upon Gentiles who did not seek it, He has made Himself known. He has extended Himself to redeem humanity, sending His

Son to do what Adam's offspring could not do. He empowers and sustains His people through the Holy Spirit. He provides for their protection and sustenance in the interceding Savior.

As we consider these great proclamations, we derive strength and encouragement from them. God has shown us He consistently honors faith. Those who are willing to trust Him will be helped by Him. That includes Abraham in a spiritually primitive day, and Paul responding to His call while in a nation that had rejected Christ Jesus.

There is no word in Scripture that would lead us to believe the Living God is not kindly disposed

There is no word in Scripture that would lead us to believe the Living God is not kindly disposed toward those who earnestly seek to do His will.

toward those who earnestly seek to do His will. Anywhere and everywhere men have chosen to seek the Lord and obey His will, God has undergirded their efforts. **Wherever faith is found, Divine favor will be experienced.** Further, hearts convinced that God is merciful will be disposed to trust Him. Those who consider that God "is good," and that "His mercy endures forever" (1 Chron 16:34; Psa 136:1), will be encouraged and empowered to do His will. While they live within the influence of that dominant consideration, Divine exhortations make perfect sense. To fulfill them becomes the preference of those who have no doubt of the reality and accessibility of "the mercies of God."

Wrath and Beginnings

The wrath of God and the imminence of the day of judgment can also have a powerful constraining force upon the heart. However, they are not intended to be a permanent constraining factor. **The soul cannot advance toward glory by**

being surrounded by "fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb 10:27). That often induces a beginning, but brings precious few, if any, souls into glory.

A Prevailing Consideration

At some point, the soul must be brought under the prevailing contemplation of the "mercies of God." It is only through them that we will be able to fulfill exhortations, such as the one we will now consider. If God is not good to us, we will not be able to make this presentation. If He does not pity our frail frame, we will not be able to make a "living sacrifice." If His favor is not upon us, and His grace does not sustain us, we will prove too weak for this challenge. **It is "by the mercies of God" that this will be accomplished, or it will not be accomplished at all!**

A FINAL OBSERVATION

I cannot leave this section without making one additional observation. Where the people of God are not constantly reminded of the "mercies of God," it is not likely that "living sacrifices" will be made. **Constant diets of Law, external disciplines, entertainment, and social and domestic issues, and the like, will not produce a God-glorifying harvest.** When the church becomes the focus, sacrifices are diminished. When the family becomes the center of attention, sacrifices to God are no longer the issue. **When Law is the thrust, what is given to God is rarely seen in a personal way.**

The people of God must wisely and consistently be given a regular diet of grace and mercy. The Gospel of Christ, which is the supreme carrier of these Divine bestowments, must be at the heart of preaching and teaching. Nothing should be allowed to move us at such a distance from the Gospel we are no longer inclined to declare it. No matter how deplorable the condition into which professed believers have fallen, even if they have left their first love like Ephesus, room must be made to declare, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is

in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). Even if a church is lukewarm and repulsive like Laodicea, after the rebukes have been issued, the incentives of grace

must be held before them. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his

throne” (Rev 2:21). Do not underestimate the power of “the mercies of God!” They will accomplish in people what no moral code, however lofty, can do.

THE PRESENTATION OF YOUR BODIES

“^{1b} . . . that you present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . ” It is interesting to speculate what practical application of the truths expounded in this book would be made by our religious peers. What kind of admonition would come to their mind when hearing of a Sovereign God who loves Jacob and hates Esau? What sort of reactions would be expected when hearing of God raising up Pharaoh, cutting some branches off of the tree of Israel, and grafting in some branches from a wild olive tree? How would men be expected to respond to the promise that God would turn away ungodliness from Jacob, or that He was able to graft them in again? What are believers expected to do when they hear about righteousness being imputed, or faith being the basis of acceptance, or God working all things together for their good?

I do not doubt that some imagine no response is necessary at all. Some simply thrust all of these things from their mind, perceiving them as too deep for them, and thus proceed with their own private agenda. The mind-set of the average Christian is far removed from making any association between the profound declarations of the Lord and the response of His people to them. **However, God does require a response from us, and will exhort us to see to it that it is accomplished.**

If we do not approach this text with that in mind, it will appear to be a mere option – something we may or may not do. It may even be perceived as something that separates advanced believers from juvenile ones, or leaders from followers. Although quite common, such conclusions are all delusions, bringing death to the soul and separating the individual from the Lord.

No one can afford to embrace them.

The fact that this exhortation is to be fulfilled “by the mercies of God” accentuates its indispensability. The appeal to God’s mercy does not suggest He will be tolerant of a refusal to do what He says. It does not indicate what is admonished is really not necessary, or that He is willing to remain and work with the deluded soul who ignores this requirement. Rather, “the mercies of God” confirm that He will work with us in this area. And will do so because of its absolute necessity. **Neither the Law, its ceremonies, nor grace, remotely suggest that God will ever receive what is not presented to Him.** His “mercies” provoke and enable that presentation to be made. This confirms how necessary the presentation is, else

religion becomes intensely personal. When the exhortation “that you present” is read or heard, the sensitive soul immediately translates it into “that I present.”

The “you,” a supplied pronoun, is the “brethren” in the first clause. It is “beloved of God” and “the called of Jesus Christ” 1:7. It is those who are “justified” in 5:1, and those who “are not under the law, but under grace” of 6:14.

Responsibility Does Not End at the Beginning of Spiritual Life

As elementary as it may seem, our responsibility toward the Lord does not end when at the beginning of newness of life. Although it is not fashionable speak in this manner, God is calling His people to higher ground. Our text is an excellent example of this. In view of many religious emphases, it is interesting to consider what the text does **not** say. Remember, this is the beginning of a new section of the book, and it is the very first exhortation constrained by the lofty truths we have contemplated.

Depending on the church environment to which you have been subjected, you may very well have heard one or more of the following priorities. “Begin witnessing to everyone,” “Get the baptism of the Holy Ghost,” “Assume the proper role in your home,” “Get involved in politics,” or some similar emphasis. Whatever place may be assigned to these things, it is not one of priority.

“PRESENT YOUR BODIES”

“ . . . present your bodies . . . ” Other versions read “offer your bodies,”^{NIV} and “give your bodies.”^{BBE/NLT} The Amplified Bible reads, “make a full decisive

The mind-set of the average Christian is far removed from making any association between the profound declarations of the Lord and the response of His people to them.

God would not underwrite it with His own nature and gifts.

“THAT YOU” – IT IS PERSONAL!

A legalistic religion tends to emphasize what is required in others. It moves those who are unaware that a log is protruding from their own eye, to seek to remove a small sliver from the eye of a brother. However, when the grace of God consciously surrounds the heart, one’s

dedication of your bodies – presenting all of your members and faculties.”

The word “*present*,” or “*offer*,” means to place beside or near, to place something at the disposal of another. It involves the invitation for another to examine as well as accept what is offered.

Presentation, or offering does not assume acceptance by God, but earnestly seeks it. When something is offered to God, an appeal is made for it to be received. This reception is not assumed. In such presentations God looks upon the heart and the thrust of the person’s life, as well as the conformity of the offering to His requirements. There have been things offered to God that were not accepted.

- Cain’s offering was not accepted (Gen 4:5).
- King Saul’s sacrifices were not acceptable (1 Sam 15:22).
- The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to God (Prov 21:27).
- Israel’s sacrifices became an abomination to God (Isa 1:11-14; Jer 6:20; 14:12; Amos 5:22).

Under the Law, for example, there were certain requirements for offering of an animal to God.

- It had to be at least eight days old (Lev 22:27).
- It has to be offered with salt (Lev 2:13).
- A male without blemish (Lev 22:19).

In the days of Malachi God upbraided the priests for offering unacceptable things to Him. This included “*polluted bread*” and “*blind*,” “*lame*,” and “*sick*” animals (Mal 1:7). Thus the quality of the sacrifice as well as the one making the sacrifice was judged.

This reasoning is to be applied to the offering now before us, for they were written for our learning. Those ancient sacrifices, and the rules pertaining to them, revealed the mind of the Lord concerning better sacrifices. He meticulously fulfilled them in the offering of His only begotten Son. We do well not to ignore them in the presentation of our bodies to God.

What the Spirit Says of Our Bodies

A novice might imagine that God would ask us to offer our hearts, or our minds, or our wills to Him. Instead, He asks us to present our bodies! Here is the weakest part of our beings, the most culpable member of our makeup. He does not ask us to ignore our bodies, but to present them to God! He knows they are, from one perspective, “*vile bodies*” (Phil 3:21). That, of course, is precisely why they are to be “*presented*” or “*offered*” to Him. It is in prospect of this presentation that the following is said of our bodies.

- The Spirit quickens our “*mortal bodies*” (Rom 8:11).
- Our bodies are “*the members of Christ*” (1 Cor 6:15).
- In baptism, they have been “*washed with pure waters*,” thus dedicating them to the Lord (Heb 10:22).
- The body is “*for the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:13).
- The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).
- God is to be glorified in our body (1

of presenting our bodies to God.

In delineating this aspect of spiritual life, the Spirit continued, “*yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. . . even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness*” (6:13,19). Our “*instruments*” are all of our capacities of expression. These were formerly devoted to sin. This is described as the “*throat*,” “*tongues*,” “*lips*,” “*mouth*,” and “*feet*,” being given over to iniquity. **Whatever is employed to think, speak, and do iniquity is now to be presented to God!**

The Body Belongs to God, Yet Is Yours

Strictly speaking, the body belongs to God, both by creation and redemption. He “*formed*” the body “*in the womb*” (Isa 44:2), and purchased it in redemption (1 Cor 6:19-20). Yet, the body is also “*your body*.”

It is “*your body*” by stewardship, not

We cannot, therefore, be indifferent about our bodies. If they are “the members of Christ” and are “for the Lord,” who will dare to treat them with indifference. They are to be “presented” or “offered” to our God.

Cor 6:20).

We cannot, therefore, be indifferent about our bodies. If they are “*the members of Christ*” and are “*for the Lord*,” who will dare to treat them with indifference. They are to be “*presented*” or “*offered*” to our God.

What Is Our “Body”?

Our body involves more than the skeleton and flesh in which we live. Earlier, the Spirit spoke of our bodies in a broader sense, setting the stage for this commission. The sixth chapter declared we were not to allow sin to “*reign*” in our mortal bodies (6:12). That is the opposite

by ownership. The advocates of abortion are completely wrong in affirming the woman has rights over her own body. It is **not** her body, but belongs to the One who formed and purchased it. No person is except from the declaration, “*and you are not your own, for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*.”

Those who take this text and apply it to dietary practices and other aspects of health are in serious error. They detract us from the truth. Such people would never advocate fasting from both food and water for forty days – but Moses did (Ex 34:28; Deut 9:9). Jesus *also* “*fasted forty days and*

forty nights" (Matt 4:2). In both cases, the body was offered to the Lord.

Some also criticize believers who are tireless in their labors for the Lord, saying they are "burning the candle at both ends." Whatever element of wisdom may be found in that saying, it is not worthy of extensive pursuit. Epaphroditus, for example, wearied himself "for the work of Christ," nearly to the point of death. It is said of him, "for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life" (Phil 2:30). Paul referred to this type of attitude as being glad to "spend and be spent" for the souls of men (2 Cor 12:15).

While these examples are extraordinary, they reveal the extent to which the body can be presented to the Lord. Such noble souls are acutely aware that their bodies have been purchased by the Lord and belong to Him. There certainly is room for decided improvement in this area among believers.

Present Them!

Armed with an awareness of, and sensitivity to, these realities, our bodies are to be "presented" to God. There is an element of formality in this presentation, although that does not exhaust the meaning. This is not merely an attitude, although that is involved. The presentation is something like the response of Isaiah when He "heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Having been purged of his iniquity, he immediately responded, "Here am I; send me" (Isa 6:8). He presented his body for Divine employment! When Jesus revealed Himself to Saul of Tarsus, "putting" him "into the ministry" (1 Tim 1:12), his response was immediate. He set about to conform his life to the calling he had received. Of this Paul said, "immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Gal 1:16-17). He presented his body to God that Christ might "be magnified" in his body (Phil 1:20). God received it, and he was blessed.

The Western world has been plagued with a spirit of casualness – an attitude of simplicity and informality that requires little focus or rigor of mind and body. It is reflected in how people regard the work of the Lord, the fellowship of the saints, and personal holiness. It is seen in the way they speak, how they dress, and where their prime energies are spent. **There needs to be a revival of presenting the body to God.**

It is quite true that we are to give our

Most of the sacrifices under the Law were killed. The offering of animal life generally involved its termination. But this is not the type of sacrifice we are to make. Our bodies are to be "a living sacrifice."

hearts and minds to the Lord, our thoughts and our wills. It is also true that we are to "present" our bodies to God. After all, they are only a stewardship to be occupied for a short season. They are also the weakest and most vulnerable part of our constitution, all the more requiring that they be presented to God. **Our bodies are to be placed at God's disposal, ready for His employment.** It appears to me that this requires a certain aggressiveness that will separate the individual from the religious masses.

This presentation involves a persuasion of the reality of God and the supremacy of His will and work. **This is not a matter of mere discipline, but of insightful commitment.** The Spirit is not calling us to a routine, but to personal involvement with God. Philip had to marshal the energies of his body to join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29). I suggest that may have appeared far too challenging to a casual disciple (if there is such a thing). After all, the chariot was apparently moving, and it was in a desert.

The man in it was also a stranger to Philip. Philip was not told what to say, or how to join himself to the chariot. However, having presented his body to God, he "ran" to the person in the chariot, "heard" this government official reading, and asked him if he understood what he was reading (Acts 8:30). His body had been presented to the Lord.

But the presentation of our bodies to God is not always attended by such favorable circumstances. The bodies of Peter and John were "beaten" because of their presentation. However, they did not complain about the difficulty and pain related with that beating. They had presented their bodies to God. Thus, "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42). They knew why they suffered. They also knew the ultimate outcome of that suffering – reigning with Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

"A LIVING SACRIFICE"

" . . . present your bodies a living sacrifice." Every major version, and all more liberal translations and paraphrases, read the same way.

Most of the sacrifices under the Law were killed. The offering of animal life generally involved its termination. But this is not the type of sacrifice we are to make. Our bodies are to be "a living sacrifice." That is, the body is to be used in service to God, and as a means of bringing honor to Christ.

The heathen offered the bodies of their children to idols by causing them to "pass through the fire," thereby being consumed. God forbade such sacrifices to be made by His people (Lev 16:21). When their sacrifices required the taking of life, it was animal life, not life that was in the image of God. Even then, they were to be totally consumed, with nothing left for any other purpose (Heb 13:11). However,

our text does not say we are to offer our bodies a “burnt offering,” but as a “living sacrifice.” The consumption of our bodies is not the objective, but their profitable employment for the glory of God.

Foreshadowed in the Levitical Priesthood

This type of sacrifice – “a living sacrifice” – was foreshadowed in the Levitical priesthood. They were not given an inheritance in the promised land. They were devoted exclusively to the Lord – living sacrifices. As it is written, “*But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance*” (Num 18:23). The tithes of the people were given to the Levites for this reason, because they had “no inheritance” among the people (Num 18:24). Even then, they were required to give a “tenth part of the tithe” back to God, for they spent their lives in exclusive service to Him (Num 18:26). Like Aaron the high priest, they were to “have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them.” God Himself was their inheritance: “*I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel*” (Num 18:20). How strongly the words come through, “*Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance*” (Deut 18:2). They were living sacrifices, totally devoted to the Lord.

Depicted in the Live Goat and the Living Bird

The sacrifices made under the Law prefigured the thoroughness of Christ’s sacrifice. They introduced us to salvation by both the death and life of Jesus. After all, “*if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be*

saved by His life” (Rom 5:10). This twofold aspect of salvation is seen in two different sacrifices.

The goats. The day of atonement included the presentation of two goats.

One was for the Lord, to be offered on the altar of burnt offerings. The other was a scapegoat, eventually to be released in an uninhabited place, removed from the flock and mundane use. In the case of the Lord’s goat, the life was forfeited. In the case of the scapegoat that life was preserved, but separated from all other uses (Lev 16:5-10).

Thus we have a picture of the nature of spiritual life. First, the “old man” is to be put off, mortified, and not allowed to express himself. Second, remaining life is to be removed from commitment to other uses – a “living sacrifice.”

The birds. In the cleansing of leprosy, whether in man or a house, two clean and living birds were to be taken. One of the birds was killed over running water. The living bird was then dipped in the blood of the other bird, and the blood sprinkled on the leprous person or house. The living bird was then to be loosed “into an open field,” where it could fly free (Lev 14:1-7; 35-53).

Once again, the Spirit has provided a depiction of a “living sacrifice.” This is nothing less than the offering of life itself, with all of its expressions, to the Living God. How appropriate for the mighty God to be given a “living sacrifice.”

A Continual Sacrifice

A “living sacrifice” is a continual one. It is not occasional, like those offered under the Law. **Spiritual life is consistent, not cyclical.** When the soul is erratic, and commitment to God uneven and sporadic, the individual is not helped

A “living sacrifice” cannot be offered unconsciously, or without an acute awareness that it is being done. It cannot be offered accidentally or inadvertently. It is not the result of happenstance. To offer a “willing sacrifice,” you must be both willing and deliberate.

and God is not glorified. Faith cannot operate on an emergency basis alone, and spiritual life cannot be lived occasionally. If the offering of our body to God is not continual, it will not be received. Such a sacrifice is inconsistent with both the nature and the purpose of God.

A Conscious Sacrifice

A “living sacrifice” cannot be offered unconsciously, or without an acute awareness that it is being done. It cannot be offered accidentally or inadvertently. It is not the result of happenstance. To offer a “willing sacrifice,” you must be both willing and deliberate.

A genuine commitment of the body is made to the Lord in a full and dominating persuasion “*that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day*” ^{NKJV} (2 Tim 1:12). Such a commitment exerts a great power upon us.

PRESENTED TO GOD

“^{1c} . . . holy, acceptable to God . . .” Other versions read, “holy sacrifice, acceptable to God,” ^{NASB} “holy and pleasing to

God,” ^{NIV} “sanctified, acceptable to God,” ^{YLT} “holy sacrifice-- the kind He will accept,” ^{NLT} and “dedicated and acceptable to God,” ^{NJB}

As I have already indicated, all sacrifices are not acceptable to God. Both the nature of the sacrifice and the heart of

the one making it can disqualify the offering. For example, under the Law, the “hire of a harlot and the price of a dog,” could not be offered to the Lord (Deut 23:18). Also, the blood of the sacrifice could not offered “with leaven,” or yeast (Ex 34:15). The sacrifice had to be proper, else it would not be accepted. Sacrifices offered under the Law were separated from common use. They were devoted to God, and were not to have the least spot upon them, or deficiency within them. They could not be blemished or diseased, sick or lame. These requirements foreshadowed the type of sacrifice Jesus made, and the type we are to make.

The verse before us emphasizes the nature of the sacrifice – the presentation or offering of our bodies to God. It deals with a responsibility we have – a responsibility that involves the preparation of the sacrifice. Under the Law, extensive preparations were made before the sacrifice was offered. A drink offering was prepared to be presented with the burnt offering (Num 15:5). Wood was to be laid in an orderly manner on the altar (Lev 1:7-8). The priest who made the offering has to wash himself (Ex 30:20). The burnt offering was to be flayed, the head and the fat laid upon the altar, and the inwards and legs washed with water and laid upon the altar (Lev 1:6-9).

All of this prefigured the manner in which Jesus prepared Himself to be offered, and the manner in which we are to prepare to present our bodies to God. Sacrifices are not to be offered on the spur of the moment or with no thought and preparation. This is one of the manners of the Kingdom.

“HOLY”

Holiness is a quality “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). “Holy” means blameless and dedicated. It involves being pure and consecrated.

Bodies presented as a living sacrifice to God must be “holy,” dedicated to Him and separated from the world. Those who labor for the Lord must themselves be

clean. The words of the prophet Isaiah are appropriate here. “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD” (Isa 52:11).

This very point is powerfully made in Second Timothy. “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2:21). The particular purging involved in this text is separation from false teachers (vs 16-18). The principle, however, applies to all forms of iniquity, particularly sins of immorality and bodily defilement. Human theology may allow for defiled individuals to engage in the work of the Lord, but God will not.

Our bodies are to be holy as well as our souls! How poignantly the Spirit states the case: “therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20). They are “the members of Christ” and are not to be given to uncleanness (1 Cor 6:13). A body that is “holy” is an “instrument of

Sacrifices are not to be offered on the spur of the moment or with no thought and preparation. This is one of the manners of the Kingdom.

righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13). They are bodies devoted to “holiness” (Rom 6:19).

Those who have given their bodies to sin are not to be received by the church. As it is written, “if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat” (1 Cor 5:11). These are matters that disqualify a person from Divine acceptance. “Know ye not that the

unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10).

There is a noticeable lack of holiness in the professed church, and it is a most serious condition. The irony of the situation is that “praise and worship” is being emphasized by some of the very people who have little apparent regard for holiness. Above the noise and clamor of the religious world the Spirit shouts out, “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16).

The truth of the matter is that a holy God cannot walk with an unholy people. A holy work cannot be fulfilled in an unholy body! When, therefore, we are called to present our bodies to God, it is understood that they are to be holy, devoted to Him, and uncontaminated with the manners and fashion of this world. Lips that speak guile and profanity ought not to seek to speak truth. Eyes filled with covetousness will not be able to see the things of God. Hands that fashion sinful things cannot minister in Jesus’ name. Feet that run in the way of transgressors cannot carry the Gospel of peace.

Let no one entertain the notion that God will receive the presentation of an unholy body. Nor, indeed, are we to imagine that God will receive us if we do not present our bodies to Him. Although these thoughts are revolutionary in some circles, they are very fundamental.

“ACCEPTABLE TO GOD”

“ . . . acceptable to God.” Other versions read “pleasing to God,”^{NIV} and “the kind He will accept.”^{NLT} The idea of “acceptable” is WELL pleasing, or especially satisfying. This is not an alternative “pleasing,” as though God will

accept sacrifices from men with which He is not pleased.

You may remember there were some Israelites with whom God was “not well pleased.” It is said of them, “they were overthrown in the wilderness” (1 Cor 10:5). On the other hand, those who present their bodies a living sacrifice to God will enjoy Divine acceptance.

The idea here is that what God receives He uses in Divine employments. Bodies that are appropriately presented to Him are “sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work”^{NKJV} (2 Tim 2:21). Again it is written,

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). Those so characterized can enter into the “good works” for which they have been created in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10).

By its very nature, the presentation of our bodies to the Lord is not a casual matter. They cannot be given to sin and presented to God. Our “members,” which include our bodies, cannot be yielded simultaneously “as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,” and as “instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13). Only one master can be

served at a time, whether we speak of the mind, the soul, or the body.

Make it your aim to present your body to God, and for that presentation to be acceptable to Him. If sin necessitated the sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son, you may be sure no place will be made for it to continue in the believer.

Personal and resolute war must be declared against all forms of sin in the individual before our bodies are presented to the Lord. We must, at all costs, keweep under our body. Once that is done, the presentation will be accepted, and overcoming grace will be experienced.

IT IS ONLY REASONABLE

“^{1d} . . . which is your reasonable service.” It is my understanding that a comparison is here made with the Jewish ceremonies of the Law, and idolatrous practices of the Gentiles. This statement is also to be compared with our former manner of life, when we were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1-3), “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Tit 3:3). The Spirit will now show us that what is required of us is not an impossible yoke or burden. Nor, indeed, is it to be considered unreasonable, or something impossible to comprehend or do.

IT IS ONLY REASONABLE

Some versions use the word “spiritual” in the place of “reasonable” (NASB/NIV/NRSV). The difference between the two words is not as large as at first appears. Although it is a bit technical, a brief explanation is in order.

The word “reasonable” comes from the Greek word λογικήν [logikan], from which the word “logic” is derived. Lexically, the word means “rational,” or “spiritual,” or “belonging to the real nature of something.”

The meaning here is that what is

asked of us conforms to the real nature of life in Christ Jesus. Or, to view it from the opposite side, to fail to present our bodies to God in the manner prescribed is contradictory of spiritual life. In other words, it is spiritually insane to fail to present our bodies to God. There is a form of reasoning that belongs to the Holy Spirit. It is called “the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27). In the sense of our text, anything that conforms to that mind set, “the mind of the spirit,” is “reasonable.” Anything that does not is

mind of the Lord. This we read, “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:6). This may be thought to be too shallow, giving license to imagine a person can think in harmony with the Spirit, but live in contradiction of the truth. If we are tempted to think in this manner, it is well to remember the words of Solomon, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7). Jesus confirmed this was the case by declaring “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man” (Matt 15:19). Again He said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” and “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things” (Matt 11:34-35). Again it is written, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God” (Rom 7:25).

Thus, the word “reasonable” emphasizes how this presentation makes perfect sense to faith. The word “spiritual” underscores how it perfectly blends with the nature of life in Christ Jesus. There is nothing about the presentation of a holy body to God that conflicts with sound thought. There is also nothing about it that interferes with spiritual life, or retards our response to God.

The Spirit will now show us that what is required of us is not an impossible yoke or burden. Nor, indeed, is it to be considered unreasonable, or something impossible to comprehend or do.

unreasonable.

From this perspective, true spirituality does not consist of certain forms of human conduct. Rather, it is a condition where the individual is brought into accord with the

Sacrifices Under the Law

The sacrifices imposed under the Law were not intended to conform to either human nature or the nature of spiritual life. They were appointed shadows and prefigurements, designed to point us to ultimate sacrifice that would precisely conform to Divine purpose.

Sacrifices made under the Law *“could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience”* (Heb 9:9), and were never intended to do so. Neither, indeed, could those sacrifices *“make the comers thereunto perfect”* or purge the conscience of the *“worshippers”* (Heb 10:1-2). Also, *“it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”* (Heb 10:4). From this point of view, they were **not** reasonable.

I am careful to say that from the standpoint of obedience, those sacrifices were reasonable. It would have been the epitome of ignorance to refuse to offer them unto God. Yet, there was a certain abrasiveness about them, for they did not accomplish what God desired. Rather, they were preparatory in both substance and nature.

It was *“necessary”* that required cleansing be accomplished *“with better sacrifices than these”* (Heb 9:23). To confirm what I have just described is the case, it is written, *“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure”* (Heb 10:6; Psa 40:6). They were unreasonable as final sacrifices, and as a means of procuring a cleansed conscience. They were reasonable from the standpoint of foreshadowing the greater and effective sacrifice of Christ.

Sacrifices under the Law were, in a sense, impersonal. Although animals were taken from one’s own flock, yet the personal life of the sacrificer was not offered to God. From the standpoint of routine, a technically qualified sacrifice could be offered while the heart remained aloof from God. Further, following the sacrifice, made in strict accord with revealed procedures, the conscience

remained contaminated by sin, forbidding the individual to enter into the presence of the Almighty.

In this regard, the sacrifices, and other aspects of the ceremonial Law, were *“weak and beggarly elements”* (Gal 4:9). They were in order until Jesus came, but are totally unacceptable in this day of salvation.

Gentile Sacrifices

All of the sacrifices made by the Gentiles are covered in the phrase, *“worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator”* (Rom 1:25). That is surely the epitome of unreasonableness! Elsewhere, the Spirit is even more precise on this matter: *“the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God”* (1 Cor 10:20; Deu 32:17).

completely unreasonable.

“SERVICE”

“Which is your reasonable service.” Other versions say, *“which is your spiritual service of worship,”*^{NASB} *“this is your spiritual act of worship,”*^{NIV} *“which is your spiritual worship,”*^{NRSV} *“which is the worship it is right for you to give Him,”*^{BBE} and *“that is the kind of worship for you, as sensible people.”*^{NJB}

The word *“service”* comes from the Greek word *λατρείαν*, which means *“religious service based in worship of God, divine service, worship.”* Thayer’s Greek lexicon defines the word as *“the service and worship of God according to the requirements of the Levitical law,”* and *“to perform sacred services, to offer gifts, to worship God in the observance of the rites instituted for His worship.”*

But, what of the sacrifice that is urged in our text? How reasonable is it to present your body to God, holy and completely? To those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit, this presentation makes perfect sense.

Israel’s “Service”

This precise word, in both English and Greek, was used in the ninth chapter, and will serve to more precisely define its use here. In the itemization of the advantages given to the Jews, the Spirit mentioned *“the service of God”* (9:4). Other versions read, *“the temple service,”*^{NASB} and *“the temple worship.”*^{NIV}

The *“First Covenant,”* we are told, *“had also ordinances of divine service (λατρείας), and a worldly sanctuary”* (Heb 9:1). This service was not accomplished by the people in general, but by the priests, who *“went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service (λατρείας) of God”* (Heb 9:6).

Their sacrifices, therefore, were fundamentally and totally unreasonable.

It Makes Sense!

But, what of the sacrifice that is urged in our text? How reasonable is it to present your body to God, holy and completely? To those who live by faith (Heb 10:39) and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), this presentation makes perfect sense. To those who are in fellowship with God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9) and are walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7), it is totally unreasonable not to present their bodies in a state of holiness to God. To put it another way, halfheartedness, under whatever guise it may be presented, is totally unacceptable to God. It is also

In this case, *“service,”* or *“worship,”* related to approaching the Lord. The approach was summarized into four categories.

- Offering appropriate sacrifices. The various sacrifices, and the procedures related to them, are defined in the book of Leviticus (Lev 1:9,13,17; 5:8; 14:12; 17:5).
- Receiving guidance. Special knowledge for judgment was appropriated by the use of the Urim and Thummim, two

stones that were placed in the breastplate (Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; 1 Sam 28:6).

- ❑ Regular ministry in the Lord's presence, the holy place (Ex 28:43). The priests were to keep twelve cakes of bread upon the table of showbread (Num 4:7-8). The candlestick in the holy place was to be kept burning (Ex 27:20; 35:14). Incense was also to be kept burning upon the altar of incense (Ex 30:7-8).
- ❑ Unleavened bread and the flesh of the sacrifices that were given to the priests were also to be eaten "in the holy place," the place of regular priestly activity (Lev 6:16,26; 7:6; 10:13; 24:9).

These procedures were "the service" given to the children of Israel. They were merely external because the people did not have new hearts or spirits. They were fundamentally alienated from God, their hearts being "far from Him" (Isa 29:13). In fact, they did not have a heart to do what the Lord required of them, even though they said they would. Thus God Himself lamented, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deut 5:29).

A Different Kind of Reasonableness

Under the Law, the reasonableness of the "service," or "worship," was of a different order. The fact that God required it was what made it reasonable. In the minds of the people, nothing else made the service "reasonable." Neither the priests nor the people knew they were dealing with shadows and prefigurements. That was not spelled out to the people. The coming Savior, His sacrifice, and the justification that would come from it, were, at the very best, hazy and without spiritual substance to them.

The primary motivation for following the procedures of Law was not the reasonableness of the deed. Rather, it was "that he die not." When Aaron went about to minister, he was told to wear the priestly vestments "that he die not" (Ex 28:35). Aaron was not go within the veil at unappointed times, "that he die not" (Lev 16:2). On the day of atonement, incense

was to be appropriately burned, with the fragrance covering the mercy seat, "that he die not" (Lev 16:13). Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and their feet before entering the tabernacle "that they die not" (Ex 30:20-21). It is no marvel that it is written of those under the Law, "those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb 2:15). Under the Law, "reason" was of a different order than it is in Christ!

A Stark Contrast

What a remarkable contrast there is in "reason" under grace and "reason" under the Law. The scope of God's purpose is more clearly seen, thereby compelling the insightful person to enter more heartily into the service of God. Now, it is "the love of Christ" that "constrains" us, rather than the fear of death. It makes perfect sense to cease to live for self and to live wholly for the Lord, presenting our bodies to Him. As it is written, "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:14-15).

Our service to, or worship of, God, then, is a matter of personal judgment. That does not mean it is optional, or that we may choose to ignore God with impunity. Those with a propensity to Law have great difficulty understanding this. They cannot conceive of a person preferring to serve the Lord without the constraint of Law. But God will have none of their foolish reasoning. A person knowingly reconciled to God does not think like one who is not. They have received a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). God has written His laws into their minds, and put them into their hearts (Heb 10:16). To such people, it is perfectly reasonable to present their bodies, in a state of holiness, to God. It is also refreshing and satisfying.

"Reasonable service," or "spiritual worship" is the same as worshiping "God in the Spirit" (Phil 3:3). In fact, the word "worship," in the Philippians text, is precisely the same root word translated "service" in Romans 12:1 (λατρεύοντες).

The Point

The point of our text, is that the presentation of our bodies to God is not a mere ritual. It is one attended by spiritual insight and deep devotion. We do not serve God by rote, or empty routine.

Real worship consists of living for the Lord, wholly committed to Him. It is taking what we have, what we are stewards of, and presenting it to God. It is living in concert with heaven, and in harmony with the Divine agenda. What is more, it is doing this willingly, insightfully, and with great joy.

Our whole persons are involved, spirit, soul, and body. All of them were purchased, and all of them are given to the Lord. Salvation involves all of them, and all of them to be offered in service.

Real worship consists of living for the Lord, wholly committed to Him. It is taking what we have, what we are stewards of, and presenting it to God. It is living in concert with heaven, and in harmony with the Divine agenda. What is more, it is doing this willingly, insightfully, and with great joy. To put it in words that the Holy Spirit teaches, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3).

Ponder the Blessings

In view of what God has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus, it is totally irrational not to give ourselves to the Lord without reservation. The Son has made us "free indeed" (John 8:36), and we are no

longer debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh (Rom 8:12). Our enemy has been cast down, and is thus no longer able to hold us captive (Heb 2:14; Col; 2:15). Our nature has been changed (2 Cor 5:17). We have become heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ as well (Rom 8:17). We are partakers of Christ and of the Divine nature (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4). We have been “*made the righteousness of God*” in Jesus (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 5:19). Our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20; Heb 12:23). An eternal inheritance is reserved for us in heaven (1 Pet 1:4). We are

presently kept by the power of God through faith (1 Pet 1:5). Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25). Because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (Gal 4:6).

In view of these things, and more, what possible reason can be adduced for failing to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God? This is our “*reasonable service*,” or “*spiritual worship*.”

The presentation of our bodies to God ought to be as direct and formal as the

presentation of the Gospel of Christ to us. The Gospel left nothing to conjecture, but told us precisely what Jesus had accomplished. When we present our bodies to God, we should avoid generalities and ambiguities. It should be clear that we intend to live for the Christ and be willingly and insightfully employed in the execution of His will.

That is what is involved in presenting our bodies a living sacrifice – **or a sacrifice of life** – to God. It is a resolute presentation.

THE CONFORMITY THAT IS CONDEMNED

“² **And do not be conformed to this world . . .**” Here is a Divine requirement of which we hear very little in this day. What does it mean? Other versions read, “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world*,”^{NIV} “*be not fashioned according to this world*,”^{ASV} “*let not your behavior be like that of this world*,”^{BBE} “*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world*,”^{NLT} “*Do not model your behavior on the contemporary world*.”^{NJB}

AND . . .

The requirement stated in this verse is one of the implications of presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God. By that I mean the presentation of our bodies requires this determination. **To put another way, to become like the world voids any commitment to the Lord.**

THERE ARE MATTERS TO BE AVOIDED

Just as surely as there are things to be done, there are things that are **not** to be done. There are benefits to be appropriated, and curses to be shunned. Just as surely as we are to love God, we are **not** to love the world (1 John 2:15). Not only are we to place our affections on things above, we are not to place them upon the earth (Col 3:1-2). We are to not only love the Lord, but hate iniquity (Psa 97:10). This is an aspect of

spiritual life that is not popular, but it is absolutely essential if we are to please God.

“CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD”

“*This world*” is a “*present evil world*” from which Jesus has delivered us (Gal 1:4). Because “*the world is passing away, and the lust of it*” (1 John 2:17), its present “*fashion*,” with all of its

is “*not of this world*” (John 18:36). The “*wisdom of this world*” has been totally repudiated by God (1 Cor 1:20) because it is “*foolishness*” to Him (1 Cor 3:19).

When men do not believe the Gospel, it is because “*the god of this world*” has blinded their minds (2 Cor 4:4). Walking, or living, according to “*the course of this world*” is what necessitated salvation. It constitutes alienation from God and dominance by the devil (Eph 2:1-2). Satan’s hierarchy includes personalities described as “*the rulers of the darkness of this world*” (Eph 6:12).

To be “*conformed to this world*” is to absorb its manners. It is to adopt its way of thinking, and to see life from its perspective. It is to be dominated by the seen, and be oblivious of the unseen. Being “*conformed to this world*” means we live for the here and now, without regard to the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment, and our eternal destiny. A person who is “*conformed to this world*” has its set of values, and lives according to its priorities. The “*wisdom of this world*” ranks high with such people.

To be “*conformed to this world*” is to be assimilated by its culture – to become one with it, so that one is no longer in fundamental variance with it.

Just as surely as there are things to be done, there are things that are not to be done. There are benefits to be appropriated, and curses to be shunned. Just as surely as we are to love God, we are not to love the world

associations, is also “*passing away*” (1 Cor 7:31). “*This world*” is the realm of temporality, and it has been infected by sin and cursed by God. The cares and concerns of “*this world*” actually choke out the Word of God (Matt 13:22; Mk 4:19). Satan is the “*prince of this world*” (John 12:31; 14:30), and thus presides over its manners. Christ said His kingdom

“Friendship” with the world constitutes enmity against God. Whoever, therefore, “wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” ^{NKJV} (James 4:4). Such are people who “mind earthly things,” and for that very reason are “the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:19).

If the grace of God teaches us to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Tit 2:12), those who are “not conformed” to the world have been effectively taught by the grace of God. Those who are conformed to the world have spurned that grace, seeking to turn it “into lasciviousness” (Jude 4).

It is written that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). What folly, therefore, to be conformed to it, thinking like it, and adopting its values! An order from which men must be delivered is certainly unsuitable as a pattern for thinking and doing. A realm that is expressly said to be “evil,” has nothing of value to give to us, either for the mind or for the body. Its assessments

are unworthy of our embrace. Its praise is not to be sought, and its approval is to be seen as utterly worthless.

If the world loves someone, it is because that individual is conformed to the world. We know this is the case because of the words of our blessed Lord.

If the world loves someone, it is because that individual is conformed to the world.

“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19).

A SERIOUS ADMONITION

I cannot overstate the seriousness of

this exhortation. The Western world is plagued with a church that is conformed to this world. It obtains its credentials from the world, and courts the world with its approach to the things of God. The exaltation, for example, of academics over faith is nothing less than conformity to this world. An emphasis upon worldly credentials is evidence of conformity to this world. Much of what is called “contemporary Christian music” conforms to the world. The counseling thrust of the Christian community is the result of conformity to this world.

Conformity to this world puts one at variance with the world to come, and at war with God. The only way survive the destruction of the world, which is an irreversible appointment (2 Pet 3:7), and dwell at last with the Lord, is to energetically avoid conformity to it. The world does have a pattern of thought, and a way of doing things. As a person in Christ Jesus, it is your business to NOT be conformed to the world.

THE REQUIRED TRANSFORMATION

“^{2b} . . . but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . . ” More is involved in spiritual life than not doing certain things. There is a fullness in spiritual life that causes one to leave one realm for another.

LEAVING AND OBTAINING

When we are admonished to shun some things, it is in order that we may take hold on other things. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees in order to go to a land God would show him (Gen 12:1-3). Israel left Egypt in order to go to Canaan (Josh 5:9-10). Elisha left plowing with twelve of oxen in order to follow Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19-20). Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their fishing trade in order to follow Jesus (Matt 4:18-22).

This is the manner of the kingdom. There are things that cannot be

appropriated until other things are forfeited. There are lofty climes that cannot be entered until other ones are abandoned. Many a timorous soul has never gained higher ground because of an unwillingness to abandon lower ground. The stunted growth of many professed believers is directly traceable to their unwillingness to leave the realm of flesh for the realm of the Spirit.

Thus we leave the realm of the dead to live in the domain of the living. We “sin not” in order that we might do righteousness. We cease to serve Satan that we may serve God. We leave the domain of darkness that we might walk in the light as He is in the light.

In our text, we refuse to be conformed to this world, in order that we might be transformed. There will be no genuine

transformation until there is a determined and consistent refusal to be conformed to this world. And, let it be clear, a change of the magnitude described in the word “transformation” must take place if we are to ever be with the Lord!

TRANSFORMATION, THE MODE OF THE KINGDOM

God is not calling men to reformation: i.e., to simply change their habits. The summons is not simply to a different way of doing things – a discipline of life, so to speak. In transformation the individual becomes different. It is more than living by a routine, it is living with a different set of preferences, loves, and hates.

The word “transform” comes from a word that means to transfigure, or change. The Greek word is μεταμορφοῦσθαι (metamorphose), from which we get the

word “metamorphosis.” The change described by this word is like that of a lowly caterpillar into a lovely winged butterfly. It is a change like that of a legless tadpole into a leaping frog, or a loathsome larvae into a flying noisy locust.

Here is a total change that God has imprinted in the natural creation. The similarities between a caterpillar and a monarch butterfly can hardly be found. Neither, indeed, can we study a tadpole, deducing from its appearance that it will someday leap from water lily to water lily, leaving the water and croaking loudly. There is nothing in the larvae that suggests it will be a locust. These crawling creatures go into a cocoon and rot, only to emerge in another form. Interestingly, the larvae cannot reproduce. That can only take place after the transformation to the winged creature has taken place.

Here, however, is a most interesting observation. Those in Christ Jesus, already made “*new creatures*,” are admonished to “*be ye transformed!*” Our change, then, is not yet complete. While we are presently being “*transformed*” (same word) *into the same image from one degree of glory to another*” by the Holy Spirit ^{NRSV} (2 Cor 3:18), we do have some responsibility in the matter. We must seek to free ourselves from simplistic views of the Kingdom that leave us sitting in the easy chair of the flesh, expecting everything will turn out well for us with very little effort on our part. Our text will allow no such conclusion. Solemnly we are admonished, “*be transformed!*”

An alternate word for “*transformed*” is “*transfigured*,” which comes from the same word (μετεμορφώθη). When Jesus was transfigured, a significant change took place. His face “*did shine as the sun*” (Matt 17:2a). His clothes “*became white as light*” (Matt 17:2b). As He prayed, “*the*

fashion of His countenance was altered” (Lk 9:28). In effect, His inner glory burst through His flesh and clothing, showing Him as He had never been seen by men before. In that state, He blended so well with the eternal order that Moses and Elijah appeared with Him in glory, speaking with Him “*of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem*” (Lk 9:31). There you have a vivid picture of transformation!

“RENEWING OF YOUR MIND”

And how is it that we are to be transformed? Rest assured, you cannot go through a moral and spiritual metamorphosis by simply changing your habits. This cannot be accomplished by rote – a heartless execution of some mere routine. Nor, indeed, can it take place as long as one is conformed to this world.

Sin has taken such a toll on the mind, that even after we have been born again, it must be “*renewed*.” The mind is much like a sieve when it comes to the things of God. Without due attention, they are soon forgotten, and life is viewed without a due regard for the truth. The renewing of the mind is a renovation project. It is like a dilapidated structure that needs to be refurbished throughout.

The word “*renew*” means a complete change for the better. It speaks of a lifting of the mind into the domain of the heavenlies. If this does not take place – if we are not transformed by the renewing of our minds – we will “*faint*” in our minds (Heb 12:3). Through subtlety, Satan will corrupt the mind that is not renewed (2 Cor 11:3).

For those in Christ there is “*the law of*

my mind” that must be strengthened and refurbished with the truth of God (Rom 7:23). It is, after all, with the mind that we ourselves “*serve the law of God*” (Rom 7:25). No wonder we are admonished, “*be renewed in the spirit of your mind*” (Eph 4:23). Such a renewal results from girding up “*the loins*” of your mind, and hoping up “*to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 1:13).

Thinking must not be the weak point of the believer. In fact, believing

The change described by this word is like that of a lowly caterpillar into a lovely winged butterfly. It is a change like that of a legless tadpole into a leaping frog, or a loathsome larvae into a flying noisy locust.

and thoughtlessness cannot mix together. Those who “*live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires*” ^{NIV} (Rom 8:5). They have a “*sound mind*” (2 Tim 1:7), and “*think*” upon pure and holy things (Phil 4:8). As their minds are wrapped around the Word of God, pondering it and delighting in it, they begin to “*live by every word of God*” (Luke 4:4). They are transformed by the renewing of their mind.

There is, in my judgment, far too little of this in the average church. There is little transformation because of fundamental deficiencies in the mind. And, there are deficiencies in the mind because of conformity to the world. It is time for this admonition to be sounded and heeded, spoken and received.

PROVING THE WILL OF GOD

“^{2c} ... *that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” Just as we refuse to be conformed to the world in order that we might be transformed by the renewing of our mind, we also are transformed in

order that we might comprehend the will of God. An unrenewed mind cannot discern the will of the Lord, regardless of its seeming keenness. A wrong mind cannot take hold of right things. An unholy mind cannot benefit from holy things. An ungodly mind cannot perceive what God desires or is doing.

A person has to cut loose from the world to know what God wills. There must be a renewing of the mind before His purpose can be perceived.

PROVING, A HOLY ACTIVITY

“... that you may prove...”

Other versions read, “Then you will be able to test and approve,”
NIV “so that you may discern,”
NRSV “so that by experience you may have knowledge,”
BBE and “so that you may discern for yourselves.”
NJB

“Proving” is an aspect of judgment – of arriving at a proper conclusion, and being able to discern, or distinguish, something. It is to be compared with rule keeping, where discerning is not the point, but merely adhering to a set of regulations that are not understood – like a child obeying its parents. God is not honored by an inability to test and validate what is right and wrong, good and evil, or acceptable and unacceptable.

A person who does not present their bodies a living sacrifice to God will not be able to renew their mind. The one who does not renew his mind, will not be able to properly test, or examine what is set before him. **Such a person will not be able to arrive at a proper conclusion concerning critical things – things pertaining to life and godliness.** It does not appear as though this is generally known. Nevertheless, it is true, and there can be no effective contradiction of it. A person cannot be spiritually discerning while their mind remains unrenewed, riveted to the earth. Those who insist on leaving their minds in a state of spiritual stagnation are thereby confined to ignorance concerning the will of God. There is no way to avoid this. It is foolish to attempt to do so.

WILL OF GOD

“... the will of God.” It is the will of God that is to be tested and proved. Thus I will address this first, while touching upon the various attributes of that marvelous will, or purpose, later.

The point of this text is the establishment of “*what the will of God IS.*”
NASB It is not to determine if the will of God is really good, or necessary, but what it really is. What does God want?

A person has to cut loose from the world to know what God wills. There must be a renewing of the mind before His purpose can be perceived.

What is God doing?

Immediately you see that what man wants is to be given the lower place. It is God’s will that is to occupy our attention. Further, knowing His will is not simply a matter of academic definition. The very fact that it is to be discerned or comprehended confirms that it immediately related to us. The will is not impersonal, even though it does not revolve around our persons. We profit from the will of God, but we ourselves are not the center of it. Therefore, as soon as our own wills sit upon the throne of our mind, the will of God becomes obscure. The renewing of the mind, in this case, involves the purging of purely selfish interests.

The truth of this text is stated by Jesus in yet another way. His words are most arresting, unveiling the reason for the discernment of some and the ignorance of others. “*If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority*”

NKJV (John 7:17). That is yet another way of saying men “*prove what is... the will of God.*” Being willing to do God’s will comes from the renewing of the mind.

It is fashionable to hear this expression in certain circles: “*the will of God for my life.*” I do not question that the will of the Lord is intensely personal. However, that perspective can be carried too far, giving the individual greater worth than the eternal purpose of God. God’s will for your marriage, home, vocation, and the likes, is never the focus of Scripture. Moses and the Prophets did not speak in this manner. John the Baptist avoided the snare of such approaches to the will of God. Jesus certainly did not deliver the truth of God from that perspective, nor did the Apostles.

This does not mean there is no Divine direction on a personal level. It does mean that is not the focus of God’s will. If God orchestrates the selection of a wife for Isaac, it is not merely for Isaac’s sake, but for the larger matter of His great salvation. Whether it is Joseph, David, or Daniel, the involvement of the Lord with them personally was never just for their sakes. There was a larger context to His workings with them, as ought to be evident. Godly men always spoke of their participation in the will of God that extended far beyond their persons.

In the case of Abraham, it was to bless “*all families of the earth*” (Gen 12:3). With Joseph, it was to “*save much people alive*” (Gen 50:20). With John the Baptist it was to “*make ready a people prepared for the Lord*” (Lk 1:17). In the case of Paul, it was to “*open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me*” (Acts 26:18).

The people of God must learn to think beyond the narrow perimeter of their own personal lives. The “*will of God*” has infinitely larger boundaries than our lives. It is knowing that will that is the point of this text. Although this will be greatly

misunderstood, our assemblies must be noted for a proper emphasis. They should not make us more familiar with one another than with God.

The fact that our minds must be renewed in order to recognize God's will proves how hostile they are by nature. They must be refurbished by grace and truth in order to their proper and profitable use.

GOOD

The will of God is basically "good." That goodness pervades every facet of His will. It is "good" by nature, not merely by definition. There are poor souls who do not see God's "will" as good. Like Israel in the wilderness, they murmur against their lot in life, unable to associate it with the good will of the Lord.

By saying the will of the Lord is "good," the Spirit means God's intentions are good. From the personal view, God says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" ^{NKJV} (Jer 29:11). From a global point of view, God said to Abraham, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:3). From the perspective of His intention in Christ Jesus, "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).

What God wants is good. It is good for His glory. It is good for angelic hosts to behold. And, it is good for you. But your mind must be renewed before this can be seen. And you must not be conformed to this world before your mind can be renewed. And, your body must be presented to God before you can come

away from the world.

ACCEPTABLE

God's will is not only "good," it is "acceptable." Other versions read "pleasing." ^{NIV/BBE/NAB} The word "acceptable" means "well pleasing," "giving satisfaction," and "serving well." This is the sort of thing Jesus described to the woman at the well of Samaria. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:14). He proclaimed the same thing to the multitudes he fed with a few loaves and fishes. "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

There is a deep and abiding satisfaction in perceiving and embracing the will of the Lord. Jesus said who ever did the will of God was His brother, sister, and mother (Mk 3:35). Those who realize that will surely do "the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:6), for they know God will do good to them. God's will is referred to as "the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:5). If it brings pleasure to Him, it will surely to so to you!

It is not coincidence that "good and acceptable" are joined together (Rom 12:2; 1 Tim 2:3; 5:4). It is the goodness of God's will that makes it "acceptable." It makes it pleasant and satisfying to the soul.

However, as apparent as that may seem to you now, if your mind is not "renewed," the goodness of God's will is not apparent. His salvation will not appear to be preeminent. His blessing will not appear worth seeking. His Word will not seem indispensable.

Thus, you will not be able to associate

your life with what the Lord is doing. There will not seem to be a connection with preparation for glory, refinement, and being changed from glory unto glory. O, there is a great and dreadful penalty to not being transformed by the renewing of our mind. Further, it is totally unreasonable not to be.

PERFECT

"... perfect ..." God's is also "perfect," and needs to be so seen. Although the word "perfect" comes from a rather common Greek word (τέλειον), it certainly does not have a common meaning here. Etymologically speaking, the word can mean full grown or mature. That, however, seems to me to be a vulgar way of looking at God's will – as though it developed over a long period of time, or was at some time immature, infantile, and undeveloped. We do well not to drag Divine traits through the slime pit language. Too much of earth and the wisdom of men then cling to these words.

The idea here is that the will of God is free from any defect – and has always been. It stands complete of itself, and does not obtain power or effectiveness by being mixed with something else. Nothing about God's will is out of balance, unjust, or incomplete – nor has it ever been so characterized. It is absolutely consistent, never varying, never being updated, and never requiring adjustment.

Nothing can be added to the will of God, and nothing can be taken from it. It stands wholly sufficient of itself. It only remains for it to be recognized and received for what it is. That requires revelation on God's part, and proving on our part. He has already revealed His will in the "record of His Son" (1 John 5:10-11). Apart from Christ, His will is hidden.

CONCLUSION

These short, yet pungent, verses are the spiritual conclusion to the first eleven chapters of Romans. They represent the proper response to the things that have been revealed. The announcement of a righteousness from God by faith, when

seen, will provoke this reaction (chapter one). The fact that all have sinned, and can make no claim of personal uprightness before God, will compel men to fulfill the admonition of our text (chapters two and three). Once the

imputed righteousness of God is received, the exhortation makes perfect sense (chapter four). The effective nature of faith will confirm this to the heart (chapter five). When the realities accomplished in our baptism are

comprehended, we will enter joyfully into the fulfillment of this text (chapter six). The reality of the fierce inner warfare between the flesh and the Spirit will confirm the necessity of this work (chapter seven). The fact that we are justified by faith, are not condemned, and have been given the Holy Spirit will encourage us in this work (chapter eight). The inscrutable working of God with the Jews and the Gentiles will assure us of the effectiveness of God's will (chapters nine through eleven).

Does this not constrain you to see your body from a new point of view? Can you not present it to God in expectation of good things to come? Your body is what will be employed to minister to God's people. It will be used to glorify God by letting your light shine before men. Present it to God as a "living sacrifice," the offering up of your life to the great

God of heaven. When it comes to this world and the devil, be stingy with your body. Do not give it to the world for its enjoyment and your condemnation. The world and the devil have had enough of your body. Give it to them no more. Present your whole body to God, together with every form of expression of which you are capable.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind daily, even hourly. When you sense your mind gravitating to the lower regions of the earth, renew it by the consideration of the things unseen. Thus you will be transformed, gloriously changed to a new stage of glory. When you are taken up with cares of this world, renew your mind. Ponder the promises and thus be transformed by the renewing of your mind. When you are tempted, drawn away of your own lusts, renew your mind. Neutralize the temptation by

pouring the Word into your mind and meditating upon its implications. Thus you will be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

It will not be long until you will be able to test and prove the will of God. You will see how good it is, and how accessible it is by faith. In the glow of that will, what the world offers will not appear good at all. The will of God, like the sun in its zenith, will outshine all other wills, including your own. You will see how acceptable and pleasing the will of God is. It will bring lasting satisfaction to your heart, thereby diminishing life's difficulties and challenges. You will see the will of God as perfect, without any flaw. It will never bring a disadvantage to you, or hide anything good from you. From every vantage point, it is good. In every experience of it, it is acceptable. Now, enter into the fulfillment of the text.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 38



SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SERVING GOD

^{12:3} For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to 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. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

(Romans 12:3-8)

INTRODUCTION

Having introduced us to the proper application of the marvelous proclamations and expositions of the first eleven chapters, namely the presentation of our bodies to God, the Spirit now develops the reason for this response. It is often the nature of Christian men to approach matters of religion from Mount Sinai. Thus, words like commandment, authority, duty, and obligation, rise to the surface of their vocabulary, becoming the primary motivation for living unto God. While there is some merit to this approach, it is certainly not the highest level of involvement, nor does it represent the most noble incentive. When lawful, it is largely how those who dwell in far off places are addressed – those living in

practical aloofness from God.

The presentation of our bodies to God, without defilement and acceptable to Him, has been described as our *“reasonable service,”* or *“spiritual act of worship.”*^{NIV} As such, it is utterly unreasonable not to make this presentation. To fail in this presentation constitutes one unspiritual and unacceptable before the Lord. If this assessment is true, and I am persuaded it is, it completely changes the way in which the contemporary church is evaluated. Many of its boasts fall to the ground as worthless.

The text before us elaborates on the reasonableness of the sacrifice of our lives

to God. Those in Christ have been called into holy involvements, and they are to be properly prepared for them. There is an underlying assumption that we have been placed in the body of Christ for a reason. There is a work to be done by each individual that requires the presentation of one’s body as a living sacrifice to God. It is a work that requires holiness on our part, and acceptance on God’s part. What is more, apart from this work, there is no reason to be added to the church (Acts 2:47), or be placed in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18).

I understand this may appear too harsh. Some would rather imagine we were called out of unholy involvements,

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THINKING PROPERLY (12:3)
- II. WE ARE MANY, YET ONE BODY (12:4-5)
- III. GIFTS THAT ARE DIFFERENT ACCORDING TO GOD'S GRACE (12:6a)
- IV. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY (12:6b)
- V. THE GIFT OF MINISTRY (12:7a)
- VI. THE GIFT OF TEACHING (12:7b)
- VII. THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION (12:8a)
- VIII. THE GIFT OF GIVING (12:8c)
- IX. THE GIFT OF LEADING (12:8c)
- X. THE GIFT OF SHOWING MERCY (12:8d)

but not into holy ones. Such cannot conceive of God's employment of every member of the body of Christ, choosing to think of only a few select souls being placed into actual Kingdom activity. Of course, there is a religious superstructure in place that encourages such vanity of thought. But it is seriously wrong, and must be thrust from us as the plague it really is. It will defile the soul!

At the very outset of creation, God declared the purpose for man: *"let them have dominion"* (Gen 1:26,28; Psa 8:6). Initially, that *"dominion"* related to the creation itself: *"over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."* The Psalmist stated it this way, *"Thou madest him to have dominion*

over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Psa 8:6-8).

Do not imagine for a single moment this is the most precise statement of God's purpose for mankind. It was more of an introductory statement than a complete one. Governorship of the natural creation is far from being the pinnacle of the *"dominion"* God intends for man. There is sufficient revelation on this matter to make it sure to our hearts and minds. Men do not now have dominion over the creation.

- ☐ Three times Paul suffered shipwreck, often involving storm and tempest (2 Cor 11:25).
- ☐ The perils to which he was subjected involved *"perils of waters," "perils in the wilderness,"* and *"in perils in the sea"* (1 Cor 26).
- ☐ *"Hunger and thirst,"* and *"cold and nakedness"* were also among the experiences he endured (2 Cor 11:27).
- ☐ Saints of old time who ranked high before God *"wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented . . . wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth"* (Heb 11:37-38).

These precious souls did not appear to have dominion over the elements, as some boast today. But that does not mean they had no dominion, or that they were not

given authority. Further, they will surely rise up in the day of judgment against those who have misrepresented the will of God and the nature of His great salvation.

The thrust of the application of our salvation is not dominance over the natural realm, but the presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Do not imagine that God has called you into Christ to avert storms and famines. Whatever you may think of the possibility of such things, they are not the framework within which Divine fellowship and utility is realized.

When Jesus sent out the seventy, He told them, *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* (Luke 10:19). But this was by no means intended to declare the nature of future involvements with Jesus. It related to the fulfillment of a work, not a domain of authority. James was killed by Herod. The Apostles were beaten by the Jewish council (Acts 5:40). Stephen was stoned by the council (Acts 7:59). Paul was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19). Antipas was martyred by the enemies of Jesus (Rev 2:13). Such noble souls as these would surely wince if they heard some of the nonsense that is preached in the name of Christ today.

The immediate area of our dominion will be defined in our text. It will be seen as bearing directly upon our relationship to the people of God. That relationship will involve Divine endowments, the grace of God, and the benefit of the saints.

THINKING PROPERLY

^{12:3} ***For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to 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.*** This is an elaboration on WHY we are to ascertain the will of the Lord: i.e., *"so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect."* ^{NR5V} The strong intimation is that living pleasingly and profitably

before the Lord is not possible while one is ignorant of His will. God is not served in a state of ignorance. In fact, ignorance of God actually alienates the soul from Him. As it is written, *"They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts"* (Eph 4:18).

As the above text indicates, an ignorance of God is a mark of being

unregenerate. It has no place in the believer. Wherever the smallest portion of it is found, a hearty effort must be extended to rid ourselves of it. One of the key marks of the New Covenant is, *"for **all** shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them"* (Heb 8:11).

Thus we have been admonished to *"present"* our bodies to God, a sacrifice of life, in order that we may come to know the good will of God. With determination,

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we are to avoid being conformed to this world. Rather, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, which transformation will enable us to know the will of the Lord.

The Spirit will now delineate a chief aspect of God's "good, and acceptable, and perfect will." It is essential to understand this is not an academic matter, involving merely the human intellect. This will involve our participation in the will of God as well as our knowledge of it. In salvation, we have been called into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). We become laborers together with God (1 Cor 3:9), and the extension of Christ's own Person. The church is "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23). It is the repository in which His character and power are being poured. Here is where His will is executed and His purpose is being fulfilled. Our identity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:4-6), has been in order that He might live in us and work through us.

This marvelous circumstance is seen in the words, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God **through us**"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 1:20). Again, it is written, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and **through us** diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 2:14). The weight of this situation is also seen in Paul's testimony concerning His own participation in this purpose. "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"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:20).

Not Limited to the Apostles

The Apostles have been placed "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28). They are "first" in priority, with the greater responsibility of putting the foundation in place, and making known the formerly hidden purpose of God (Eph 3:5).

This Divinely orchestrated circumstance has led some to view the Apostles as separate from the rest of the body of Christ. This view is largely in the

background of people's thinking, yet has moved them to live as though there were no God-ordained ministries in Christ's body today, or at best, very few of them. Thus masses of professing *Christians* have been reduced to mere spectators, with relatively little, if any, involvement in the good will of God. However, there are a great number of ministries that have been

It is essential to understand this is not an academic matter, involving merely the human intellect. This will involve our participation in the will of God as well as our knowledge of it.

put into the church "after" the Apostles. These ministries are called "*spiritual gifts*" (1 Cor 12:1; 14:1,12). Those possessing them are called "*stewards of the manifold grace of God*" (1 Pet 4:10). As the Head, Christ works through them to minister grace to His people (Col 2:19).

These gifts are the theme of this section of the twelfth chapter. Their presence and functionality are the reason why we are to know the "good and acceptable, and perfect will of God." As we will see, the point is not merely to know about these abilities, but to actually be a part of their fulfillment.

SPEAKING THROUGH GRACE

"For I say, through the grace given unto me." Paul does not speak out of the reservoir of flesh! Nature is not the domain from which his knowledge of the things of God has been obtained. He does not speak as a Roman citizen and resident of Tarsus. Neither, indeed, does he address the people from the perspective of one who sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He does not speak as an expert in the Law, trained and disciplined among the most strict sect of the Jews, the Pharisees (Acts 26:5). In the flesh, he was, indeed, all of these things. Yet, they were a wholly unsuitable context from which to

address the people of God.

The man of God speaks "*through the grace*" that was given to him. By this he means he is speaking "*as God's messenger*."^{NLT} He speaks in the capacity of an Apostle, where God has placed him in the body. He does not venture his opinion about things, but declares what grace has enabled him to see. He has been entrusted with a message, and he now speaks in strict accord with that message.

Spiritual gifts are dispensations of the grace of God. For this reason, those possessing them are "*administering God's grace in its various forms*"^{NIV} (1 Pet 4:10). Words that are spoken through the grace of God are words of love and benefit. They declare gracious provisions, and announce congenial desires. They are good for us, and yield good results. They announce God's "*thoughts of peace*" toward us (Jer 29:11). Such words must not be received as harsh laws, but as revelations of God's goodness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Paul speaks with authority, but it is authority to edify, not to bludgeon and coerce. As it is written, "*according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction*" (2 Cor 13:10). Again he writes, "*our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction*" (2 Cor 10:8). When this intention is perceived, Apostolic admonitions become sweet and precious to us.

Let us devote ourselves to speaking more from grace. As it is written, "*Let your speech be always with grace*" (Col 4:6). Thus will our words be "*good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*" (Eph 4:29).

SPEAKING TO EVERYONE

"... to everyone who is among you." The words that follow are not addressed to the leaders alone, but to everyone. They are not intended for the wayward only, but for everyone. In a day fraught with specialized ministries to special groups, it is exceedingly refreshing to read a word

that is for everyone!

This circumstance should come as no surprise to us. The Gospel has been declared to be God's power to effect salvation in *"everyone who believes"* (1:16). Glory, honor, and peace are promised to *"everyone who works what is good"* (2:10). Christ is announced as *"the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes"* (10:4). *"Everyone"* who names the name of Christ is to *"depart from iniquity"* (2 Tim 2:19). Christ tasted death *"for everyone"* (Heb 2:9). Messages of grace are for *"everyone."*

This observation may appear rather elementary, and even crude and unnecessary. However, we are living in an era when the power of the truth has been decidedly neutralized by addressing special groups within the body of Christ rather than the whole body. Often differing vocabularies are used to declare varying emphases. You will find no such approach in the Word of God. John the Baptist gave counsel to the soldiers, but his message was for everyone. Jesus spoke to everyone, with occasional words to groups like the Pharisees.

The more a word is addressed to special groups of believers, the less power it has to edify. The Apostles were appointed to minister to two major bodies of people: the circumcision (Jews) and the uncircumcision (Gentiles) – Gal 2:7. Their message, however, was essentially the same. They laid the same foundation and declared the same pivotal realities. **A Gospel that cannot be preached to everyone ought not to be preached to anyone.** A message that is confined to one part of the body of Christ is one that ought to be viewed with suspicion, and received with great reluctance. The message before us is *"to every one of you."*^{NIV}

HOW NOT TO THINK

"... not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." Other versions read, *"not to have an over-high opinion of himself,"*^{DARBY} *"Be honest in your estimate of yourselves,"*^{NLT} and *"never pride yourself on being better than*

you really are."^{NJB}

We Are God's Workmanship

At the root of this admonition is the fact that we are God's *"workmanship"* (Eph 2:10), and have been placed in the body of His Son in strict accordance with His good pleasure (1 Cor 12:18). To think *"more highly"* of ourselves, or pride ourselves in being better than we really are, is to think of ourselves apart from our placement in the body. It is to assign a

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value to ourselves that does not comport with what has been given to us by God.

According to the Measure of Wisdom

To view it from another perspective, it is to conduct ourselves as though we had more wisdom than we really possess. This would involve making judgments we are incapable of making. It also involves speaking as though we had authority about matters concerning which we have no *"spiritual understanding."*

Abilities That Are Received

Yet another way in which persons can think too highly of themselves is to treat their abilities as though they had not received them. As it is written, *"For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 4:7).

Probing Matters Unrevealed

There are matters that ought not to be probed or investigated. These are things God has not been disposed to reveal to men. It is written, *"The secret things*

belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut 29:29). Although the curiosity of man is disposed to look into such matters, it is better to confess with the Psalmist, *"LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me"* (Psa 131:1).

A remarkable amount of corruption has entered the professed church through preachers and teachers who have thought more highly of themselves than they ought to think. As well, a considerable amount of unlawful controversy and division has taken place for the same reason. This is an area where every person must take care.

THINK SOBERLY

"... but to think soberly."
To think soberly is to think within the context of reality. Rather than extending ourselves beyond the borders of what we have experienced and seen, thinking *"soberly"* humbly acknowledges one's own limitations.

Those in Christ are to make a proper estimation of their own gifts and abilities. In so doing, they will be able to minister to and advantage the people of God. To fail to do this will only bring disruption and discord among the saints. Each believer should so conduct their life as to avoid the aphorism, *"If I could buy him for what he is worth, and sell him for what he thinks he is worth, I would make a significant profit."*

THE MEASURE OF FAITH

"... as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." Other versions read, *"as God has allotted to each a measure of faith,"*^{NASB} *"in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you,"*^{NIV} *"each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned,"*^{NRSV} *"measuring your value by how much faith God has given you,"*^{NLT} and *"recognizing that God has given to each one his measure of faith."*^{NJB}

It is true, there is only *"one faith."* From one point of view, ones possession of it can be referred to as *"little faith"* (Matt

6:30; 16:8), or “*great faith*” (Matt 8:10). That, however, does not refer to a “*measure of faith*,” assigned by God, but to the reception and use of that faith. Peter spoke of the faith we have received as being of the same kind as that which the Apostles received: “*to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours*” (2 Pet 1:1). This, however, is not the perspective of our text.

The Measure

The word “*measure*” does **not** refer to quantity, i.e., a lot of faith, or not so much faith. It refers to a vessel used for measuring, such as a cup, bowl, bushel, omer, etc. The size of the vessel does not determine the value of the substance placed in it. One may use a small spoon for measuring salt or flavoring, but a large multi-cup vessel for measuring flour or

sugar. **The capacity of the vessel, or the measure, is determined by what the substance it measures is used for.**

So it is with the “*measure of faith*.” While all of God’s people are given faith, each possess it is a measure – **a capacity to fulfill a particular function in the body of Christ.** The faith of the Apostles made them adequate for the Apostleship. The faith of Philip and Timothy equipped them to be evangelists (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5). The faith of Apollos made him an apt exhorter (Acts 18:27-28). The faith of Barnabas made him an able encourager and consoler (Acts 4:36).

It is important to note that faith, not training, makes us effective ministers for the Lord. Men are prone to view educational attainments as kingdom

credentials, but they are not. **It is what God gives us that equips us for effective work in His kingdom, not what we gain from men.** That may appear to be very rudimentary, but it can easily escape our attention.

The exhortation to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and to think soberly, is an admonition to concentrate on what our faith equips us to do. We are to come away from philosophizing about faith and ministries. Ministry to the saints is to be accomplished, not talked about. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to do this. Thus we are exhorted to allow our faith to be the directing influence of our work. Our thinking is in view of our faith. Our labors are to be motivated by our faith. Our gifts are made effective by our faith.

WE ARE MANY, YET ONE BODY

“⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

The people of God have been called into a single body, each individual being endowed with faith that qualifies him to provide needed resources to the rest of the body. Thus it is written, “*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful*” (Col 3:15). The Spirit will now show us that God has so devised nature, particularly our bodies, that it reflects His intention for the church.

THE PORTRAYAL OF NATURE

“*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function . . .*” Our bodies are a demonstration of different parts working in harmony.

This same perspective is provided in the book of First Corinthians. “*For in fact the body is not one member but many. If*

the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a

The people of God have been called into a single body, each individual being endowed with faith that qualifies him to provide needed resources to the rest of the body.

hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather,

those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our representable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (12:14-25). The following should be noted.

- The body consists of many members.
- Being part of the body does not consist of everyone being the same member.
- All members are not the same.
- If there were not multiple and differing members, there would be no body.
- No part of the body can say it has no need of the other parts.
- Parts which appear to be weaker are often even more necessary.
- The parts of our body that are not of themselves attractive, are attired in a more comely manner.
- There is no need to vaunt the more

prominent parts.

- All of this is a deliberate arrangement so there will be no schism, or rupture, in the body.

MANY, YET ONE

“... so we, being many, are one ...”

The word “many,” in this case, means many different kinds. “Many” are numerically large (Rev 7:9), but numeracy is not the point. Just as the body has many different **functioning** parts, and all of them are necessary and beneficial, so the body of Christ has many different, yet essential, parts. They are “parts” in relation to function. They serve differing, yet harmonious, purposes.

Every part of the body of Christ is functional, deliberately placed in it to minister the grace of God. The call to sober thinking summons us to think in harmony with what God has called us to do.

The Human Body

In the human body, there are external visible parts such as the head, torso, shoulders, arms, legs, hands and feet. There are also external parts that are of a different nature, like the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. There are other external parts that have different characteristics, like hair and skin. There are internal organs like the heart, liver, kidneys, and lungs. There are internal members like bones, tissues, sinews, and blood vessels. Blood and water are a vital part of the body, as well as the brain. Within the bloodstream there are microscopic bodies that are necessary, like white and red cells, and numerous antibodies. There are entire bodies of knowledge that deal with segments of the body. Histology is the study of tissue structure, while Cytology is the study of cell structure. The human body is indeed marvelous for its diversity and complexity, and more marvelous still for its unity. How true it is, “*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psa 139:14). No wonder those with insight confess, “*Know ye that the LORD He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves*” (Psa 100:3). That applies to the realms of both nature and grace, the flesh and the spirit, and it is marvelous to consider.

The Body of Christ

As we might expect, the realm of the Spirit is even more marvelous than the realm of nature. Nature is only a faint reflection of the domain of the Spirit. The vast variety of spiritual functions within the body of Christ, together with their harmony with one another, and effectiveness for the purpose of God, is evidence of a great God with a great salvation.

There are no exhaustive lists of the various functions within Christ’s body. Occasionally, the Spirit will mention some of them. They are largely viewed from the standpoint of their variety and effective ministry. Too, those that are provided are

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given in view of the church addressed by the Epistle, and are therefore not intended to be a completed listing. Some samples are provided below, confirming what marvelous variety is found in them.

ROMANS. Prophecy, ministry, exhorting, giving, and showing mercy (12:6-8). **In Romans, the gifts are viewed from the standpoint of faith, which is the means through which they are executed.**

FIRST CORINTHIANS. Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, and governments (12:8-10, 28). **In First Corinthians, the gifts are viewed from the standpoint of their origin and effectiveness. They are**

distributed by the Spirit (12:4), administered by the Lord (12:5), and activated by God who works all in all (12:6).

EPHESIANS. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers (4:8-10). **In Ephesians the gifts are seen as Christ’s provision for the church during the time of our absence from Him.**

FIRST PETER. Speaking and ministering (4:10-11). **Peter speaks of the gifts in relation to the grace of God, declaring in their execution we are stewards of the manifold grace of God—or the grace that, in the gifts, takes various forms.**

WE DO NOT HAVE THE SAME OFFICE

“... and all members have not the same office.” Most versions read, “*the same function.*” Behind this is the postulation that every member is functional, or serves a specific and needful purpose. No believer can say they do not belong to the body of Christ because they are unable to do what they conceive to be most important. On the other hand, no believer can boast they have no need of the other members because they imagine them to be inferior.

The roles we play in the body of Christ have been assigned to us, not selected by us. The faith that has been given to us is in strict accord with that assignment. When our faith is strong, we will fulfill our function to the glory of God and the help of His people.

ONE BODY IN CHRIST

“... are one body in Christ ...” Elsewhere it is affirmed, “*there is one body*” (Eph 4:4). Much is made of this in Scripture. Those who are in Christ “*being many are one bread, and one body*” (1 Cor 10:17). Believers “*are one body,*” and “*by one Spirit,*” have been “*baptized into one body*” (1 Cor 12:12,13). The precise statement of our text (“*we, being many, are one body*”) is also made in First Corinthians 12:20. It is also declared that

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in Christ, Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled unto God *“in one body”* (Eph 2:16). We have been *“called in one body”* in order that the peace of God might *“rule”* in our hearts (Col 3:15).

This *“one body”* has been reconciled unto God and freed from the tyranny of the devil, the flesh, and the world. What is objectionable about them has been cut away from them, and they are being built together for *“the habitation of God through the Spirit”* (Eph 2:20).

The term *“one body”* is not a synonym for *“one church,”* as ordinarily conceived. With great care, the Spirit applies the concept of oneness to the functioning members – *“one body.”* This is not an institutional view, and designedly so. Those who use a text like this to disenfranchise other believers reveal the wretchedness of their own hearts. If anything, the concept of *“one body”* excludes those who are idle and non-contributive. Even that would be an inappropriate use of the expression.

“One body in Christ” underscores that we are not only individual members, but that we are connected to the Head of the body. Jesus ministers vitality to His people through the individual members, making them a cohesive whole. It is from Jesus as *“the Head”* that *“the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow”*^{NIV} (Col 2:19).

The Fulness of Christ

One of the most remarkable descriptions of the church is found in the book of Ephesians. Earlier I alluded to this text, but it will bear further scrutiny. With great power it is affirmed, *“God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way”* (Eph 1:22-23).

Although Jesus is *“the Head of the church”* (Eph 5:23) and *“the head of the body, the church”* (Col 1:18), that is not the

point of this text. **The Spirit is not speaking of authority over the church, but of provision for it.** God has made Jesus *“Head over everything,”* investing Him with *“all power in heaven and in earth”* (Matt 28:18). He has authority over all of our adversaries to restrain them. He has power over all the armies of heaven, to marshal them to work for our good. He has authority over the dispensing of the gifts of grace, so that we may receive them. He has been made Head over all of these things *“for”* [the benefit of] *“the church, which is His body”*

By calling the church Christ’s

But He is not simply filling them with attitudes or character traits, although that is involved. Rather, He is endowing them with the capacity to minister in His name – to advantage His people by doing for them what He Himself does. Thus, they become workers together with Him.

“fulness,” the Spirit is affirming that Jesus is filling His people with Himself. This is another way of saying they are *“made partakers of Christ”* (Heb 3:14) and of the *“Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). But He is not simply filling them with attitudes or character traits, although that is involved. Rather, He is endowing them with the capacity to minister in His name – to advantage His people by doing for them what He Himself does. Thus, they become workers together with Him.

MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

“... and individually members of one another.” Other versions read, *“each member belongs to all the others,”*^{NIV} *“we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others,”*^{NLT} and *“as different parts*

we are all joined to one another.”^{NJB}

The body of Christ is not comprised of disconnected members. That is the condition of those without spiritual life, not those who are alive unto God. Disconnected members are like Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones. They were not connected together. It was not until the word of the Lord came in power that *“the bones came together, bone to his bone,”* forming something that would eventually be functional (Ezek 37:7). Then, the bones became *“members of one another.”*

The point here is that no individual member of the body possesses all of the fulness of Christ. To put it another way, **no member is sufficient of itself, or can live in isolation from the rest of the body.** Thus Titus was refreshed by the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:13), and himself comforted Paul (2 Cor 7:6). Onesiphorus *“oft refreshed”* Paul (2 Tim 1:16), and Phebe succored, or helped, him (Rom 16:1-2). Paul was comforted by the faith of the Roman brethren, and they were comforted by his (Rom 1:12). Aquila and Priscilla ministered to Apollos (Acts 18:26), and Apollos *“helped them much which had believed through grace”* (Acts 18:17). Mary *“labored much”* for Paul and his coworkers (Rom 16:6), and Epaphroditus *“ministered to”* his *“wants,”* or need (Phil 2:25). All of these were *“members of one another,”* supplying needed graces in accordance with their personal faith.

Believers Fit Together

The people of God fit together. They are a spiritual house that is *“fitly framed together”* (Eph 2:21). Other versions read, *“the whole building, being joined together,”*^{NKJV} and *“the whole building, being fitted together.”*^{NASB} **The factor that knits and fits us together is not mere commonality, but what Jesus supplies through us.** That supply is like the mortar that bonds the people of God together, thereby making the house, or temple of God, strong. Thus, from the Head, Jesus, *“the whole body”* is *“being fitted and held together by that which*

every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part"^{NASB} (Eph 4:16). It is the flow of grace through the individual members that fits them together – when *"each part is working properly."*^{NRSV}

We Need One Another

Thus, the body is not held together by its profession, but by the working of each individual member. When we come into Christ, we are *"added to the church,"* making us one with the rest of the body (Acts 2:47). Our responsibility is now to *"keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph 4:3). This is not done by

getting together, discussing, and ironing out our differences. That is too philosophical, and has not yielded extended and profitable benefits.

The "unity of the Spirit" is kept, or maintained, by means of mutual ministry, or edification. That is the whole point of the fourth chapter of Ephesians (vs 12-16). That is involved in being *"members of one another,"* and is the point that will now be developed.

The Promotion of Humility

There is an uncomely quality in the flesh that seeks to arrive at a point where

others are not needed. To be able to stand alone, and function without the assistance of anyone else is thus thought to be an attainment of great value. First, such a state is not possible. It is purely an imagination, whether in nature or in grace. However, this is particularly true in Christ Jesus.

Our interdependence upon one another is a great promoter of humility. It regularly reminds us that our sufficiency is of God, and that it has been largely ministered to us through Christ's body, which is His means of expression. Humility opens the door for effectiveness.

GIFTS THAT ARE DIFFERENT ACCORDING TO GOD'S GRACE

"^{6a} Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them . . ."

HAVING GIFTS

"Having then gifts differing . . ." Other versions read, *"And since we have gifts that differ,"*^{NASB} *"We have different gifts,"*^{NIV} and *"God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well."*^{NLT} Those who are fond of applying the pronoun *"we"* to the Apostles, when speaking of *"gifts,"* will have a most difficult time doing so with this passage! This text is not speaking of the Apostles, but of *"the body,"* and all who are *"members in particular."* That includes the Apostles, but is not limited to them.

another" (Rom 14:19). That, of course, is why he showed them an even *"more excellent way."* It is the way of *"charity,"* which edifies (1 Cor 13).

The Spirit will now reason with us

ACCORDING TO GRACE

" . . . differing according to the grace that is given to us." All versions, whether literal or paraphrased, read the same way.

"Gifts" are Kingdom abilities, or aptitudes. They fit together, yet are *"different."* In accounting for the difference in these abilities, the Spirit takes us to the grace of God. Prior to this (verse 3), the gifts were traced back to a *"measure of faith."* How is it that they are here associated with grace. The answer is simple. In all of its aspects, salvation is ever *"by grace through faith"* (Eph 2:8). Grace has to do with what is given, faith with how it functions. Grace assigns the gifts to us, and faith delivers them. Grace makes them *"gifts,"* faith makes them ministries.

Further, no one has faith that does not have a connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Additionally, no person is connected to Christ that does not have an aptitude to benefit His brethren.

It is a foregone conclusion that all of those in Christ *"have gifts."* They are different, to be sure, but they are very real and need to be cultured and expressed. When Paul admonished the Corinthians to *"covet earnestly the best gifts,"* he was not suggesting they were in the body without already possessing spiritual abilities. Prior to that he reminded them, *"But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired"*^{NASB} (1 Cor 12:18). His point was not that they should seek after particular gifts, but ones *"wherewith one may edify*

concerning spiritual gifts. He begins with the posit that we do have them. They are an aspect of our faith, and are determined by our *"measure of faith."* There are no members in the body of Christ who do not have faith, for that is what constitutes them *"the children of God"* (Gal 3:26). Further, no one has faith that does not have a connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Additionally, no person is connected to Christ that does not have an aptitude to benefit His brethren. Those are the underlying assumptions of this text, and are a key to understanding them.

Grace is *"manifold,"* or multifaceted. Thus, the gifts grace brings are various, different from each other, yet harmonious in their objective. Grace saves us, yet does it through faith. As it is written, *"For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace"*^{NASB} (Rom 4:16). Faith is the means through which the grace of God becomes effective, whether in saving the soul, or enabling it to minister to the people of God.

Differing gifts allow for expanded

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ministry and a plentitude of edification. More grace can be received by the individual when that grace takes varying forms and ministries in the rest of the body. The more restricted we are on the sources of edification, the more deficient we become in our own persons. Those who limit themselves to a single “minister” can rise no higher, or receive no more, than is ministered by that solitary individual.

Further, we are not limited to those who are in our generation. Those who have completed their race may still minister grace to us. The Apostles and Prophets are primary evidences of this.

before us from the field of battle and labor. Wherever a gift has been given, whether in the past or the present, it has been “for the profit of all” of the body^{NKJV} (1 Cor 12:7).

There are some things you cannot receive unless they come from other members of the body. If Jesus received ministry from others, who are you to suppose you are exempted from such service. We read of “*Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance*” Luke 8:3). In another place we read of “*Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the*

LET US USE THEM

“*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.*”^{NKJV} Other versions read, “*let each exercise them accordingly,*”^{NASB} “*let us exercise them.*”^{NAB} Unused gifts become a reason for chastening, and even condemnation. Gifts are a matter of stewardship, and they are to be faithfully used for the edifying of the body.

It is particularly important to note Satan has encouraged the development of non-contributory religion. The shell of religion is kept, yet is wholly lacking in spiritual substance. There is a “*form of the truth,*” but a denial of “*the power therefore*” (2 Tim 3:5).

Notice the wording of our text. It does not say “*IF we have gifts,*” but “*Having gifts differing.*” The issue is not whether or not we have received a spiritual ability, but if we are using it. If God has placed us in the body where it has “*pleased Him*” (1 Cor 12:18), let us conduct ourselves in view of that placement! If God has dealt to every person “*a measure of faith*” (Rom 12:3), let us see to it that it finds profitable expression through us.

The Spirit will now mention several of these gifts, and how they are to be used. In my judgment, Paul deals with the more prominent gifts in Rome, as he also dealt with the more prominent ones in Corinth. The admonition will not be basically corrective, as it was in Corinth. The brethren in Rome, it appears, had conducted themselves more admirably toward one another, and thus did not require extensive teaching or correction as those in Corinth. Faithfulness does have its own reward.

The more restricted we are on the sources of edification, the more deficient we become in our own persons. Those who limit themselves to a single “minister” can rise no higher, or receive no more, than is ministered by that solitary individual.

Yet, we are not limited in this regard. Wherever a member of the body existed, grace was given to that member to minister. Some of them received grace to pass truth to succeeding generations. We may profit from them. The vast array of those who have received a “*measure of faith*” to minister to the saints is staggering. While there are no laws or procedures bound upon us in this regard, we are to know we are “*members of one another,*” even those who have gone

Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem” (Mark 15:40-41).

Jesus used Peter’s boat (Luke 5:3). He wrought a great miracle with a young boy’s lunch (John 6:9). Who is the soul who would think himself beyond receiving from others? Let us learn from our Lord to think soberly.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

“^{6b} . . . if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.” Other versions read, “*If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith,*”^{NIV} “*such as the quality of a prophet, let it be made use of in relation to the measure of our faith,*”^{BBE} and “*if it is a gift of prophecy, we*

should prophesy as much as our faith tells us.”^{NJB}

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

It is most unfortunate that some sophists have sensationalized this gift, limiting it to a declaration of the future, or coming events. That is not a fair

representation of the gift of prophecy, and it has certainly not yielded optimum benefit to the people of God.

The word “*prophesy*” means “*a discourse emanating from Divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and*

admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing hidden things.”
Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary Prophesying does include the matter of foretelling coming events, but that is a subordinate and secondary meaning. The primary meaning is forth-telling, or telling forth, things revealed by God.

We are not left to conjecture or etymological resources in this matter. The Spirit speaks directly to the subject. *“But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men”* (1 Cor 14:3). Other versions read, *“But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort,”* NIV *“those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation,”* NRSV *“the word of the prophet gives men knowledge and comfort and strength,”* BBE *“helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them,”* NLT and *“speaks to other people, building them up and giving them encouragement and reassurance.”* NJB

Edification

Edification involves building up believers, promoting their spiritual strength and stamina. It is related to bringing clarity to the things of God, so that the hearer understands more clearly and is less confused. The result of edification leaves the recipient with more spiritual knowledge and understanding, a greater degree of confidence, and a larger measure of joy and peace. Where these things have been accomplished, prophesying has been done.

Exhortation

Exhortation calls the hearers up higher, urging them to appropriate what has been given to them. It arouses the soul to action that glorifies God and puts one more fully into the mainstream of the will of God. Exhortation is one of God’s chief ministries to the human will.

Comfort

Comfort is encouragement. Whereas exhortation rouses the will, comfort awakens hope, causing it to come into

prominence. Comfort causes trials and hardships to be minimized. When comforted, sufferings are seen as momentary, and the prelude to a greater weight of glory.

PROPHESYING AND FAITH

Prophesying is to be done in strict accord with one’s faith – what the prophet is able to see. Before the term *“prophet”* became prominent, those who prophesied were called *“seers.”* Thus it is written, *“Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come,*

If one objects that men should not be expected to do what Jesus did, it must be remembered that Christ’s body is where He pours forth Himself. This is where His “fulness” is deposited, and where He ministers to His brethren

and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer” (1 Sam 9:9).

A *“seer”* was someone who perceived or understood. The truth had been unveiled to the person, and he spoke what he had seen, or comprehended. In this regard, false prophets were those who had seen a *“vain vision,”* or one that was not true (Ezek 13:7).

Prophets Cannot Be Trained

It goes without saying, but you cannot train a prophet. Such a person is not produced by an educational or academic process. Like all other spiritual gifts, it requires a *“measure of faith”* to be a prophet—to be able to edify, exhort, and comfort the people of God.

The Proportion of Faith

Being a prophet does not qualify a person to speak on matters he does not understand. A person who speaks in the

behalf of God can only declare what he has seen—what he comprehends, or understands. To fail to confine oneself to this is to refuse to speak *“in proportion”* to one’s faith.

“In proportion” to faith is strict agreement with one’s faith, only declaring what has been apprehended, or understood. It is never right to venture an opinion in the name of a prophet. There must be a direct correlation between the faith of the speaker and what he speaks. If this Divinely imposed rule was duly honored, a great number of ministers would quickly resign their positions.

Opening the Scriptures

The person who prophesies is able to *“open the Scriptures,”* as Jesus did to the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:32,45). If one objects that men should not be expected to do what Jesus did, it must be remembered that Christ’s body is where He pours forth Himself. This is where His *“fulness”* is deposited, and where He ministers to His brethren.

A person who is fundamentally ignorant of the Scriptures should not be given license to speak much to the people of God. Those who do speak in the behalf of Jesus are to *“speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Pet 4:11). Other versions read *“let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God,”* NASB and *“as one speaking the very words of God.”* NIV Their speech is to not only be in words *“taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”* NIV (1 Cor 2:13), but in strict harmony with the Scriptures. A real prophet will never declare something that is at variance with the Word of the Lord.

The person who is gifted to prophesy, speaking unto men to edify, exhort, and comfort, ought not be assigned menial duties that are unrelated to those ministries. When the Lord has gifted an individual for a noble ministry to His people, no other work is honorable.

All too often, this is the tactic of the institution. They ignore abilities God has given to those within their walls,

assigning to them works that are more suited to the goal of the institution than

the work of the Lord. I fear this is a far more serious condition than men are

inclined to think. Such actions rob the saints, dishonor Jesus, and ignore God.

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY

“^{7a} . . . or ministry, let us use it in our ministering . . . ” Other versions read, *“If it is serving, let him serve,”*^{NIV} *“or the position of a Deacon of the church, let a man give himself to it,”*^{BEBE} and *“If your gift is that of serving others, serve them we.”*^{NLT} There is a peculiar wording in this verse. The NKJV captures the full sense of the expression: *“or ministry, let us use it in our ministering.”* The *“it”* that is used in ministering is the gift of ministry itself. In other words, the gift cannot be used for self-serving, but for serving others. The idea is stated most precisely in the words of our blessed Lord. *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matt 20:28), or *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”*^{NASB} There is a Divinely appointed intent in the bestowment of spiritual gifts, and they are to be executed in strict fulfillment of that intention. Men are not at liberty to inhibit these gifts or seek to reassign them.

had grown exponentially, the number of disciples being *“multiplied.”* A sense of care for one another had developed. The mass of believers were *“of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common”* (Acts 4:32).

However, in process of time, some inequities began to occur in meeting the needs of various people. It is written, *“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations”* (Acts 6:1). Knowing the people of God have been called to peace, the Apostles immediately set out to resolve the problem. *“Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven*

ministry. The importance of this work of service is seen in the caliber of men who were required to accomplish it. They were to be *“men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.”*

The word pleased the people. They did not need a further explanation of the requirements, and they made perfect sense to them. Finding men duly qualified (Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas), they *“set [them] before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them,”* thereby setting them apart for the work. They did their work well, for it is written, *“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (6:7).

An Official Office

Unlike the offices of an Apostle (except for Mathias, Acts 1:16-26), and Prophet, men had a hand in selecting deacons. They did not make deacons, but recognized and set them apart for the work of serving. Because of the involvement of others, requirements were specified for these servants (1 Tim 3:8-13). This is a legitimate office, placed in the body of Christ.

There are those, gifted of God to administer practical and business affairs of the church. Such is not a menial work, as indicated by the qualifications set forth in the sixth chapter of Acts, and the third chapter of First Timothy. It might be well to briefly recount them.

- Men of honest report, or a good reputation.
- Full of the Holy Spirit.
- Full of wisdom.
- Grave, or reverent.
- Not double-tongued, giving conflicting words.
- Not indulging in much wine.
- Not greedy of filthy lucre, or pursuing

The importance of this work of service is seen in the caliber of men who were required to accomplish it. They were to be “men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.”

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY

Those who place an undue emphasis upon spiritual gifts rarely mention this one. The word translated *“ministry”* refers to the office, or function, of the *“deacon.”* This is an office of *“service,”* or *“ministry,”* and involves seeing to the needs of others.

A Unique Need

The need first arose in the church approximately two years after the day of Pentecost had *“fully come.”* The church

men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4).

Although the work was important, it was not one to be done by Apostles, who had been placed in the body in a different capacity. It was not that the work was demeaning. It was, however, something that would require extended involvements, which would have detracted the Apostles from their commissioned

dishonest gain.

- Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.
- Men who are first proved, or put to the test.
- Men who are found blameless.
- Their wives must be grave, reverent, and dignified.
- Their wives must not be slanderers or gossips.
- Their wives must be sober or temperate.
- Their wives must be faithful in all things.
- The deacons must be the husband of one wife.
- They must rule their children and their own houses well.

Those who serve well as deacons will experience growth in Christ. It is written, *“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus”* ^{NKJV} (1 Tim 3:13). Two notable examples of the fulfillment of these words are Stephen and Philip, both of whom went on to become great preachers of the Word.

In my judgment, this is a particularly

weak area in the contemporary church.

USING IT IN MINISTRY

The gift of ministry is to used in ministering – in serving others. Attention is to be given to the work of service, and seeing to the needs of others. Some degree of creativity or originality may be used. The idea is to use the faith given to the individual in the manner in which it is intended to be used.

A person with the gift of service should not be put into a leadership capacity. His ability to lead will be discovered while he is ministering to the needs of others, working under the leadership of someone else. Neither, indeed, should gifted servants be required to fulfill duties unrelated to their calling. That would be as unreasonable as an Apostle serving tables. God is not honored by ignoring His gifts to do man’s will.

Expanding the Thought

There is a sense in which this requirement can be fulfilled in every member of the body of Christ. Though He was the King, Jesus served (John 13:4-5). The Apostles, though placed first in the church, served (Acts 20:34). Prophets

serve the saints by edifying, exhorting, and comforting them.

Regardless of the particular function assigned to the saints, they are admonished, *“through love serve one another”* (Gal 5:13), and *“be subject one to another”* (1 Pet 5:5). The spirit of service is a most wonderful quality.

There is a word on ministering given by Peter. It is appropriate for this discussion. *“If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 4:11). To attempt to do God’s work in the energy of the flesh is strictly forbidden. In fact, it is impossible.

The Lord gives the work, and the ability to do it as well. It is our business to put the ability and the work together. The purpose for this is clearly stated: *“so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”* ^{NIV} If, then, these directives are ignored, God will **not** be praised in all things through Jesus Christ. Who is able to measure the magnitude of such a transgression? It is on the part of wisdom to avoid such a sin.

THE GIFT OF TEACHING

“^{7b} . . . he who teaches, in teaching . . .” As simplistic as it may appear, the one gifted to teach is to use that gift to teach. Just as worldly abilities cannot be employed to do the work of God, spiritual abilities are not intended to fulfill worldly duties. Although there may be disagreement on this matter, our text is quite clear on the subject. Our gifts are involved in being members of the body of Christ, and that body is the target for our ministry. Now we come to the gift of teaching – the person endowed with the ability to instruct, expound, and clarify.

THE GIFT OF TEACHING

This gift is ranked third in the dispensation of grace: *“thirdly teachers”* (1 Cor 12:28). Some of the more external and attention-getting gifts are *“after that.”* Teaching would be

involved in *“the word of wisdom”* and *“the word of knowledge”* (1 Cor 12:8). It appears, however, that *“teaching”* is more consistent than a word of wisdom or knowledge. Those endowments appear to

functions within a more broad base. It is also on a more consistent basis.

This gift is mentioned in Ephesians, and is linked with pastoring, or

The gift of teaching is not intended to instruct in the field of economics, domestic responsibilities, or motivational skills. Whatever may be said for those fields of discipline, they are wholly unrelated to the body of Christ. The gift of teaching is not intended to instruct in the field of economics, domestic responsibilities, or motivational skills. Whatever may be said for those fields of discipline, they are wholly unrelated to the body of Christ.

deal with specific issues, while *“teaching”*

shepherding – feeding the flock of God

The grace of God equips the saints of God to do the work of God--by Given O. Blakely

(Eph 4:11). A teacher can instruct people in the ways of the Lord. A teacher can “expound” the way of the Lord more perfectly and thoroughly to someone with an immature view (Acts 18:26).

THE WORK OF TEACHING

The teaching of reference does not pertain to the things of this world. This is a vital distinction that must be grasped by the saints. The Spirit opens the real nature of teaching in a statement made to the Galatians. “Let him who is **taught the word** share in all good things with him who teaches”^{NKJV} (Gal 6:6). Other versions read “taught in the Word,”^{KJV} and “instruction in the Word.”^{NIV}

The purpose for spiritual gifts is not the correction of society, or presenting resolutions for social ills. Believers are certainly not opposed to such things, but they do not require Divine endowments, and we greatly err in imagining they do.

A “teacher” puts a handle, so to speak, on the Word of the Lord, so people can carry it in their minds, and apply it to their lives. Such a person makes the Word of God come alive, opening it like a precious box of jewels.

Nicodemus knew Jesus was a “Teacher” (John 3:2). His teaching separated Him from all other teachers, for “He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mk 1:22). No less than fourteen times the Gospel’s say of Jesus, “He taught.” Jesus has taken this aspect of His Person and endowed certain within His body with the ability to teach His Word.

Paul was ordained a “teacher of the Gentiles” (1 Tim 2:7). In Ephesus he “taught publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Apollos “taught diligently” (Acts 18:25). Paul and

Barnabas taught the Word of the Lord (Acts 15:35). For a year and six months Paul taught in Corinth (Acts 18:11). For two whole years he dwelt in his own hired house “teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). The Apostles were noted for “teaching the people” (Acts 5:25,42).

The church at Antioch was noted for having several “teachers” (Acts 13:1). Some of them are named: “Barnabas, and

among “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23). Yet, “their works do follow them” (Rev 14:13), being public and known to many. It is never wrong to learn from such kingdom notables, not lifting ourselves up as though we had no need to be taught. The Lord gives the gift of teaching because there is teaching to be done. Those so gifted are to devote themselves to teaching.

Those who are teachers should

A “teacher” puts a handle, so to speak, on the Word of the Lord, so people can carry it in their minds, and apply it to their lives. Such a person makes the Word of God come alive, opening it like a precious box of jewels.

Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

Once again, it is a sin of the greatest magnitude to take members of the body that have been given the gift of teaching, and assign them to roles wholly unrelated to teaching. Yet, this is being done continually in churches and various other Christian institutions. It is not unusual to find a certain obstinance in professed Christians that refuses to recognize the gift of teaching. Such assign their own criteria for teaching the Word of God, for which action they will surely be judged. When God makes a person a teacher, whether it is Paul, Apollos, or Aquila, it is the business the people of God to give ear to what is declared by them.

No small number of these teachers have completed their race, and are now

determine to leave the people of God more informed and knowledgeable of the Word of God. Let them refuse to be moved into areas of spiritual trivia by those who cannot see afar off. Men may fancy that they can study the Word of God for themselves, needing no teaching from others. But when they have finished pondering this puff of theological smoke, let them explain why God has placed teachers in the church? Let them consult with the Ethiopian eunuch who unashamedly replied, when asked if he understood a certain Scripture he was reading, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:31).

Let the teacher devote himself to teaching, and let him not think his labors are in vain! God has called him to, and endowed him for, a most noble work. Many a confused and helpless soul will be helped by their teaching. Let them be strong, and quit like men.

THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION

“^{8a} . . . he who exhorts, in exhortation . . .” While a prophet speaks “unto exhortation,” the one “who exhorts” specializes in it. Just as some

people’s faith equips them to prophesy, the faith of some enables them to effectively serve others, and the faith of still others makes them capable teachers,

just so, the faith of some is tailored to make them exhorters. The church must make room for the work of these people, for God has placed them in the church.

That is the area where they are effective, not the world.

THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION

An exhorter is one who moves people into Kingdom activity. He awakens sluggish wills, and rallies the people to activities that honor God and prepare them for eternity. Following their baptism into Christ, Peter *“with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation”* (Acts 2:40). When Barnabas came to Antioch, he *“exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord”* (Acts 11:23). Judas and Silas, themselves prophets, *“exhorted the brethren with many words”* (Acts 15:32). Barnabas and Paul confirmed the souls of the disciples, *“exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22). When Apollos was disposed to pass through Achaia, the brethren wrote letters to the people, *“exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped*

them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).

There are people within the body of Christ who can move us from slothfulness to faithfulness. Some can stir us up, so that we will run more energetically and with more consistency. When they address us, the commissions of the Lord seem more doable, and we are encouraged the more to heartily enter into them.

EXHORTING

And what are such people to do? How should one who has been given the gift of exhortation conduct his life? He must give himself to exhortation. The people of God need his ministry, and he needs to speak that he might be refreshed (Job 32:20).

However, there is a most unfortunate circumstance in our part of the world. The institutionalized church has made no provision for the gift of exhortation. They have made room for the lecturer and the scholar, but not the exhorter! They have adjusted their roster to allow for

administrators and assistants, but have no place for the gift of exhortation. If an exhorter was present in the average church, when would he exhort?

When was the last time you heard a stirring call to lay hold on eternal life, or to save yourself from this wayward generation? How about a summons to faithfulness, diligence and constancy? When are exhortations sounded to continue in the faith, and cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart? For many, these words have a strange sound. But they are not strange, and those who challenge us with such admonitions are gifts from God to us!

Now, you cannot train an exhorter, for he is motivated by his heart, not his head. His gift comes from God, not from exposure to human expertise. It is a ministry that flows from a perception of what is needed among the saints. The one who exhorts has a driving compulsion to see the saints laying hold of the benefits that have been provided for them.

THE GIFT OF GIVING

“^{sb} . . . **he who gives, with liberality . . .**” Although the gifts mentioned in Romans are few in number, they represent an extremely wide range of ministry. From prophets to servants, and teachers to givers, we are being exposed to the breadth of salvation. Let me remind you that all of these gifts have two sides. The first is the ability that comes from God. The second is a heart to do it for the glory of God. Thus a prophet will declare the Word, even if it jeopardizes his life. The one who serves will do so, even if it is not appreciated. The teacher will expound the Word, even though it is not popular, and may become inconvenient. The one who exhorts has a heart to do so, even when it represents a new and challenging thought to the listeners.

they are not exercised. The heart is also looking for an opportunity to use the gift. Now, we will see how those with the gift of giving are to fulfill their ministry.

say that we are not to be covetous, and are to be content with such things as we have (Heb 13:5). But do not imagine for a moment that everyone in the body of Christ subsists on a meager fare. The Word of God affirms, *“**not many noble are called**”* (1 Cor 1:26). It does not say, *“**not ANY noble are called.**”*

Let me remind you that all of these gifts have two sides. The first is the ability that comes from God. The second is a heart to do it for the glory of God.

THE GIFT OF GIVING

There are some who despise the thought of having possessions. They believe there is virtue to poverty, and that God is always honored by having just enough for ourselves. But this is not a fair representation of the case. I am quick to

As already mentioned, there were some noble women who ministered to Jesus out of their substance (Lk 8:3). During the early days of the church, when unusual circumstances existed, *“**as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need**”* (Acts 4:34-35). **They had the gift of giving!**

During those days, Barnabas, called

The gifts of God come with a longing to do them, and a great dissatisfaction if

“the son of consolation,” “Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37). He had the gift of giving!

When Paul sent the converted slave Onesimos back to his master Philemon, he said, *“If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account” (Phile 18). He had the gift of giving.*

When the churches in Macedonia heard of the needs of some of the brethren, they rallied to the cause, gathering a gift for them. Of them Paul said, *“For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.*

And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will”^{NIV} (2 Cor 8:3-5). They had the gift of giving!

There are people, strategically placed within the body of Christ, who have the means to assist others. They also have the heart to do so. They are quick to see lacks that need to be met, like the good Samaritan who saw the beaten and robbed man by the wayside (Luke 10:33-35). **He had the gift of giving!** How are such people to give? What is to be their reaction to need?

GIVING WITH LIBERALITY

“Let him do it with simplicity.” The word “simplicity” means most sincerely, without seeking self interests, and with

personal sacrifice. It is giving without the clutter of pride or the quest for glory. Consequently, because of this glorious simplicity, the giving is bountiful and liberal, with no thought of having less because of giving generously.

Other versions capture this sense. *“He who gives, with liberality,”^{NKJV} “let him give generously,”^{NIV} “let him give freely,”^{BEBE} and “give generously from the heart.”^{NJB}* Concerning this ministry, it will be enough to remind you of the words of our Lord: *“freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8).* And again, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).* God be praised for these liberal souls! They have been placed in the body to relieve it of undue concerns, and sweeten life’s cup. Only eternity will reveal the effects of their generous spirits.

THE GIFT OF LEADING

“^{8c} . . . he who leads, with diligence . . .” Other versions read, *“he that ruleth, with diligence,”^{KJV} “if it is leadership, let him govern diligently,”^{NIV} “he who has the power of ruling, let him do it with a serious mind,”^{BEBE} “if one is over others, with diligence,”^{NAB} and “if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious.”^{NJB}* This word will be intimidating to those who do not like to be a subordinate, and challenging to those possessing this particular gift.

THE GIFT OF LEADING

There are some who believe everyone in the body of Christ is equal. But this is not the case at all. There are some who *“are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thess 5:12).* These do not lead by coercion, or the exertion of carnal authority, but they do lead. Remember, it is God who gives this gift. First Corinthians refers to this gift as *“governments,”^{KJV} or “administrations”^{NASB} (1 Cor 12:28).* First Timothy refers to the *“elders that rule well,”* or *“direct the affairs of the church well,”^{NIV}* affirming they are *“worthy of double honor.”* These are particularly singled out as *“those who*

work hard at preaching and teaching”^{NASB} (1 Tim 5:17).

The thirteenth chapter of Hebrews

These are not bosses, like those who govern the men of this world. They lead by example (1 Pet 5:3), and by their faithful admonishing, teaching and preaching (1 Thess 5:1;2 1 Tim 5:17). They are watching for men’s souls, not their business, not their homes, and not their private lives.

also speaks of those *“that have the rule over you.”* They are described as watching for men’s souls, and those who will give an account for their responsibility. Heb 13:17,24). Peter admonishes elders, *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to*

the flock” (1 Pet 5:2-3).

These are not bosses, like those who govern the men of this world. They lead by example (1 Pet 5:3), and by their faithful admonishing, teaching and preaching (1 Thess 5:1;2 1 Tim 5:17). They are watching for men’s souls, not their business, not their homes, and not their private lives. They do not have the kind of authority that makes men answerable to them. However, **they** are answerable to God for how they handle their stewardship.

A *“leader”* is directing people in a path he himself has taken. He is demanding enough to keep the people moving forward, but gentle enough not to discourage them. I have found there are not a lot of this type of people, and it is probably good there is not.

LEADING WITH DILIGENCE

What is a leader to do – a person who has *“power with men” (Gen 32:28)?* Some, because of the recalcitrance of people, withdraw from leadership. They do not feel it is worth all of the aggravation. But

if a person is genuinely gifted to lead, the word of the King is straightforward: *“he who leads, with diligence.”*

The word *“diligence”* means with earnest care and consistency. Those he is leading do not wander from the straight and narrow path because of his indolence. The Lord was serious in dispensing the gift of leadership to him, and he is serious in executing it to the glory of God.

While the Apostles and other disciples were awaiting Divine empowerment for their work, Peter *“stood up in the midst of*

the disciples,” calling their attention to the need to replace Judas. He correlated the matter with Scripture and, under his direction, a replacement was selected by God through them (Acts 1:15-26). **He was a leader,** and he led with diligence.

Early in the history of the church, dissension arose over the acceptance of the Gentiles, and what laws would be binding upon them. Paul and Barnabas, and certain other men, were sent to Jerusalem *“about this question.”* Instead of calling for a congregational meeting, they appealed to *“the Apostles and elders”*

(Acts 15:2-4). They were endowed with the gift of leadership, and executed their gift with diligence (Acts 15:23-31).

As with the other spiritual gifts, spiritual leaders cannot be trained, even though men speak as though they can. They are gifted by God, not educated by men! They are to understand that God is with them in their work. He has equipped them for effective ministry. That will motivate them to be diligent in the execution of their responsibilities. Jesus is surely with them throughout the duration of their ministry.

THE GIFT OF SHOWING MERCY

^{8d} *“ . . . he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”* Here is a gift for which the flesh has no longing. It can more easily covet to prophesy, teach, or rule. It can even seek recognition through giving like Ananias and Sapphira. However, to show compassion or mercy is not attractive to the flesh. There is a great need for this ministry, and thus God has especially gifted some to show it. There is a sense in which all believers are to show mercy. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”* (Matt 5:7). In fact, the *“wisdom that is*

THE GIFT OF SHOWING MERCY

Those with the gift of mercy abound in the grace of being merciful. It is their strength, and they delight to show it. They have a sense of the need of mercy, detecting candidates for it before others do, and being quick to meet that need. Mercy involves compassion, and helping the needy out of a sense of profound pity for, and empathy with, them.

When Jesus interrogated a certain man concerning the good Samaritan, He asked him, *“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him*

him” (Luke 10:37). Mercy, therefore, relieved the afflicted person, provided for his continued care, and took care of any debts that were incurred.

Let it be clear, *“he who shows mercy”* is the person particularly endowed with the ability to detect the need for mercy, and meet it. While this word may be applied to anyone showing mercy, whether particularly gifted or not, it has specific application to the person who has been placed in Christ’s body to show mercy. What is to be the manner in which that individual *“shows mercy?”*

SHOWING MERCY WITH CHEERFULNESS

“Cheerfulness” involves a cheerful disposition: gladness of heart because of the opportunity to show kindness to the needy. It also involves a *“readiness of mind,”* which finds great joy in exhibiting the mercy. The person with a *“ready mind”* looks for an opportunity to *“do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10).

In this manner, the gifted person is participating in the Divine nature. It is said of Jesus, *“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart”* (Psa 40:8; Heb 10:7). Also, it is said of God Himself, *“He delights in mercy”* (Micah 7:18). There are some to whom the Lord has especially given this quality.

Those with the gift of mercy abound in this grace. It is their strength, and they delight to show it. They have a sense of the need of mercy, detecting candidates for it before others do. Mercy involves compassion, and helping the needy out of a sense of profound pity for, and empathy with, them.

from above” is *“full of mercy,”* and will be exhibited by all receiving it (James 3:17).

that fell among the thieves?” The man wisely replied, *“He that showed mercy on*

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CONCLUSION

We see from this brief but pungent passage, that spiritual gifts involve the consent of our wills and the exercise of our faith to become effectual. They come to us because of the grace of God, and our

faith is the means through which we are both qualified and enabled to use them. They are designed to bring advantages to the body of Christ. They also bring great satisfaction to those who faithfully handle

them, becoming one of the primary means through which they accrue rewards and treasures in heaven. Give due attention to what you can do for the Lord, and do it diligently and energetically.

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COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 39



CONDUCT BECOMING OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

^{12:9} Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹ not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³ distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. ^{NKJV} (Romans 12:9-21)

INTRODUCTION

Often spiritual life is represented as not being practical – not touching upon every aspect of life. Thus we hear sayings like, “Do not be so heavenly minded you are no earthly good,” “Lighten up,” or “What about **real** life?” There seems to be a prevailing attitude among professed believers that commitment to God and the

Word of God is too cerebral, and has little to do with day-to-day living. This erroneous view is precisely why Scripture is often ignored in preference for dealing with the supposed issues of the day. The development of “seeker friendly” formats and services is also traceable to this perspective. The persons who are devoted

enough to the Lord that He dominates their conversation are considered a bit “weird,” and out of touch with reality.

COMMON, BUT WRONG

Although these are common perceptions, they wholly misrepresent God and His truth. They distort salvation,

OUTLINE

- ▶ THE RESPONSE OF LOVE (12:9a)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE TOWARD EVIL (12:9b)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE TOWARD GOOD (12:9c)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER (12:10)
- ▶ THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE (12:11)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE IN HOPE, TRIBULATION, AND PRAYER (12:12)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE TOWARD NEEDS OF SAINTS (12:13)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE TOWARD OUR PERSECUTORS (12:14)
- ▶ REJOICING AND WEEPING WITH OTHERS (12:15)
- ▶ HAVING THE SAME MIND (12:16a)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE TOWARD SELF (12:16b)
- ▶ GODLY RESPONSES (12:17)
- ▶ IF YOU DETERMINE THE CIRCUMSTANCE (12:18)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE TOWARD OUR ENEMIES (12:19-20)
- ▶ OVERCOMING, BUT NOT OVERCOME (12:21)

reproach Jesus, and do despite to the Spirit of grace. They reveal a frame of heart that is appropriately called *“minding earthly things”* (Phil 3:19). The people of God must develop a certain intolerance of such misrepresentations, for they contaminate the soul. They introduce carnal imaginations into the stream of thought, tending to harden the heart and dull the conscience. They put too much distance between the individual and eternity, pushing the coming of Christ and the day of judgment out of prominence in both heart and mind. No one should doubt the reality of these things. Only brief self examination will confirm what happens to the individual when the accent is removed from the things of God to matters relating to life in this world.

The propensity of *church* people to entertainment, trivia, issue-centered preaching and teaching, counseling, and spiritual brevity and shallowness, are all

outgrowths of this misperception: i.e., that heavenly mindedness is impractical.

IN SPITE OF CLARITY

This delusion exists in spite of the total absence of humor in the Bible, the obviously single focus of Jesus, and the spiritual thrust of Apostolic doctrine. One will search in vain for an extended commentary on the political issues of the day in which an inspired writer lived. The social issues of the day are equally shunned by inspired writers. The **only** mention of things relates to spiritual life, preparation for eternity, and fellowship with Deity. There is such a remarkable consistency in this, it is difficult to see how the thrust of Scripture could be missed. This condition is a confirmation of the dulling effect of carnal mindedness, or minding earthly things.

ALL OF LIFE ADDRESSED

Lest some conclude that being justified, or having the righteousness of God imputed to us, does not influence our manners in this world, the Spirit speaks of the practicality of spiritual life. With unusual power, He shows us **there is no facet of legitimate life and human relationships that is not impacted by newness of life**. In so doing, the Spirit removes all excuses for not living wholeheartedly for the Lord. No valid reason can be adduced for failing to love the Lord with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength. There is no justification for having our minds nailed to the earth.

F a i t h addresses every aspect of life in this world. The person who has been reconciled to God will find no point in life where the Lord may be pushed into the background, the Word of God ignored, and citizenship in heaven forgotten. Whatever causes these things to occur is wrong, and is to be shunned with zeal and consistency. Nothing about salvation allows for

forgetting God. Nothing about newness of life moves a person to navigate in this world without an acute awareness of the coming of the Lord and imminent judgment. The law of God is not put into our hearts and written in our minds only to be placed into the background of thought. This should be abundantly clear.

THE PROPER CONTEXT

The context in which we live, think, and speak, is critical. Basically, there are only two contexts: *“this present evil world”* and *“the world to come.”* To put it another way, there are the contexts of time and eternity.

Let it be clear, the *“present world”* is fundamentally evil, contaminated by sin. Because of this, Jesus has *“delivered us”* from it (Gal 1:4), and it is destined for destruction (2 Pet 3:10-12). To make this world, or time, the context in which we live is disastrous. It contradicts the fact that we have been delivered from it.

The *“world to come”* is the lasting one. There is where the fulness of eternal life will be received (Mark 10:30). The *“world to come”* is the subject of Apostolic exposition (Heb 2:5). Every commandment, exhortation, correction, and elucidation of Scripture is set within the context of *“the world to come.”* If it were possible to remove that world, or if it were just an imagination, there would be no need for Christ Jesus or the Scriptures. **Salvation in all of its aspects is couched in the setting of eternity!**



The exhortations to which we will now be subjected are to be received as matters that tend to orient us for glory.

Life in this world is not their ultimate objective. Rather, they are given in order that life in this world will not distract us or disqualify us from the glory to which we have been appointed by God's grace.

IN VIEW OF THE TIMES

I have taken the time to mention these things because of my persuasion of the wickedness and religious corruption of the times. Certain religious manners and preferences have arisen that are not right.

They are in sharp conflict with the revealed purpose of God, and do not contribute to the eternal well being of people. Men have been given too much honor, and God has been given too little. The wisdom and writings of men have been given too much prominence, and the Word of God too little. In the mind of the average *church member* heaven is a distant thought, and the coming of the Lord is rarely brought into the meditative process.

As we enter into this section of practical exhortations, you will find they have more weight when they are considered within the context of eternity. When you contemplate your reception of the righteousness of God, these admonitions will make perfect sense, and you will desire to fulfill them. If they are viewed only as our duties, to be fulfilled in the energy of the flesh, they will appear beyond your reach. There is an unwavering consistency in this.

THE RESPONSE OF LOVE

^{12:9a} **Let love be without hypocrisy.** Other versions read, "Let love be without dissimulation,"^{KJV} "Love must be sincere,"^{NIV} "Let love be genuine,"^{NRSV} "Let love be unfeigned,"^{DARBY} "Let love be without deceit,"^{BBE} and "Let love be without any pretense."^{NJB} Our love is to be without disguise. It is to be the **genuine** expression of the "new man," the **outgrowth** of the "newness of life." The righteousness that has been given to us WILL express itself in this way. Just as surely as God Himself is averse to pretense, so the life that He has given to us cannot be so characterized.

The word "dissimulation" means "to hide under a false appearance." English synonyms include "camouflage, cloak, dress up, and mask."^{MERRIAM-WEBSTER} Love with dissimulation, or hypocrisy, is love that is not genuine, even though the individual expressing it may not even know it. One of the dreadful results of walking in the flesh, or **not** living by faith, is that the individual can fall into reprehensible conduct without even knowing it. This is precisely why this exhortation is given – to awaken the heart to self examination.

Love with dissimulation, or feigned love, is draped with culture and painted with fleshly refinement. It is not what it appears to be. The fact that we are exhorted to avoid this pretense confirms that the seeds of such a tendency remain within our natural man. If we do not set

ourselves to avoid ostentatious love, we may easily be lulled into a spiritual sleep that finds us wearing the mask of carnal politeness.

THE SOURCE OF LOVE

The Genuineness of love is not determined by the feeling of the individual. Nor, indeed, is it determined by the intention of the person. **The thing that makes love genuine is its source!** Love "without hypocrisy" is the love that flows out from the love that has been "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5). This love is not pumped up by the individual. It is not a mere attempt to do what is right,

"But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection"^{NKJV} (Col 3:14). A lack of love disrupts the "unity of the Spirit," allowing for the entrance of Satan, delusion, and spiritual death.

There is an attractiveness to genuine and uncomplicated love. It draws the people of God together, for it is consistently selfless, always seeking the welfare of others. It brings the saints together in mutuality, building up each member. Thus there comes an "increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:16). That is the "bond of perfection" that causes one maturing member to profitably adhere to another.

INSTITUTIONAL LOVE

There is a feigned love I have chosen to call "institutional love." It is a love that centers in religious institutionalism rather than the love of God. Jesus spoke of this kind of love when He said, "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" (Matt 5:46-47). Such love is based upon mere human confraternity. It gives no weight to faith, and certainly not to Divine acceptance.

There is a considerable emphasis in our day on religious camaraderie. This involves civility that is based upon institutional identity rather than the love of God. It has no place in Jesus.

Love is the spiritual adhesive that binds the saints of God together. That is why it cannot be fabricated, simulated, or expressed in pretension.

although the effort of the individual is involved. This is part of "the fruit of the Spirit," and is the consequence of walking in the Spirit.

THE BOND OF PERFECTION

Love is the spiritual adhesive that binds the saints of God together. That is why it cannot be fabricated, simulated, or expressed in pretension. It is written,

IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTRIVE

The admonition, “*Let love be without dissimulation,*”^{NKJV} does not suggest that genuine love – the “*fruit of the Spirit*” – can be possessed, yet imperfectly expressed. The idea here is that no professed believer is to attempt to cover up hatred and ill-will with the mask of love, or charity. In other words, those who do not love the people of God are not to pretend as though they did.

HELP IS AVAILABLE TO US

It is good to know that Divine help is available to us through our faith. The Lord can “*make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men*” (1 Thess 3:12). Other versions read, “*cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men,*”^{NASB} and “*make your love increase*

and overflow for each other and for everyone else.”^{NIV} In such a case, love will not be with hypocrisy. It will also yield the benefits only genuine love can produce. Some of them are as follows.

- Faith works by love (Gal 5:6).
- In love we serve one another (Gal 5:13).
- Love edifies, or builds up (1 Cor 8:1).
- Love suffers long (1 Cor 13:4a).
- Love is kind (1 Cor 13:4b).
- Love does not envy (1 Cor 13:4c).
- Love does not parade itself (1 Cor 13:4d).
- Love is not puffed up (1 Cor 13:4e).
- Love does not behave rudely (1 Cor 13:5a).
- Love does not seek its own (1 Cor 13:5b).
- Love is not easily provoked (1 Cor

13:5c).

- Love thinks no evil (1 Cor 13:5d).
- Love does not rejoice in iniquity (1 Cor 13:6a).
- Love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor 13:6b).
- Love bears all things (1 Cor 13:7a).
- Love believes all things (1 Cor 13:7b).
- Love hopes all things (1 Cor 13:7c).
- Love endures all things (1 Cor 13:7d).
- Love will cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8).

Love that is feigned is totally lacking in these traits. It may have a polished appearance, but it brings no benefit to the saints. Neither, indeed, can it open a door of opportunity for those who are outside of Christ. Love that is by dissimulation is totally worthless, and is to be discarded. God does not honor it, and neither can we.

THE RESPONSE TOWARD EVIL

“^{9b} **Abhor what is evil.**” Other versions read, “*Hate what is evil,*”^{NASB} and “*Avoid what is evil.*”^{NJB} The strength of this word is apparent. The word “*abhor*” means to “*hate utterly,*” entirely and totally. It also means to shrink away from, as from something that is loathsome or detestable. To “*abhor*” is to draw away

circumference of evil influence.

The intention of this exhortation is not simply the development of an attitude, but of a godly response. All of these are reactions that reflect the Divine nature. They include an attitude, feeling, or outlook, but extend into the area of the

strong aversion that exists deep within the individual. It is the word μισέω. The word used in our text (ἀποστρυγούντες) comes from another root word (στυγέω). The difference between the two is that the latter is “*hatred expressed.*”^{VINCENT}

ABHOR MEANS TO DEPART

That is why I prefer the word “*abhor,*” for it carries the idea of withdrawal more than an inward attitude alone. That withdrawal, of course, is driven by an inward response to evil, which compels the believe to take action. Thus, when God said of Israel, “*I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces*” (Amos 6:8), He meant that He would withdraw from them, leaving them to the behest of their enemies. When the Psalmist said, “*the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man*” (Psa 5:6), he meant the Lord would have nothing to do with such a man. The Lord “*greatly abhorred Israel,*” “*He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, The tent He had placed among men, and delivered His strength into captivity, And His glory into the enemy’s hand*” (Psa 78:60-61). Again it is written, “*Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance.*”

Much of the psychological jargon that is spewing from the pulpits of the land leaves one imagining God tenderly embraces those He abhors. Nothing could be further from the truth, as Satan and his angels can testify.

from, out of a sense of utter disgust and repulsion. Something that is abhorred goes against the nature of the person. It chafes against the soul, and weighs the heart down with offensiveness. For that reason, the individual cannot abide the presence of the thing abhorred. He will not allow himself to remain within the

will and of action.

In the matter before us, to “*abhor*” is to have such a horror of something that is expressed by withdrawal. From the viewpoint of language, there is a Greek word for hatred that emphasizes the attitude of the heart and mind. It is a

And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, And those who hated them ruled over them” (Psa 106:40).

Let there be no mistake about this. What or who the Lord abhors, He leaves, or forsakes. You do not want your thinking to be loose or unstable on this point. Much of the psychological jargon that is spewing from the pulpits of the land leaves one imagining God tenderly embraces those He abhors. Nothing could be further from the truth, as Satan and his angels can testify.

The Relevance of the Observation

It may appear as though all of this has little to do with our text. But that is not the case. The response that is enjoined upon us is nothing less than the expression of the “Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), called the “new man,” or a “new creature” (Col 3:10; 2 Cor 5:17). We are being admonished to withdraw from the very things God and Christ withdraw from. They are things that God cannot tolerate, and that He will not abide in His presence.

Those who insist on remaining close to what God abhors will themselves become detestable to God.

That is precisely why the Lord speaks to His people in this manner. “Therefore Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 6:17). This is not a popular word in our time, but it is a very needful one, and must often be declared.

The Lord leaves no stone unturned in His appeal to us to abhor whatever is evil. “You who love the LORD, hate evil!” (Psa 97:10). “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Prov 8:13). “Hate the evil” (Amos 5:15). “Depart from evil” (Psa 34:14). One of the telling marks of the Savior of the world is that He “hates wickedness,” or “iniquity.” For this reason, God bestowed the greatest blessing upon Him. “God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (Psa 45:7;

Heb 1:9).

A person who abhors “that which is evil” will join David in this holy resolve. “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness” (Psa 101:3-4). When the Word of God brings understanding to the heart, the believer shouts, “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psa 119:104).

One of the marks of a wicked man is, “he abhorreth not evil” (Psa 36:4). On the

Reports of men and women falling into immortality are not confined to the politician arena. It has become altogether too common in the professing church. Why do such things occur? It is because the offenders did not “abhor that which is evil.”

other hand, one of the points for which Jesus commended backsliding Ephesus was, “you cannot bear those who are evil” (Rev 2:2). We could do with a revival of that kind of attitude!

We must not allow the psychiatrists to deceive us about, what is called, “fallen leaders.” Reports of men and women falling into immortality are not confined to the politician arena. It has become altogether too common in the professing church. Why do such things occur? It is because the offenders did not “abhor that which is evil.” If such poor souls expect to be received by God, they do well to admit this is the case, and to aggressively seek to obey this text. Their sin did not occur because they were in the wrong place at the right time. It happened because they did not “abhor that which is evil.” Sin

does not lay hold of a person just because they are simple, or because others take advantage of them. It is because they do not “abhor that which is evil.” They chose to live close to what God commands them to hate and leave. They trafficked on forbidden territory with hearts that had been sullied with the love of the world.

THE DREADFULNESS OF EVIL

With the deterioration of sound doctrine and spiritual life, there has also come a blindness concerning the dreadful nature of evil. Religious people have been blinded to the reprehensible nature of “evil.” The very first issue that faced humanity related to “the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9). At the very instant man came to “know evil,” he was thrust from the presence of the Lord (Gen 3:22-24). The world of Noah’s day was utterly destroyed because “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). When God became incensed against Israel, it was because they were an “evil congregation” (Num 14:27).

Jesus spoke of vain words that came “from evil” (Matt 5:37). He taught us to pray, “deliver us from evil.” Some versions read “the evil one”^{NIV} (Matt 6:13). Jesus said “evil thoughts” defile a person (Matt 15:19-20). He spoke of an “evil eye” (Mark 7:22), “evil things” (Mark 7:23), an “evil man,” and an “evil treasure” in the heart (Lk 6:45). Troubling and defiling spirits from the domain of the devil are called “evil spirits” (Lk 7:21). Our Lord spoke of an “evil generation” (Lk 11:29), “deeds” that are evil (John 3:19), and those who “do evil” (John 3:20). The works of the world, Jesus said, “are evil” (John 7:7).

The fall of the Gentile world included the invention of “evil things” (Rom 1:30). The Spirit promises that “tribulation and anguish” will come upon “every soul of man that doeth evil” (Rom 2:9). There are communications and associations that are “evil” (1 Cor 15:33). This present word,

from which Jesus has delivered us, is “evil” (Gal 1:4). There is such a thing as “evil speaking” (Eph 4:31), days that “are evil” (Eph 5:16), and “evil workers” (Phil 3:2). There is an “appearance of evil” that is to be avoided at all cost (1 Thess 5:22). There are “evil surmisings,” or suspicions (1 Tim 6:4), and “evil men” that “wax worse and worse” (2 Tim 3:13). There is such a thing as an “evil heart of unbelief,” and we are to see to it that it does not enter into us (Heb 3:12). There are “evil thoughts” (James 2:4), and “evil” that can flow from the tongue (1 Pet 3:10).

The consistency and firmness with which we are addressed concerning evil makes it inexcusable for a tolerant attitude toward it. No justification can be given for choosing to be around evil, or allowing its encroachments into our hearts and minds.

What Is “EVIL”?

The word “evil” is very large in both its meaning and its implications. It carries the ideas of disadvantageous, bad,

harmful, and painful. It also connotes useless, unprofitable, and unserviceable. Anything or anyone that is “evil” is wicked, poisonous, and has no redeeming qualities. Evil inflicts injury upon the soul, corrupts the mind, and defiles the conscience. “That which is evil” is inherently bad. It is like a piece of rotten fruit that cannot be made good. It is to be discarded, and that with great haste.

You cannot sanctify something that is evil. You cannot convert it to useful purposes. It is contaminated throughout, and cannot blend with the unseen things to which we have been called (2 Cor 4:17-18). Whatever has the taint of the world upon it is evil. Whatever Satan uses is evil. Whatever competes with God is evil. Whatever makes living for the Lord more difficult is evil. Things that interrupt communion with the Lord are evil. Actions, thoughts, and objects that will cause shame on the day of judgment are evil. Evil is the opposite of God. It is what Jesus hates, and what causes the Holy Spirit of God to grieve. It is what stops the

Spirit’s work, drives a wedge between the soul and its Creator, and makes the blessing of God seem unworthy of pursuit.

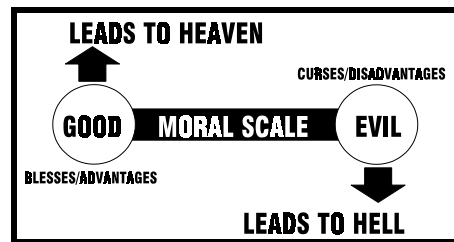
And what is to be our response to evil? We are to “abhor it.” When we are aware of it, we are to draw back in revulsion, putting a distance between it and us. We are to refuse what it offers, and close our ears to its suggestions. We are to run from it like Joseph fled from Potiphar’s wife.

Abhorring evil is not the result of a disciplinary procedure, or the exercise of self-will. Rather, it is the result of a heart that has been duly sensitized to the Lord. As Moses’ face was altered by exposure to the glory of God, so the heart is sharpened and stimulated. Evil became especially repulsive to Moses after he had been in the presence of the Lord – even more so than to Aaron, who had remained in the presence of the people (Ex 32:19-24). That is the secret to obtaining an utter hatred of sin – dwelling in the presence of God, walking in the light of His countenance.

THE RESPONSE TOWARD GOOD

“^{9c} **Cling to what is good.**” Other versions read, “Cleave to that which is good,”^{KJV} “hold fast to what is good,”^{NRSV} “keep your minds fixed on what is good,”^{BBE} “hold on to what is good,”^{NAB} and “Stand on the side of the good.”^{NLT}

Here is an aggressive stance – one that requires sustained effort and determination: “Cling,” “hold fast,” “hold on to!” The picture is of something that can be elusive – something that may not always be as accessible as it is at the moment. The word translated “cling,” or “cleave,”^{KJV} means to be joined to something – to be glued, or fastened firmly, together. Coming from *κολλάω*, this word is used to describe both illicit and holy relationships. “What? know ye not that he which is **joined** to a harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is **joined** unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:16-17). Whatever is joined becomes a single entity, working together for a common objective.



Be Glued to Good!

This text exhorts us to be bonded to good, not merely acquainted with it. It is to be identified with good, not merely admit to its uprightness. The attitude toward evil was two-fold: have a disdain for it, and turn from it. Likewise, there is a two-fold response to good: love it, and attach ourselves to it.

Clinging to “what is good” presumes a preference for it. It also involves satisfaction and enjoyment realized from it. There is also a refusal to let it go.

WHAT IS “GOOD”?

“Good” is the opposite of evil, and is so represented throughout Scripture. No less than ninety-seven times, the words “good and evil” occur in Scripture. The first warning in human history regarded these extremities (Gen 2:9,17). In a plea to Israel, the Lord associated “good” with life, and “evil” with death (Deut 30:15).

“Good and evil” are the extremes on the scale of moral values. “Good” blesses, giving advantage and leading to heaven. “Evil” curses, robbing the soul and leading to hell.

“Good” is anything that is associated with the strait and narrow way that leads unto life (Matt 7:13-14). It is related to the “fruit of the Spirit,” which “is in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph 5:9). “Good” has the hand of God upon it, who is Himself “good” (Psa 34:8; 100:5), and is “abundant in goodness” (Ex 34:6). In fact, as compared with all that is created, “there is none good but one, that

is, God" (Matt 19:17).

The Nature of Spiritual Life Seen

Here, the nature of spiritual life is seen. Not only are we to disassociate ourselves from evil, we are to associate ourselves with good. We are not only to refrain from doing evil, but engage in doing good. We avoid what tears down, and embrace what builds up. We shun what causes spiritual deterioration, and take hold of what contributes to spiritual growth and stability. In all of this, our heart is not only in accord with our thoughts, words, and deeds, it is the governor that dictates what we do.

Doing Good IS Emphasized

The particular point of emphasis here is the DOING of good. It is engaging in benevolent and helpful conduct toward all men, particularly those who live by faith. As it is written, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us **do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith**" (Gal 6:10). "Good," in this case, leaves the ones to whom it is directed better. It opens the door for the blessing of God, and leaves the individual with spiritual advantages.

Thus, we are admonished, "Depart from evil, and **do good**" (Psa 34:14; 37:27). Again, "Trust in the LORD, and **do good**" (Psa 37:3). It is possible for our words to "**do good to him that walks uprightly**" (Mic 2:7). Jesus admonished "**do good to them that hate you**" (Matt 5:44), and to "**do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again**" (Lk 6:35).

Those with an abundance of resources are exhorted to "**do good, that they be**

rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim 6:18-19). Here is something we must not forget. "**But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is**

Doing good is actually God ministering to others through a willing vessel. It is the result of walking so close with the Lord that others are actually benefitted by it.

Competitive Influences

For this reason it is written, "He that

There are contrary winds about us that can cause us to veer off course. We dare not imagine that adhering to the good will happen without any effort on our part. While it is true that our effort is not the determining factor, neither is it something that is excluded.

well pleased"^{NKJV} (Heb 13:16). Those who desire to love life and see good days are admonished, "**eschew evil, and do good**" (1 Pet 3:11).

"Good" is not to be the subject of empty discussion and philosophizing, it is to be done. **Only as we engage in the doing of good can we be joined to it.** We cannot "*cling*" to what we do not do. We can claim no association with anything with which we are not personally involved.

An Expression of the New Creation

Doing good, or bringing eternal advantages and kindness to others, is the expression of the new creation. By nature, "*there is none that doeth good, no, not one*" (Psa 14:3; Rom 3:2). Our text, therefore, is not speaking of mere human goodness, kindness, or thoughtfulness.

doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God" (3 John 11). The fact that we are exhorted to "*cling to that which is good*" confirms we are in the midst of competitive influences. There are contrary winds about us that can cause us to veer off course. We dare not imagine that adhering to the good will happen without any effort on our part. While it is true that our effort is not the determining factor, neither is it something that is excluded.

If you have been in the Lord for any length of time, you have experienced the value of brethren who "*do good*" to you. Such kind and tender souls have associated themselves with good, clinging to it, and refusing to purge thoughts of doing good from their minds. You know how profitable that can be. May you be such a soul, holding on to the good.

THE RESPONSE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER

¹⁰ **Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another . . .**" In Scripture, a considerable amount of attention is given to believer's involvements with one another. Unity is not a mere institutional formality, and the attitude and conduct of believers among themselves is given

substantial weight. Our adversary the devil has been particularly effective in the matter of disrupting the unity of the Spirit, which can only be maintained in "*the bond of peace*" (Eph 4:3). Sectarianism has taken its toll among the people of God, as well as a worldly-minded spirit. These conditions have compelled professing believers to view admonitions

like the one before us in relation to a particular denomination. Some even restrict them to their local congregation. As a result, a significant amount of inconsideration and harshness exists in the Christian community. This is a most unfortunate circumstance that has actually neutralized the effectiveness of the truth, and brought great reproach

upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is imperative that the admonition before us be taken seriously. It is not a mere suggestion, nor is it something that is optional. It does not represent a high level of spirituality, only to be attained by a few unusual souls.

KINDLY AFFECTIONED

"Be kindly affectionate to one another . . ." Other versions read, *"Be devoted to one another,"* ^{NASB} *"be tenderly affectioned one to another,"* ^{ASV} *"with genuine affection,"* ^{NLT} and *"let your feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression."* ^{NJB}

Kind affection involves cherishing the people of God and being profoundly considerate of their welfare. This is the kind of affection a parent has for a child, or for family members. The word carries the meaning of "tenderly affectionate, very loving, and naturally devoted to." ^{ROBERTSON} This is a love that is "not called out by circumstance, but is the natural love of kindred." ^{VINCENT}

Spiritual love, part of *"the fruit of the Spirit,"* is like a great tree with many branches. Kind affection is one of those branches, upon which much fruit can be borne. Tender affection is to be expressed among the household of faith regardless of social or domestic distinctions. The master can be profoundly considerate of the slave, who may reciprocate with joy. Thus Onesimus the slave can become profitable to Philemon the master (Phile 10-11), and a Centurion can seek the welfare of his slave (Matt 8:5-6). The Jew can be kindly affectioned toward the Gentile, enjoying a reciprocation of the same. Thus Titus the Greek can comfort Paul the Jew (Gal 2:3; 2 Cor 7:6), while Paul ministered and cared for Gentile believers (Rom 15:9-12). The thoughtful consideration can be enjoyed between male and female, in a beneficial and un sinful way. Thus Phebe can minister to Paul (Rom 16:1-2), and Paul can minister to Lydia (Acts 16:14,40). Spiritual affection can be experienced between the young and the old in Christ Jesus. Thus Eli can minister

to young Samuel, while Samuel served him (1 Sam 3:1-16).

The fact of our oneness in Christ allows for being kindly affectioned toward one another. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:27-28). The Lord Jesus was tender toward all who were drawn to Him. He was gentle toward Nicodemus the Jew (John 3:1-16), and a Gentile centurion (Luke 7:1-9). He was gracious to a man who was a demoniac

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(Mark 5:15), and a woman who was an adulteress (John 8:10-11). He healed an older woman, Peter's mother-in-law (Lk 4:38-39), raised a twelve year old girl, and blessed little children (Lk 8:41-42,52-54; Mark 10:16). He answered the prayer of a master, and healed his servant (Matt 8:6-7). He was *"kindly affectioned."*

Tender affection does not discriminate among the children of God! Yet, we are admonished to BE kindly affectioned toward one another, extending ourselves to express what God has put within us. The reason for this requirement is obvious: **when what the Lord gives us is not used, it soon withers and becomes useless.**

There is a profound need for tender affection within the household of faith. Because of our faith, we have become pilgrims and strangers in the world (1 Pet 2:11). The world does not love us because we no longer belong to its order (John

15:19). If, therefore, we are lacking in tenderness toward one another, we will have robbed the people of God of something provided for them.

You will note that the requirement is to express the tender affection, not receive it. It is not the business of the King's children to seek for others to bestow tender affection upon them. Rather, it is their lot to bestow it upon their brethren. They will soon find the affection returning many fold to them, fulfilling the word of the Lord, *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again"* (Luke 6:38). Many a small soul has become disgruntled because they did not receive the attention they thought was due to them. Almost without exception, such people have been stingy with their own affection, and thus have reaped an extremely small harvest of the same.

With Brotherly Love

" . . . with brotherly love."

This is a special kind of love, devoted to the family of God. This is the love that drives being *"kindly affectioned"* one to another. It is mentioned at least four other times in Scripture.

First, this love is taught to us by God Himself – not in the Scriptures, but within the context of fellowship with the Father and the Son. *"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another"* (1 Thess 4:9). This is not a mere academic lesson, but involves the communication of God's own propensity to love to those who have been joined to His Son.

Second, brotherly love is never to terminate, or find a conclusion. In Christ, no provision is made for it to end. *"Let brotherly love continue"* (Heb 13:1). This is not a crisis quality, or one that is intended to be temporary. It is an ongoing trait that enables the survival and growth of the saints.

Third, brotherly love is the outcome or purifying our souls in obeying the truth through the power of the Holy Spirit. *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”* (1 Pet 1:22). The new birth is necessary before this love can ever be exhibited.

Fourth, the love of the brethren is the experiential proof that we have passed from death unto life. *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because*

do so in *“brotherly love.”* But the matter does not end there, as though we were fulfilling a law from Mount Sinai.

In Honor

“ . . . in honor . . . ” With very few exceptions, every translation uses the word *“honor.”* This is the frame of spirit we are to have when we are kindly affectioned toward one another with brotherly love. It is to be done *“in honor;” “showing honor;”* ^{NRSV} or *“with honor.”* ^{DOUAY}

To *“honor”* means to respect, recognize as valuable, and esteem. This is

Giving Preference

“ . . . giving preference to one another.” Brotherly love is altogether selfless. It does not seek its own, but prefers another. Other versions read, *“give preference to one another,”* ^{NASB} *“Honor one another above yourselves,”* ^{NIV} *“outdo one another in showing honor,”* ^{NRSV} *“each taking the lead in paying it [honor] to one another,”* ^{DARBY} *“putting others before yourselves,”* ^{BBE} *“take delight in honoring each other,”* ^{NLT} and *“regard others as more important than yourself.”* ^{NJB}

Flesh cannot do this, for it sees no benefit in it. That is why this attitude is so exceedingly rare. It is not of this world. This is the frame of spirit that Jesus displayed freely. He said, *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matt 20:28). It is seen when He miraculously provided tribute money for both Himself and Peter (Matt 17:27). It is seen when He washed the disciples feet (John 13:4-5), and prepared an early breakfast for them (John 21:9). How often His disciples must have recalled Jesus’ acts of humility and consideration.

In preferring one another, we speak honorably of each believer, throwing the mantle of love upon them all, lest they be disgraced by some unwilling weakness. If our brethren have sins, we prefer they not be seen, and extend ourselves to conceal them from others. This word is appropriately described in Philippians 2:3-4. *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”*

There is a certain dignity associated with being called “the sons of God” (1 John 3:1-2), and it is our business to recognize it in our brethren. If our Father is going to “honor” those who serve the Son (John 12:26), we do well to also give them “honor.”

we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).

Brotherly love is the well from which *“brotherly kindness”* (2 Pet 1:7) and tender affection are drawn.

PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER

As with several passages of Scripture, there is a Divine progression in this thought. As we allow the sails of inspiration to bear us up, we will find ourselves mounting up with the wings of the eagle, soaring into lofty heights. Not only are we to be kindly affectioned, we

perceiving the people of God as He sees them – as *“jewels”* belonging to Him (Mal 3:17). There is a certain dignity associated with being called *“the sons of God”* (1 John 3:1-2), and it is our business to recognize it in our brethren. If our Father is going to *“honor”* those who serve the Son (John 12:26), we do well to also give them *“honor.”*

To honor the saints by being kindly affectioned toward them in brother love, is the opposite of despising them. It involves preferring their company, benefitting from the grace they have received, and bestowing labor upon them.

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE

“ ¹¹ Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Here the Spirit touches upon an area of especial weakness among believers. In the routine matters of life, whether directly or indirectly related to the Lord’s work,

there is an attitude to be avoided, and one to be obtained. The Divine stamp of approval is never given to halfheartedness, retardation, and slowness of response. Never are such traits commended or represented as being

tolerable. Those who are bent in such a direction will do well to give heed to this word, receiving it with all sobriety.

NOT SLOTHFUL

“Not lagging in diligence. . . ” Other

versions read, “*Not slothful in **business**,*”
KJV “*not lagging behind in diligence,*”NASB
 “*Never be lacking in zeal,*”NIV “*Be not slow in your work,*”BBE and “*Never be lazy in your work.*”NLT

Here, the various translations appear to obscure the text. Linguists insist that the word “*business*,” as used in the KJV, is not correct. Yet Thayer, the esteemed Greek lexicographer defines the word used here (σπουδή) as, “earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything.” That, of course, is precisely what the word “*business*” means: “purposeful activity . . . an immediate task or objective . . . a particular field of endeavor.”MERRIAM-WEBSTER

The Meaning

In this verse “*diligence*” means commitment to do something, or giving oneself to the completion of a specific task: i.e., the *business* of learning, What is your *business* here?, the best in the *business*, etc.

The meaning of the exhortation is this: whatever you set your mind and hand to do, do not be slothful in accomplishing it. It is another way of saying, “*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might*” (Eccl 9:10). Bringing that exhortation into the domain of the New Covenant, it says, “*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ*” (Col 3:23-24). Another way of saying the same thing is, “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil*” (Eph 5:15-16).

You will search the Scripture in vain for any word of encouragement for slothful souls. Slothfulness and lagging behind have no place in the walk of faith. God is not slothful. Jesus is not slothful. The Holy Spirit is not slothful. The holy angels are not slothful. What would lead

any soul to believe this grievous trait is acceptable among men – particularly those who have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13)?

In this time of falling away, the church is not noted for its zeal. There is an unfortunate spirit of stupor that has

one (James 5:16). Our love for one another is to be done “*fervently*” (1 Pet 1:22). Those who repent are to do so with zeal (Rev 3:19).

Can you imagine Noah being slothful in building the ark? How about Israel’s preparation to come out of Egypt? “*Whatever you do*” (Col 3:17), throw

There is an unfortunate spirit of stupor that has settled upon the Christian community, and it is altogether unacceptable. Aggressive preachers, teachers, elders, and deacons are not common.

settled upon the Christian community, and it is altogether unacceptable. Aggressive preachers, teachers, elders, and deacons are not common. In practical financial and business matters, Christians do not generally have good record.

We are solemnly admonished, “*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him*” (Col 3:17). It should be evident that no place is made for slothfulness in that exhortation.

FERVENT IN SPIRIT

“ . . . fervent in spirit.” Other versions read, “*keep your spiritual fervor,*”NIV “*be ardent in spirit,*”NRSV “*enthusiastically,*”NLT and “*with conscientiousness and an eager spirit.*”NJB This is equivalent to “*with all your might*” (Eccl 9:10), “*heartily*” (Col 3:23), and “*making the most of every opportunity*”NIV (Eph 5:16).

Apollos is an example of fervency. “*This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord*” (Acts 18:25). Another example is Epaphras. “*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers*” (Col 4:12). We are told that the prayer heaven will honor is a “*fervent*”

yourself into it. Do so because the Lord is honored by it. Do so because the people of God are helped by it. Do so because you are adorning the doctrine by it.

SERVING THE LORD

“ . . . serving the Lord.” Spiritual fervor is not an end of itself. It is the spirit in which God is served. Nothing in all of Scripture remotely suggests that God is served by halfheartedness or lukewarmness. Those who attempt to serve the Lord in a spirit of disinterest, infrequency, or out of a sense of obligation are not serving the Lord, and their efforts will not be recognized by Him. It simply is not possible to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and be haphazard or nonchalant in serving Him.

Those religious leaders who have pioneered brief meetings, infrequency of gatherings, and shallow presentations, should explain their preferences and practices in view of this passage. They have chosen to cater to the carnal mind, and to a manner of religious life that does not comport with the revealed will of God. It is quite true that we ought not be overbearing, or more demanding of the saints than the Lord. Such a custom is altogether unacceptable. Everyone, however, does well to take this text seriously, and to purge from their lives all forms of indolence and sloth.

HOPE, TRIBULATION, AND PRAYER

“¹² *Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer . . .*” Faith responds correctly

New Life in Christ Expresses Itself Consistently and to the Glory of God.--by Given O. Blakely

and beneficially under all circumstances. It always walks through difficulties, through the fire and water, hand-in-hand with the Deliverer. The eye of faith always sees beyond trials and tribulations, enabling the survival of the child of God, even though he is sorely tested.

Our text now addresses the difficulties of life. These are areas where survival and continuance are maintained with great difficulty. The race that is set before us leads to glory, yet it goes through the grievous "straits" in which even our persecutors "overlook" us (Lam 1:3). Faith is triumphant, overcoming the world, but not without a fierce conflict. If this was not the case, admonitions regarding "hope," "tribulation," and "prayer" would not be necessary.

These three responses are to accompany our service to the Lord: "serving the Lord" (verse 11). These are attending graces. They do not stand by themselves, but are put to work in the crucible of service to God. Apart from that service to, or worship of (12:1-2), the Lord, they have neither meaning nor purpose.

HOPE

"Rejoicing in hope . . ."

Other versions read, "Be joyful in hope," ^{NIV} "As regards hope, rejoicing," ^{DARBY} and "Being glad in hope." ^{BBE} The Spirit has already mentioned this marvelous quality: ". . . our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (5:2). This rejoicing, therefore, is "by," or "through," Christ Jesus. It is realized by means of His power and through fellowship with Him. Yet, this does not mean no effort is required from us. God does not admonish Jesus to cause us to rejoice in hope. We are the ones exhorted to do so! Divine appointments must be appropriated through faith.

What does it mean to "rejoice in hope?"

Hope regards the future. It is faith peering beyond the horizon of time and circumstance, seeing what God has "prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor

2:9). Hope does not look down, but up. It does not survey the circumstances, but ponders the future, when we will "ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). Hope does not ask, "What is happening to me?," but declares, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb 10:37). Hope does not linger in the outer court of where we are, but looks into the most holy place, where we are going.

Rejoicing in hope results from the contemplation of "the crown of righteousness" that will be given to us (2 Tim 4:8). It is awakened by the consideration of receiving "praise from God" (1 Cor 4:5), and hearing His "well done!" (Matt 25:23). When our thoughts

These are areas where survival and continuance are maintained with great difficulty. The race that is set before us leads to glory, yet it goes through the grievous "straits" in which even our persecutors "overlook" us

linger on the fact that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom 7:17), joy erupts, pouring refreshing water upon our souls. Meditating upon the coming glory, when we will "ever be with the Lord," sitting with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21), and reigning with Him (2 Tim 2:12), summons rejoicing to the place of dominance.

Things related to "the hope of His calling" (Eph 1:18) can only bring joy when they are duly considered. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:4-5). "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and

his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev 22:3-5).

If these things seem too good to be true, the God of heaven adds, "These sayings are faithful and true" (Rev 22:6).

It goes without saying that rejoicing in hope is only possible as these blessed realities are brought to the forefront of our thoughts. You may consider the possibility of your circumstances in this world improving. You may even associate such improvement with the grace and power of God. **But such thoughts cannot produce the rejoicing of hope.** If, whether concerning your own person, or those to whom you minister, you labor to bring rejoicing in the hope of earthly circumstance improving, you have not done well. You must hold the revealed future for all saints before people if they are to rejoice! Neither faith nor hope can flourish and refresh while thoughts are wrapped around earthly circumstances.

TRIBULATION

" . . . patient in tribulation . . ."

Other versions read, "persevering in tribulation," ^{NASB} "patient in affliction," ^{NIV} "be patient in suffering," and ^{NRSV} "endure in affliction" ^{NAB}

Patience is perseverance, persistence, or endurance. It is making progress when the details of life are not conducive to progress. It is continuing in the race when it leads through the Red Sea of impossibility or the burning desert of trial. Patience shouts to the soul what Moses was told to cry out to Israel: "speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Ex 14:15).

Patience is also an aspect of faith. Faith appropriately responds when it enters into the furnace of tribulation. Rather than being beat down by the flames, it becomes more determined than

ever to stand. When circumstance throws troops of complication and walls of impossibility before the child of God, faith shouts, *“For by Thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall”* (Psa 18:29).

It is not possible for those who live by faith to avoid tribulation.

Jesus has declared, *“In the world ye shall have tribulation”* (John 16:33). The only issue here is whether we will continue to run the race set before us or not. Many a professed believer has thrown in the towel when things become seemingly too difficult. Such imagine they will find relief by withdrawing from the race, and ceasing to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12). Thus, they are thrown to the ground by discouragement, and pummeled into despair by frustration. Poor souls, indeed, for they have actually incurred the indignation of God by their response. Is it not written, *“but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”* (Heb 10:38-39).

This is the word from heaven: *“be patient in tribulation!”* No other alternative is offered! This can only mean that our Father has graciously supplied all that we need to be *“patient in tribulation.”* If we quit in tribulation, it is because we have not availed ourselves of the resources God has provided. It is because we have not believed, or kept the faith. There is no valid reason for this to happen!

PRAYER

“ . . . continuing steadfastly in prayer.” Other versions read, *“continuing instant in prayer,”* ^{KJV} *“devoted to prayer,”* ^{NASB} *“faithful in prayer,”* ^{NIV} *“persevere in prayer,”* ^{NRSV} *“be constant in prayer,”* ^{RSV} and *“at all times given to prayer.”* ^{BBE}

importunate widow, who refused to cease from asking until she received an answer (Luke 18:1-8). They are also seen in the mighty prophet Elijah, who prayed seven times for rain – until his servant saw a small cloud forming, about the size of a man’s hand (1 Kgs 18:44). The early church was *“instant in prayer,”* immediately going to the Lord when they

Many a professed believer has thrown in the towel when things become seemingly too difficult. Such imagine they will find relief by withdrawing from the race, and ceasing to fight the good fight of faith

The words *“continuing steadfastly,”* or *“continuing instant,”* come from a single word (προσκαρτεροῦντες). The word has a broad meaning. It includes the ideas of *continuance* and *readiness*. It also means to *pay persistent attention to*, and *be devoted to*.

The meaning of the exhortation is this: **we are to remain so sensitive and devoted to prayer that it is your first and continual resort.** Concerning our response, we are to be *“instant in prayer,”* not tardy or slow in heart. Concerning the manner of prayer itself, we are to *“continue steadfastly”* in it, not giving up in difficult cases. Regarding our attitude concerning prayer, we are to be *“devoted to prayer,”* not allowing anything to move us from it.

All of these are seen in the

were threatened (Acts 4:24-31).

“Continuing instant in prayer” requires a sensitive spirit – one that is more aware of heaven than it is of earth. Such a soul is not shaken by circumstance, or moved by threats from the enemy. It is persuaded that God is *“a very present help in the time of trouble,”* and relies upon that fact (Psa 46:1).

Such people live and move and have their being within the framework of an acute consciousness of God. They know they are reconciled to Him. They know they have access to Him. They know He is seeking their welfare. Without such persuasions, one cannot continue *“instant in prayer.”* With them, such prayer is possible to the child of God. Blessed is the person who knows that joyful sound, and embraces it with joy and faith!

THE RESPONSE TOWARD NEEDS OF SAINTS

¹³ . . . distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”

Here is an exceedingly practical area of living by faith. It is not common to hear exhortations in this area, or to behold any degree of consistency in the fulfillment of the exhortation. I want to keep before you that the Spirit is showing how faith works. He is also revealing the response of the individual to whom righteousness has been imputed. The individual who is able

to fervently desire, and enter into, these good works possesses confirmation that he is righteous. As it is written, *“ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him”* (1 John 2:29). And again, *“he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous”* (1 John 3:7).

DISTRIBUTING

“Distributing to the needs of the saints.” Other versions read,

“Distributing to the necessity of saints,” ^{KJV} *“contributing to the needs of the saints,”* ^{NASB} *“Share with God’s people who are in need,”* ^{NIV} and *“When God’s children are in need, be the one to help them out.”* ^{NLT}

For some, this is a most difficult text. Particularly in the Western world, a kind of Christianity is being marketed that looks with disdain upon any believer being

needy. The resurrection of the health and wealth gospel (falsely so called) teaches that salvation includes financial prosperity and health of body. Thus, these benighted souls surmise, need is an evidence of unbelief. Of course, if these people were right, you would not contribute to the needs of the saints, but exhort them to have no needs at all. The best thing to do with such teaching is to throw it into the theological scrap heap.

The word “*distribute*” postulates that we are stewards of the resources God has given us. They are not intended to be for ourselves alone, but are to be used for the glory of God. Those who have more than an adequate supply of resources are admonished to handle them properly. “*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*” (1 Tim 6:17-19). Notice the wealth of insight that is here made known.

- ❑ The rich are to be “*charged*,” commanded, ^{NKJV} or instructed ^{NASB} regarding their riches.
- ❑ The rich are not to be “*highminded*,” haughty ^{NKJV} or conceited. ^{NASB}
- ❑ They are not to “*trust in uncertain riches*,” of fix their hope in fading resources.
- ❑ Their hope is to be firmly “*in the living God*.”
- ❑ The things they have received have come from Him, who richly supplies us all things to enjoy.
- ❑ The rich are to “*do good*” with their riches.
- ❑ They are to see to it they are “*rich in good works*,” rather than only in goods or possessions.
- ❑ The rich are to be “*ready to distribute*,” “*ready to give*,” ^{NKJV} and “*generous*.” ^{NASB}
- ❑ They are to be “*willing to*

communicate,” or “*share*.” ^{NKJV}

- ❑ By so doing, they are “*storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*,” or “*storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed*.” ^{NASB}

The proper handling of earthly resources is a matter of stewardship. It reveals whether or not a person has faith. It also provides an opportunity to excel in

The proper handling of earthly resources is a matter of stewardship. It reveals whether or not a person has faith. It also provides an opportunity to excel in good works. Faithfulness in this area directly impacts upon our future—“the time to come.”

good works. Faithfulness in this area directly impacts upon our future—“*the time to come*.” Finally. It relates to taking hold of eternal life. When, therefore, we speak of giving to the needs of the saints, we are not dealing with a trivial and inconsequential matter!

Determining Our Eternal Destiny

Jesus revealed that our response to the needs of His brethren – “*the saints*” – had a direct bearing upon our eternal destiny. He mentioned several areas, relating them all to Himself personally. “*I was hungry . . . I was thirsty . . . I was a stranger . . . I was naked . . . I was sick . . . I was in prison*.” The response of the people to these situations revealed whether they were “*sheep*” or “*goats*,” accepted or rejected. It became the basis for being on His right hand or left hand. It determined if they inherited the kingdom prepared for them, or were cursed, forced to depart from him and have their part in

the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and His angels.

Those who were blessed to be forever with the Lord were told, “*you gave Me food . . . you gave Me drink . . . you took ME in . . . you clothed Me . . . you visited Me . . . you came to Me*.” Those who were cursed and cast into everlasting fire ere told: “*you gave Me no food . . . you gave Me no drink . . . you did not take Me in . . . you did not clothe Me . . . you did not visit Me*.”

In both cases, the people were not aware of any action they had performed toward the Lord Himself. The righteous responded, “*Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?*” The wicked responded, “*Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?*”

Our Lord’s answer unveiled the kind of realm into which we have been called. To the righteous He said, “*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me*.” To the wicked He replied, “*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me*.” (Matt 25:32-46).

Weighty Words

Within the context of those words, our text takes on a greater weight. This is no mere suggestion: “*Distributing to the necessity of saints*.” No wonder David exclaimed, “*Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble*” (Psa 41:1) – particularly when they are the saints of God (Gal 6:10)!

The Experience of the Early Church

Almost immediately, the early church was faced with the need of the saints. Devout men “*from every nation under heaven*” had flocked to Jerusalem to

observe the feast of Pentecost. They had not come to stay, but had planned to return home after the festivities. However, during their stay, they heard the news of the exalted Savior, were convinced of their need to be reconciled to God, and were "added to the church." As a result, they remained, basking in the blessing of the Lord and the newness of life.

Consequently, their resources soon were depleted, and need surfaced. Faith rose to the occasion. It is written, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

While this was an unusual circumstance, it provides an excellent example of being "ready to distribute." We are told that God "is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb 6:10). Such sharing is described as "sacrifices" with which God is "well pleased" (Heb 13:16).

Elsewhere the Spirit reminds us that the love of God does not dwell in the individual who fails to respond to the needs of Christ's brethren. "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

What of Those with Chronic Needs?

What of those with chronic needs, who always seem to stand in need of assistance? What is to be done in their case.

The Helpless

First, there ARE people who, due to debilitating circumstances, always need to be helped. Such was the beggar Lazarus, full of sores, who was daily laid at the gate of a rich man (Lk 16:20). In the case of Lazarus, he found no relief until he died and was escorted by angels to Abraham's bosom (16:22). There was also the lame beggar who was carried every day and placed at the "gate of the temple" (Acts

3:2). His situation was changed when Peter and John, in the name of Jesus, eliminated his need (3:6-7). There was also blind Bartimaeus who regularly begged alms (Mark 10:46).

Thus, there are people whose need is never really eliminated, and we ought not to grow impatient with them. They have disadvantages that prohibit them from meeting their needs. Of such, Jesus said, "For you have the poor with you always" ^{NKJV} (Matt 26:11).

Elsewhere the Spirit reminds us that the love of God does not dwell in the individual who fails to respond to the needs of Christ's brethren.

The Slothful

There are others, however, whose need has arisen because of their lack of diligence and productivity. The role of believers is not to nurse such along, ignoring their slothfulness. Of such, it is written, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: **If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.** For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread" (2 Thess 3:10-12).

From the very moment man was thrust from the garden, hearty work was ordained. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19). Any person who seeks to avoid this judgment is in rebellion against God. Such souls are sluggards who can always find a reason for NOT working, or NOT eating his bread as the result of his own work. Of such Solomon said, "The sluggard will not plow by

reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing" (Prov 20:4). He hands "refuse to labor," and thus God has withdrawn help from him (Prov 21:25).

You see, then, that discretion is required as we distribute "to the necessity of the saints." We are handling God's resources, and therefore are to do so for His honor and glory, as well as the assistance of the poor.

HOSPITALITY

"... given to hospitality."

Other versions read, "practicing hospitality," ^{NASB} "extend hospitality to strangers," ^{NRSV} "pursuing hospitality," ^{DOUAY} "ready to take people into your houses," ^{BBE} "And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night," ^{NLT} and "look for opportunities to be hospitable." ^{NJB}

In a day of economical motels and credit cards, this exhortation may sound strange. It may even be viewed as a cultural thing, with no bearing upon the nature of spiritual life. However, the Holy Spirit does not apply the effects of imputed righteousness and faith to mere cultural matters. Such a postulate is wholly without foundation. It has the Lord admonishing us to conform to culture on the one hand, and yet refuse to conform to the fashion of the world on the other hand (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 7:31). Such thinking is unbecoming for those with renewed minds.

There are numerous examples of hospitality in Scripture.

- Pharaoh to Abraham (Gen 12:16).
- Melchizedec to Abraham (Gen 14:18).
- Abraham to angels (Gen 18:1-8).
- Lot to angels (Gen 19:1-11).
- Abimelech to Abraham (Gen 20:14-15).
- Sons of Heth to Abraham (Gen 23:6-11).
- Laban to Abraham's servant (Gen 24:31).
- Laban to Jacob (Gen 29:13-14).
- Isaac to Abimelech (Gen 26:30).
- Joseph to his brethren (Gen 43:31-34).
- Pharaoh to Jacob (Gen 45:16-20).

- Jethro to Moses (Ex 2:20).
- Rahab to the spies (Josh 2:1-16).
- Men of Gibeah to the Levite (Judges 19:16-21).
- Pharaoh to Hadad (1 Kgs 11:17,22).
- David to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:7-13).
- The widow of Zarephath to Elijah (1 Kings 17:10-24).
- The Shunammite to Elisha (2 Kgs 4:8-10).
- Elisha to the Syrian spies (2 Kgs 6:22).
- Job to strangers (Job 31:32).
- Martha to Jesus (Lk 10:38; John 12:1-2).
- A Pharisee to Jesus (Luke 11:37-38).
- Zaccheus to Jesus (Luke 19:1-10).
- Simon the tanner to Peter (Acts 10:6,23).
- Lydia to Paul and Silas (Acts 16:15).
- Jailor to Paul and Silas (Acts 16:33-

- 34).
- Publius to Paul (Acts 28:7).
- Phebe to Paul (Rom 16:2).
- Onesiphorus to Paul (2 Tim 1:16).
- Gaius (3 John 5-8).

Considerable blessing was conferred upon people in the above instances of hospitality. It became an environment in which encouragement was ministered and the work of God was extended. In Zaccheus' case, salvation came to his house in the atmosphere of hospitality. In Rahab's case, her whole family was spared because of her hospitality. The father of Publius was healed because of his hospitality to Paul. The Shunammite woman was given a child because of her hospitality.

Let the people of God be known for

their kindly spirit, and for sharing their home and possessions with others. We can well afford to receive others because Christ *"has received us to the glory of God"* (Rom 15:7).

One of the qualifications for an elder is, *"given to hospitality"* (1 Tim 3:2), and even being a *"lover of hospitality"* (Tit 1:8). Before a widow can be supported by the church, she must *"have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted"* (1 Tim 5:10). Such hospitality is to be given to one another *"without grumbling"* (1 Pet 4:9).

Here is a virtue in which considerable advancement can be realized. The church is deficient in this area.

THE RESPONSE TOWARD OUR PERSECUTORS

"¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Spiritual life expresses itself on all levels, and in all relationships. There is no legitimate area of life where it is not productive, or does not bear fruit. Here, faith responds to those who persecute and abuse the saints.

BLESS! BLESS!

How are we to respond to those who hurt us - who persecute us, and do all manner of evil against us? How does Divine life react to people like that? What kind of grace are we to seek to help in a need such as that?

Bless!

Here is a challenge worthy of the people of God: *"Bless your persecutors!"* ^{NJB} Seek their advantage! Ask the Lord to bestow benefits upon them. Pursue their welfare!

Jesus put it this way: *"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; **that ye may be***

the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:44-45).

Spiritual life expresses itself on all levels, and in all relationships. There is no legitimate area of life where it is not productive, or does not bear fruit. Here, faith responds to those who persecute and abuse the saints.

One of the traits to which Paul confessed was this: *"being reviled, we bless"* (1 Cor 4:10).

When a band of men and officers came to arrest Jesus in the garden, Peter rushed to His defense, drawing his sword, *"and smote the high priest's servant, and*

cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus" (John 18:10). The reaction of Jesus to that deed is recorded by Luke. *"And He touched his ear, and healed him"* (Lk 22:51). He blessed His enemies, and did good to those despitefully using Him.

Luke records the first words Jesus said after He was crucified: *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"* (Lk 23:34). He was blessing His enemies, and those who persecuted Him. Stephen did the same regarding his enemies, blessing them with these words, *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"* (Acts 7:60). He blessed them while the stones they were throwing battered the life from his body.

To bless our enemies is not a natural disposition, and it cannot be carried out in the energy of the flesh. You will have to live in fellowship with Christ to do it, and you really have no choice but to do so.

Do Not Curse!

Of old time, holy men were known to curse their enemies. Elisha cursed forty

two children who had chided him saying, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head." Two she bears forthwith came out of the wood and mauled them all to death! On another occasion, when hostile men were sent to Elijah by the king of Samaria, he called fire down from heaven upon them, consuming two groups of fifty, together with their leaders (2 Kgs 1:10-12).

Drawing upon these two occasions, the disciples of Jesus once confronted some Samaritans who did not want to receive Jesus because they saw He was headed for Jerusalem. Infuriated by the circumstance, James and John asked the Lord, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" Most solemnly, the Lord replied, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Lk 9:52-56).

Thus did He set the tone for His followers to "curse not!"

If it seems too difficult for this word to be fulfilled in your life, you must consider Job, who had neither Bible nor kindred spirits around him. He confessed, "If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul" (Job 31:29-30).

Even under the Law, the Lord demanded of the people, "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him" (Ex 23:4-5). I doubt not that most Israelites failed to see the kernel of truth in that commandment. But that must not be said of us!

Some centuries later, David, the man after God's own heart, acknowledged, "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother" (Psa 35:13-14).

Even Solomon declared, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished" (Prov 17:5). Through the poor, the hearts of men are discovered.

The Lord, therefore, has asked nothing of us that is too difficult. We have, by grace, been called into affiliation with the One who reconciled us when we were enemies (Rom 5:10). We have been the recipients of great blessing, and can now refrain ourselves from cursing our enemies, and those who do us harm.

REJOICING AND WEEPING WITH OTHERS

¹⁵ **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** Here is another admonition that cannot be fulfilled by mere discipline, or out of a sense of obedience alone. Heart and affection can be admonished, but they cannot be commanded, as in the sense of law. In this very sensitive exhortation we are urged to make the experiences of our brethren our own. How can such a word be viewed as a cold and heartless commandment, or obeyed out of a sense of obligation? Your heart will tell you such a thing is not possible.

Nature cannot rise to this requirement. It has neither the strength nor the inclination to do so. Neither, indeed, can legalism fulfill this admonition. Job's "friends," driven by a spirit of law, were not able to weep with Job in his sorrow, nor rejoice with him in his deliverance. They were suspicious, not sensitive, and antipathetic, not

empathetic. Although God refused to excuse their inconsideration, these men lived in the dim light of limited revelation. However, those living in the high noon of

The saved cannot always rejoice or weep with the unsaved, for they do not have the same sense of values. While there are common experiences in which measured empathy can take place (death, birth, etc), those occasions are not the thrust of this word.

the Gospel of Christ are abundantly capable of rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep. It only remains for them to do so.

HOUSEHOLD RESPONSES

This is an encouragement to identify more fully with those who are in Christ Jesus. The saved cannot always rejoice or weep with the unsaved, for they do not have the same sense of values. While there are common experiences in which measured empathy can take place (death, birth, etc), those occasions are not the thrust of this word.

Rejoicing with Those Who Rejoice

David provided an example of one trusting person rejoicing with another. "My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad" (Psa 34:2). And again, "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word" (Psa 119:74).

Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist, experienced the same type of

fellowship. When John was born, “*her neighbors and her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her*” (Luke 1:58).

Another picture is provided in the parable of the lost sheep. The good shepherd left the ninety and nine sheep to find the one that was lost. Finding it, he carried it upon his shoulder “*with rejoicing.*” Upon returning home, “*he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost*” (Luke 15:4-6).

One of the measures of true spiritual advancement is the ability to rejoice at the well being and successfulness of our brothers and sisters. It confirms that we have been delivered from the tyranny of self. Thus, if “*one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it*” (1 Cor 12:26). There is a great comfort that comes to us in the realization that our brethren are rejoicing with us. It mitigates otherwise selfish tendencies.

Weeping with Those Who Weep

When we rejoice with those who rejoice, the joy is, as it was, multiplied. However, when we weep with those who weep, sorrow is reduced, and made more

bearable.

One remarkable passage that touches upon this matter, regards our consideration of those who are suffering in bonds, or chains. “*Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body*” (Heb 13:3).

This is not a mere formality, like those who came to lament the passing of Lazarus (John 11:33-38), or the passing of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37-40). It is an action driven by insight, and the capacity to participate in the experiences of those of like precious faith.

WHY WE CAN REJOICE AND WEEP

Common. These responses are possible because of the “*common faith*” (Tit 1:4) that exists among us. We are all members of one body, have the same values, have left the same condemned realm, and are headed for the same glorious liberty.

Capacity. In Christ, we have the capacity to rejoice and weep with fellow strangers and pilgrims. We are able to do this by virtue of the same Spirit that we possess. We also have been given the same kind of nature in Christ, and have the same law written upon our hearts and put

into our minds.

Versatility. Faith can adapt to all kinds of experiences. While we are rejoicing in our own blessings, we can, at the same time, weep with those who have been less fortunate. Suffering ones, on the other hand, can rejoice in their brethren who have been exalted at the same time they are standing in the furnace of trial. **Faith works at the extremities of human experience as well as at its center – in the valleys as well as on the mountains.**

Many of us have been able to negotiate through very difficult times because our brothers and sisters wept with us. Also, we have been able to handle great blessings without being overcome with pride, because our brethren rejoiced with us. This is a good family benefit.

One might ask why such an exhortation is necessary. It is because the remnants of the old nature remain in us, quite willing to express themselves during times of spiritual obtuseness. Sinful selfishness can overcome the expression of mutual feelings if we do not walk by faith and live in the power of the Spirit. Satan is particularly active in this area, and thus we are to be alert to his delusions.

HAVING THE SAME MIND

“^{16a} **Be of the same mind toward one another.**” Other versions read, “*Live in harmony with one another,*”^{NIV} “*Have the same respect one for another,*”^{DARBY} “*Have the same regard for one another,*”^{NAB} and “*Give the same consideration to all others alike.*”^{NJB} This is another way of saying we are not to have “*respect of persons,*” for “*if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin*” (James 2:9).

There are several texts in which we are admonished to “*be of the same mind,*” embracing the same perspectives of God and His great salvation, or having the same emphasis (Rom 15:6; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 4:2). **However, that is not the thrust of this verse.**

The key here is “*toward one another.*” That is, we are not to be selective about those with whom we “*rejoice*” or “*weep.*” We are not to have our favorites, so to speak, developing religious cliques, or groups. This is a lamentable tendency that is quite common among professed Christians. Sectarianism encourages such a stance, driving wedges between those whom faith unites.

This is having “*the same love*” (Phil 2:2) and thoughtful consideration toward one another. Being “*of the same mind toward one another*” will move us to “*by love serve one another*” (Gal 5:13). We will thus live considerately of one another, “*forbearing one another, and forgiving*

one another” (Col 3:13), thereby encouraging growth in Christ Jesus.

In this attitude, we view one another as we are in Christ Jesus, without regard to social or other fleshly distinctions. We are all born of God, washed, sanctified, and justified. We have all received the Spirit of adoption, an eternal inheritance, and grace for grace. Our names are all written in the book of life, the angels minister to us all, and Jesus makes intercession for us all. Recalling these, and other things, will assist us in having the same regard for one another. This will produce a pleasant spiritual environment in which encouragement and comfort will be ministered.

It must be remembered that faith has alienated us from the world. It does not and cannot love us, even though we often receive helps from it. But they are not of the sort that are received from the household of faith, and are not to be compared with the same. At the very best,

those who are of the world can assist us in temporal ways. We are grateful for such helps, but they are not to be compared with the lifting up of the hands than hang down, and the strengthening of the feeble knees received amidst the saints of God. There is a comfort that is superior. There

is a help that is more excellent. There are advantages that are more beneficial, more laden with Divine resources. These are blessings Jesus ministers through the members of His body. No one can bring these to us but those who are reconciled to God. They are needful to us all.

THE RESPONSE TOWARD SELF

“^{16b} Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.” Once again, I am reminded of the presence of the sinful nature within us. It is what necessitates exhortations like this, and we do well to remember it. You may recall the fierce spiritual struggle that was depicted in the seventh chapter of Romans. There arise in us thoughts and inclinations that we hate, and we are powerless to stop them from asserting themselves. Time and time again, we must reject them, throwing them down in the energy of faith (7:15-18). All of this confirms that in our natural persons, or *“flesh,”* there is nothing good, nothing salvageable, nothing that must be allowed to dominate (7:18). With the Adamic nature we *“serve the law of sin”* (7:25).

Salvation has freed us from an obligation to the flesh. We are no longer debtors to it, to live after it – even though it is constantly crying to us for attention (8:12).

This condition is the reason for this word. There is in us a propensity that must be cast down to the ground, and that with aggression.

MINDING HIGH THINGS

“Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.” Other versions read, *“Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate,”*^{KJV} *“do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly,”*^{NASB} *“Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position,”*^{NIV} and *“Pay no regard to social standing, but meet humble people*

on their own terms.”^{NJB}

The idea is that we are not to gravitate to people who appear to give us the greater advantage. The KJV version accentuates this by saying, *“condescend to*

There arise in us thoughts and inclinations that we hate, and we are powerless to stop them from asserting themselves. Time and time again, we must reject them, throwing them down in the energy of faith

men of low estate.” The meaning is **not** to condescend to ourselves be men of low estate (although that **is** emphasized in the next clause), but to be identified with others who are of lower social standing.

The church in Rome had people from *“Caesar’s household”* (Phil 4:21), and those who served in the households of others, having none of their own (16:10,11). There was not to be division in the church with, for example, the slaves meeting together in one place, and those of high social standing in another. The most advanced in Christ were to associate themselves with those of most ignoble backgrounds and associations, showing no preference.

The Lord Jesus

Our blessed Lord lived out this spirit in a public manner. It was so contrary to

the nature of the religious bigots of His day, that they criticized Him for it. They said of Him, *“Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners”* (Matt 11:19). Jesus was neither gluttonous nor a winebibber (drunkard). However, because He condescended to bring the Gospel to them, His enemies thought He had become defiled by the association.

Again, when He stooped to wash the disciples’ feet, He was condescending to be identified with men of low estate (John 13:4-5). He was the King, yet was not demeaned by performing the work of a servant to those He Himself created!

Again, when mothers brought their little children to Jesus, that He would *“touch them,”* His disciples were much displeased. It seemed much to lowly for the Master Teacher to engage in such mundane things. Therefore, the disciples sternly *“rebuked those that brought”* the little children. When the Lord saw this conduct, He was *“greatly displeased.”* He told His disciples to cease from forbidding little children to be brought to Him. He then took the little children *“up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them”* (Matt 19:13-16). He stooped to be identified with the lowliest estate of all – that of little children.

The Practice of Paul

We learn from Scripture that a certain runaway slave, Onesimus, was converted by Paul. This took place when Paul was in prison (Philemon 10). Onesimus was probably in prison with

Paul at the time. Later, Paul referred to him as “a faithful brother,” sending him to Colossae with Tychicus (Col 4:9). Eventually, Paul sent him back to Philemon, saying he would prove profitable to his former master (Philemon 11-16). This circumstance would never have arisen if Paul, from an illustrious Jewish background, did not associate with Onesimus the runaway. He was not haughty in mind, but associated with the lowly.^{NASB} This was not grace given to an Apostle, but grace for the saints.

Who can forget the time when Paul was shipwrecked. The entire crew of the ship, together with its prisoners (of whom Paul was one), finally making it to the shore of an island of uncultured and “barbarous” people. Because of “the rain, and because of the cold,” the islanders received them, even kindling a fire for them. Paul, however, did not simply sit by the fire, but “gathered a bundle of sticks” for the fire. In the process, he was bitten by a poisonous snake, which he shook off in the fire, that no one else would be harmed (Acts 28:2-3). He condescended to be identified with men of low estate, thereby opening the door for the Lord to work on that island.

The church has too long suffered from men of haughty spirit, who refused to be identified with those they imagined were too lowly. It is our business to make sure this uncomely trait is not in us.

WISE IN OUR OWN EYES

“Do not be wise in your own opinion.” Other versions read, “Be not wise in your own conceits,”^{KJV} “Do not be wise in your own estimation,”^{NASB} “Do not be conceited,”^{NIV} and “do not claim to be

wiser than you are.”^{NRSV} Flesh tends to provoke us to overestimate our own worth. It is not unusual to find professing Christians engaging in all manner of activities for which they are not well suited. Some, for example, imagine that academic credentials qualify them for these tasks. Those in Christ are to “think soberly,” and in strict accord with their role in the body of Christ (12:3).

Isaiah declared, “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa 5:21). Solomon enjoined, “Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Prov 3:7). Again he warned, “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him” (Prov 26:12). Paul warned those who speculated about the Jews without hearing what God has said of them, “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in”^{NASB} (Rom 11:25).

A person who is wise in his own eyes has used worldly standards to make that vain determination. He has asked the world for the criterion of judgment. Such a person is solemnly warned, “Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise”^{NIV} (1 Cor 3:18). Whether it is in the area of logic, language, history, or other forms of worldly knowledge, the world cannot produce “wisdom” in the child of God. The wisdom of this world, in its totality, is “foolishness in God’s sight” (1 Cor 3:19). It tends to puff up, and cause men to

over-evaluate their own worth before God and to the saints. Such people must give heed to the words of our text!

Those who are “wise” in their “own opinion” are leaning to their own understanding. They do not understand “through faith” (Heb 11:3), and thus their understanding is vain. For this reason it is written, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Prov 3:5). The person who is wise in his own eyes has failed to give heed to this word. For this reason, his wisdom is without value.

If this word was given due heed within the professing church, it would require changes of great magnitude. The structure of local congregations and Christian institutions would be altered so radically, one would scarcely be able to identify the results with what presently exists. There is a certain manner in place in the professing church, that has assigned high value to things of minuscule spiritual worth. People with very little spiritual insight have been vaulted into places of prominence. They have been given the responsibility of teaching and training others in the ways of the institution while they themselves are grossly ignorant of the ways of God. It may appear that this is a harsh judgment, and is characterized by inconsideration. However, when men are unable to move about in heavenly places, handle the Word of God, and open the mysteries of the Kingdom, they are not wise, regardless of their imagined credentials. A system that allows, and even encourages, them to consider themselves wise is seriously deficient, to say the least. I doubt that it can be blessed by God.

GODLY RESPONSES

“¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.” Good and evil are all about us, personally impacting upon our lives. It is essential that we respond properly to them both.

DO NOT REPAY EVIL FOR EVIL

“Repay no one evil for evil.” Other versions read, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone,”^{NASB} and “Do not give evil for evil to any man.”^{BBE} The commandment is firm.

Under the Law

Under the Law it was written, “But if

any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Ex 21:23-24). Again it was written, “If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him; fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for

tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him” (Lev 24:19-20). And again, “then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deut 19:19-21).

The Law was a harsh and retaliatory system. It was ordained of God, and was suited for those who were not reconciled to Him. It was a covenant for those who lived in the flesh, under the dominance of sin, with a defiled conscience and an unchanged heart. It was designed to keep sin in check, lest it break forth on all sides, becoming uncontrollable.

Because the people had not been joined to the Lord, and were unlike Him in their thoughts and ways, they were often required to take some matters into their own hands. They were charged with the responsibility of restraining sin from bursting out of bounds, as it did in the days of Noah. However, this was not the ideal situation, to say the least.

Under the New Covenant

Things are quite different under the New Covenant. This difference is not owing to a mere change of the legal code. It is because men themselves are changed. Their sins are remitted, and the law of God is written upon their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 10:16-17). They are partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14), and have been made “a new creature” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17).

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who

asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.” NKJV (Matt 5:38-42). In the words of our text, “Repay no one evil for evil.”

Peter admonished us, “not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling” (1 Pet 3:9). Whether in word or deed, those who do evil to us are not to be allowed to set our agenda, or determine how we react. The Lord is our Shepherd, and as such

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dictates how we respond to our enemies.

If you are tempted to return evil for evil, heed this word: “Do not say, ‘I will recompense evil’; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you” (Prov 20:22). It is our responsibility to “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all” (1 Thess 5:15).

Should we choose to ignore this word, all manner of evil will be awakened within us. When we set ourselves to return evil for evil, the “old man” is raised in great strength, and begins to sit upon the throne of our heart and mind. He will not rule us well, and will again put us on the broad road that leads to destruction. Returning evil for evil gives a large room of residence to the devil, and he will not fail to occupy it.

REGARD GOOD THINGS

“Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.” Other versions read,

“Provide things honest in the sight of all men,” KJV “Respect what is right in the sight of all men,” NASB “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody,” NIV and “but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.” NRSV

This is another call for a total departure from self-centeredness. We are to have a regard for how others – even “everybody” – perceives our manners.

This does not mean we are to become pleasers of men, for then we would cease to be the servants of Christ (Gal 1:10; Eph 6:6; Col 3:22). However, there is a general sense in men, even unregenerate men, of what is good and proper. While the wicked may not act upon this general knowledge, we must not be guilty of violating that consciousness.

Prepare beforehand. By saying “Have regard,” or “provide” for such things, the Spirit means we are to think about our manners ahead of time. We are to consider how “all men” will view what we do – not because we seek to please them, **but because we do not want them to have a wrong view of life in Christ.** Whether it is our countenance, words, deeds, clothing, or social preferences, **the world must not conclude that we are no different than they.** They must not see our profession as empty and without an impact upon our lives.

Avoiding offence. Young Titus was told to exhort young men about these things. The words given to him are applicable to us as well, and we do well to take them seriously. “Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you” (Tit 2:6-8). An aggressive exhortation, indeed!

Make no mistake about this, we are to “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a

crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15). The name of the Lord and His doctrine has suffered much reproach because of the manners of many who wear His name. They have not provided for things honest in the eyes of all men.

Adorn the doctrine. There is a word spoken to slaves that is also a timely one for us all. It will have particular application to those in the employment of others, yet can be adapted to every person in Christ. *"Exhort bondservants to be*

obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Tit 2:9-10).

What others think of your expressions does have a bearing on how you are to live. If you live in violation of even the common sense of goodness that all men have, you greatly dishonor the Savior, and place yourself in great jeopardy. God will not ignore such inconsideration. Again, we live in times that require this to be taught

aggressively. There is far too much looseness in the professing church concerning this matter. The attitude of the people living under the Judges has resurfaced to the shame of the church. *"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Our text forbids such an attitude, for no person in Christ is an island to himself. Hence, he cannot live independently of the body. The church is the "fulness" of Christ (Eph 1:23), and thus is essential to us.

IF YOU DETERMINE THE CIRCUMSTANCE

¹⁸ ***If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*** Other versions read, *"Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible,"*^{NLT} and *"As much as possible, and to the utmost of your ability, be at peace with everyone."*^{NJB} **Agitation and turmoil are the foe of spiritual progress.** Many a soul has gone down in defeat because of a troublesome environment! If you want a harvest of righteousness, *"the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace"* (James 3:16). The NIV reads, *"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."*

There is such a thing as being able to *"MAKE peace"* – that is what our text declares. This is not a constant circumstance, or something over which we

have total control. However, there are times when peaceableness depends upon us: *"as much as depends upon you!"* A wise woman once said to the fierce warrior Joab, *"I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel."* Her words spared a city, and only a single offender was punished. Peace depended on that wise woman (2 Sam 20:19-21).

There is a sense in which we are the cause of division and agitation. Even as Jesus said of Himself, *"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword"* (Matt 10:34). But this is not the preference of *"The Prince of peace"* (Isa 9:6). He prefers that men be reconciled to God, and gave His life for that purpose (2 Cor 5:18-20).

So it is with the children of God. We

do not desire to have war and conflict all about it. It is not in our heart to set every person against us, and be constantly opposed in what we do. We find no delight in such circumstances. As David would say, *"I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war"* (Psa 120:7). We will do everything short of dishonoring our Lord to keep peace. We will not go out of our way to make war or cause dissension, but will extend ourselves to *"make peace."*

As with all such matters, this high regard for peace is to be had in our associations with *"all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal 6:10). May the words of our blessed Lord find residence in our hearts: *"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matt 5:9). The benefit is worth the effort.

THE RESPONSE TOWARD OUR ENEMIES

¹⁹ ***Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.***²⁰ ***Therefore If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*** This is a text worthy of deep contemplation.

Perhaps you have begun to see the magnitude of these exhortations. They extend far beyond the capabilities of the flesh or mere civility. That is one of the reasons for the abundance of them, and the insistence that they be carried out. This moves us to rely the more upon the Lord, showing us how utterly insufficient we are of ourselves.

If we keep religion in the realm of philosophy, it will place no pressure upon us. Nor, indeed, will it move us to call upon the name of the Lord, or to see the futility of our own understanding and strength. But if we will hear the words of this passage, particular regarding our response to our enemies, we will move beyond the boundary of speculation. The passage before us is a most excellent

example of this truth.

AVENGE NOT YOURSELVES

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves. . .”

Other versions read, *“Never take your own revenge, beloved,”*^{NASB} *“Beloved, do not look for revenge,”*^{NAB} and *“Do not give punishment for wrongs done to you, dear brothers.”*^{BBE}

You are not to be the judge of your enemies, or the avenger of wrongs done to you. God has withdrawn that right from you. The Lord does not allow us to take matters into our own hands, dispensing vengeance as though we had omniscience. Even under the Law it was said, *“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD”* (Lev 19:18).

One of the judgments again Edom, Esau’s descendants, was that they took vengeance themselves. *“Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate from Teman; and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword”* (Ezek 25:12-13). If God reacted in this manner to the self-assertive vengeance of the Edomites, what will be His response to such conduct among those who wear the name of His Son?

This prohibition does not suggest that those who wrong you have not been duly noted by your Father in heaven. In fact, it is written, *“it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you”* (2 Thess 1:6). You must believe His promise, and be willing to wait for Him. His judgment will be righteous taking everything into consideration.

“ . . . but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Other versions read, *“but leave room for the wrath of*

God,”^{NASB} and *“but leave it to the wrath of God.”*^{RSV} The meaning is that we are provide room for God to execute His wrath, not take it upon ourselves to settle the matter. The implication is that **if we take matters into our own hands, God will not work for us.**

God has spoken, declaring the right to show wrath *“belongs”* to Him. It does not belong to us. The reason for this is simple. *“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”* (James 1:20). God’s purpose is not served, and His name is not honored by the explosion of man’s anger. It is something to be controlled.

All of this means that unlawful wrath

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is resident in the flesh, and is to be subdued in the power of the Spirit. *“Wrath,”* or *“outbursts of wrath,”*^{NKJV} are part of the *“works of the flesh”* (Gal 5:20). If you have been truly wronged, God will settle your case.

HOW TO TREAT YOUR ENEMY

“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” How flesh cringes when it hears this word! Once again, even under the Law, there was a glimmer of this kind of conduct. *“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it”* (Ex 23:4-5). This word, therefore, ought not have a strange sound to us,

even though it is challenging.

These words are taken from Proverbs 25:21-22. *“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.”* Jesus said the same thing in these words, *“do good to them that hate you”* (Matt 5:44).

If these words appear too difficult (and surely they are not), let us remember the action of our Lord toward us when we were His enemies. *“When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son”* (Rom 5:10). Let us also remember what our Father in heaven did.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-6). These recollections will assist us in doing good to our enemies whenever it is in our hand to do so. Although they may not receive the Word from us, or give ear to our testimony, yet they may be put in a situation where they will receive the normal amenities of life from us. Thus the way may very well be paved for the Lord to work in them as He did in Saul of Tarsus.

In So Doing

“. . . for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” This does not mean we **intend** to heap coals of fire upon the heads of our enemies. Rather, it means that is what will result. We cannot do good to our enemies, giving them bread and water, with the intent of bringing misery upon them. That should be evident, for it is not in keeping with the spirit of the passage.

The figure of *“coals of fire”* heaped upon the head is, indeed, a figure of intense pain. This pain, however, is of a special sort. It is the pangs of a condemning conscience – the bitter regret of having wronged someone to whom no wrong was due. It is the conviction that the wrong inflicted by

our enemies was not right. Thus the door is opened for repentance. At least one paraphrased version emphasizes this: *“and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you.”*^{NLT}

This teaching is also expounded by Peter, and confirms this is the intent of the passage: *“having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Pet 2:12). The day of visitation is the time when God judges the

person, whether in a temporal punishment, or when Jesus comes again.

Again Peter writes, *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed”* (1 Pet 3:15-16).

Thus, a gracious response to our enemies can be used of God to convince them of their wrongdoing and move them

to repentance. By the same token, a failure to react in the prescribed manner will place the blood of our persecutors on our own hands.

It Has Been Noticed

It is not that those who do evil to you have not been duly noted in heaven. Nor, indeed, does this mean they are excluded from all judgment if they do not repent. But, we are not the ones charged with the responsibility of exacting this judgment. We have been *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17), and He alone *“will repay”* (Heb 10:39).

OVERCOMING, BUT NOT OVERCOME

“²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Here is a short but pungent word. Here is something we are NOT to do, and something we ARE to do. Both of them have to do with evil that is directed toward us. Among other things, this alerts us to the inevitability of suffering at the hands of men.

WHAT WE ARE NOT TO DO

Regarding evil, we are not to allow it to overcome us. This is the evil that men do to us. Their persecutions are not to be the means by which we fall. They are not to be the occasions when flesh erupts with defiling power. This has to do with being slow to anger, and having control of your own spirit. As it is written, *“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city”* (Prov 16:32). Nothing must be permitted to stop the well of blessing flowing from us. Thus it is written, *“Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing”* (1 Pet 3:9).

When *“rivers of living water”* cease to

flow from our belly, or inmost person, we have been *“overcome by evil”* (John 7:37-38). It is possible for believers to actually be vanquished by the evil that is done to them. That possibility, however, is only because of the flesh, which is to be subdued. As stewards of life, God has supplied us with all of the graces necessary to *“not be overcome by evil.”* If you will put on *“the whole armor of God”* and *“resist the devil,”* you will NOT be overcome by evil (Eph 6:10-18; 1 Pet 5:8-9).

WHAT WE ARE TO DO

If you are looking for a challenge worthy of a hearty effort, here is one. *“Overcome evil with good!”* In a way, you can overcome the evil person by doing good to him when he does evil to you: feeding him when he is hungry and giving him something to drink when he is thirsty. After all, *“greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). Why should you not be able to continue doing good, even when those aligned against you continue to do evil?

If we avenge ourselves, we have been overcome by evil. If we *“do good”* to our enemies, we are overcoming evil with good.

In this case, overcoming evil does not mean evil disappears, or that the wicked cease to inflict evil upon us. **Rather, it means that the intentions of the evil doer are not realized.** Daniel’s opponents sought to get rid of him by raising a false accusation against him. He overcame evil with good, continuing in prayer in spite of the threat of a lion’s den. The evil intent of his enemies was not realized. They were the losers, not Daniel. His response is still ministering to and encouraging us.

As for you, you have been given even more grace than Daniel received. It is not that you are greater than Daniel. Rather, you are participating in the salvation of which he received but faint glimpses. He lived in a preparatory period. You are living in *“the day of salvation”* when more is being given to men than was ever given before. This is the time of spiritual plentitude, when heaven has been opened to the sons of men. It is a time of fulness, satisfaction, and adequacy. The way to God has been thrown open for heavenly commerce! The sun of righteousness has risen in power. There is no reason why you cannot excel in this regard. I encourage you to put your hand to the plow!

CONCLUSION

Now, be up and doing this great commission! The Lord has set before you an array of responsibilities that are too

great to be fulfilled in the energy of the flesh. Mere human discipline cannot accomplish them. There is no secret knowledge in the world that will put them within your reach. This is work for faith! It is doing that is accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit! Your “new

man” can do all of these things, and your “old man” is set to resist them. I encourage you to throw yourself into the doing of them, all the while calling upon the name of the Lord. As you see them being fulfilled in your life, joy and confidence will come together in your

heart, causing strength and determination to become strong within you. Now, “*Be of good courage . . . play the men . . . and the LORD do that which seemeth Him good*” (2 Sam 10:12). There is no reason why a harvest of righteousness cannot be enjoyed by you, dear child of God!



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 40



SUBJECTION TO THE GOVERNMENT

13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. ^{NKJV}

(Romans 13:1-7)

INTRODUCTION

All of life is significantly altered when we are "joined to the Lord" (1 Cor 6:17), or become a "new creation" in Him (2 Cor 5:17). "Old things" do pass away, and "all things" do "become new." No aspect of life is unaffected when we are in "fellowship" with God's "Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). Of course, the very concept of "Lord" suggests this is the case, for He is "Lord of ALL" (Acts 10:36). For some, this only speaks of duty, obligation, and commandments. While all of these things are surely involved, that does not exhaust the meaning of Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God. A few examples of the

extensiveness of Christ's authority will suffice to set the stage for this lesson.

- He has been exalted to give repentance and remission of sins (Acts 5:31).
- In the capacity of LORD, He has been sent to "bless" us, by turning us away from our iniquities (Acts 3:26).
- He has been given power that He might "give eternal life" to those God has given to Him (John 17:2).
- He comes to give us an understanding, that we might know God (1 John 5:20).

- In the capacity of LORD, He is "bringing many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10).
- He is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18).
- He has been exalted that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9).
- We have "peace with God" through Jesus Christ as LORD (Rom 5:1).
- We "joy in God" through Jesus Christ the LORD (Rom 5:11).

OUTLINE

- ▶ GOVERNING AUTHORITIES OR HIGHER POWERS (13:1)
- ▶ RESISTING GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY (13:2)
- ▶ HOW TO AVOID BEING AFRAID (13:3)
- ▶ HE IS GOD'S MINISTER (13:4)
- ▶ WRATH AND CONSCIENCE (13:5)
- ▶ WHAT ABOUT TAXES (13:6)
- ▶ RENDER TO ALL THEIR DUE (13:7)

- Grace now reigns *“through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our LORD”*^{NIV} (Rom 5:21).
- We are *“alive unto God through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 6:11).
- God grants us the gift of eternal life *“through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 6:23).
- Our thanksgiving to God is received by Him *“through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 7:25).
- God's love is experienced by us *“through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 8:39).
- Grace and peace are dispensed to us by *“God our Father, and from the LORD Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor 1:3).
- We are *“washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified”* in *“the name of the LORD Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor 6:11).

If Jesus Christ was not *“LORD,”* we could not repent, be acceptable, or receive remission of sins. We could not be turned away from our iniquities or receive eternal life. We could not understand God, be brought glory, or be brought to God. Peace with God and joy in God depend upon Jesus being *“LORD.”* The reign of grace, being alive unto God, and the gift of eternal life are all owing to Jesus being *“LORD.”* Our thanksgiving would not be acceptable if Jesus had not been exalted. The love of God could not be lavished upon us if Jesus was not *“LORD.”* Your experience of grace and peace, as well as your washing, sanctification, and justification, require that Jesus be *“LORD OF ALL.”*

The salvation of God is such a

demanding work, that it could not be initiated, experienced, or maintained without an exalted and reigning Savior.

ESSENTIAL OBSERVATIONS

These observations are essential to a proper response to the great work of God within us. Already, the Spirit has affirmed numerous things that we are to do, and that with great power.

- Reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin (6:11a).
- Reckon yourself to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ (6:11b).
- Do not let sin reign in your mortal body (6:12).
- Do not yield your capacities as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (6:13a).
- Yield yourself unto God as one who is alive from the dead (6:13b).
- Offer your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to holiness (6:19).
- Boast not against the Jewish branches (11:18).
- Be not high minded, but fear (11:20).
- Present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God (12:1).
- Do not be conformed to this world (12:2a).
- Be transformed by the renewing of your mind so you can determine the will of God (12:2b).
- Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think (12:3a).
- Think soberly, in strict accord with the measure of faith God has given to you (12:3b).
- Exercise your ministry in strict comportment with the nature of the Kingdom (12:4-8).
- Let love be without hypocrisy (12:9a).
- Abhor what is evil (12:9b).
- Cling to what is good (12:9c).
- Be kind to one another in brotherly love, preferring one another (12:10).
- Do not be slothful in what you set your mind to do (12:11a).
- Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (12:11b).
- Rejoice in hope (12:12a).
- Persevere in tribulation (12:12b).
- Be instant and faithful in prayer (12:12c).
- Contribute to the needs of God's people (12:13a).

- Practice hospitality (12:13b).
- Bless your persecutors, and do not curse them (12:14).
- Rejoice with those who rejoice (12:15a).
- Weep with those who weep (12:15b).
- Do not practice respect of persons (12:16).
- Do not repay evil for evil (12:17a).
- Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of all men (12:17b).
- Whenever it depends on you, be at peace with all men (12:18).
- Do not avenge yourself, but make place for God's wrath, not your own (12:19).
- Minister to your enemy in the time of his need (12:20).
- Do not be overcome by evil (12:21a).
- Overcome evil with good (12:21b).

TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

No person of sound mind will deny that these admonitions are to be taken seriously. They are not options, and no provision is made for them to be ignored.

Faith, with all of the various graces that are realized through it, are in order to the doing of these things. The Lord Jesus has been exalted to assure that our efforts are not in vain. Because He is Lord, He will get the required resources to us, subdue our enemies, and sustain us in our labors for Him. But none of this will happen until we, in faith, put our hands on the plow. That will only occur when we see that receiving God's righteousness has a direct bearing upon such matters.

I have become convinced over the years that the vast majority of people professing identity with Jesus are lacking in this area. They have not seen the relevancy of whole-hearted service to God, or made the correlation between daily living and justification. It is the business of the church to assist such souls to see these things more clearly.

TWO SIDES TO LIFE

While it is true that we are not primarily the servants of men, nor are we to court their favor, yet spiritual life does have an impact upon our peers. Jesus urged us to live in such a manner as would display the *“light of life,”* given to us in Him (John 8:12). The outcome of

this exhibit of light is marvelous. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

There is such a thing as serving Christ in a manner that is “acceptable to God, and approved of men” (14:18). While it is true the world, or the ungodly, cannot love the people of God (John 15:19), sinners can be brought to a point where

they can “be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you” (Tit 2:8). It is possible to “provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Rom 12:17). Faith does put us an enmity with the world, but not because we conduct ourselves foolishly, or do things that are commonly acknowledged as base and reprehensible.

The section we are now entering deals with our relationship to civil government.

It confirms that Christ has not called us to be agitators, or to raise insurrections against civil authorities. Here is an area where our light can shine without compromising our commitment to God. Further, this is the only passage of Scripture that treats this subject to this extent. It should therefore capture our attention all the more. Here is the Divine perspective of temporal authority among men, and of our appropriate response to it.

GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, OR HIGHER POWERS

^{13:1} **Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.** The social context that existed when the Apostles wrote was not democratic. The first democratic forms of government were developed in the Greek city-states during the sixth century B.C. The imperial onslaughts of Macedonia and Rome crushed these forms of government. There was a republic form of government which allowed input from the citizens. Ultimately, that form gave way to the Roman emperors. Democracy in any substantial form did not reappear until the seventh century. All of Scripture, therefore, was written to people familiar with a governmental dictatorship.

It is essential to see this, for many read the Scriptures as though democracy was the only valid form of government. Such a view neutralizes the potency of the text before us. Also, it should be remembered that Nero was the Emperor in Rome (54-68 AD) when this book was written. Our text will not excuse the atrocities committed by Emperors like Nero, and that is not its intention.

No God-ordained institution makes sin right, or justifies overlooking it. That is true of government as well as the church, and a husband as well as a king. There will be sufficient examples in Scripture to confirm this is the case.

SUBJECTION IS FOR EVERY SOUL

“Let every soul be subject . . .” Other versions read, “Let every person” ^{NASB}

“Everyone must submit himself.” ^{NIV} “Everyone is to obey . . .” ^{NJB} Here is an area where believers are to exercise their wills in faith. No person is exempt from this requirement. The submission is to be voluntary, not forced by civil law.

You may recall that at the time Jesus was crucified, an insurrection against the government had taken place among the Jews. The Roman government ruled in their very own city, Jerusalem, where God had placed His name (1 Kgs 11:36). The uprising was so strong, that murder had been committed during it, and several were being held in prison. Mark tells us of this circumstance. “And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection” (Mk 15:7). You may also recall that the Jewish mob preferred to have Barabbas released and Jesus crucified. In the sense of our text, Barabbas was not “subject” to the power, nor did he “submit himself.”

HIGHER POWERS

“ . . . governing authorities . . . ” Other versions read, “the higher powers,”

^{KJV} “authorities that are above him,” ^{DARBY} and “the government.” ^{NLT} I prefer the term “higher powers,” ^{KJV} for it more precisely conveys the idea intended. These are superior, or supreme authorities. This means, of course, that, from a social point of view, all souls are not on the same level.

Peter briefly expounded on this very subject, exhorting us to submit ourselves to the ordinances imposed by these powers. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or no governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Pet 2:13-14). **The people of God must not be noted for being lawbreakers, or raising insurrections against the government.** We are solemnly charged to “be subject to governing authorities.”

An Area Where These Powers Have No Power

There is an area in which civil authorities are given no power. That is in the matter of the individual’s identity with the Living God. When civil authority contradicts the mandate of the Lord, it is

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not to be obeyed. There are sufficient examples of this in Scripture to dissolve all doubts on the subject.

Egyptian Midwives

During the oppression of Israel in Egypt, “the king of Egypt” gave a commandment to the midwives who attended Jewish mothers giving birth. “When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.” The midwives refused to obey the edict of the king. “But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.” When called to account for their deeds, they told the king, “the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.” Those with a legalistic mind-set would say they disobeyed duly constituted authority, even resorting to lying to excuse their disobedience. However, this was not the response of the Lord, who gave the king of Egypt his authority. “Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He made them houses” (Ex 1:15-21).

Moses

When the time drew nigh for Moses to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage, he “went out unto his brethren.” Seeing an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, he “looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.” When the thing was eventually made known to Pharaoh, he sought after Moses. However, Moses did not yield to him, but “fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian” (Ex 2:11-15). Later, rather than requiring Moses to be subject to Pharaoh, who received his authority from God, the Lord said to him, “I have made thee a god to Pharaoh” (Ex 7:1).

Daniel

When an edict went out from king

Darius “that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions,” Daniel refused to honor it. Instead, when he “knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Dan 6:10). For refusing to honor the king, Daniel was, indeed, thrown into a den of lions. You

Although it was a sovereign decree, issued by someone God Himself had set up, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey it.

already know the rest of the story (Dan 6:16-26).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Earlier, on another occasion, King Nebuchadnezzar set up a large golden image in the plan of Dura. It was ninety feet high and nine feet wide. At the dedication of this image, he made a decree. The herald shouted it out, “To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” Although it was a sovereign decree, issued by someone God Himself had set up, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey it. When confronted by the king, and threatened with the fiery furnace, they replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to

deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.” The result of their civil disobedience is one of the better known facts of Divine history (Dan 3:1-30).

Wise Men from the East

When the blessed Savior made His entrance into the world some of the only people aware of what was happening were some wise men from the East. After making a long journey, and coming to Jerusalem, they made inquiry of king Herod concerning the one “born king of the Jews.” Having been informed by those knowing the Scriptures that Bethlehem was the place of birth, the wise men continued on their journey. Before leaving, Herod, who received his authority from God, strictly charged them, “Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.” His word, however, was countermanded by a dream from God. The wise men thus ignored the word of Herod, and “departed into their own country another way” (Matt 2:1-12).

Peter and John (Acts 4:18-19)

When Peter and John powerfully preached Gospel, they were summoned before the Jewish rulers, elders, scribes, and high priest – all of whom received their power from God. These authorities commanded Peter and John, “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” Without any hesitation, “Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” After being further threatened and released, Peter and John went to the brethren. They prayed fervently with them, and a great outbreak of fruitful preaching followed (Acts 4:5-33).

The Apostles

On another occasion, when the Apostles were powerfully declaring the

Gospel, the high priest, an office created by God Himself, became indignant. It is written that they *"laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison."* That very night *"the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 'Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.'" Later, after the Apostles had done as they were commanded, the "captain and the officers" apprehended them, bringing them before the council and the high priest. When reminded they had been commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, "Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:17-29).*

Conclusion

The authority given by God to earthly magistrates, governors, kings, and the likes, is never given precedence over the authority of God Himself. When duly sanctioned earthly authority, from the domestic to the political level, requires disobedience to God, it is operating outside of Divinely appointed boundaries.

AUTHORITY IS FROM GOD

"For there is no authority except from God." Other versions read, *"there is no power but of God,"* ^{KJV} *"for there is no authority except that which God has established,"* ^{NIV} *"there is no power which is not of God,"* ^{BBE} and *"the government, for God is the one who put it there."* ^{NLT}

Here is a foundational teaching with which many souls have had great difficulty. Further, there is also a considerable amount of difficulty encountered when attempting to apply this principle to every-day life. Notwithstanding, let us have the courage and faith to receive this saying, knowing that it is frequently declared. Viewed correctly, and applied in wisdom, it will prove to be a great consolation for us.

With the single exception of "Divine power," (2 Pet 1:3) or authority, all power is delegated.

Only God the Father Himself has not received power, authority, dominion, or jurisdiction. Because of the emptying of Himself even the Lord Jesus Christ has been *"given all power"* (Matt 28:18). Even the blessed Holy Spirit functions in strict accord with *"the will of God"* (Rom 8:27; John 14:26).

What Is "Power" or "Authority"

The word *"power,"* or *"authority,"* includes the idea of jurisdiction or right. It is decision-making power that impacts upon others. It embraces the concept of leadership, and even the governing of other individuals. On the lowest level, we would have parents over children (Eph 6:1-2) and husbands over wives (Eph 5:23). At a higher level, there are shepherds or overseers over the flock of

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God (Acts 20:28). At still another level, and specifically the one addressed in our text, there is civil government, kings, rulers, governors, and the likes. At the ultimate level there is Jesus Himself, who is *"Head over all things"* (Eph 1:22).

Within the church, the Holy Spirit administers a diversity of gifts, all designed for mutual edification (1 Cor 11:4). There are also individuals within the church who have been given the gift of *"administrations,"* or *"governments"* (1 Cor 12:28). The Apostles were given authority to deliver the doctrine to be followed by all believers (Acts 2:42), and to edify (2 Cor 10:8), and to give *"commandments"* to the saints (2 Pet 3:2).

When Jesus began to send forth the twelve *"two by two,"* He gave them *"power over unclean spirits"* (Mk 6:7). Upon the triumphant return of *"the seventy,"* sent forth by Jesus, He announced to them, *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* (Lk 10:19; Psa 91:13).

We Must Accept This Postulate

As you can see, there is a wide variety of authority that has been distributed among the sons of men. However, all of it has come from God, *"for there is no authority except from God."* Self-appointed or existent power is an imagination. There is no such thing! *"For there is no authority except from God."*

While this may cause questions to arise in our minds, we must thrust such doubts from our thinking. **Our first and foremost responsibility is to receive this word without question.** If we fail to do this, the teaching that follows will make no sense, and Satan will tempt us to reject it in favor of our own opinion.

Power, or authority, involves the right to operate in a competitive arena without being hindered by it. It includes others serving the one with power, as well as the fulfillment of specific objectives.

AUTHORITIES ARE APPOINTED BY GOD

"... and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Other versions read, *"the powers that be are ordained of God,"* ^{KJV} *"and those which exist are established by God,"* ^{NASB} *"The authorities that exist have been established by God,"* ^{NIV} *"those authorities that exist have been instituted by God,"* ^{NRSV} *"those that exist are set up by God,"* ^{DARBY} and *"All governments have been placed in power by God."* ^{NLT}

Scripture is written in such a way as to encourage trust in God. This verse is an excellent example of that fact. We are in a world where we are subject to authority. There is domestic

authority. Our social responsibilities involve authorities. Citizenship in a nation and its subsidiary divisions is related to authority. Even within the body of Christ, there are individuals invested with authority. But we must not be intimidated by these conditions, for *“the authorities that exist are appointed by God,”* who is our Father.

The particular focus of this passage is political, or civil, authority. These powers, however good or evil they may be, *“are appointed by God.”* He appoints them in the interest of His eternal purpose, using them as He sees fit, to implement His own good and acceptable and perfect will.

Powers, or authorities, ONLY exist because they have been appointed by God. They cannot be called into being by a created personality. As it is written, *“For promotion [exaltation^{NKJV}] cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another”* (Psa 75:6-7).

Again, we have numerous examples of powers being appointed by God, some for good, and some for evil.

Pharaoh was told, *“And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth”* (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17).

Nebuchadnezzar, who dominated the world, was raised up by God. *“And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of*

the field I have also given him to serve him. So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son’s son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them” (Jer 27:6). Again the Lord declared, *“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him. I have given him the beasts of the field also’”* (Jer 28:14). God punished Israel through this king for their disobedience in the matter of not letting the land enjoy its sabbaths (2 Chron 36:21; Jer 26:9; 32:28). For this reason, God referred to Nebuchadnezzar as *“My servant”* (Jer 25:9).

God also raised up and used **Cyrus** for His own purpose (2 Chron 36:22-23). God took the kingdom from Saul and gave it to David (1 Sam 15:28; 2 Sam 6:21). Darius also *“took the kingdom”* after God had deposed Belshazzar on the very night he made a feast for a thousand of his lords (Dan 5:1-31). God raised Cyrus up according to His own commandment, to build the house of the Lord (Ezra 6:14).

God is ever imminent in the affairs of men and nations. In fact, He is the ultimate manager of all nations, *“For the kingdom is the LORD’S: and he is the governor among the nations”* (Psa 22:28). Again, it is written, *“For God is the King of all the earth.”* (Psa 47:7). For that matter, the Lord Jesus is the *“Lord of lord and King of kings”* (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16). He is also *“the prince [or ruler] of the kings of the earth”* (Rev 1:5). All of this is involved in the words, *“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”*

Jesus’ Word to Pilate

In confirmation of this, the Lord addressed a word to Pilate, who, according to appearance, was in charge of the situation. When He refused to answer Pilate, he said to Jesus, *“Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?”* With the tone of Divine authority and insight Jesus replied, *“You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above”^{NKJV}* 19:11).

CONCLUSION

We must not allow men to rob us of this truth. Times have not changed the manner in which God governs the world. He still *“raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, And He has set the world upon them”^{NKJV}* (1 Sam 2:8).

From a practical point of view, this is one of the obvious reasons why God can *“work things together for our good”* (Rom 8:28). It also confirms to our hearts that *“If God be for us, who can be against us”* (Rom 8:31). The God who gives authority does not relinquish one portion of it. He can withdraw power immediately from those to whom He gives it. He also uses those with power to ultimately serve His own immutable purpose. No believer, therefore, should balk at being subject to the higher powers. If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how could we explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us? Something to ponder!

RESISTING GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY

“² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” Here is a Divine conclusion, one that is to be embraced by all believers. It is not a suggestion, but a statement of Kingdom reality. It is based upon the revealed

situation. There is no power, or form of authority, that has not been dispensed, or is not controlled, by the Living God.

THEREFORE

In view of the realities that have been affirmed, this is the only proper conclusion. Our thoughts must be affected

by this truth so that we can walk acceptably before the Lord.

RESISTING GOD’S ORDINANCE

“ . . . whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God.” Other versions read, *“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the*

ordinance of God," ^{KJV} "he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God," ^{NASB} "he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted," ^{NIV} and "those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God." ^{NLT}

It is important to have a working grasp of the three key words in this expression: "resist," "authority," and "ordinance."

Resist. To "resist" is to refuse to submit. It is to oppose, dispute, or challenge. It means to be arrayed against, or hostile toward.

Authority. This refers to another person's jurisdiction over us – someone to whose authority we have been subjected. It is someone who can tell us what to do, imposing their will upon us.

Ordinance. This is an arrangement put into place by God. It is an kind of authority that has been ordained by God.

Remembering that our text is speaking about civil authority, or government, the Spirit mentions a category of people who refuse to subject themselves to duly constituted authority. They choose their own will over that of the power ordained by God. They imagine they are self-governed, and have been excluded from any responsibility to another authority.

In the words of Jude, these are individuals who "despise dominion," or "reject authority," ^{NKJV} and are not hesitant to "speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8). This was the very first area in which the devil tempted man – in the matter of subjection to authority (Gen 3:5). When Saul was first made king, the "children of Belial" refused to submit to him (1 Sam 10:27). In a telling prophecy concerning Christ Jesus, the Psalmist spoke of those who rejected His authority, seeking to break the bands of His dominion from themselves (Psa 2:1-6). Jesus spoke a parable affirming those who refused Him as having that very trait. "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this

man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). The Lord speaks of flattering lips and His commitment to cut them all off. One of the traits of those so characterized is this: "Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" (Psa 12:4).

Whether it is civil authority (the subject of our text), domestic authority, or that which Jesus has placed within His church, resistance of authority is never taken lightly by God. What He has put into place is to be honored. The holy angels are themselves keenly aware of this

Whether it is civil authority (the subject of our text), domestic authority, or that which Jesus has placed within His church, resistance of authority is never taken lightly by God. What He has put into place is to be honored.

requirement. On one occasion, when Michael the archangel disputed with the devil concerning the body of Moses, he "did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude 9). Although he did not subject himself to the devil, for God had not placed the devil over him, Michael knew Satan's authority had come from God, and thus he did not dare cast a reviling aspersion at the devil. Satan has been given authority over evil, and over the kingdoms of this world (Lk 4:6).

Even the Law spoke to this subject, and with great clarity. "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people" (Ex 22:28). Here, the word "gods" is applied to magistrates and earthly dignitaries, as in Psalm 138:1. Solomon also addressed this subject. "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter"

(Eccl 10:20).

You may recall the occasion when Paul rebuked Ananias the high priest, when he commanded that he be struck on the mouth. Paul replied, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" Those standing by replied to Paul, "Revilest thou God's high priest?" Knowing the Word of God, Paul responded, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people'" (Acts 23:1-5). In this case, the "ruler" was a religious one, not a political one. Yet, Paul was aware of the need to give him honor, even though Ananias was personally a dishonorable man.

How much more serious it is for those who are living under authorities that have been placed over them, to resist those authorities! The gravity of their sin is revealed in the next clause.

BRINGING JUDGMENT ON OURSELVES

"... and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." Other versions read, "and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation," ^{KJV} "and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves," ^{NASB} "and those who resist will incur judgment," ^{NRSV} "and rebels must expect to receive the condemnation they deserve." ^{NJB}

The word "judgment," or "damnation," is as strong as it sounds. This precise word is used at least eleven times in the New Covenant Scriptures, and is always of great significance.

- ❑ "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." (Matt 23:14).
- ❑ "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt 23:33; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47)
- ❑ "But he that shall blaspheme against

the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." (Matt 3:29).

- ❑ *"And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:29)

with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." (1 Pet 2:3)

Other translations use the alternative words "condemnation" and "judgment."

out to all such individuals. I do not know the full nature of that punishment, but I do know it is something to be avoided at all cost. Authorities that have been put in place by the Almighty God are to be honored to the fullest extent possible.

The Example of Paul

Although Paul vigorously defended his character in a court of law, he did not do it in resistance of the law itself. In fact, he announced that he was ready to submit to any punishment due to him if he had violated the law. Here is what he said. *"For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar"* ^{NKJV} (Acts 25:11). That is the response of a man dominated by faith, who had the utmost regard for the authorities ordained by the God of heaven.

Faith will move us to a proper response in this area. While it is not at all popular to think in this way in our type of government, we do well to discipline our thoughts and manners accordingly. You may be sure, God will ordain no government that liberates His people from the obligation to honor duly constituted authority—particularly since that authority is given by Him. Nor, indeed, does His salvation give such license.

Faith will move us to a proper response in this area. While it is not at all popular to think in this way in our type of government, we do well to discipline our thoughts and manners accordingly.

- ❑ *"And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just."* (Rom 3:8)
- ❑ *"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."* (Rom 13:2)
- ❑ *"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."* (1 Cor 11:29)
- ❑ *"Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith."* (1 Tim 5:12)
- ❑ *"And through covetousness shall they*

The meaning of the word is damnation, condemnation, be condemned, a verdict, or a sentence. There is nothing inconsequential about this word, and it most assuredly does not have that tone in our text.

One might ponder whether or not God Almighty would condemn people for refusing to submit to the government of the land. Their own imaginations may excuse such disobedience as though it was relatively minor in the eyes of the Lord. However, wherever such authority is resisted and rejected, unless it be because of submission to the Lord Himself, God has determined punishment will be meted

HOW TO AVOID BEING AFRAID!

³ *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.*" It is possible for fear to grip the heart of those receiving this instruction – particularly if they are living under a heathen government like Rome. The Spirit therefore speaks to our hearts, assuring us there is no inherent disadvantage to submitting ourselves to the powers ordained by God. He will set before us the norm, not an inviolable rule. There may be despots who will persecute believers for doing good, but we are to regard them as departures from the

general principle of civil authority.

NOT A TERROR TO GOOD WORKS

"For rulers are not a terror to good works." Other versions read, *"For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior,"* ^{NASB} *"For rulers hold no terror for those who do right,"* ^{NIV} *"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct,"* ^{NIV} and *"For the authorities do not frighten people who are doing right."* ^{NLT}

Paul, moved by the Spirit, wrote these words while Nero was Emperor. He is not writing to condone everything rulers did, but is setting forth the general rule.

Believers are to think of rulers in terms of what God has ordained, not in terms of their persons. Our thoughts are not to be shaped by exceptions to the rule – a tendency against which we will have to wrestle.

Exemplary citizens are not to expect an outbreak of terror against them, even though such may happen. There may be a Pharaoh that arises who does not know Joseph, and oppresses the people (Ex 1:8-11). A Herod may rise who thinks nothing of slaughtering masses of children under two years of age (Matt 2:16). Nevertheless, we are not to consider this

the normal way the government responds to those who do “good works.” Robert Haldane wisely observes, “No man was ever punished because he would not injure his neighbors.” *Exposition of Romans*

What Are Good Works?

These are the works formerly described as “things honest in the sight of all men.” As I understand it, this emphasizes the avoidance of things **commonly** considered to be evil. “Good works” are the deeds that result in being good citizens, who behave well in their various neighborhoods. Those committing such deeds will do no harm to their neighbor. In so doing, they bring an advantage to their community, and have nothing to fear from the government.

We learn from this passage that one of the primary reasons for government is the encouragement of well doing. By this means, God has ordained that civility and obedience is to be encouraged.

A TERROR TO EVIL WORKS

“For rulers are . . . a terror . . . evil.” Other versions read, “For rulers are . . . a cause of fear . . . for evil,” ^{NASB} “For rulers hold . . . terror . . . for those who do wrong,” ^{NIV} and “For rulers are . . . a terror . . . to bad.” ^{NRSV} Those who engage in “evil” do harm to their neighbors, engaging in selfishness and ill will. They tend toward ruthlessness, like those in the days of Noah, when “the earth as filled with violence” (Gen 6:11).

God has ordained civil government for the punishment of those who inflict harm upon others, living only for themselves. That punishment is to be of such a nature as strikes terror into the heart of the offenders. They are not to imagine there is no penalty for evil works.

In this arrangement, God has ensured the inhabitants of the world do not fully duplicate the times of Noah, when violence and abuse ran rampant throughout the world.

DO YOU WANT TO BE UNAFRAID

“Do you want to be unafraid of the

authority?” Other versions read, “Do you want to have no fear of authority?” ^{NASB} and “Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?” ^{NIV}

It is not God’s will that we live in continual fear of the authority of government, whatever its level. This is exceedingly practical – so much so that it can escape our consideration. Fear is distracting to the individual, corrupting the soul and defiling the affections. It is no vain word that God now gives, teaching us to avoid being afraid of those who have authority over us.

In this arrangement, God has ensured the inhabitants of the world do not fully duplicate the times of Noah, when violence and abuse ran rampant throughout the world.

DO WHAT IS GOOD

“Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.” Other versions read, “Then do what is right and he will commend you,” ^{NIV} “Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval,” ^{NRSV} and “So do what they say, and you will get along well.” ^{NLT}

Doing good has to do with man-to-man conduct, particular in regard to keeping the laws of the land. Any civil law, even though fashioned crudely, does not allow for pillage, violence, and extortion. By the same token, governments generally look with favor upon those who are mindful of their neighbors.

One might object to this line of reasoning, citing governments that have oppressed the common people and persecuted the saints. However, these are not fair representations of the principles declared in our text. This is a matter of faith – of believing God. If it is true that God raises up kings, and deposes them as

well, He will surely be mindful of His people in both cases. We are therefore to commit the keeping of our souls to God “in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4:19). It is our business to trust God and do good, providing things honest in the sight of all men. Even if we suffer for righteousness sake, we still do not have to live in terror of the king.

EXAMPLES

As you might expect, there are some notable Scriptural examples of the recognition of those who did good. A brief consideration of them will serve to open the door of hope to us, encouraging us to translate this text into godly living.

Joseph

Joseph was recognized for trustworthy and exemplary work on at least three occasions. Potiphar identified Joseph’s goodness, making him “overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand” (Gen 39:1-5).

Again, when Joseph was falsely charged by Potiphar’s wife, and because he refused to do evil, he was wrongly sent to prison. But even there, he continued to do good. The result is most remarkable. The keeper of the prison “committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper” (Gen 39:22-23).

Again, in order that the purpose of God might be fulfilled, Joseph was brought before Pharaoh to interpret a critical dream for him. When standing before the monarch, Joseph did not chide him for being wrongly accused and imprisoned. Instead, he did good, giving the word of the Lord for a coming time of crisis, and offering a God-ordained solution. Again, the authority was mindful of him. The Pharaoh’s response to Joseph’s counsel is encouraging for those willing to believe God and do good. “And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh,

and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou” (Gen 41:37-40).

Nehemiah

Another case in point is Nehemiah. He was in a foreign land, and serving a heathen monarch, Artaxerxes the king. On one occasion, upon hearing of the desolation of Jerusalem and the house of God, Nehemiah’s countenance fell. The king noticed the sadness of Nehemiah, for this was not his usual manner. Normally, he served the king with a cheerful countenance and spirit. When the king detected Nehemiah had sorrow of heart, he asked him about the matter. Upon hearing about the desolation of Jerusalem, the king simply asked, “What do you request.” After Nehemiah had prayed, he asked to be sent to the holy city to rebuild it. The king did, indeed, send Nehemiah, providing letters of authorization to begin the work (Neh 2:1-7). Thus Nehemiah was rewarded for doing good.

Daniel

Daniel was taken captive at a young age in the Babylonian captivity. Early on he was recognized for his ability and excellent spirit. He determined to please God, and not partake of the king’s dainties. Yet, he did so in wisdom, carefully avoiding any reproach to the

king. Not only did God give Daniel wisdom, it was recognized by the king. Nebuchadnezzar “made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan 2:48).

Belshazzar “clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom” (Dan 5:29).

Darius “set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm” (Dan 6:1-3).

Daniel “prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (Dan 6:28).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

These three young men maintained their spiritual integrity along with Daniel. Yet, they were not reactionaries against the heathen government of Babylon. As a result, and at the request of Daniel, the king set them “over the affairs of Babylon” (Dan 2:49; 3:12). Following their deliverance from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree, “That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall

be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon” (Dan 3:29-30).

AN APPLICATION

Many professing Christians conduct themselves unacceptably among those who have authority over them. They speak ill of their managers, or those to whom they are responsible. They have a murmuring spirit, and continually complain about how they are treated. Such small souls do well to take heed to our text. Someday they will confront Joseph, Nehemiah, Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. How will they explain their conduct to those precious souls who did good and remained cheerful in a heathen land and under heathen kings?

It is good for the people of God to set themselves to be industrious, helpful, and noted for doing good. God has established authority for the encouragement of those who do good, as well as the punishment of those who do evil.

If you are a child, then do good and be industrious. Your parents will honor you. If you are employed, then be exemplary in your conduct and attitude. Your managers will encourage you. If you are a member of the body of Christ, submit to those who have the rule over you, and they will feed you and do good to you. If you are a student, be a model one, and your teacher will esteem you. As citizens, be noted for keeping the law without being forced to do so. It will honor God and help you.

HE IS GOD’S MINISTER

“⁴ For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”

Capital Punishment

We now come to the matter of capital

punishment, a subject hotly debated in the professed Christian community. Here is how the Holy Spirit reasons on the matter, leaving no room for any contrary views. Those who oppose capital punishment saying it is better to show mercy, forget what God has ordained. God did not ordain the “higher powers” to have mercy on evil doers, but to punish

them. Government is not intended to placate those who insist on doing evil, but to strike terror into their hearts.

The issue here is society itself, not the individual. The Lord has made provision for the suppression of social ills and outbreaks of uncontrollable violence. In my understanding, this is in order that

His anger not again break forth as it did in the days of Noah. It is not enough for God simply to promise He will *“never again destroy every living thing, as I have done”*^{NASB} (Gen 8:21). Just as surely as His promise of the remission of sin was implemented by means, so His promise to refrain from destroying every living thing is being implemented by means. The Divine nature cannot change. God cannot simply overlook sin, passing it by as though it did not exist (Ex 34:7; Nah 1:3).

Civil law is an appointed means of keeping iniquity from breaking beyond the bounds of Divine tolerance. As we will see, there is nothing casual about it. It is not intended to eliminate evil, but to suppress it.

GOD’S MINISTER TO YOU

“For he is the minister of God to thee for good.” Other versions read, *“For he is God’s servant to do you good,”*^{NIV} *“for of God it is a ministrant to thee for good,”*^{YLT} *“The authorities are sent by God to help you,”*^{NLT} and *“it is there to serve God for you and for your good.”*^{NJB} This is a most provocative text!

“He” is the ruler, or civil authority, whether an individual, like a king, or a group, like a senate or some other form of republic government. God has ordained this authority for our good – particularly the good of His people. The “good” has two sides: the encouragement of good, and the punishment of evil. We learn from this that sin is so ingrained in humanity that it must be forcibly restrained, else it will break forth in ever-increasing measures. This is confirmed whenever law becomes slack, and wickedness is not duly punished. If all governmental restraints were removed believers would be more fiercely attacked in every city and region of the world. The persecutions that are unleashed against them now are only because of the slackness of the law. But how much worse it would be if there was no civil law at all! Let us learn to view civil authority in the way God describes: *“a minister to THEE for good.”* It seems to me that God will honor such an attitude.

Examples of civil authorities which ministered to God’s people *“for good”* include Pharaoh (Gen 41:44-46), Cyrus (2 Chron 36:22-23), Darius (Dan 6:1-2), and Artaxerxes (Ezra 6:14; 21), Ahasuerus (Esther 8:1-2,11), Felix and Agrippa (Acts 25-26), etc.

We also learn from this passage that rulers are not put into place to execute their own pleasure. That such rulers exist, cannot be denied – men who use the authority God ordained to fulfill their own purposes, and to seek their own advantage. That, however, is an abuse of

We also learn from this passage that rulers are not put into place to execute their own pleasure. That such rulers exist, cannot be denied – men who use the authority God ordained to fulfill their own purposes, and to seek their own advantage. That, however, is an abuse of power, not the proper use of it.

power, not the proper use of it. God will judge such rulers, as He did Pharaoh, Sihon, Og, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Herod, and others. We can safely leave such matters with the Lord. They will all give an account to God for the manner in which they governed, and the diligence with which they encouraged good and suppressed evil.

IF YOU DO EVIL

“But if you do evil, be afraid.” “Evil,” in this case, is the transgression of the laws under which we have been placed. The only exception to this is when the laws countermand the laws of God. In that case, obeying the laws of the land would be evil, even though we may be punished for it. Such men as Moses, Daniel, Shadrach, Meschech, Abednego, and the Apostles, provide us with examples of choosing to serve God rather than men, even though that choice was attended by political opposition.

This is the ordinary view of government, which is God’s means of encouraging good and suppressing evil. When God’s people break the laws of the land, which disobedience is NOT owing to an allegiance to Him, or a desire to obey God rather than men, they are not to look to the Lord for protection. They are to *“be afraid.”* When we *“do wrong,”* we ought to expect to be *“buffeted for our faults”* (1 Pet 2:20). This is something of what is involved in providing things that are *“honest in the sight of all men”* (12:7).

We should not expect to be treated considerably when we break the laws of the land. With the single exception of obeying God rather than men, such deeds not only have broken civil law, but the law of God as well. No wonder we are to *“be afraid”* under such circumstances.

BEARING THE SWORD

“... for he does not bear the sword in vain.” Other versions read, *“for it does not bear the sword for nothing,”*^{NASB} *“for the sword is not in his hand for nothing,”*^{BBE} *“for it does not bear the sword without purpose,”*^{NAB} and *“because it is not for nothing that the symbol of authority is the sword.”*^{NJB}

Bearing the sword, is carrying the means to execute punishment to evildoers. That sword is not a mere show, but a symbol of authority to carry out due punishment. The “sword” also speaks of the ultimate civil punishment, which is death. This means that civility will be forced upon men if they insist upon doing evil. God has ordained that those bent on doing evil and bringing disruption and harm to society in general, be forcibly caused to stop their wickedness.

We have in the crucifixion of Christ an inspired example of the proper and improper use of *“the sword,”* or capital punishment. Jesus was consigned to death unjustly, while the two thieves were so punished justly. Although many who wear the name of Jesus object to capital punishment, the penitent thief knew the truth of situation. He said to his cohort in

crime, *“Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong”* (Lk 23:40-41). Notice how he related the punishment to the fear of God, as well as the exercise of civil authority. This came from a man who was only introduced to Jesus, yet his perception was vastly superior to that of many who wear the name of Jesus in our time. What is more, Jesus did not rebuke him for his observation. In fact, it led the man into a state of repentance in which he asked to be remembered by Jesus when He came into His kingdom. Jesus took him as a trophy of grace into the realm of paradise (verse 43).

AN AVENGER TO EXECUTE WRATH

“... for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” The Spirit will once and for all throw down to the ground the notion that capital punishment is wrong.

That is a wicked imagination that has been raised by people with, at the very best, a distorted understanding. What is here affirmed will grate against the flesh, and we should not be surprised that it does. However, this word is directly related to our heavenly Father. It is not, under any conditions, to be questioned, much less denied.

He is God’s Minister

“For he is God’s minister.” Other versions read, *“He is God’s servant,”*^{NIV} *“It is the servant of God,”*^{NRSV} and *“it is there to serve God.”*^{NJB} Notice, some translations use the word *“he,”* while others use the word *“it.”* In the case of the former, *“he”* is the person using *“the sword.”* In the second *“it”* is the sword itself, which is designed to serve God. In both cases, the essential sense of the text is maintained. God has established *“the sword”* to bring an end to the malefactors. He has also established the person who has been given authority to use it.

Here is an office that is not necessarily held by a person who fears God, yet that person is *“God’s minister.”*

That means the office that he holds has been ordained by God. It also means the individual has been elevated to that office by God Himself. Additionally, it means that the means of suppressing evil has been appointed by God.

An Avenger

“... an avenger.” Other versions

Here is an office that is not necessarily held by a person who fears God, yet that person is “God’s minister.” That means the office that he holds has been ordained by God. It also means the individual has been elevated to that office by God Himself.

read, *“a revenger,”*^{KJV} *“an agent of wrath,”*^{NIV} and *“His revenger.”*^{NJB}

Here is a person – an offspring of Adam, whether an individual or an institution – that is appointed to carry out vengeance: *“an avenger.”* This may appear strange after believers have been admonished, *“avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”* (12:19). However, *“God is not the author of confusion.”* His words are not intended to confound the godly.

This text reveals one of the ways in which God takes vengeance. All vengeance is not reserved unto the day of judgment, and consignment of sinners to the lake of fire. As it is written, *“Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later”* (1 Tim 5:24). One way in which such sins are *“clearly evident”* is when punishment is inflicted upon offenders by their peers – as with Achan (Josh 7), and the thieves dying with Jesus (Matt 27:44).

When we are admonished to *“leave*

room for the wrath of God”^{NASB} (Rom 12:19), rather than taking it upon ourselves to be a revenger, it may well be that God will use government to execute His wrath. Our text affirms that is His appointment. God, then, has set an order in place that allows for the swift and decisive punishment of evildoers. That role has not been given to the church, but to the government, the *“higher powers”* among men. It is good for us to give thanks for this arrangement!

To Execute Wrath

“... to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” Other versions read, *“to execute wrath on the wrongdoer,”*^{NRSV} *“to execute wrath on the wrongdoer,”*^{NIV} and *“to execute HIS wrath on the wrongdoer,”*^{RSV}

The magistrate is not executing his wrath upon the wrongdoer, but the wrath of God. Ultimately, the wrongdoer has offended God. Secondly, he has offended men. Punishment is the appointed penalty for evil – doing

wrong!

Immediately after the flood, God instituted capital punishment. In my understanding, this was in order to suppress the duplication of the society judged in the flood. God directed Noah, *“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man”* (Gen 9:5-6). Because man is made in the image of God, his life is sacred. If an animal kills a man, that animal must die: *“from the hand of every beast will I require it.”* If a man kills a man, *“his blood shall be shed.”* Men may not like this rule, but God has put it into place, and has never rescinded it.

In order to keep evil from dominating His people Israel, God commanded the death penalty for a number of offences. Murder (Num 35:16-33), adultery (Lev 20:10), incest (Lev 10-:11-14), bestiality (Ex 22:19), sodomy (Lev 18:22; 20:13),

whoredom (Deut 22:21), the rape of a virgin (Deut 22:25), kidnaping (Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7), witchcraft (Ex 22:18), offering human sacrifice (Lev 20:2), striking or cursing one's parents (Ex 21:15,17), disobedient and rebellious children (Deut 21:19-21), working on the Sabbath day (Ex 35:2), false prophets (Deut 13:1-5), sacrificing to false gods (Ex 22:20), not hearkening to the priest or judge (Deut 17:12).

There were also offences of a lesser nature that were punishable by scourging (Lev 19:20; Deut 25:2), and imprisonment (Lev 24:12; Num 15:34). There was also financial restitution for injury inflicted upon another (Ex 21:32-35). A person stealing or killing an ox was to restore five for one (Ex 22:1a). For sheep, the

restitution was four to one (Ex 22:1b). If the animal was found alive and restored to the owner, an additional one was also to be given (Ex 22:4).

Not only was wrath executed as a punishment of the evil doer, but in order that others *"shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you"* (Deut 13:11; 17:13; 19:20; 21:21). Solomon also said, *"Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge"* (Prov 19:25). And again, *"When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise"* (Prov 21:11). This same principle is even applied to rebuking sinners within the church. *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear"* (1 Tim 5:20).

In these various laws, the Lord has revealed how He is impacted by human sin – all evil doing. It should strike a certain fear in the hearts of those prone to disobedience, rebellion, and the offending of their peers.

From the death penalty to various other forms of punishment, civil authorities have been appointed by God to take His vengeance upon offenders. This arrangement is not to be questioned. Rather, such punishments are to be avoided by an honorable life.

One may be tempted to take this text and go further with it than the Spirit has. Such an inclination must be moritified. It is enough to take it seriously, and live so as to avoid social punishments.

WRATH AND CONSCIENCE

"⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake." As the Spirit is wont to do, He will now draw some conclusions for us. These conclusions are based upon the solid foundation of Divine ordination.

YOU MUST BE SUBJECT

"Therefore you must be subject . . ."

Other translations read, *"Wherefore ye must needs be subject."*^{KJV} *"Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection,"*^{NASB} *"Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities,"*^{NIV} and *"You must be obedient, therefore."*^{NJB}

By saying *"you must be subject,"* the Spirit accentuates how unreasonable it is NOT to be subject to the *"higher powers."* if they are ordained by God, how utterly foolish to resist them, or refuse to subject oneself to them!

Someone might object that subjecting ourselves to civil authorities might very well be to our harm. And, indeed, it does appear that way to the flesh. However, this submission is done in the persuasion that the Lord is truly *"the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the Governor among the nations"* (Psa 22:28). With great

boldness faith declares, *"The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Heb 13:6). The believing souls knows, *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will"* (Prov 21:1). We must be willing to trust the Lord in this matter, else our hearts will trouble us to the point of distraction.

BECAUSE OF WRATH

" . . . not only because of wrath . . ."

This is the lowest level of perception. If we are not subject to the authorities, choosing to ignore them, we will be punished. The fear of that punishment ought to provide some incentive for living in an orderly and unoffensive manner. If, by Divine decree, he does not carry the sword in vain, then it is the height of foolishness to proceed against the ruler or rulers of the land.

The *"wrath"* we seek to escape is primarily that of God, and secondarily that of the civil authority. It is God's wrath because He has put the authorities in place to punish evil doers. It is the wrath of the government because if we violate the law, he will execute wrath against us as directed by God.

As I have said, this is the lowest level of human incentive. It is better suited for those who are more beastly than manly, and are more stubborn than sensitive. The further a person is from God, the more needful this incentive becomes.

BECAUSE OF CONSCIENCE

" . . . but also for conscience' sake." This is the highest incentive – for the sake of one's conscience. One of the marks of a godly person is this: *"I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"* (Acts 24:16). Our hearts will confirm that social order and tranquility is proper, and that we should do our best to maintain it, never disrupting it out of selfish ambition. After all, *"the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace"* (James 3:18). The objective of God's commandment involves obtaining and maintaining a *"good conscience"* (1 Tim 1:5). If one thrusts a *"good conscience"* from them, they will surely make *"shipwreck of the faith"* (1 Tim 1:19).

The writer of the book of Hebrews made this petition of his readers. *"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly"* (Heb 13:18). Maintaining that good conscience with spiritual aggression

will have its impact upon our enemies, even if they are within the government. Thus it is written, "Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ" (1 Pet 3:16).

For conscience sake, therefore, let us subject ourselves in a godly manner to the authorities of the land. Let none of us be viewed by our rulers as wayward, disobedient, or rabble rousers. Rather, let us be noted for being good citizens who

are no threat to civility and tranquility.

Even when rulers have treated the saints unjustly, beating and incarcerating them, they were faced with a humble people. Imprisoned men like Joseph, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Peter and John, and Paul, did not organize rebellions against the governments that treated them unjustly. The injustices leveled against them would be settled by God Himself, and they knew it. In the meantime, faith can confess with Paul, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation

through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death" (Phil 1:19-20).

If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how will we be able to explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us? We have received more insight than they!

WHAT ABOUT TAXES?

"⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing." We must never allow the wisdom of men to cause us to gloss the Word of the living God. Although this is a sensitive subject in many circles, the Holy Spirit speaks candidly concerning it, providing no opportunity for rebellion among the children of the Lord. If Jesus was born during a time of world-wide taxation (Luke 2:1-2), it should not surprise us that something good can occur when we pay our taxes as unto the Lord. This is one of the primary ways in which we submit ourselves to the "higher powers."

PAY TAXES

"For because of this you also pay taxes . . ." Other versions read, "For this cause pay ye tribute also,"^{KJV} "This is also why you pay taxes,"^{NIV} and "For the same reason you also pay taxes."^{NRSV} And what is the reason for which taxes are to be paid? There is a twofold way of looking at this. First, the magistrates and officials have been ordained to subdue evil and encourage good. Our taxes, or tribute, will assist them in meeting this requirement. Second, because we will be punished if we do not pay them. Third, for the sake of our conscience, which is to be shaped by the Word of our Lord.

The Words of Jesus

This very issue of taxes, or tribute money, came up during Christ's ministry among men. On one occasion, the Pharisees sent their disciples to Jesus, "with the Herodians," who were a political party devoted to Herod. The question they asked of Jesus was this: "Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" The Spirit

If Jesus was born during a time of world-wide taxation (Luke 2:1-2), it should not surprise us that something good can occur when we pay our taxes as unto the Lord.

tells us that Jesus "perceived their wickedness, and said 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.'" When they brought Him a "penny," or Denarius, "He said to them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They said to Him, 'Caesar's.' And He said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'" His answer caused them to marvel, just as it has done today.

Jesus' telling point was this. The tax money has the image of Caesar upon it. Do not hesitate to give it back to him as he requires. The image of God, however, is upon man himself. He is, therefore, to give himself to God. One of the ways in which this is done is in the paying of taxes. Our text plainly says, "Pay taxes!"

GOD'S MINISTERS

" . . . for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing." These authorities are "God's ministers" in the keeping of order and social tranquility. The "very thing" to which they give themselves is ruling, or keeping order. ". . . for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing."^{NIV} The idea is that our taxes allow them to do their job more effectively.

The effort required for a person to govern a people is too great for the average person. It requires "continual" involvement, with hardly a moment being their own. That is the very point of this text, though it may seem rather mundane: "to take care of such things at all times."^{BBE} Why should those who have been reconciled to God make the tasks of those ordained by Him more difficult? Both faith and reason affirm they should not. When heeded, believers will not.

RENDER TO ALL THEIR DUE

“⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

There is to be a certain consistency in our response to civil authorities. We are not given the liberty to pick and choose whom we will honor. This obligation is owing to the dignity that goes with any office ordained by God. If man himself, without regard to the position he holds, is to be given due honor because he is “*made after the similitude of God*,” (James 3:9), what of those who have been placed in positions of authority by Him?

We are living in a time of great disrespect and social rebellion. This passage should be declared often to the people of God, lest they be lulled into sleep by carnality, or the wisdom of this world. It is to be remembered that despising dominion is classed along with the exceeding sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are more like Satan than they are like God (Jude 7-8).

RENDERING TO ALL THEIR DUE

“*Render therefore to all their due.*” While the deeds that follow are to be done on a voluntary basis, they are, nevertheless, **debts** to be honored. Because the saints are strictly charged to “*owe no man anything*” (Rom 13:9), they are to see to it these debts are paid, sincerely, respectfully, and as unto the Lord Himself.

To “*render*” is to pay, give, perform a duty, or discharge what is due. To fail in this regard is to be characterized by rebellion. In such a case, not only is the authority dishonored, the name of the Lord is also reproached, God is disobeyed, and the flesh takes the dominance.

TAXES THAT ARE DUE

“*... taxes to whom taxes are due.*” Here taxes are called a debt – something that is “*due*.” It involves an obligation that has been placed upon us. Ultimately,

that obligation is to God, who has inspired these instructions. The amount of tax that is owed is to be paid, and it is to be paid to the one or ones to whom it is due. If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how could we explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us?

CUSTOMS THAT ARE DUE

“*... customs to whom customs.*” These are not “*customs*” in the sense of manners, or certain ways of doing things, i.e., “it is not our custom” to do thus and so. It is more related to “*customs*” costs related to imports and exports – a levy that is paid for the handling and transporting of merchandise. Jesus referred to such charges when He asked Peter, “*What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take*

If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how could we explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us?

customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?” (Matt 17:25). All such dues are to be “*rendered*” or paid.

FEAR THAT IS DUE

“*... fear to whom fear.*” This is a wholesome respect that will not allow the fearing person to disobey or disrespect the dignitary. There are certain people placed among us to whom fear is “*due*.” This is not a cringing fear that moves the individual to strive to merely please men. After all, “*The fear of man bringeth a snare*” (Prov 29:25). This is actually a fear that proceeds from the fear of God, not one that replaces it.

Solomon counseled his son, “*My son,*

fear thou the LORD and the king” (Prov 24:27). Under the Law, it was commanded, “*Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father*” (Lev 19:3). That is a wholesome respect that will not speak reproachfully to them or dishonor them by disobedience or disrespect. This is a fear of offending or dishonoring, rather than a cringing fear of an evil doer.

HONOR THAT IS DUE

“*... honor to whom honor.*” All men are not alike. There are some to whom honor is due. Children are to honor their parents – they owe them that honor (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:1). There is an honor that is to be paid to the aged. The Law prescribed, “*You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD*” (Lev 19:32). This has all but been eliminated in our country, which has come to venerate youthfulness above maturity. Many religious programs cater to the youth instead of rising before the aged.

Peter wrote, “*Honor the king*” (1 Pet 2:17). Elders that “*rule well*” are to be “*counted worthy of double honor*” (1 Tim 5:17). Servants are to consider their masters “*worthy of all honor*” (1 Tim 6:1). Husbands are to give “*honor*” unto their wives” (1 Pet 3:7).

There are also certain customs and protocols related to meeting higher officials. God Himself, for that matter, has established a certain protocol in approaching Him: i.e., “*a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb 10:22). It should not surprise us that a faint reflection of this is involved in approaching dignitaries He has put over us. An example of such a protocol is seen in Esther’s approach to the king, who was her own husband. When she approached him to plead for her people, she “*put on her royal apparel*.” When the king held out the scepter of acceptance, she “*drew*

near, and touched the top of the scepter.” When asked concerning her request, she appealed to the good will of the king: “If it seem good unto the king” (Esth 5:1-3).

In my judgment, the modern church is sadly lacking in the requirements of this text. Disrespect reigns supreme among those bearing the name of Jesus

Christ—at least in the Western world. Both civil and spiritual leaders lack the respect that is due to them by the Word of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Let those who imagine that spiritual life lacks practicality, give due heed to the passage we have just reviewed. This is an exposition of the nature of spiritual life. It is one of the ways “rivers of living water” flow from the “belly,” or inward parts of the children of God (John 7:39). Where such responses are not found, spiritual life is not found, for this is the way in which life from God expresses itself in the world.

Thus far, the Spirit has declared the following effects of justification, or the imputation of righteousness.

- ❑ The body is presented to God as a living sacrifice (12:1-2).
- ❑ Thoughts concerning oneself are in strict comportment with the measure of faith given (12:3).
- ❑ Care is taken to minister to the members of Christ’s body in strict accord with the gifts administered to us (12:4-8).
- ❑ Consistent and God-honoring attitudes are exhibited toward the people of God (12:9-10).
- ❑ Appropriate responses to the circumstances in which we find ourselves (12:11-21).
- ❑ Submission to the “higher powers,” or civil authorities (13:1-7).

In these matters, the justification of life is made known. This principle is

stated in the fifth chapter. “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**” (5:18). Some translations read “justification AND life”^{NRSV/NJB} Others read substantially the same, “acquittal and life.”^{NAB/RSV} The NIV reads, “justification that brings life.” While there is an element of truth in all of these expressions, in my judgment they fail to express the true meaning.

Ordinarily, it is the individual that is said to be justified. “. . . this man went down to his house justified” (Lk 18:14). “. . . all that believe are justified” (Acts 13:39). “. . . a man is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28). “For if Abraham were justified by works” (Rom 4:2). “. . . them he also justified” (Rom 8:30). “. . . ye are justified” (1 Cor 6:11), etc.

That is not, however, the manner of speaking in Romans 5:18. The Greek word used here is ζωης (zo-as). This precise word is used no less than forty-seven times in the New Covenant Scriptures. Forty of those times it is translated “OF life.” Phrases used include “days of life,” “resurrection of life,” “bread of life,” “words of eternal life,” “light of life,” “ways of life,” “Prince of life,” “newness of life,”

“Spirit of life,” “savor of life,” “word of life,” “book of life,” “promise of life,” “hope of eternal life,” “end of life,” “crown of life,” “grace of life,” “tree of life,” and “water of life.”

All of this may seem like an academic diversion, with little or no value. Yet, in my judgment, a most powerful facet of redemption is to be seen in this expression, and the passage before us.

In Christ Jesus, life itself, or living, is made acceptable to God: “Justification OF life.” Not only is the person sanctified, but the life lived by that individual is also made holy. Divine life exhibits itself in the expressions of life, not in a mere profession. Where these expressions are not found, there really is no evidence spiritual life.

Beginning with the twelfth chapter, the Spirit unfolds the manner in which the life of God expresses itself. The various admonitions set before us are not cold obligations, to be fulfilled under the bludgeon of threats. Even though they are duties, they are also evidences that we have been “made righteous” by a gracious God. The knowledge of this situation will prove a great encouragement for advancement to God-honoring maturity.

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COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>**



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 41



LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. ⁹ For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ¹⁰ Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. NKJV

(Romans 13:8-10)

INTRODUCTION

This section of Romans is a commentary on the practicality of the "justification of life" (Rom 5:18). It reveals how spiritual life behaves itself in this world – when men are in a "house of clay" (Job 4:19), hounded by a personal "adversary" (1 Pet 5:8-9), and assaulted with "all that is in the world" (1 John 2:15-17). These exhortations are infinitely more than theoretical goals for successful living. There is a compulsory tone to them that does not permit them to be ignored.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

This is an Apostolic exposition of the second commandment: "And the second is

like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt 22:39). It is part of the summation of the Law – a sort of heading under which many of the detailed laws were Divinely grouped. The Ten Commandments dealt with interpersonal relationships.

- ' "Honor thy father and thy mother."
- ' "Thou shalt not kill."
- ' "Thou shalt not commit adultery."
- ' "Thou shalt not steal."
- ' "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."
- ' "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's . . ." (Ex 20:12-17).

The Levitical Law gathered these commandments, together with all of their implications, and declared, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but **thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**: I am the LORD" (Lev 19:18). These precise words are found nowhere else in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. Nowhere do any of the prophets refer to this as "the second" commandment. If the Holy Spirit had not "moved" holy men to speak in such a manner, I do not believe humanity would have concluded such a thing.

Jesus and the Apostles, however,

OUTLINE

- < ON THE MATTER OF DEBT (13:8)
- < WHAT NOT TO DO (13:9a)
- < BRIEFLY COMPREHENDED (13:9b)
- < WHAT LOVE DOES (13:10)

frequently refer to this commandment. Jesus grouped it with the commands to do no murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness, and honor your father and mother (Matt 19:19). When asked concerning *“the great commandment in the Law,”* He said it was *“the second”* great commandment (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31). Our text affirms it briefly comprehends all of the commandments regarding human relationships (Rom 13:9). Galatians 5:14 declares *“all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”* James 2:8 refers to it as fulfilling *“the royal law.”* We are not, therefore, speaking of something inconsequential, as though *“second”* suggests a lack of importance.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT HONORED FIRST

Notwithstanding, the Holy Spirit is careful to deal first with our relationship to God. Within the framework of that *“first and great commandment,”* the *“second”* obtains its significance. A brief review of this thrust will serve to set the stage for the exposition of this section.

Let me be clear: I am showing here the superiority of our relationship with, and duty toward, the God of heaven. Until this matter is satisfactorily addressed, no person will approach the second commandment with seriousness and resolution.

- ‘ Jesus is preeminently *“the Son of God with power”* (1:4).
- ‘ The Gospel of Christ is *“the power of God unto salvation”* (1:16).
- ‘ The subject of the revelation contained in the Gospel is *“the righteousness of God”* (1:17).
- ‘ The fall of the Gentile world is directly related to its rejection *of God* (1:19-

- 32).
- ‘ It is *“the goodness of God”* that leads us to repentance (2:4).
- ‘ The whole world was guilty because it did not *“seek after God”* (3:11).
- ‘ The Law produces the realization that the whole world is *“guilty before God”* (3:19).
- ‘ The sin of humanity reveals it comes *“short of the glory of God”* (3:23).
- ‘ Abraham’s justification was based upon him believing *God* (4f:2-5).
- ‘ Being justified by faith, we have *“peace with God”* (5:1).
- ‘ The Holy Spirit sheds *“the love of God”* abroad in our hearts (5:5).
- ‘ We are *“reconciled to God”* through the death of Christ (5:10).
- ‘ We are to reckon ourselves to be *“dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God”* through Jesus Christ our Lord (6:11).
- ‘ We ourselves are to be *“yielded unto God”* (6:13).
- ‘ In Christ, we have become *“servants unto God”* (6:22).
- ‘ We have been married to Christ in order to *“bring forth fruit unto God”* (7:4).
- ‘ With our minds, we serve the *“law of God”* (7:4).
- ‘ The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us according to *“the will of God”* (8:27).
- ‘ Our bodies are to be *presented “unto*

appears to have been given precedence over *“the first and great commandment.”* However, this is never done in Scripture. Man-to-man responsibilities are never delineated until man-to-God obligations are first declared. What is more, issues related to loving our neighbors as ourselves are always expounded within the light of our relationship to God in Christ Jesus. This is absolutely consistent throughout the Apostles’ doctrine.

Our text is a sterling example of this Apostolic manner; i.e., God first, man second. Not until the matter of living unto God has been established, is our duty toward one another taken up. The reason for this is apparent. Man is made *“in the image of God”* (Gen 9:6), *“in the likeness of God”* (Gen 5:1), and *“after the similitude of God”* (James 3:9).

This circumstance is what mandates that we love our neighbors as ourselves. They are the *“offspring of God”* (Acts 17:29), whom we are to love. This is not a heartless social law, but a reasonable moral and spiritual one. It flows more from a perception of the truth than from the compulsion of mere obligation. It is, in the strictest sense of the word, an expression of a new heart and spirit—the result of the Law of God being written within the heart, and put into the mind.

The fulfilling of *“the second”* commandment appears to have been given precedence over *“the first and great commandment.”* However, this is never done in Scripture. Man-to-man responsibilities are never delineated until man-to-God obligations are first declared.

- God”* (12:1-2).
- ‘ It is not until these fundamental responsibilities to God are expounded that we are brought to consider human relationships. Right here I must mention what I believe to be an underlying weakness in modern *Christianity*. The fulfilling of *“the second”* commandment

Relation to God is the root of the matter. That is where everything valid begins. Reconciliation to God precedes reconciliation to man. Love for God antedates love for man. You can never begin with man and end up with God. Loving your neighbor will never bring you to love God. Being mindful of your neighbor does not lead to mindfulness of God.

ON THE MATTER OF DEBT

^{13:8} ***Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*** This is a text that has, in my judgment, been greatly distorted by those with a propensity toward legalism, or cold and lifeless law. While care must be taken not to become loose in our views of debt, equal care must be taken not to impose human opinion upon this text, or make it say something that conflicts with the general tenor of Scripture. Living by faith is difficult enough. We have no need to be brought under the rules and opinions of mere mortals. The early church took care not to impose upon Gentiles too many rules (Acts 15:29). We do well to be as considerate toward those who are genuinely seeking to live by faith. Spiritual life is not nurtured within the framework of regulations. It derives its strength from faith, not rules.

THE CONTEXT

This verse is a continuation of the thought introduced in verse seven. *“Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”*^{NIV} None of these are to be left outstanding, as though we were free to choose when such dues were to liquidated.

OWING NO MAN

“Owe no man anything . . .” Other versions read, *“Let no debt remain outstanding,”*^{NIV} *“Be in debt for nothing,”*^{BBE} *“Pay all your debts.”*^{NLT} **The thrust of the passage is not to avoid debt, but to satisfy the debt, paying what is due.** The debts to which verse seven refers cannot be avoided. They were created by God, not man, and they are to be honored with dispatch and without hesitation. Once again, the **only** exception to this rule is when the authorities honored require us to dishonor or disobey God. Such occasions, however, are the exception to the rule. **Sound doctrine is always built around the norm, not the exception.**

Many people who would consider it reprehensible to refuse to pay back monies or goods that were borrowed, think nothing of refusing to pay their taxes, or give honor and respect to those to whom it such due. *“Owing,”* in this

Living by faith is difficult enough. We have no need to be brought under the rules and opinions of mere mortals. The early church took care not to impose upon Gentiles too many rules

case, is withholding what is due to the person.

Indebtedness for Service

Owing does not always involve those under authority honoring those having authority over them. Sometimes the table is turned, and the one in authority gives honor to the ones under him. The Law sited a rule involving indebtedness that dealt with employees, or hired servants. *“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the LORD, and it be sin to you”* (Deut 24:14). Leviticus 19:13 reiterates this law. The labors of a hired servant incurred a debt, and they were to *“owe not man anything.”*

Note, the hired servant was *“poor and needy.”* That is the circumstance that required this law. This does not mean it was wrong to accrue wages, according to a mutual agreement. An example of such an agreement is found in Laban and Jacob (Gen 30:28-29; 31:8). Another such agreement was found between Pharaoh’s

daughter and Moses’ mother (Ex 2:9). The requirement for daily payment did not hold true in these cases.

An Example from Jeremiah

Another example of not paying debts is found in Jeremiah 22:13. *“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor’s service without wages and gives him nothing for his work.”*^{NKJV} (Jer 22:13). Here, the service and labor of one’s neighbor is not to be considered worthless. Unless an offsetting agreement has been made with the neighbor, his labor in the behalf of the individual is to be considered a debt to be paid.

This particular example is considerably prevalent in the Christian community. Countless churches regularly expect men of God to expend labor without proper remuneration. While no covetousness is to be found within the laborer, the people receiving spiritual benefit from the work are to consider the following. *“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches”*^{NKJV} (Gal 6:6). The idea here is that the teacher has shared what God has given him. Those with whom he has shared those things are to share with him what God has given them. It is a matter of debt, and they are to *“owe no man anything.”*

Again, it is written, *“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things”*^{NKJV} (Rom 15:27). The benefits the Roman brethren had derived from the saints in Jerusalem rippled into eternity. They had become *“debtors”* to them, and were not to leave the debt unpaid.

This exceedingly practical area is regularly ignored among professing

believers. It has, in my judgment, brought great disgrace upon the name of the Lord. With a few gracious exceptions, this has been the manner among churches of the Restoration Movement, with whom I have been affiliated. This is largely owing to the neglect of sound teaching on the matter.

Debts of Ability

Solomon spoke of the debt of doing good to your neighbor in his time of need. *"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you"* ^{NKJV} (Prov 3:27-28). Here is a different kind of debt, yet it is very real. When a need is experienced by our neighbor, and we have the power and goods to meet that need, we are debtors to him. That debt is to be paid. We have robbed him if we withhold such things from him.

Withholding Is Robbery

To withhold what is due another is to *"owe,"* in the sense of our text. Such debt is actually a breach of the eighth commandment: *"Thou shalt not steal"* (Ex 20:15). In such a case, the theft is failing to pay what is due, rather than breaking into the neighbor's house and taking something already in his possession. This is the very thing for which God upbraided Israel. They had robbed Him, the Lord declared. *"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me"* (Mal 3:8). Israel remonstrated, asking how it was possible that they had robbed God. The Lord's answer unveils something of the magnitude of our text. *"But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it"* (Mal 3:8-10). It is not wise for believers to ignore this text.

Many a professed believer has

committed this very sin – they have robbed God by withholding what is due to Him. Although some teachers are fond of telling us tithing is not valid under the New Covenant, they only betray their own ignorance of the Divine nature. Tithing, like faith, preceded the Old Covenant. Both Abraham and Jacob paid tithes, or the first tenth of their goods (Gen 14:20; 28:22). Further, neither of them was commanded to do so.

"No Man"

"Owe no man anything" covers every aspect of debt, and every individual to whom such debt is owed. Taxes are debts to be paid. Honor is a debt to be discharged. Fear toward the authorities ordained by God is a debt to be paid. Honor for those in places of authority is a debt to be satisfied. Hired services are debts to be cleared. Assistance given men in times of need are debts to be liquidated. Profiting spiritually from those who have

When a need is experienced by our neighbor, and we have the power and goods to meet that need, we are debtors to him. That debt is to be paid. We have robbed him if we withhold such things from him.

communicated the truth of God is a debt to be honored. Opportunities to be helpful to those in need are a debt to be settled.

You see what an exceedingly large matter this is. It is to be taken seriously by every believer.

ON THE MATTER OF FINANCIAL DEBT

It is not unusual for certain teachers to use this passage to condemn all financial indebtedness. I now approach this matter with great care, for the strictest allowance must be made for the conscience of every believer. However, the

conscience of one believer cannot be bound upon another, particularly when it is based upon a view of Scripture, and not the Scripture itself.

It should at once be obvious to you that this passage is not condemning debt itself. Where there is no debt, nothing can be *"due."* The very idea of not allowing a debt to *"remain outstanding"* ^{NIV} suggests that one has been incurred. It goes without saying that we should never incur debts we know we will not be able to pay. Debt should always be taken seriously, for in it we become obligated to the world. Debt can cause our roots to sink too deeply in this present evil world, and should therefore always be approached with great sobriety.

Under the Law

Under the Law, provision was made for lending money to the poor among God's people. No usury, or interest, was to be charged a fellow Israelite. Yet, the money was to be repaid. *"If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest"* (Ex 22:25). Of course, if it is morally wrong to incur debt, it would be a sin to create it by lending.

Jesus' Parables

In one of His parables, Jesus likened the Kingdom of heaven to a king to whom certain servants were indebted. The Lord forgave debts, while one of his forgiven servants demanded that debts owed him be paid by those with no means to pay them (Matt 18:23-35). The point germane to our text is this: if debt itself was sinful, it would not be used in as a key factor in the exposition of the Kingdom of heaven. The parable itself presumes the legitimacy of debt. Else, there would be no point to the parable.

The Widow and Elisha

All debt is not self-incurred. On one occasion, a recently widowed wife of one of the sons of the prophets came to Elisha. Although her departed husband was a prophet and feared the Lord, he had incurred a debt. Her crisis was that the debt was due, yet she had no means by

which to pay it. She reported, *"Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."* The prophet did not rebuke her for being in debt, nor did he cast aspersions upon her husband for falling into debt. Instead, he was used of God to provide a miraculous means for paying the debt (2 Kgs 4:1-7). Thus, by paying the debt, she *"owed no man anything."*

Nehemiah's Day

In Nehemiah's day, the people *"borrowed money for the king's tribute,"* offering their lands and vineyards as collateral. Nehemiah did not condemn the people for borrowing. Rather, he rebuked the Jewish rulers for exacting usury from their brethren (Neh 5:4-7).

Christ's Teaching

Jesus taught us, *"Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away"* (Matt 5:42). Of course, if it was sinful to create a debt, those who acquiesced to it by allowing someone to borrow from them would be causing their brother to stumble. Jesus did forbid lending as a money-making venture (Lk 6:34-35). He did not, however, condemning lending or asking for something to be advanced. Another of His parables was based upon an individual petitioning his neighbor, *"Friend, lend me three loaves"* (Lk 11:5-9). If indebtedness itself was sinful, it could not be an example of obtaining an answer to prayer.

Debt is not wrong. Refusing to pay debt is what is wrong. Our text assumes the existence of debt, not the sin of it. Further, it is not limited to financial matters, and not one syllable of the text suggests financial priorities.

A Word of Caution

This by no means suggests believers can take a loose view of financial indebtedness. Nor, indeed, does it intimate it is proper to pile up needless debts. Such an approach to life requires a covetous spirit and a sense of being at home in this world. Faith will not allow

either attitude. A spirit that grasps after carnal things stands on the precipice of eternal ruin.

It is ever true, *"the borrower is servant to the lender"* (Prov 22:7). Indebtedness is always to be taken seriously. All debts are to be paid, whether they are debts of money, tribute, customs, fear, or honor. **While earthly associations are inferior, they are not to be regarded as beyond godly obligation.** Those who wear the name of Jesus are to live in view of their relationship to God through Christ. They are not free to grasp the things of this world as though they were

As to making laws concerning the extent to which borrowing and debt is allowed, God has not given us license to legislate to our brethren. I have every confidence that when our text is taken seriously, it will move the trusting soul to carefulness in the matter of making debts.

primary, or incur debts as though life in this world was fundamental. At no point are they at liberty to ignore their debts.

As to making laws concerning the extent to which borrowing and debt is allowed, God has not given us license to legislate to our brethren. I have every confidence that when our text is taken seriously, it will move the trusting soul to carefulness in the matter of making debts. Also, as I have shown, there are numerous debts you owe that were not created by you, but by your Lord. They are to be paid as well as the ones we ourselves incur.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

"... except to love one another." Other versions read, *"except the continuing debt to love one another,"*^{NIV} *"but to have love for one another,"*^{BBE} and *"except the debt of love for others."*^{NLT}

The meaning of the text is this: **loving one another is a debt that cannot be liquidated.** It cannot be fully

paid or thoroughly satisfied. It is not only a large debt, it is a growing one. It is as though the interest on it keeps on accruing at a large rate. What is more, it is a debt that is not intended to be eliminated.

The Reasoning of Flesh

Flesh will reason there is no need to pay on the debt at all, seeing we cannot pay it off. However, this is erroneous reasoning, for the debt is very real. Hence, payment must be made on it, else we have, in fact, stolen from our brethren, taking from them what rightfully belonged to them. It is as though we only paid off the interest on the debt, never really reducing the principle.

A Focused Debt

Love is what we *"owe"* to our brethren. Notice, the debt of love is to *"one another"*—the people of God, or the *"household of faith."* We have a *"special"* relationship to them that transcends all other human relationships (Gal 6:10). This does not mean we are not responsible to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, or pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us (Matt 5:44). However, our love toward the saints is of a different order. It is more profound, more extensive, and associated with greater benefits.

The particular comparison being made is between what we owe to civil authorities, and what we owe to the people of God. Our obligation to the *"higher powers"* involves paying tribute and customs, fear, and honor (13:7). Our relationship to the brethren is on a much higher level. That level does include the matter of honor. However, civil authorities make demands of us, the people of God do not. We do not love the brethren because they have required that we do so, but because we desire to. Our hearts are knit with them, and we have been made one with them. That is not the kind of relationship we sustain to other men, whether they be political leaders, those who maintain law and order, or those by whom we have been employed. It is more personal and more rewarding.

Our Relationship to the Saints

The relationship we sustain with the people of God is a frequent subject in Scripture. The variety of references to this association serve to accentuate the importance of our text.

Brethren. Redemption relates its constituents to one another. Because we have participated in a "common salvation" (Jude 3), and have a "common faith" (Tit 1:4), we are "brethren." This is by Divine design. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among **many brethren**" (Rom 8:29).

Same body. Because of their connection to the Head, Jesus Christ, the people of God are "one body." They are motivated and governed by the same head, and are designed to work together. "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of **the same body**, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:6).

Same Household. God has a household over which He presides. He sustains and cares for this household, giving them exclusive gifts and privileges. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of **the household of God**" (Eph 2:19).

Members of one another. By virtue of their common Father and life, believers are actually integrated with one another. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one **members one of another**" (Rom 12:5).

Same Father. Those who are in Christ Jesus have been begotten by the same Father. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even **our Father**, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess 2:16).

Same Savior. Our deliverance from sin has come from a common Source—one mighty Deliverer. "But is now made manifest by the appearing of **our Savior Jesus Christ**, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10).

Partakers of the same nature. In salvation, people receive the same nature. They have the same mind set,

sense of values, objectives, and appetites. This is the direct result of participating in the very nature of God Himself. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be **partakers of the Divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:4).
Same Status – Strangers and pilgrims. Believers have the same relationship to the world. Ultimately, because they

through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:3-6).

The Work Is of God

Our participation in this blend of human spirits is owing to the work of God Himself. As it is written, "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption"^{NIV} (1 Cor 1:30). And again, "For we are **God's workmanship**,

The relationship we sustain with the people of God is a frequent subject in Scripture. The variety of references to this association serve to accentuate the importance of our text.

have received eternal life, they are misfits in this temporary and cursed world. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as **strangers and pilgrims**, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11).

All of One. The saints have the unique privilege of sharing the Fatherhood of God with the Lord Jesus Himself. "For both He that sanctifieth (Jesus Christ) and they who are sanctified **are all of One** (God the Father): for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb 2:11).

Same Family. While men speak of differing organizations and church affiliation, God speaks of a single family. Here is where all spiritual resources are received—the solitary family among whom God has taken up residence. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom **the whole family in heaven and earth is named**" (Eph 3:14-15).

One Body, Spirit, Hope, Faith, and Baptism. The oneness of God's people is not a mere formality. It is marked by the same initiation, persuasion, animation, and goal. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is **one body**, and **one Spirit**, even as ye are called in **one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all**, who is above all, and

created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10). The effectual willingness and work that is found in us is actually traced back to God, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

The conditions mentioned above are the circumstances that have created the debt of love we owe one another. Our indebtedness is not owing to what we have done for one another, although that is significant. God Himself has created this debt, just as He did in the matter of civil authority.

If we begin to imagine we no longer owe a debt of love to the people God, let us remember they are His people, and He has charged us with their care and encouragement. **The new birth is accompanied by the payment of the debt incurred by sin. It is also accompanied by the creation of a debt to the people of God that cannot be fully paid by us.** Should the time come when this is clearly seen, denominationalism will collapse immediately. **In fact, sectarian walls can only exist to the degree this indebtedness is not perceived.** Such a condition is totally inexcusable. Not only has God spoken extensively on this subject, He has given us a new heart that IS CAPABLE OF sensing and enjoying

that circumstance.

THE ONE WHO LOVES

“... he who loves another.” While we are a part of a large family, our associations with it are intensely personal. Our text does not read “WE who love,” but “HE who loves.” The word “another” refers to “another” member of the household of faith. This is not a selective word, as though we loved only certain members of the body. Rather it denotes the extension of our hearts on a personal and individual level.

There are ways in which we benefit the people of God without knowing it. Our mutual preferences and interests move us to be profitable to those of like precious faith, often without being aware of it. **However, love for another is not inadvertent. It is focused and intentional.** The love of God flows out from one believer to another as an act of the will. It is with a purposed intention to do the person good, bringing eternal advantages to them. It is done at personal expense, and with an objective in mind.

Often the outpouring is wrapped in temporal concerns and ministries, relieving the afflicted, fatherless, and widows. But it is always what the person wants to do, delights to do, and sees a need to do.

This is a love that is taught by God Himself. It is not the result of natural politeness or culture. It is a special kind of love that cannot be generated from the earth. It is sent to the earth, and wrought by God through personal involvement with Himself. The Thessalonians, for example, were commended for the extensiveness and consistency of their love for God’s people. Yet, it was acknowledged their love was not the product of their own natural discipline. “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for **you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.**” That Divine instruction was effective indeed, even rippling out to all the brethren in

Macedonia. Yet, their debt of love had not been paid. The Apostle continued, “But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more” ^{NKJV} (1 Thess 4:9-10). They were making payments on a debt that continued to grow. Only God can teach people to love in this manner, and He is quite willing to do so because of the vicarious atonement made by His only begotten Son.

Abounding more and more. The love of the brethren is an area where ever-increasing expressions are to be found. In fact, God can “make” us to increase in our love for one another. Sensitive and perceptive souls will seek this for one another. As it is written, “**And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men**” (1 Thess 3:12). The word “make,” or “cause,” ^{NASB} does not speak of forcible improvement that is against both our wills and natures. Such a work would bring no glory to God or benefit to man.

In failing to love the people of God, we have taken from them what belongs to them, thereby becoming robbers instead of those who bless. It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of such a circumstance.

Rather, it speaks of the Lord pushing our love beyond the boundaries of creation and natural aptitude.

In knowledge and in judgment. This love of the brethren is not rooted in emotion, although it is emotional. Here is a love, taught to us by God, that involves both knowledge and judgment. Again, this is a subject of Apostolic prayer. “**And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment**” (Phil 1:9). The word “judgment” refers to discernment, not condemnation. The love taught by God

perceives the needs of brethren, and rushes with joy to meet them. Such love makes the individual aware of what to do, and the will heartily acquiesces to meeting the need.

The evidence of passing from death to life. The preference for the people of God, coupled with the desire to do them good, is evidence that we have moved from death in sin to life in Christ. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). It should not be necessary to comment on what is evidenced by the absence of such love. Where the love of the brethren is not possessed, death reigns, and people have not been taught by God – profession notwithstanding.

From another perspective, if we do not love one another, we are not making payments on the debt we owe. In such a case, the debt is growing larger while we are getting smaller and less capable. In failing to love the people of God, we have taken from them what belongs to them, thereby becoming robbers instead of those who bless. It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of such a circumstance.

FULFILLING THE LAW

“... he who loves another has fulfilled the law.” A number of versions read “neighbor” in the place of “another” (RSV, NASB, NAU, DOUAY, BBE). The NIV reads “fellow man.” Etymologically, the emphasis of the word “another” is “of another kind or order.” Doctrinally, its meaning is that our love is for those outside of ourselves. That is, we do not love them out of selfish interests, because they are precisely like us, or because we are seeking to gain advantages from them. This kind of love flows from the well of Divinity, seeking the welfare of “another.”

Whereas the Law demanded that love be executed out of mere human energy, for it was a system of merit, this love is of another order. It accomplishes what the Law itself could not achieve. The Law set forth a righteous standard. It was “spiritual,” “holy,” “just,” and “good”

(Rom 7:12,14). However, that very circumstance put its fulfillment beyond the reach of "the natural man." Instead of the Law becoming a basis for justification, it was the reason for condemnation, for "the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor 15:56).

The Law was right in demanding such love, but man was too weak to fulfill it. Now, apart from the Law, and by the grace of God, "brotherly love" fulfills the Law, meeting its demands precisely and consistently. This is involved in the wonderful proclamation, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit**" Rom 8:3-4).

Apart from its ministry of information – for "by the Law is the knowledge of sin" – the Law, as an enforced code, was necessary because of man's faulty heart. Apart from Christ, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer 17:9). However, when the heart is made new, and the law of God is inscribed upon it, the Law is no longer required as an enforcer.

Let it be clear, "the righteousness of the Law" is not the same as "the righteousness of God." It is more of a goal than a reality, for no one was ever made righteous by keeping the Law. In fact, Christ's vicarious death was necessary because of man's inability to measure up to the standard of righteousness set forth

in the Law. As it is written, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal 2:21).

Because of this circumstance, Christ has terminated the Law as a means to becoming righteous. He has inducted a righteousness that is realized by faith, not by doing. Thus it is written, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes

5:17). It is the result of a more precise image of God (Col 3:10), not a human effort to become like God.

The fulfillment of the Law that is here declared is not inferior. It is not a sort of token fulfillment that lacks spiritual substance. It does not brush the Law aside as though it was not good and holy. This is not a meager fulfillment of a robust and spiritual Law. It is not a kind of reduced righteousness!

Because of this circumstance, Christ has terminated the Law as a means to becoming righteous. He has inducted a righteousness that is realized by faith, not by doing.

about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them'" (Rom 10:4-5).

HAS Fulfilled

Notice, the one who "loves another" **HAS**, by that very posture, already fulfilled the Law. While this love is carried out "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18), it is essentially found in the heart. This is a love that is produced by one's love for God, which is the fountain from which all other valid human love springs. That is precisely why the "second commandment" is "like unto" the "first" (Matt 22:39). Through the Spirit, Peter admonished us to "love one another **with a pure heart fervently**" (1 Pet 1:22). This love is an expression of the "new creation" (2 Cor

This love not only fulfills the Law, it exceeds the demands of the Law.

All that the Law demands regarding our neighbors is fulfilled when we love them as ourselves. Loving another is not a single deed, nor is it fulfilled at a point in time. By its very nature, it is ongoing – a debt that can never be liquidated. What the Law demanded from without, love compels from within. What the Law required, with threats of death, love delights to do without the need of an enforced code. Love is the fulfilling of the Law, for it desires nothing contrary to the Law! It fervently desires to fulfill the Law. Surely you must see this to be a most marvelous and beneficial circumstance.

WHAT NOT TO DO

"^{9a} **For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet . . .**" When speaking of our neighbor, the Law majored on what NOT to do, rather than things that were to be done: "Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not**."

THE RELEVANCY OF THE LAW

As regards human conduct, the Law was put into place to stop the outbreak of the corruption of the heart. **It was the appointed means of restraining the fallen nature.** The days of Noah confirm to us what occurs among sinners when there is no Divine law. Upon beholding the entirety of the human race, young and old, the Lord said, "that the wickedness of

man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" Gen 6:5). The utter devastation of the flood, leaving only eight souls upon the face of the earth, did not change this wicked propensity. This is precisely why the Lord declared He would never again destroy every living thing as He did in the Noachic flood. Following the flood, with a fresh start for humanity, the

Lord said in His heart, *"I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done"* (Gen 8:21).

In His mercy, however, God did not allow depraved human nature to remain unchecked. **The Law was given to address man's sinful condition, not to release an imagined innate goodness.**

- ' The Law was given *"that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"* (Rom 3:19).
- ' The Law was not intended to produce a knowledge of righteousness, *"for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Rom 3:20).
- ' The Law, because of its abrasiveness against fallen humanity, became *"the strength of sin"* (1 Cor 15:56).
- ' When the commandment of the Law came, *"sin revived,"* producing a wellspring of iniquitous thoughts and deeds (Rom 7:9).
- ' Sinful passions, or the *"motions of sin,"* were aroused by the Law (Rom 7:5).
- ' The Law was *"added"* to the Abrahamic promise *"because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made"* (Gal 3:19).
- ' The Law was designed to be a schoolmaster, or tutor, to *"bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (Gal 3:24).
- ' Although the Law itself was spiritual and holy, it was given *"that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful"* (Rom 7:13).
- ' The *"Law"* is not, nor ever has been, *"made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine"* (1 Tim 1:9-10).

The Law shined a Divine spotlight on the human condition, but provided no remedy for what was uncovered. It defined sin, but provided no power to overcome it. Although it was spiritual, the Law could not produce spirituality. Even though it was holy, it could not produce holiness. Although it was good, it could not produce goodness. It commanded love, but provided no strength or ability to be loving. It judged, but did not help. It condemned, but did not save.

At least two indispensable needs were addressed by the Law.

Thus the one who loves does not destroy the Law, but removes the need for it by fulfilling the Law. The Law still exists, but in quite another capacity. Rather than condemning the individual, it now confirms the presence of the Divine nature.

- ' First, it uncovered the condition caused by sin, thereby preparing men for a Savior.
- ' Second, under the threat of death (Ezek 18:4,20; Gal 3:10), it restrained the uncontrollable outbreak of sin – as existed in the days of Noah.

It is with particular regard to the latter, namely the inhibiting of prolific sin, that our text is declared. When love exudes from the new heart, there is no further need for Law to restrain the outbreak of sin. Thus the one who loves does not destroy the Law, but removes the need for it by fulfilling the Law. The Law still exists, but in quite another capacity. Rather than condemning the individual, it now confirms the presence of the Divine nature. It has been *"fulfilled,"* and is thus satisfied, no longer stopping the mouth of the individual, or condemning him.

Unless there is some understanding of these things, the text before us will make no sense. It will be seen as a sort of Divine compromise that brings dishonor to God, and robs the believer of Divine power.

A Critical Distinction

Our text provides a critical distinction that must be seen. The Law that is fulfilled is not a new law, but the one which *"was given by Moses"* (John 1:17). The fact that it is *"fulfilled"* by the one who *"loves another"* confirms that Law has not been eradicated, or replaced by another moral code. You cannot fulfill something that was previously abrogated.

The Law has been ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), but it still stands in tact.

COMMITTING ADULTERY

"You shall not commit adultery." While adultery is often committed in the name of *"love,"* our text shows it is the result of NOT loving our neighbor. Adultery is one of the more reprehensible sins in Scripture, and is never taken lightly or excused – in either the Old or New covenants. *"Adultery"* includes infidelity, as well as all manner of sexual corruption. It is all intimacy of every sort outside of the sacred bond of marriage – unity between one man and one woman.

Always Deliberate

Adultery is never accidental, inadvertent, or without intention. It is always deliberate, thought out, and intensely selfish. It involves the prostitution of the body, which has been purchased by God. Thus it is written of fornication, which includes adultery, *"Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body"* (1 Cor 6:18).

A person who commits adultery – particularly one who wears the name of Jesus – must do the following.

- ' The Holy Spirit must be quenched.
- ' The Holy Spirit must be grieved.
- ' The Word of God must be ignored, and even stifled.

' The conscience must be ignored and suppressed.
 ' The coming of the Lord must be forgotten.
 ' The day of judgment must be put out of the mind.
 ' The world must be viewed as primary.
 ' The conviction of the Holy Spirit must be ignored.
 ' Personal desires must be exalted above the will of the Lord.
 ' The individual must refuse to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God.
 ' The one who is the object of lust must be seen after the flesh.
 ' The way of escape, which accompanies all temptation, must be refused.
 ' If married, one's spouse must be despised.
 ' The presence of holy angels must be forgotten.
 ' One must cease to fear God, who has spoken clearly on this matter.
 ' One must cease to love God, who has supplied what is required to avoid such sin.
 ' It is necessary to frustrate the grace of God.

' The love of the truth must be suppressed.
 ' Rather than subordinating the body, it must be allowed to rule.

In a revelation of the scope of this commandment Jesus said, *"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"*(Matt 5:28). Again, the voluntary nature of this sin is underscored. The individual described in this text looked in order to lust. But whether it is looking to lust, or engaging in the sinful deed itself, the Law powerfully declares, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery!"*

Those who commit this sin need not give us an explanation for what they have done. We already know why they sinned. They had no regard for the commandment of God. They did not hide His Word in their heart. Instead, they nurtured the nature the Spirit commanded they crucify and mortify (Rom 6:6; Gal 5:24; Col 3:5).

I have taken the time to mention these things because of the remarkable rise of

God and their neighbor as well.

I understand there is forgiveness and plenteous redemption with the Lord, but it is that He *"might be feared"* (Psa 130:4,7). When faith takes hold of the forgiveness and redemption of God, it will never condone involvement in sin, or the transgression of the Law.

The principles I have cited apply to the remainder of these sins. There is no need to repeat them.

NOT KILLING

"You shall not murder." The second recorded sin is that of murder. Cain killed his own brother Abel. Before he committed this dastardly deed, the Lord reasoned with him about doing good. *"So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."* ^{NKJV} But Cain's heart was hard, and he gave no heed to the words of a gracious God. Immediately after that, while talking with his brother in the field, *"Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him"* (Gen 4:6-8). Thus the first murder was committed.

What Is Murder

Murder is taking the life of one who is made in the image of God – a fellow man. Capital punishment is not murder as the opponents of it claim, for it has been ordained by God, and civil authority has been put into place to carry it out (Gen 9:6; Rom 13:4). Killing an animal is not murder, as the animal-rights people affirm.

Murder, or killing, is taking the life of another out of anger, like Cain did Abel (Gen 4:8). It taking the life of another for personal advantage, like Pharaoh did the newborn male children of Israel (Ex 1:16,22), and Herod the males under two years of age around Bethlehem (Matt 2:16). It is plotting the death of another, like David did Uriah (2 Sam 11:14-17), or Barabbas in an insurrection against the government (Mark 15:7; Acts 3:14).

Abortion is murder. Suicide is self murder. The least conspicuous murder is

Those who commit this sin need not give us an explanation for what they have done. We already know why they sinned. They had no regard for the commandment of God. They did not hide His Word in their heart. Instead, they nurtured the nature the Spirit commanded they crucify and mortify

' The Gospel of Christ must be violently thrust from the mind.
 ' Eternity must be forgotten.
 ' The Law of God must be ignored.
 ' All of the warnings of Scripture concerning this sin must be rejected.
 ' All of the Scriptural examples of those committing this sin must be pushed out of the mind.
 ' One must make a place in their heart for Satan to work.
 ' Satan is not resisted.
 ' One must yield to Satan.
 ' It is necessary to step out of the light and begin walking in darkness.

adultery within the professed church. It is found among the leaders as well as those who are being led. It is found among the old as well as the young. However, no matter how prevalent it may be, and whatever reasons may be cited for its existence, it is forbidden by God. *"Thou shalt not commit adultery!"* There are no "ifs" or exceptions. The Law forbids adultery, and the Law is spiritual, holy, just, and good. That means adultery is unspiritual, unholy, unjust, and evil. Those who commit it have broken the commandment, and done so willingly. They have become unspiritual, unholy, unjust, and evil. They have sinned against

You cannot “briefly comprehend” error. All error deviates from the truth, and thus cannot be pulled together. Truth, on the other hand, can be stated in a concise manner without losing any of its power. When a lie is stated concisely, if that is possible, it loses its power.

hatred for a person within the heart. As it is written, *“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him”* (1 John 3:15). The most atrocious of all murders was the killing of the Son of God. As it is written, *“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers”* (Acts 7:52). But whether in the heart, or in actuality, the Law cries out, *“Thou shalt not murder!”*

A murderer has assumed the prerogatives of God, who alone is *“able to save and to destroy”* (James 4:12). Murder is an affront to God, in whose image man is created.

NOT STEALING

“You shall not steal.” Stealing is taking what belongs to another, assuming the ownership of something that has not been given to us, or for which we have not paid the price. Stealing can also be withholding what rightfully belongs to another—like not paying tithes and offerings to God (Mal 3:8). Kidnaping is stealing—man stealing (Ex 21:16; 1 Tim 1:10). Stealing disregards the things God has given to others, and presumes to take them for oneself.

NOT BEARING FALSE WITNESS

“You shall not bear false witness.” Modern versions omit this prohibition (NASB, NIV, NRSV). Jesus, however, cited a nearly identical summary of the

commandments regarding men in Matthew 19:19, including the prohibition against *“false witness.”* We are in strict accord with the Law and its Scriptural representations by including false witness here. False witness is a lie offered as evidence—as the false witnesses at the trials of Jesus (Matt 26:60), and Stephen (Acts 6:13).

From another view, *“false witness”* is a misrepresentation of the facts—a total fabrication. Solemnly we are told, *“lie not one to another”* (Col 3:9). We are told that God *“cannot lie”* (Tit 1:2), and therefore men should not lie. Israel *“lied”* to God *“with their tongues”* (Psa 78:36). Ananias and Sapphira *“lied to the Holy Spirit”* when they misrepresented the amount of money they gave to the work of the Lord (Acts 5:4). Men can lie by exaggeration, and by deliberate understatement. They can preach lies, write lies, and even sing lies. Those with a love of the truth really have no desire to lie. All such speaking is to be thrust from us. As it is written, *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another”* (Eph 4:25). Let it ever be remembered that whoever *“makes a lie”* will not be allowed to dwell forever with the Lord (Rev 21:27; 22:15). Instead, *“all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* (Rev 21:8). We do well, therefore, to take the Divine prohibition against false witness and lying seriously.

NOT COVETING

“You shall not covet.” Coveting precedes stealing. It is desiring what has been allotted by God to another. In this text it is to set your heart upon something that rightfully belongs to another. From another view, it is longing for something God does not intend for us to have—like Israel longing after the foods of Egypt when God was giving them angel’s bread (Num 11:15). Another example is Achan, who *“coveted”* and *“took”* what God had cursed (Josh 7:21).

A man can covet another man’s wife, like David did Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:3). He can covet another man’s possession, like Ahab when he coveted Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-5). A person can covet after money, causing him to err from the faith and be pierced through with many sorrows (1 Tim 6:10). A covetous individual has no regard for the person or possessions of his neighbor, and thus feels at liberty to violate the holy commandment of God (Ex 20:17).

THESE ARE THE DEMANDS OF THE LAW

“The Law” is God’s Law, and hence represents God’s demands. They are not suggestions, or mere targets toward which men are to casually aim their lives. The transgression of the Law, in all forms, caused the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those violations were what was *“laid”* upon Christ, making Him to *“become sin for us,”* and mandating that God make Him *“a curse”* (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13).

It is not the purpose of this text to lay out the scope of sin. Rather, it deals with sin as it regards our neighbor: person-to-person relationships. **The Law actually protected men against those with calloused and unbelieving hearts, by enforcing civility.** The new creation enforces civility in a better way. It is implemented by means of a new heart and spirit, not by fleshly discipline or threats. It is effective by grace through faith.

BRIEFLY COMPREHENDED

“^{9b} . . . and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely,

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Here is an example of instruction calculated to impact the life of

the hearer or reader. Sound instruction is more than passing along information, or providing a thorough and orderly account

of some facet of the truth. Much of the instruction of our day is too academic. It does not seem to be aiming at anything, and leaves the hearers in a state of spiritual confusion.

In our text, the aim is to show that love meets the demands of the Law, fulfilling its requirements. **Those who are changed within do not need to be regulated from without.** In this sense, salvation is not merely a “*way of life*,” as some suggest. Rather, it is a Divine accomplishment in which the individual is conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. God is not honored by people who must be forced to live godly, if such a thing is even possible. Those sophists who promote accountability to one another in order to the maintenance of moral purity do well to rethink their distorted theology. If “*love is the fulfilling of the Law*,” then lawlessness reveals lovelessness. You cannot legislate love. That is something that must be taught by God and advanced by faith.

OTHER COMMANDMENTS

“ . . . if there be any other commandment.” Other versions read, “and any other commandment,”^{NASB} “and whatever other commandment there may be,”^{NIV} and “and all the other commandments that there are.”^{NJB}

Here we see there is a commonality in all of the commandments, so that one cannot be pitted against another. **It is as though they were all one gender, even though they may have differing personalities.** Here the Spirit views all of the commandments from the standpoint of the common thread that is woven through each one of them – LOVE.

BRIEFLY COMPREHENDED

“ . . . it is briefly comprehended.” Other versions read, “are all summed up,”^{NKJ} “are summed up in this sentence.”^{NIV}

Only statements that are interrelated can be “*summed up*.” In this case, the summation is a single statement from which all of the others are derived. To put it another way, if you did all of things

commanded, the Divine commentary would be the single phrase into which they have been summed.

Divine summations occupy an important place in “*sound doctrine*.” **I have found that one of the marks of false doctrine is the requirement for extensive explanation.** You cannot “*briefly comprehend*” error. All error deviates from the truth, and thus cannot be pulled together. Truth, on the other hand, can be stated in a concise manner without losing any of its power. When a lie is stated concisely, if that is possible, it

Much of the instruction of our day is too academic. It does not seem to be aiming at anything, and leaves the hearers in a state of spiritual confusion.

loses its power. **Truth lends itself to conciseness and summation, falsehood does not.**

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES

“ . . . and all the other commandments that there are, are summed up in this single phrase: **You must love your neighbor as yourself.**”^{NJB} There is a marvelous principle to be seen here. The commandment to love our neighbor as our self is completely contrary to the flesh. It demands the same kind of concern for our neighbor that we have for ourselves. We seek to meet his needs with the same enthusiasm as we address our own. This is, in fact, beyond our ability. Yet, if we will believe the Word of the Lord, and seek with our whole hearts to do it, our great God will enable us to do precisely what He has commanded.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus taught us that our neighbor was the person who stands in need of our assistance. In answer to the question, “*Who is my neighbor?*”, Jesus delivered this parable. At the conclusion He asked the interrogating lawyer, “*Which now of*

these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?” When the lawyer wisely answered, “*He that showed mercy on him,*” Jesus replied, “*Go, and do thou likewise*” (Lk 10:29-37).

Loving our neighbor as our self, therefore, has more to do with meeting his need than with a mere emotional feeling. From one point of view, “*your neighbor*” is all men, with a particular focus upon those who stand in need of consideration and mercy. From another point of view, it is everyone within the sphere of our influence. For example, the good Samaritan was not in his native area. He was journeying when he came upon the wounded man. Yet, he did for that man what he would do for himself. He “*went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him*” (Lk 10:34). He also made provision for his care until his recovery was realized (verse 35). The sphere of his influence had been

extended.

Within the Body of Christ

This commandment is brought to its highest level within the body of Christ. There, our neighbor is all of the saints, particularly those with whom we are journeying to glory. Of such it is written, “*Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification*” (Rom 15:2).

Again, an application of this commandment is made in the Spirit’s word concerning those who are not yet mature in Christ – those who can be harmed by thoughtless living. “*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself***” (Gal 5:14).

James also deals with this commandment, applying it to having respect of persons, and the consequent neglect of the needy. “*But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy*

name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are

convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:6-9).

The point of our text is that all of the details of Law concerning not harming or

disadvantaging others are only delineations of having love for another. They are a kind of breakdown of how love reacts to the need of our neighbor. It is both consistent and effective.

WHAT LOVES DOES

"¹⁰ Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." The strength of this text is seen in the manner in which it is stated. Here is a statement – an unwavering utterance – based upon the nature of love. Two affirmations are made. Both of them are strong, and neither of them can be negated. We are told what love does NOT do, and what it DOES do.

THE STRENGTH OF LOVE

In the world, love is not considered strong. It is one of those "weak things" through which God chooses to "confound things which are mighty" (1 Cor 1:27). Solomon once wrote, "love is strong as death" (Song of Sol 8:6). While he was writing of romantic love, the principle he stated also applies to spiritual love. The phrase "strong as death" conveys the idea that nothing but death itself can interrupt love. Just as death in the flesh finally triumphs over life in the body, so love triumphs over all of the challenges of life. Thus "many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Sol 8:7).

However, allow me to state the strength of love in the superior words of Apostolic doctrine. These come more to grips with the intention of our text. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth" (1 Cor 13:4-8). Where is a human virtue with such strength and stability? Can such things be

accomplished by will power? Is the free will of man sufficient for such an assignment? Can human discipline or regimentation produce such consistent and powerful results? There is no need to answer these questions. The answer is obvious. Love is superior!

This is the love that, "with faith" comes "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 6:23). It is the love that is part of the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22)P. It is personally "taught by God" (1 Thess 4:9). He alone can "make" us "increase and abound in love one toward

Satan "cannot rise up against himself" (Mark 3:26), so love **cannot** cause harm to one's neighbor. Just as we "cannot serve God and mammon" (Lk 16:13), and a man "cannot enter the kingdom of God" without being born of the "water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5), so love **cannot** sin against one's neighbor.

Working ill toward, or harming another person is not something love should not do, it is something love **cannot** do. It is impossible for love to yield harm, hurt, ill-will, or disadvantage. It simply **cannot** be done. Wherever, therefore, inconsideration, neglect, and harm are done, love is not present. It is not in the heart of the evil doer.

We see from this that the first and greatest commandment, together with the second, which is like unto it, cannot be separated. It is not possible to keep one and violate the other.

The Implications of this Truth

The implications of this are alarming. John states it this way. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God

whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21).

another" (1 Thess 3:12). This is the love of which our text speaks.

WORKING NO ILL TO ONE'S NEIGHBOR

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor." Other versions read, "Love does **no harm** to a neighbor," ^{NKJV} "Love does **no wrong** to a neighbor," ^{NASB} "Love does **no evil** to the neighbor," ^{NAB} "Love **can cause no harm** to your neighbor." ^{NJB}

Just as God "cannot lie" (Tit 1:2), and a "good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit" (Matt 7:18), so love "**cannot**" harm, do wrong to, or commit evil against one's neighbor! Just as a "house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mark 3:25), and

We see from this that the first and greatest commandment, together with the second, which is like unto it, cannot be separated. It is not possible to keep one and violate the other. The knowledge and embrace of this reality will assist us in evaluating our own heart in these matters. If we are deficient in one of these areas, we are deficient in the other as well.

THE IMPOTENCE OF THE LAW

The fulfillment of the Law by love reveals the impotency of the Law itself. Love comes to us outside of the

boundaries of Law. It is granted to us through the grace of God, not developed in the energy of the flesh. The Law simply cannot impart life, which is required to have love. Thus it is written, *“for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law”* (Gal 3:21). It is not possible for spiritual life to result from Law – any law. For this reason, those with a propensity to Law are consistently lacking in the matter of love.

FULFILLING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW

The righteousness of the Law must be

satisfied! Wherever this does not take place, the Law rises to stop the mouth of the pretender.

The righteousness that is imputed to us through faith is very real. One must not begin to imagine that because it is imputed it does not penetrate into the various expressions of the individual. That imputation is preceded by the very real remission of sin. God is fully satisfied with the atoning death of Christ, and therefore sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His sons and daughters. He empowers them to do what the Law demands, and

thus the Law is satisfied.

When the Law is written upon our hearts and put into our minds, we are brought into accord with that Law. The love that it demands finds a place in our hearts and minds. That means we are in accord with the Law, love it, and serve it with our minds (Rom 7:25). Those so characterized will do no harm to their neighbor. *“Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”* It is a fulfilling of the Law that is pleasing to God. It also genders confidence in the person motivated by such love, and benefit to those around him.

CONCLUSION

The Fulfilling of the righteousness of the Law is not the pinnacle of spiritual life, although it is imperative. **There are higher expressions of spiritual life than obeying commandments.** This does not diminish the necessity of obeying the commandments, for *“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God”* (1 Cor 7:19).

The Words of Jesus

Jesus once said, *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come*

in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:7-10).

If our service to the Lord ends with simply doing what we are told to do, we

remain *“unprofitable servants.”* That is what the Lord affirmed! This means it is not enough to live by a code of Law. That may appear wise to men, but it is only evidence of a fundamental ignorance of, and enmity toward, the Living God.

The blessing of genuine spiritual love is that it moves you to fulfill the righteousness of the Law without having to continually be reminded to do so. That condition, dear child of God, brings honor to the Lord. It confirms before men and angels that God has provided a just and effective salvation for a hopeless race!



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 42



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version; NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes and Identification -----

PUTTING ON CHRIST

13:11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. ^{NKJV} (Romans 13:11-14)

INTRODUCTION

Justification by faith is not a cold and calculating doctrine. **It is not possible for a Living God to issue a lifeless doctrine, intended only for the intellect, and having no impact upon practical life.** The thought of such a possibility must be thrust from us as poison that will anaesthetize the soul. Neither, indeed, is justification by faith, or the imputation of righteousness, to be viewed as a subject for theologians, or those with specialized academic credentials. This is not a doctrine for the “doctors of the law” (Lk 5:17), although it is often so viewed.

This section of Romans (chapters 12-

16) is **the logical exposition of the effects of justification.** The imputation of righteousness is declared to have a calculated impact upon the way we live, as well as upon our attitudes.

JUSTIFICATION – THE THEME

Justification, or the imputation of righteousness, is the theme of the book of Romans. Justification involves the remission of sin as well as the imputation of righteousness. These are the two means whereby salvation is made effectual. Remission is in order that the righteousness of God may be imputed, or credited, to us. Ponder the undeniable

emphasis on this matter. The use of the following words in the book of Romans, confirm this to be the case.

- “Justify” (3:30).
- “Justified” (2:13; 3:4,20,24,28; 4:2; 5:1,9; 8:30).
- “Justification” (4:25; 5:16,18).
- “Justifier” (3:26).
- “Justifieth” (4:5; 8:33).
- “Righteous” (2:5; 3:10; 5:7,19).
- “Righteousness” (1:17; 2:26; 3:5,21,22, 25, 26; 4:3,5,6,9,11,13,22; 5:17,18,21; 6:13,16,18,19,20; 8:4,10; 9:28,30,31; 10:3,4,5,6,10; 14:17).
- “Impute” (4:6).

The nature of spiritual life, and the environment in which we live, demand that we put on Christ.--by Given O. Blakely

OUTLINE

- ▶ KNOWING THE TIME (13:11a)
- ▶ HIGH TIME TO AWAKE (13:11b)
- ▶ OUR SALVATION IS NEARER (13:11c)
- ▶ THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT (13:12a)
- ▶ THE DAY IS AT HAND (13:12b)
- ▶ CAST OFF THE WORKS OF DARKNESS (13:12c)
- ▶ OUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT (13:12d)
- ▶ WALK PROPERLY (13:13)
- ▶ PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (13:14a)
- ▶ MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH (13:14b)

- *“Imputed”* (4:11,22,23,24; 5:13).
- *“Imputeth”* (4:6).

ERRONEOUS TEACHING

Some of the phrases used in Romans are unusually strong, driving home the point that our righteousness depends upon Divine intervention.

- *“His faith is counted for righteousness”* (4:5)
- *“God imputeth righteousness without works”* (4:6).
- *“Faith reckoned to Abraham for righteousness”* (4:9).
- *“The righteousness of faith”* (4:11,13).
- *“It was imputed to him for righteousness”* (4:22).
- *“The gift of righteousness”* (5:17).
- *“By the obedience of One shall many be made righteous”* (5:19).
- *“The righteousness which is of faith”* (10:6).
- *“Man believeth unto righteousness”* (10:10).

These, and similar, phrases have led some to believe there is little or no involvement of the individual in justification. Thus doctrines such as “once in grace always in grace,” or “eternal security,” have arisen to the confusion of many. Since, it is reasoned, God makes us righteous, and that righteousness is based upon our faith in

Christ, it is not possible for our works to interfere with the culmination of salvation. The fact that God begins salvation is considered to be proof enough that He will finish it, whether He has the cooperation of the one being saved or not. This is a completely erroneous view of the situation. It wholly misrepresents God, Christ, the grace of God, and salvation.

JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH

Justification is *“by faith,”* and the justified ones *“shall live by faith,”* and *“stand by faith”* (1:17; 3:22,28,30; 5:1,2; 9:32; 11:20). Remove faith from the equation, and there is no justification. What is more, even though faith comes from God (Eph 6:23), it becomes active in the one receiving it. They are the ones who believe. They are the ones who trust. God gives them faith, but does not believe for them. The life that is given to us in justification is maintained by faith, for *“the just shall live by faith”* (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

Faith Is Never Taken for Granted

This is not an incidental matter. Faith is never taken for granted in the believer. There is a fight associated with keeping the faith. We are admonished, *“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Tim 6:12). Rather than faith being automatic, those who believe are reminded, *“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him”* (Heb 10:38). They are also admonished, *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Heb 3:12).

Men have made *“shipwreck”* of faith, putting away a good conscience (1 Tim 1:19). Jesus spoke of those who *“for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”* (Lk 8:13). The Holy Spirit *“expressly”* spoke of some who *“shall depart from the faith”* (1 Tim 4:1).

Faith, which is the appointed means through which grace comes to us (Eph 2:8), is not to be taken for granted. We are to *“continue in the faith”* (Acts 14:22), be *“established in the faith”* (Acts 16:5), and *“stand fast in the faith”* (1 Cor 16:13). We who are in Christ are admonished, *“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith”* ^{NASB} (2 Cor 13:5). Categorically we are told

we will be presented to the Lord *“holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: **IF** ye continue in the faith grounded and settled”* (Col 1:23). The only way to overcome the devil is to resist him by being *“steadfast in the faith”* (1 Pet 5:8-9).

Faith Is Not Passive

Faith is never represented as a passive possession, maintained without any effort on the part of the one possessing it. Faith is much like a tender living treasure. It must be cared for with diligence. It must be fed, nourished, and caused to grow and increase. If this does not happen, faith will die. It cannot exist without nourishment, but *“Lives by every word of God”* (Lk 4:4). This is the appointed means through which the child of God is justified and sustained. It simply is not possible to be cleared from guilt and receive God’s righteousness apart from faith. Neither can those conditions be maintained apart from faith. **What you have from God, you have by your faith.** Thus it is written, *“The just shall LIVE by faith”* (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). Habakkuk says the just one lives by *“HIS faith”* (Hab 2:14).

Salvation is always promised to those who are believing, and never to those who are not believing. There is such a consistency in this throughout Scripture that it requires obstinance and spiritual blindness to fail to perceive it.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

All of this is germane to the exposition of this passage. **The exhortation that is placed before us is a summons to holy involvement in matter of our own justification.** That involvement is not the basis, or foundation, of our acceptance. It is, however, the outworking of it. It provides us with evidence that what we profess is true.

The point being made in the latter chapters of Romans is this: **justification from all things and the imputation of righteousness have an effect upon the believer.** Spiritual life has certain characteristics. Being *“made righteous”* is not a mere technicality where we remain fundamentally the same, yet are accepted by God anyway.

There is an alarming prevalence of this kind of thinking in the professed *Christian* world. There is a general

perception that *Christians* are basically like all other men, except they are forgiven. In fact, the statement is often made, "Christians are sinners, but they are forgiven." Others are wont to draw frequent parallels between those in Christ and the wayward Israelites. Still others compare those in Christ with the pre-Pentecostal disciples, who often were rebuked for their unbelief and obtuseness.

Because of the general deadness of the professed church, these views are taught and received as though they were true. Such persuasions deny the reality of the "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), being "begotten again" (1 Pet 1:3), and receiving a "new heart" and "new spirit" (Ezek 36:26). They deny we have been "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom" of God's "dear Son" (Col 1:13). These erroneous views contradict the proclamation that a fundamental change occurs in those who are justified, and to whom the righteousness of God is imputed.

There is a process going on within the believer. He is being changed "from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of our God" (2 Cor 3:18). By means of God's "exceeding great and precious promises," we are participating in the "Divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). To liken those

involved in such a transformation to the stiff-necked Israelites is a betrayal of gross ignorance and thoughtlessness. In the context of such fallacious views, doctrines such as eternal security flourish. However, such views cannot be espoused when consciously standing before the Lord Jesus Christ. They will vanish like scum in the brightness of His glory. One must be aloof from Jesus to

Spirit will call us to consider the nearness of the culmination of our salvation. All of this is utterly superfluous if there is no lurking danger. If it is not possible for us to draw back from God, warnings are absolutely out of order.

Our text calls for the greatest sobriety and honesty on our part. Yet, faith will

To liken those involved in such a transformation to the stiff-necked Israelites is a betrayal of gross ignorance and thoughtlessness.

espouse them. Faith will not allow such views to be embraced or proclaimed. They are products of unbelief.

TOO DIFFICULT

Is such a view too difficult to receive? Does it appear too harsh? If anything, it is understated. Our text will confirm this to be the case. We will be warned, admonished, and urged to more thorough involvement with God. We will be asked to uproot our affections from this world, and awake from spiritual sleep. The

flood the heart with confidence while we are in the process of giving heed to the words of the Spirit. **Faith is not intimidated by the demands of the Lord, for it knows Divine strength will undergird all conscientious effort to please Him.** In fact, faith longs to hear what the Lord requires, for it has a longing to please Him and be with Him. It abhors all that competes with God. Faith cries out, "What do You want me to do?" It cries our heartily, with sincerity, and with a readiness to obey.

KNOW THE TIME

^{13:11a} **And do this, knowing the time.** . . "In Christ, the performance of duty is elevated. Under the Law, the reasonableness of obedience was not clearly seen. There were great temporal blessings held out to the people, as well as dreadful curses in the world (Deut 28:1-68). But this is not the manner of life in the Son! Within the framework of the New Covenant God does not call upon us to follow Him in order to temporal benefits. Search the Scriptures and see if this is not the case. When Jesus spoke to the seven churches of Asia, He held before them benefits that extended beyond "this present evil world" (Rev 2-3).

- "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (2:7).
- "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (2:11).
- "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (2:17).
- "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star" (2:26-28).
- "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of

- the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (3:5).
- "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" (3:12).
- "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (3:21).
- "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (21:7).

Tell me, you that know the glory of the New Covenant, how do those promises compare with those of Deuteronomy 28?

Are they not of another and superior order? Do they not have a stronger pull upon your heart?

Already, the twelfth chapter of Romans has mentioned the reasonableness of giving our bodies as a *“living sacrifice unto God.”* Now, the Spirit will continue that same approach to living in a godly manner. He will not hold the wrath of God before us as a primary incentive. Nor, indeed, will He promise us that all will be well with us if we knuckle down and keep the commandments of God. Rather, He gently elevates us into the heavenlies, showing us the utter insanity of being ungodly. For those with *“the mind of Christ”* (1 Cor 2:16), this is the strongest way to move us to a life that honors God and prepares us to stand before Him with joy.

DO THIS

“And do this . . . ” Other versions read, *“And that,”* ^{KJV} *“And this do,”* ^{NASB} *“Besides this,”* ^{NRSV} and *“This also.”* ^{DARBY} What is it that is to be done? As exceedingly practical as it may appear, this refers first to the exhortation in verses seven and eight. *“Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”* Second, it refers to the admonition that will follow in verses twelve through fourteen.

The Spirit does not say “Try and do this,” or “Do your best to do this.” His words and like piercing arrows that provide us no alternative. **“DO this!”** Valid obedience is always preceded by determination – godly determination. When the convicted sinners on Pentecost cried out, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* they were ready to respond. The only thing they lacked was direction, and that was provided to them (Acts 2:37-38). When the Philippian jailor cried out, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* he was ready to DO whatever was required of him. **Resolution and determination are twins that must visit the heart before true obedience can be rendered to God.**

Here is an area in which the contemporary church could improve: a determination to do what the Lord commands. This is an attitude that responds like Abraham to the angel of God: *“Here am I”* (Gen 22:11). This is the same response Moses had when the Lord called to him from the middle of the burning bush: *“Here am I!”* The idea is, *“Here I am, ready to listen to your voice, and ready to do what you command!”*

It is the attitude conveyed in Eli’s instruction to young Samuel, who did not yet know the Lord. When the Lord called to Samuel, Eli instructed him to respond, *“Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth”* (1 Sam 3:9). Samuel was to listen with a mind to yield to whatever direction was given to him.

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This is the same spirit Isaiah had when he saw the Lord *“sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.”* When a sense of forgiveness had gripped his heart, he heard the Godhead talking among themselves: *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”* At once Isaiah spoke up: *“Here am I; send me”* (Isa 6:1-8).

That is the kind of spirit that is reflected in this words, **“This DO!”** Such an attitude was exceedingly rare prior to Jesus Christ. There were a few notables who were noted for their response to God: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, the holy Prophets, and a few others. But this was not at all common.

In Christ, however, this posture of soul is assumed. The Spirit speaks as though there was a readiness on the part of believers to obey God. He appeals to the *“inward parts,”* where God desires that truth be found (Psa 51:6). He speaks to the *“inner man”* (Eph 3:16), the *“new man”* (Col 3:10), and the *“new creation”* (2 Cor 5:17). When we are moved by this part of our being, we always do what is right, for the Holy Spirit is granting strength to the inner man.

Now, the Spirit will show us how reasonable it is to love our neighbor as ourselves. He will show us that this is much more than *“the second”* greatest commandment. This is how new life from God lives in this world. He will also show us WHY new life responds in this manner.

KNOWING THE TIME

“. . . knowing the time.” Other versions read, *“understanding the present time,”* ^{NIV} *“you know what time it is,”* ^{NRSV} *“you know what hour it is,”* ^{RSV} *“knowing the season,”* ^{ASV} *“you know how late it is,”* ^{NLT} and *“you know the time has come.”* ^{NJB}

You can see from these various renderings of the text that a certain awareness is taken for granted. He does not say you OUGHT to know the time, but that we know, or are aware, of it. From the standpoint of a **segment of history**, it is *“the time.”* Seen as an **appropriate period**, when certain benefits can be reaped by the soul, it is *“the season.”* Viewed as a **time we must not allow to pass us by**, it is *“the hour.”* Considered as a **Divine appointment**, *“the time has come.”*

God Is Associated with Times

Throughout history, God has hinged His dealings with men upon appropriate times, or periods. There came a time for Noah to build an ark (Heb 11:7). There also came a time when he had to enter into the ark (Gen 7:1). The time came when Abraham had to leave Ur, and begin a journey to the promised land (Gen 12:1-3). A time arrived when Moses had to confront Pharaoh, demanding that he release the people of God (Ex 7:1-2).

The time came when the Israelites had to leave Egypt (Ex 12:51). Again, the time came when they were to enter into Canaan (Josh 1:2). In God's time, the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist, came on the scene (John 1:6-7). In "the fulness of time," Jesus was "made of a woman, made under the Law" (Gal 4:4). Even the day of Pentecost is said to have "fully come" (Acts 2:1). A time has been appointed when the Lord will return (Matt 24:36). The day of judgment is set for a certain time (Acts 17:31). God has always worked within "times" and "seasons" which are in His power, and are used at His discretion (Acts 1:7).

However, the point of our text is

By way of contrast, Jesus rebuked His generation for being ignorant of "the times." "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but **can ye not discern the signs of the times?**" (Matt 16:2-3).

When Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3), there were those who, cognizant of the times, "looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38). There were others who were "in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ"^{NASB} (Lk 3:15). They

hearts. This word, however, did not come from God, and is at variance with the entire revelation of God. Daniel "understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." He was able to decipher the times, and thus set his "face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Dan 9:1-2). The book of Hebrews was written to a people who were informed sufficient time has elapsed for them to have grown up in Christ and obtain mature understanding (Heb 5:21). Peter reminded the saints, "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet 4:17).

The book of Hebrews was written to a people who were informed sufficient time has elapsed for them to have grown up in Christ and obtain mature understanding

The Spirit of God will now call us into account for knowing the time in which we are living. We are to be able to assess where we are, and how to respond appropriately to things confronting us, knowing the Lord is in them. It is not acceptable to remain ignorant of the Divinely orchestrated circumstances that surround us.

KNOWING the time: i.e., being aware of the period in which we are living. The men of Issachar distinguished themselves as "men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron 12:32).

sensed the times!

Some have been taught that we can have no real knowledge of the times – that God does not precede epochs with indicators that can be read by sensitive

If God is driven by His own agenda, it is certainly out of order for us to be motivated by the temporal agendas of this world, whether they be our own, or those established by our peers.

HIGH TIME TO AWAKE

^{413:11b} . . . **that now it is high time to awake out of sleep . . .** "See what a sense of urgency attends this text! It has a spirit that calls for our attention. The Word of the Living God not only contains facts, it also has a spirit or tone. If you will hear it in an acceptable manner, the WAY God speaks will call for your immediate attention. Too often this perspective is missing in professed Christian circles. There is altogether too much casualness in the average church. **Judging from the manner in which preachers preach, teachers teach, and listeners listen, you would conclude nothing of any consequence is imminent.** It appears as though men think they

have a lot of time – time to correct any flaws, time to make more plans, and time to do their own will. But this may not be the case at all, and woe to the person who proceeds in life as though such a view was true.

NOW

" . . . now . . . " One of the particular benefits of faith and spiritual understanding is that they put God in the "NOW." Response to God is associated with "now." Obedience is connected to "now." The time to serve God becomes "now." There are things available to us "now" that have not always been known.

- "Now" we know why the Law was given (Rom 3:19).
- "Now" the righteous of God is made known "without the Law" (Rom 3:21).
- "Now" we are justified (Rom 5:9).
- "Now" we have "received the atonement" (Rom 5:11).
- "Now" is the time to "yield" our capacities to the Lord (Rom 6:19).
- "Now" we are "ashamed" of our former way of living (Rom 6:21).
- "Now" we are "free from sin" (Rom 6:22).
- "Now" we are "delivered from the Law" (Rom 7:6).
- "Now" there is "no condemnation" to those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1).

- **“Now”** the God of all peace can fill us with *“all joy and peace in believing”* (Rom 15:13).
- **“Now”** the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world has been *“manifested”* (Rom 16:26).
- **“Now”** we have received *“the Spirit that is from God”* (1 Cor 2:12).
- **“Now”** we no longer *“know Christ after the flesh”* (2 Cor 5:16).
- **“Now”** is the *“acceptable time,”* when God is receiving us (2 Cor 6:2a).
- **“Now”** is the *“day of salvation,”* when deliverance can be realized (2 Cor 6:2b).
- **“Now”** in Christ Jesus we have been *“made nigh”* (Eph 2:13).
- **“Now”** we are *“fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God”* (Eph 2:19).
- **“Now”** we are *“light in the Lord”* (Eph 5:8).
- **“Now”** we are *“the sons of God”* (1 John 3:2).

It should be apparent to us that faith makes God and the things of God **contemporary** – NOW! While faith does reach back to the death of Christ and His resurrection, **its power is found in the “NOW,” not the then!** Faith brings the *“wonderful works of God”* from the past into the present, making them vibrant to our souls, and imparting resources to us. Men may speak of “historic faith,” but God does not. Faith cannot live in the past. It lives in the present, with the future in view.

Our text reads *“NOW.”* It demands immediate attention. It assumes there is an awareness that must both dominate and motivate us. The word *“now”* will not let us sit down, but moves us forward to action. It denotes urgency and immediacy.

HIGH TIME

“ . . . it is high time.” Other versions read, *“it is already the hour,”*^{NASB} *“The hour has come for you,”*^{NIV} *“it is now the moment,”*^{NRSV} *“it is full time now,”*^{RSV} *“it is already time,”*^{DARBY} , and *“time is running out.”*^{NLT}

The words translated *“high time”*^{KJV} come from the Greek word, *ώρα*, which means *“the moment, instant, occasion, or hour of the day.”* We often use the expression in this

manner. When a favorable reaction is finally realized, we will say, *“Well it is high time . . .”*

The obvious meaning is that this is the time to do what is admonished. For the last 2,000 years, believers have heard these words, urging them to immediate and resolute action. If it was *“high time,”* or precisely the right moment, for the Roman believers in the first century, it is even more so for us. The Spirit will make that very point in the next phrase.

What we are now urged to do is critical. There is no guarantee that we

although it can lead to that if not arrested. Rather, **this is the sleep of indifference that can settle upon the people of God** – a sort of spiritual drowsiness in which the soul becomes insensitive to God and unaware of His will, or even of impending judgment. This frame of mind is a constant liability.

Like a mighty clap of thunder, the Spirit shouts to lethargic churches, *“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light”* (Eph 5:14). The context of the exhortation to the Ephesians is much the

If it was “high time,” or precisely the right moment, for the Roman believers in the first century, it is even more so for us. The Spirit will make that very point in the next phrase.

will have another opportunity to do what is exhorted. Right now, when we hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, is the appropriate time to react to the word of the King. If this is true, and our text affirms this is the case, then to fail to do what is urged is wrong, and cannot be justified. These are matters concerning which no delay is in order.

If we are going to love our neighbors as ourselves, this is the time to do it. If we are going to render to every person their due, this is the time to do it. If we are going to love one another, this is the time to do it. There will not be a better time than right now! You see with what urgency the Spirit speaks. He makes no allowance for slothfulness.

AWAKE OUT OF SLEEP

“ . . . to awake out of sleep.” Other versions read, *“to wake up from your slumber,”*^{NIV} *“to rise from sleep,”*^{DRA} *“be aroused out of sleep,”*^{YLT} and *“stop sleeping and wake up.”*^{NJB}

I do not understand this to be *“the sleep of death”* that characterizes those who are alienated from God (Psa 13:3),

same as it is in Romans. In our text, our conduct in society is considered, and the necessity of living for God’s glory in every association with mankind. In Ephesians the Spirit follows the exhortation to wake up with these words, *“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Eph 5:15-16).

Those who conduct their lives in purely self-interest, and with no regard for the glory of God, are asleep! They must awaken, for they are sinking into a pit from which they might not be able to recover. The seriousness of such a condition cannot be overstated.

“Sleep” is a Scriptural word denoting the antonym of *“sober.”* *“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober”* (1 Thess 5:6). Those who are *“asleep”* are conducting their lives as though God had guaranteed they will live for many more years. As a result, they have become insensitive to His direction. They also are no longer aware of the advances of the wicked one. Such must be awakened from their slumber, else they will fall into *“the sleep of death.”*

OUR SALVATION IS NEARER!

^{13:11c} . . . **for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.**"

Here the Spirit confirms why slumbering souls are in such danger. Something is fast approaching that requires our readiness. This is no time to be lacking in spiritual alertness and awareness!

NOW

There are approaches to *Christianity* that tend to lull the soul into a state of complacency.

At one extreme, a strictly **historical view** of the faith can be embraced. In this

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28).

Amidst these varying emphases, the Spirit fairly shouts to us, **"NOW!"** He is calling us to a consideration of where we stand in relation to Divine appointments. He is making a strong appeal to our hearts. Those who correctly assess the **"now"** have learned from the past. **They know what God has accomplished for them in the past, and their faith pulls those realities into the "now," making them relevant, profitable, and precious to the soul.** Living in the power of the **"now"** factor, also reaches forward to things God has appointed for the future, bringing them into current consideration.

Thus the soul is moved to live in the prospect of the future because of the effective work of God in the past. **Those living in the "now" build upon the past and prepare for the future.**

OUR SALVATION

Here, the word *"salvation"* is used in the fullest sense. It presumes the individual is presently enjoying the *"firstfruits of the Spirit"* (Rom 8:23), is being *"changed from glory unto glory"* (2 Cor 3:18), and is waiting for God's Son to return from heaven (1 Thess 1:9).

While those so characterized are in the process of being conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29), the process is far from being complete. The most immediate proof of this is our body. Because it remains under the curse of death, it is called a *"vile body"* (Phil 3:21), and *"the body of this death"* (Rom 7:24). Because salvation includes the reclamation and renewal of the body, we are said to be *"waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body"* (Rom

8:24). That redemption is not experienced in healing, for a healed body is still a *"vile"* one, and still must die. This *"redemption"* will occur at the resurrection of the dead, when we will *"we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John 3:2).

Salvation is frequently viewed from this perspective – namely, to be completed in the future.

- ❑ Paul wrote to the Corinthians telling them his afflictions and distress were actually for their salvation – even though they were already in Christ. *"Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation"* (2 Cor 1:6).
- ❑ One of the pieces of our protective armor is the prospect of being saved. *"But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess 5:8-9).
- ❑ Paul's ministry was with a view to the people of God obtaining salvation. *"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"* (2 Tim 2:10).
- ❑ The holy angels minister to "those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:13-14).
- ❑ God has begotten us again to a living hope, *"to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Pet 1:3-5).
- ❑ Currently, we are being *"saved"* by Christ's life, in which He ever lives to make intercession for us (Rom 5:10; Heb 7:25).
- ❑ Believers will yet stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to give an account for their deeds, whether they are good or bad. In prospect of that time, the Spirit declares, *"If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet*

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perspective, the emphasis is placed upon "2,000 years ago." This approach demands, and vaunts, theological positions above faith, and tends to a legalistic approach to the church at its responsibilities.

At the other extreme, souls are led to major on, what they call, "prophecy." In this case, little is learned from the past, the present is relatively unimportant, and what is coming becomes the emphasis. This approach depersonalizes religion, and encourages a view of prophecy that is confined to temporal things. Men become more afraid of coming temporal judgments or a tyrannical global ruler, that they are of being cast into hell. Their minds are thus drawn away from the words of Jesus.

so as by fire” (1 Cor 3:15).

- There is such a thing as being **“saved in the day of the Lord”** (1 Cor 5:5).

“Our salvation” is complete from the standpoint of provision and Divine determination. It is, however, in the process of being brought to completion in us. We are not in heaven yet, and ought not allow thoughts to take hold of our minds that approach life as though we were. Here, “our salvation” speaks of the absence of all conflict and deficiency, and the appropriation of the inheritance that is presently “reserved in heaven” for us (1 Pet 1:4).

It is most unfortunate that this perspective is rarely emphasized in the modern pulpit. In fact, “salvation” itself is rarely mentioned among believers, except in relation to those who are lost, or “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1-3). However, “salvation” is a principle subject in the Spirit’s words to the churches. The day in which we are living is “the day of salvation.” This is more than the time sinners can be saved. Salvation also includes the nourishment, or succor, of the saints. As it is written, “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in **the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation**” (1 Cor 6:1-2).

As already indicated, “salvation” is also viewed from the standpoint of its culmination, or completion. This is when we will receive our new bodies, currently kept “in heaven” for us (2 Cor 5:1-5). It is also the time when we will be divested of all deficiencies and removed from all conflict. The “salvation” that is “nearer” is salvation in its completeness.

NEARER

“ . . . now our salvation is nearer.” Other versions read, “our salvation is nearer now,”^{NIV} “For salvation is nearer to us now,”^{NRSV} and “for the coming of our salvation is nearer now.”^{NLT}

The way in which the Spirit has chosen to say this is most edifying. He might well have said the following, all of which are true.

- Our race is almost completed.
- The good fight of faith will soon end.
- The devil’s time is running out.
- Our troubles will soon be over.
- The wicked will soon cease from troubling us.

Trouble stirs up a dust storm in an attempt to obscure the coming glory. We are not in a moral vacuum! Rather, we are in a fiercely competitive arena of conflict. All of this is used by Satan to pull us off the wall of Divine appointment into the valley of the “here and now.”

- The time is nearing when we will no more have another law within our members, warring against the law of our mind.
- Soon we will cease to wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
- The time of testing will soon end.
- The time of temptation is fast coming to a close.
- Soon we will no longer have this treasure in an earthen vessel.
- It will not be long and we will no longer see through a glass darkly.
- The time is approaching when we will not know in part.
- Persecutions will soon come to an end.

All of these are true, and are blessed to consider. But that is not the perspective of this text. It is not what is coming to an end, but what is up ahead that is the focus of this passage. **“Our salvation” accentuates what God has determined we will appropriate. This is**

the destiny to which we are appointed in Christ Jesus. Among other things, this includes the following.

- We will be conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29).
- We will be like Christ (1 John 3:2).
- We will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father (Matt 13:43).
- We will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2).
- We will judge angels (1 Cor 6:3).
 - We will reign with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12).
 - We will experience “glorious liberty” (Rom 8:21).
 - We will be changed, putting on an incorruptible body (1 Cor 15:52).

These are only introductory to the magnitude of what is drawing closer and closer to the people of God! The time is fast approaching when “the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever” (Dan 7:18). From our point of view, we are rapidly moving toward the glorious inheritance to which we have been appointed. From the heavenly point of view, the time is fast approaching when the Lamb will be presented with His spotless bride.

These words lack significance to the person enslaved to academics. They seem too apparent to such an one. Of course time is progressing toward a Divinely appointed role! “Why,” the intellect reasons, “is it necessary to remind us of something so obvious?” But here is where the absolute inferiority of a cerebral approach to the faith becomes apparent. It may very well appear that it is obvious the day of “our salvation” is “nearer.” **But it is not at all obvious! That is precisely why this statement is made!** If it was conspicuous, or apparent, there would be no need to “awake out of sleep!” Exhortations to sobriety and vigilance would be pointless if everyone was living in an awareness of the approaching apogee of “our salvation.”

Time and circumstance tend to throw a veil over this truth, so that it is not clearly seen. Scarcely an hour will pass without the reality of a fast approaching

new heavens and new earth beginning to fade from our view. The “*cares of this world*” aggressively attempt to “*choke the word*” (Mark 4:18). Trouble stirs up a dust storm in an attempt to obscure the coming glory. **We are not in a moral vacuum!** Rather, we are in a fiercely competitive arena of conflict. All of this is used by Satan to pull us off the wall of Divine appointment into the valley of the “here and now.” Many a soul, deluded by the wicked one, has forgotten what is coming for the righteous, as well as what is closing in upon the wicked.

This is why we must hear these words spoken often and with power: “*for now is our salvation nearer!*” We are progressing toward the objective of our hope, and that objective is quickly moving toward us.

This is not the language of time, and ought not to be so viewed. A salvation that is rooted in eternity cannot be opened up to us within an overriding consideration of time. This is language for the heart, and is to be comprehended by faith. It may appear as though time and circumstance are dominating, and that we are slaves to both. But that is not the case: “*for now is our salvation nearer!*”

It is “*nearer*” because God has been working His salvation in the earth! Everything is progressing to His appointed conclusion. It is “*nearer*” because we are making advancement in the Spirit, being changed “*from glory unto glory*” (2 Cor 3:18). We are closer to what we will be! The inheritance God has appointed for us is drawing closer to us. What a blessed consideration! Hope thrives on such a circumstance, while faith makes us more determined to obtain the prize that awaits us.

FIRST BELIEVED

“ . . . *than when we first believed.*”

Other versions read, “*than when we believed,*”^{KJV,NASB} “*than when we became believers,*”^{NRSV} and “*than when we first began to believe.*”^{NJB}

A Line of Demarcation

The time “*when we first believed*” is the line of demarcation between condemnation and justification. It is when we passed from darkness to light, death to life, and the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. This is the language of the Spirit, and we should not be ashamed to use it. Churchmen are fond of asking when we were “*saved,*” or “*born again,*” or become a “*member of the church.*” It is certainly not that any of these are unlawful. However, there remains an unfortunate suspicion among institutionalized Christians that believing somehow falls short of what is required to save a person.

The point at which we believed was the point when Jesus gave us “*power to become the sons of God*” (John 1:12). That believing is what compelled us to obey the Lord, and the Holy Spirit enabled us to follow through by obeying the truth we believed (1 Pet 1:22).

Primarily WHOM We Believe

Further, when we “*first believed*” does not accentuate WHAT we believed, but WHOM we believed. As it is written, “*I know whom I have believed*” (2 Tim 1:12). Believing the Gospel is thus described in these words. “*For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe*” (1 Thess 2:13). The Word of God, which is the “*Seed of the kingdom*” (Luke 8:11), begins to work in men when they believe it is, in truth, God’s own Word!

A Modern Day Misconception

Often, those who wear the name of Christ associate fervency, sincerity, and progress, with when men “*first believe.*” It is not unusual to find zealous believers to be the youngest, or most recent, ones. It is generally thought that spiritual zeal abates with age. But this is a total misconception. From the perspective of our text, this would mean the new believer would be more keenly aware of the fast-approaching salvation than others. They would tend to live with more of an awareness of Divine appointments than others. And, indeed, this does appear to be the norm in the average church.

This is, however, a fleshly “*norm,*” not a spiritual one. It is a total misrepresentation of the case. Faith causes the individual to **increase** in a longing for, and anticipation of, the fulness of salvation and the fruition of hope. **There is nothing about salvation itself, or the effects of it, that diminishes, lessens, or erodes.** The “*glory*” into which we are being “*changed*” only increases, it never fades. A fading glory and a diminishing persuasion, at the very best, belong to the Old Covenant order (2 Cor 3:10-14). Such has no place in “*the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Tim 2:10).

A backward posture causes “*our salvation*” to seem further, not “*nearer.*” In such a case, the glorious appearing of Christ will bring a time of condemnation, not salvation. Should this sleepy posture be upon any soul, the word of our text is sharp and to the point. “*The moment is here for you to stop sleeping and wake up, because by now our salvation is nearer than when we first began to believe.*”^{NJB} This time is not the time to “*sleep.*” It is not the time to be unaware of what is ahead, or the time to be caught up in the transitory things of this world.

THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT

^{12a} ***The night is far spent . . .*** “The Spirit will not let this matter go. It is too critical to treat it as though He was only providing interesting information. This is

a matter where our souls are at stake. We must be brought to behold our troubles as temporary, and our salvation as everlasting. The hardships of life must

be perceived as only for a while, while the inheritance reserved for us is eternal.

THE NIGHT

The nature of spiritual life, and the environment in which we live, demand that we put on Christ.--by Given O. Blakely

"The night . . ." This is a synonym for time itself. **When sin entered into the world, a long moral and spiritual night began that will be finally terminated when the Lord appears in all of His glory.** *"The night"* also speaks of the time of obscurement, or ignorance, when things are not seen plainly (2 Pet 3:10). It is also used to denote the time of sleeping, when souls are not alert, and are unaware of impending danger or blessing (1 Thess 5:5). Jesus spoke of *"the night"* as the time when men stumble, not knowing where they are going (John 11:10).

Briefly summarized, *"the night"* is a time of jeopardy and danger. It is the time allotted to the devil, in which he walks about as a roaring lion, *"seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet 5:7-8). This is when *"the powers of darkness"* can do their work (Luke 22:53). It refers to times when we are tested and tried, and when the Lord hides His face from us (Psa 143:7). It is a time when we are subject to perplexity and fears (2 Cor 4:8; 7:5). There are *"night seasons,"* when only the Lord can effectively instruct us (Psa 16:7). The *"night season"* is also a time when we cry out to the Lord, yet sense no answer from Him (Psa 22:2). Troubles can so beset us during such seasons that it is written, *"In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted"* (Psa 77:2). It is a good word, indeed, when our Lord speaks to us about *"the night"* drawing to a close.

FAR SPENT

And what does our blessed Lord tell us about *"the night"* – the time of trial and testing, of ignorance and obscurity, and of the working and deceit of the wicked one? *"The night is far spent!"* Other versions read, *"The night is almost gone,"*

^{NASB} *"The night is nearly over,"* ^{NIV} and *"the night is far gone."* ^{NRSV}

Again, this is not calendar language, but the language of faith, addressed to the heart. The time of our trials is almost over! The time when we see through a glass darkly is about to conclude. The devil's time is running out, and soon he will be violently and suddenly removed from the presence of the saints of God. All of the liabilities of being in the body are about to come to a close. It is just around the corner, and we are to live in expectancy of the removal of everything that is evil, limiting, and incomplete!

For the person living by faith,

away, frustrated by delay.

But faith is not so. It can retire in the evening believing that in the morning trouble and sorrow will be gone, and there will be no more night. If that blessing does not occur, faith can make it through another day, still *"rejoicing in hope of the glory of God"* (Rom 5:2).

When the Spirit declares, *"the night is far spent,"* He means it has been assigned a limited duration. It is not intended to be eternal – not for those who have believed. Only the longsuffering of God accounts for the presence of *"the night."* And, it is only here until the children have all been gathered in and prepared for the coming

But faith is not so. It can retire in the evening believing that in the morning trouble and sorrow will be gone, and there will be no more night. If that blessing does not occur, faith can make it through another day, still *"rejoicing in hope of the glory of God"*

everything caused by sin is about to conclude. This is not to be viewed as those in the flesh, but as those who are walking in the Spirit and living by faith. From a practical viewpoint, this can take place at any moment. **However, only faith can live with constant expectation.** The flesh cannot stand to wait, and therefore becomes disappointed when the anticipation is not realized immediately. Flesh can go to sleep, hoping for something good when it awakens. However, it cannot sustain that hope from day to day. It soon throws hope

glory.

Mark it well, just as surely as the day of salvation is marching forward to fruition and glory, the night is moving forward to frustration and termination. Whether in our death or Christ's return, *"the night"* is fast advancing to its conclusion. We will not long have to contend with darkness and things that attend it. Soon the night of suffering, trial, and battle will end. You can believe that!

THE DAY IS AT HAND

^{12b} **. . . the day is at hand . . .** Other versions read, *"the day is almost here,"* ^{NIV} *"the day is near,"* ^{NRSV} and *"daylight is on the way."* ^{NJB}

THE DAY

This is the ultimate day. From the standpoint of the wicked, it is *"the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (Rom 2:5). Considered as a time of unveiling, it is *"the day when God shall judge the secrets of men*

by Jesus Christ" (Rom 2:16). Viewed as the time when Jesus will be fully seen, it is *"the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor 1:8). Regarded as the time when the nature of every persons work will be made known, *"Every man's work shall be*

made manifest: for the day shall declare it" (1 Cor 3:13). Considered from the standpoint of the resurrection of the dead, it is *"the day of redemption"* (Eph 4:30). It is also the time when *"the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"* (2 Pet 3:10).

"The day" is the time when everything will be made plain. At that time, the Father will unveil the Son in all of His glory (1 Tim 6:15). He will then be seen, and acknowledged to be, everything God revealed in the record He has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). Nothing about Jesus will be obscure. Thus, it is said of that day, *"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil 2:10-11).

Children of the Day

This is of particular interest to those who are in Christ Jesus, for they *"are all the children of light, and the children of the day"* (1 Thess 5:5). That is, in Jesus we are being oriented for *"the great and notable day of the Lord"* (Acts 2:20). We are being prepared to not only survive that day, but to blend in with it. Our ultimate advantages and blessings will be brought to us on the wings of light! Just as we began our journey to glory in the light of the Gospel of Christ, so we

will conclude our journey at the dawning of an eternal day, after which we will never again be exposed to the night!

AT HAND

Those with a penchant for word studies are fond of telling us *"at hand"* is a term related to time. They tell us it is a phrase meaning "it is just about to happen." But their professed scholarship has not been able to decipher the meaning of the Holy Spirit. The *"day"* of which our text speaks will not appear until time has run its course and is no more.

Again, this is the language of faith. By saying *"the day is at hand,"* the Spirit means we are living with an enlivened prospect of that day. **Faith enables us to live just as though, in time, "the day" was going to occur in the very next moment.** And, indeed, that is quite possible. However, faith does not live in the prospect of possibilities, but of appointed verities. Faith does not grow in the soil of vagueness and uncertainty.

The phrase *"the day is at hand"* speaks of the same reality as is declared in Philippians 4:5: *"The Lord is at hand."* It speaks of the time declared by Peter, *"But the end of all things is at hand"* (1 Pet 4:7). It is the appointed time of Christ's unveiling. His glory is what will make it *"the day."*

Faith maintains a certain perspective that enables a proper and productive life in *"this present evil world."* Because it is not anchored to time, it must have a point of reference – an objective for which to live, and a goal for which to strive. In a Person, those requirements are met in God Himself, for faith believes *"He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who seek Him"* (Heb 11:6). Stated as an objective, *"the Lord is at hand!"* Faith longs for that day, and brings it so close to the heart that it dominates the individual. That is the perspective of this text.

The 70 A.D. Folly

Although they are totally unworthy of mention, there are those who believe that the epoch of the ending of the night and the coming of the day speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem. The theology of such people is to be discarded as filthy and contaminating rags. Those who imagine that *"the day"* occurred when Jerusalem was leveled as an act of Divine judgment betray a level of ignorance that is astounding. Rather than a day beginning, a spiritual night settled over the ancient people that has been unparalleled. For believers in Christ, 70 A.D. is not the pivotal consideration, and is nowhere so proclaimed in Scripture. It is enough to say that such a theology is too close the earth, and thus too far from heaven. It has, therefore, no real value for the soul.

CAST OFF THE WORKS OF DARKNESS

^{12c} ***Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness . . .*** "The Spirit consistently takes the things revealed and moves us to act upon them. It is not enough to merely know these things intellectually. They must be translated into living, else they will hold no benefit for us. **The truth of God that is held within the confines of a creed or theological position brings no advantage, for faith cannot work in such constricted surroundings.** Therefore the Spirit arouses us to an appropriate response to the truth. Remember, only when the truth is known does it bring us freedom. Knowing the truth takes place when we embrace it and

act upon it.

THEREFORE

The admonition before us is required by the compelling facts that have been affirmed. First, it is high time to awake out of sleep. Second, our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Third, the night is almost gone. Fourth day is at hand. No person persuaded of these realities will continue to live close to the world, for it will appear foolish to do so. However, because of the enormous influence of the flesh, we must be stirred up to action, for it is easier to fall asleep

in this evil world than to stay awake.

The word *"therefore"* also means that no other response than the one specified is acceptable to God. Those refusing to do this cannot be pleasing to God, profession notwithstanding. Those who leap forward to respond in faith will be given the grace necessary to fulfill this word.

"US"

We must never allow the world to rob us of the *"us"* perception. This is the family of God, the sanctified ones, or those who have been called out of

darkness into God's marvelous light. The greatest obligation is laid upon the saints because the greatest benefits have been given to them. The inheritance belongs to them alone, and thus they must live in such a manner as to be ready to obtain it.

Let it be clear, this is not a denominational "us," but a family-of-God "us." These are the ones who have "received the atonement," or reconciliation (Rom 5:11). This is the church, which is Christ's "body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23). There are certain responsibilities that are placed upon the people of God, and they need to hear them. It is altogether too common for sectarian requirements to be placed upon believers, while Divine essentials are withheld from them.

The text before us is a case in point. You will find that very few believers are admonished in this area. The very words will sound strange to those whose religious contacts are largely limited to the organized church. This is, however, the way in which the Spirit speaks to the church.

CAST OFF

" . . . **cast off** the works of darkness." Other versions read, "**lay aside** the deeds of darkness," ^{NASB} "**put aside** the deeds of darkness," ^{NIV} "**let us put off** the works of the dark," ^{BBE} "**throw off** the works of darkness," ^{NAB} "**So don't live** in darkness. *Get rid of your evil deeds. Shed them like dirty clothes,*" ^{NLT} and "**throw off everything** that belongs to the darkness." ^{NJB}

The strength of these words is apparent. Yet, you will be hard pressed to find a religious environment where they are taken as seriously as the language demands. It is not unusual to find "works of darkness" flaunted in religious gatherings, musical concerts, and even congregational board meetings. However, they are out of place anywhere – on the job, in the home, or in places of business.

The words "cast off" are aggressive. They mean to get rid of, not merely lay aside to be put on at some other time. There is nothing casual about these words. Imagine, if you will, that your clothes were on fire. Would you not cast them off with zeal and speed? So it is with "the works of darkness." We are to

rid ourselves of them with dispatch, not allowing them to linger in our lives. Some, in removing themselves from the Lord, have "cast off their first faith" (1 Tim 5:12). They should have rather "cast off the works of darkness" in order that they might be saved.

What Are "Works of Darkness"

"Works of darkness" are activities that result from NOT knowing the Lord. They are both developed and expressed without an awareness of God, or a desire to please Him. They do not spring from the knowledge of God, and have nothing

of darkness will have no environment in which to be expressed. That will be the time of "the day," which is moving in fast upon us. The "night," in which these works are done, is "far spent," and will soon be gone. **In view of this, let us rid ourselves of all works that will not survive the blazing light of Christ's glory!** Let us do it with zeal. Let it be done now, before it is too late!

If we dare to postpone the doing of this, we must remember how time is moving along with great rapidity. The night is passing, day is coming.

These are "works," or human expressions, that primarily relate to this world, and in which no place is made for faith. They can only be done when one is NOT living by faith.

whatsoever to do with fellowship with Him. These are "works" that allow a person to remain aloof from God – in fact, they can only be done apart from a consciousness of Him.

These are "works," or human expressions, that primarily relate to this world, and in which no place is made for faith. They can only be done when one is NOT living by faith. They blend easily with the world and all that is in it, which has been summarily cursed by God.

The "works of darkness" are tainted by the flesh. They call for the activity of the "old man," or "the flesh," which has no place in the life of faith. These are works that can only be done prior to the coming of the Lord, who will usher in eternal light, thus removing the environment in which these works are done. "The works of darkness" belong to our former lives, when we walked in the darkness. There is no place for them now.

The reasoning of this verse is as follows. The time is coming when works

PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT

^{12d} . . . **let us put on the armor of light.**” In spiritual life, things are always abandoned in order that we might appropriate something better. In the text before us, things are put off in order that better things may be put on. Contrary to common perceptions, light cannot blend with darkness. Good cannot merge with evil. Righteousness cannot intermingle with unrighteousness. Scripture says it this way. *“For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?”* (2 Cor 6:14-16).

It is not possible to do *“the works of unrighteousness”* with one hand, and put on *“the armor of light”* with the other. A person cannot serve two masters. Two conflicting purposes cannot be served at the same time. *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt 6:24).

This is a Kingdom principle that is virtually unknown among professed Christians. All manner of activity is being expended that requires the adoption of worldly wisdom and manners within a supposed religious setting. It is found in the world of education, church organization, professional religious careers, and supposed Christian music. Devoted efforts are made to mingle the flesh with the Spirit in order to attract people to Christ. It is all foolhardy, and no good will come from it. **Before a person can appropriate the things of God, he must let go of the things of the world.** In keeping with this principle, we *“cast off the works of darkness”* in order that we may be able to *“put on the armor of light.”*

PUT ON

“ . . . put on . . . ” This is something we do – an assignment from heaven that is

not to be ignored. Frequently these words are used in Scripture.

Under the Law

Under the Law, the service of God required the putting on of certain attire. The priest had to *“put on his linen garment”* (Lev 6:10). Aaron was required to *“put on the holy linen coat”* (Lev 16:4). When he went into the holy place, he had to *“put on”* his linen garments (Lev 16:23). Kings *“put on their robes”* before sitting upon their thrones (1 Kgs 22:10). Divinely appointed activities often required the putting on of certain attire. Priests *“put on”* priests clothing. Kings *“put on”* kings clothing. Soldiers *“put on”* armor, or military overdress.

Under the New Covenant

Life in Christ is also attended with

Many a soul never obtains the “armor” that can protect the soul because they are rarely, if ever, “in the light.” You will learn by experience that Divine resources are not to be found in dark places. If you desire to have what the Lord longs to give, you must come into the light!

certain requirements – things that are to be *“put on.”*

Those who are justified have *“put on Christ”* (Gal 3:27). They are also to *“put on the new man”* (Eph 4:24), and *“the whole armor of God”* (Eph 6:11). As *“the elect of God,”* they are to *“put on . . . bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering”* (Col 3:12). And, as a covering over all of these, they are to *“put on charity”* (Col 3:14).

These are not mere suggestions, or goals toward which we are to strive. They represent absolute Divine requirements.

There is no acceptable alternative action. In keeping with this manner of the Kingdom, we are to *“put on the armor of light.”* God has provided it, we are to put it on. He will not put it on us, but enable us to put it on.

THE ARMOR OF LIGHT

Our spiritual *“armor”* is referred to in different ways. From the standpoint of the nature of this protection, it is called *“the armor of righteousness”* (2 Cor 6:7). Viewed as a thorough means of security, it is called *“the whole armor of God”* (Eph 6:11,13). Here, it is called *“the armor of light.”*

Appropriated in the Light

This is *“armor,”* or an array of protection or weaponry, that is appropriated in the *“light”* of God’s *“countenance”* (Psa 4:6). That is, it is obtained while we are in fellowship with the Lord, walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). From a practical point of view, this is when we are acutely conscious of God, sensing His approval and blessing. It is when we are living by faith, motivated by the unseen realities He has revealed through the Gospel of Christ. It is when we are preferring the things of God so strongly that nothing else appeals to us. In that environment, we procure the armor that will protect us from all the devil can hurl at us.

Many a soul never obtains the *“armor”* that can protect the soul because they are rarely, if ever, *“in the light.”* You will learn by experience that Divine resources are not to be found in dark places. If you desire to have what the Lord longs to give, you must come into the light! This armor is *appropriated “in the light,”* and thus is called *“the armor of light.”*

In this sense, we *“put on the armor of light”* by walking in the realm where the armor can be appropriated. It is *“in the light”* that we become aware of what the Lord has provided, and *“put on”* manners and traits that cannot be penetrated by the fiery darts of the wicked one.

The Light Itself Is Armor

There is a sense in which the light of God protects us. In this view, the light itself is the armor. **The Psalmist knew that if God would but shine His light upon him, all would be well.** *“For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light”* (Psa 36:9). *“O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles”* (Psa 43:3). *“Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant: save me for Thy mercies’ sake”* (Psa 31:16). *“Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine: and we shall be saved”* (Psa 80:3).

Satan has been cast out of the presence of the Lord. Thus, those who walk in that presence will experience

victory over him and all of his devices. Satan’s hierarchy includes the *“rulers of the darkness of this world”* (Eph 6:12). His entire domain is *“the power of darkness”* (Col 1:13). His angels are *“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day”* (Jude 6). There is no better way to neutralize his power than to be *“in the light.”* That is what exposes him, and even repels him.

Related to Understanding

“The armor of light” is related to *“spiritual understanding.”* It has to do with seeing things properly, and knowing what is really happening. **Ignorant disciples are never ones that triumph!** If you are to be protected from the devices

of the wicked one and the eroding influences of this world, you must have some grasp of the truth of God.

It is **knowing** the truth that makes you free (John 8:32). When the truth is known, the soul becomes aware of the blessings of God and the snares of the devil. When we are *“illuminated”* (Heb 10:32), we can perceive what is to be gained, and what is to be shunned. That perception contributes to our protection. It is not the whole of it, for holy angels are working for us as well (Heb 1:13-14). However, putting on *“the armor light”* is our role in the matter of survival, and cannot be neglected with impunity. God will give us strength to put it on, and keep it on.

WALK PROPERLY!

“¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.” The association between being made righteous by God and living in this world is again made very apparent. One’s theology cannot be divorced from life, as some are wont to do. A significant number of debates have raged through the centuries over whether or not the believer is secure while living in an unacceptable manner. I am sure you are familiar with some of the positions that are being perpetrated among the churches. Flesh has a strong propensity toward the exploitation of the grace of God. As soon as it hears of *“grace,”* or of being *“made righteous,”* it begins to excuse involvement in iniquity. The *“natural man”* considers the grace of God to be a loving mantel that is thrown over the professed believer, moving God to ignore the thoughts, words, and deeds of the individual, as though they did not even exist. However, this is a total misrepresentation. The grace of God rids us of the guilt of sin, gives us a nature that is not prone to sin, and teaches us *“that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ”* (Tit 2:12-13).

The Spirit’s admonitions to us are all given with this reality in mind – the effective teaching of the grace of God. When we comprehend the loving favor of God, lavished upon us because of Christ Jesus, an effective teaching process begins. The Spirit exhorts us in view of that tutelage. What He requires is not only necessary, it is well within the range of possibility. Unlike the Law, the exhortations of the Spirit are not *“weak through the flesh”* (Rom 8:3). That is because they are not addressed to the flesh, but to man’s renewed spirit, which has the dominion over the flesh.

WALKING PROPERLY

“Let us walk properly . . .” Other versions read, *“Let us walk **honestly,**”*^{KJV} *“Let us behave **properly,**”*^{NASB} *“Let us behave **decently,**”*^{NIV} *“let us live **honorably,**”*^{NRSV} and *“let us conduct ourselves **becomingly.**”*^{RSV}

The word *“walk”* is a Scriptural synonym for living. Notice, the various translations confirm the breadth of this word: *“behave,” “live,”* and *“conduct ourselves.”* The New Living Translation uses a paraphrase for the word: *“in everything we do.”* Our *“walk,”* has to do with the entirety of our lives – what we do, the way we do it, and the reason for doing it. Our *“walk”* speaks of the

direction of life, as well as its activities.

There is a proper way to live!

The manner in which we live is not inconsequential. This is a weighty consideration in a hedonistic society that aggressively seeks personal and fleshly gratification. We are living in a time that directly contradicts the revealed manner in which Jesus Himself lived. At His most critical hour He cried out, ***“NOT my will, but Thine, be done”*** (Lk 22:42). During His ministry, Jesus confessed, ***“I seek NOT Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me”*** (John 5:30).

Let it be clear, any other motive for life is totally unacceptable! Self gratification and a dominating quest for objectives unrelated to God’s great salvation are completely out of order. Life must be lived *“properly.”*

The word from which *“properly,”* or *“honestly,”*^{KJV} is translated is **εὐσχημόνως**, which, from the standpoint of language, means **“honest and orderly behavior, decently, properly, and with propriety.”**^{Friberg Analytical Lexicon} I prefer the word *“honesty,”* for it accentuates the dominance of faith. Before persons who have received Christ can walk in an unbecoming manner, they must become dishonest, insincere, and

corrupt in their thinking. The truth must be thrust from them, Jesus must be forgotten, and eternity violently pushed into the background of their thinking. It simply is not possible to live unbecomingly while acknowledging the truth. One cannot walk after the flesh while beholding “*the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus*” (2 Cor 4:6).

To “*walk honestly*,” therefore, is to live within a prevailing persuasion of the truth and Person of Jesus Christ. Let it be clear, this is not a requirement of institutionalized Christianity. That is precisely why it is not common to find professed Christians living in this manner. However, this is a Divine essentiality.

AS IN THE DAY

“ . . . *as in the day* . . . ” This is a significant expression: “*IN the day*.” This is “*the day*” created by the light of God’s presence. It is living with an acute consciousness that it is the God of heaven “*with whom we have to do*” (Heb 4:13). Whether we know and recognize it or not, “*all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him*” (Heb 4:13). The Lord is looking upon the hearts of men (1 Sam 16:7), searching their hearts and knowing their thoughts (1 Chron 28:9). Jesus reveals to the churches that He “*searches the minds and hearts*” ^{NKJV} (Rev 2:23). Walking “*as in the day*” is living with those things in mind.

Here are some expressions that unveil what it means to walk “*as in the day*.”

- “*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my Strength, and my Redeemer*” (Psa 19:14).
- “*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*” (Psa 139:23-24).
- “*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having*

mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:8-11).

- “*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:12).
- “*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:13-14).

The Spirit provides three categories of reprehensible conduct. All of them are to be avoided. None of them are acceptable before God. In each category, the sinful expression is mentioned, as well the cause of it.

Living “*as in the day*” does not suggest pretension, or propose that we are not really “*in the day*.” Rather, it declares we are to walk with a dominating awareness of where we are in Christ Jesus. This is living with the knowledge that all of our deeds, and even the counsels of our heart, are fully known by the Lord. Your heart will confirm to you that it is not possible to so live and be dominated by sin.

NOT IN . . .

“ . . . *not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.*” The KJV reads, “ . . . *not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.*” It is not enough to know

how we **should** live. The flesh, which is ever with us, is so corrupt, that we must also be reminded how **not** to live. How we ought to thank God for this manner of instruction. There are promises and warnings, blessings and curses, instruction concerning doing and not doing. The promises, blessings, and instruction in doing good draw upon our hearts. They are the superior incentives – but they are not the only ones. The warnings, curses, and admonitions about what not to do are like trumpets that arouse us from spiritual slumber. Thus we have two good reasons to move forward toward the prize. First, to obtain glory. Second, to avoid hell.

The Spirit provides three categories of reprehensible conduct. All of them are to be avoided. None of them are acceptable before God. In each category, the sinful expression is mentioned, as well the cause of it.

**EXCESSES
Revelry (rioting) and
Drunkenness**

“ . . . *not in revelry and drunkenness.*” Other versions read, “*not in rioting and drunkenness,*” ^{KJV} “*not in carousing and drunkenness,*” ^{NASB} “*not in orgies and drunkenness,*” ^{NIV} “*not in pleasure-making and drinking,*” ^{BEB} and “*Don’t participate in wild parties and getting drunk.*” ^{NLT}

Revelry, rioting, carousing, and wild parties, are the expression. Drunkenness, or sinful indulgence, is the cause for it. These are sins of excessiveness or overabundance. In these people indulge themselves in external involvements that distort the mind, and cause beastliness to surface. Such transgressions cause men to be unreasonable and foolish, even in the sight of the world. Their minds become incapable of reason, and they degenerate to the moral level of the beasts of the earth. Carousing, revelry, and excessive feasting are involved.

Some few years ago, such sins were

largely in the history books, or the heathen cultures of the world. Now, however, they have entered like a moral hurricane into the Western world. Such things are characterized by a lack of control and intemperance. Thus, those created in the image of God are carried along by indulgence to such a degree as to destroy every semblance of reason.

Peter also referred to these activities, identifying them with the past lives of many believers. *“For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in . . . excess of wine, reveling, banquetings . . .”* (1 Pet 4:3). Other versions read, *“drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties,”* ^{NKJV} and *“drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties.”* ^{NASB}

There are some within the Christian community who speak of being “drunk in the Spirit.” In such a state, they conduct themselves just as unreasonably and foolishly as those who are drunk with wine. Others, generally among the younger generation, seek to sanctify intemperate conduct with, what they call, “Christian music.” In their activities some actually conduct themselves unreasonably, intemperately, and without any lasting awareness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let every believer be diligent to avoid any activity that causes them to lose control of their mind and affections. Such is not a proper activity.

UNCLEANNES

Lewdness (chambering) and Lust (wantonness)

“. . . not in lewdness and lust.” Other versions read, *“not in chambering and wantonness,”* ^{KJV} *“not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality,”* ^{NASB} *“not in sexual immorality and debauchery,”* ^{NIV} and *“not in debauchery and licentiousness.”* ^{NRSV}

Lewdness, chambering, sexual promiscuity, and debauchery, are the expression. Lust, or wantonness, is the cause of it. These are sins of indulgence, deeds in which the cravings of the flesh are sought to be satisfied by unlawful means. They are also sought with aggression and determination.

“Not in . . . lewdness,” or *“chambering.”* This is immoral conduct. The meaning of the term is “the defiled bed.” It is intimacy outside of the bounds of marriage, referring to adultery and illicit affairs. *“Lust,”* or *“wantonness,”* is unbridled and unrestrained lust. This is what leads to *“chambering,”* and is also

There is something these categories of sin have in common. They all center in self, not Christ. They have to do with satisfying earthly desires, not appropriating heavenly benefits.

called *“licentiousness,”* and is indecent and outrageous behavior.

The remarkable increase of this sort of sin within the professed church is staggering. Unwed mothers, teenage pregnancies, and illicit affairs among church leaders are a blotch upon our times. They all fall into the category or *“lewdness and lust,”* or *“chambering and wantonness,”* which are not to be once named among the people of God (Eph 5:3). The inflow of counselors and psychologists have led people into a sort of sympathy for those caught in such conduct. Specialists in moral recovery have become quite popular in the larger churches of the land. Time will be better spent declaring the words of our text to the church. Nothing about salvation allows for such moral defilement. Those who insist upon stepping over moral boundaries that have been established by God must know they have entered into an area for which nothing good is promised.

**CONTENTION
Strife and Envy**

“Not in . . . strife and envy.” Other versions read, *“strife and jealousy,”* ^{NASB} *“dissension and jealousy,”* ^{NIV} *“quarreling and jealousy,”* ^{NRSV} *“fighting and envy,”* ^{BBE} *“rivalry and jealousy,”* ^{NAB} and *“wrangling*

or jealousy.” ^{NJB}

Strife, dissension, quarreling, fighting, and wrangling, are the expression. Envy, or jealousy, is the cause.

Here are sins that men consider more respectable. They are quite common among professed believers as well as unbelievers. They are one of the primary reasons for division in the body of Christ, and play a key role in maintaining **sectarianism**, or denominationalism.

However, there is no dignity to these sins. They are classed along with *“rioting and drunkenness,”* and *“chambering and wantonness.”* The flesh begets all such sins, and fosters them as well. Elsewhere, the Holy Spirit identifies such actions with *“the works of the flesh.”* *“Now the deeds of the*

flesh are evident, which are: . . . enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions . . . of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21).

SOMETHING COMMON

There is something these categories of sin have in common. **They all center in self, not Christ.** They have to do with satisfying earthly desires, not appropriating heavenly benefits. All of them are anchored not only in time, but are riveted to the immediate moment. They all require a mind-set that is totally oblivious of God, Christ, salvation, the coming of the Lord, the end of the world, and the day of judgment.

New life **cannot** indulge in such things. It is not that *“newness of life”* ought not to engage in such expressions, it **cannot** do so, for it has no capacity for transgression. The *“new man”* must be ignored, *“the old man”* preferred, and the Son of God crucified *“afresh”* by the individual before these can be committed.

All of them are condemned by God, and exclude one from heaven (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5-6; Col 3:5-6). It is not possible to do these things in such a

manner as to make them acceptable. They are corrupt at the core, and there is no way to make them right.

No amount of religious activity can cause them to be good. An imagined *Christian* environment cannot sanctify them, or provide a just cause for them to

be found in us. They are to be shunned like poison, which, indeed, they are. If they are allowed expression in our lives, they will pull us into the bottomless pit. There is no natural force that can stop this from happening. They will become the cause for condemnation and the reason for Divine rejection.

There is, praise the Lord, grace to keep us from indulging in such reprehensible conduct! If you wonder where mercy can be found, and grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16), **it is at the point where sin becomes repulsive, and righteousness becomes the quest of preference.**

PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST!

Not only does the Holy inform us of what NOT to do, He directs us in the proper manner of life. Not only is there grace to avoid what is wrong, that same grace will lead us in what is right.

BUT

"But . . ." Other versions read, *"Rather,"* ^{NIV} and *"Instead."* ^{NRSV} Linguistically speaking, this is an adversative expression. It declares the antithesis, or opposite, circumstance or contrast. It is to morality what white is to black, or day is to night. It is not something that is different, but what is the opposite. It is what is diametrically opposed to indulging in sin.

While this may appear a very elementary point, more is here than meets the casual eye. **Those in Christ are not to merely refrain from the sins mentioned, they are engage in the activities here admonished.** It is not enough to merely abstain from *"rioting and drunkenness . . . chambering and wantonness . . . strife and envying."* There is no virtue in abstinence alone. **Unless refraining from sinful expressions is matched by indulgence in the things of the Spirit, the effort is vain.** This is particularly noteworthy in view of the remarkable lack of appetite in the average church for the things of God.

PUTTING ON CHRIST

^{14a} ***But put on the Lord Jesus Christ . . .*** Other versions read, *"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,"* ^{NIV} *"Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ,"* ^{NRSV} *"But let the Lord Jesus*

Christ take control of you," ^{NLT} and *"Let your armor be the Lord Jesus Christ."* ^{NJB}

This is the second admonition of this sort. The first was *"let us put on the armor of light"* (verse 12). Elsewhere, as I have already indicated (comments on verse 12), we are admonished, ***put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*** (Eph 4:24), and ***Put on the whole armor of***

not found in us, it is reasoned, it is because God has not done it yet. If we will simply wait in a state of inactivity, the Lord will eventually come through for us. The effects of this doctrine are reason enough to reject it. However, this text will afford us the opportunity of opening up the real nature of life in Christ Jesus.

A Brief Exposition

Allow me to focus on two aspects of life in Christ that speak of us putting on something. The first is our text: *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."* The other has already been mentioned, and is found in Ephesians 4:24. *"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."* In both cases, the language is quite clear. We are admonished to do something. It may appear as though this is something that has not, in any sense, been done before. Yet, the Spirit declares elsewhere that both have already been done.

There is nothing passive about living by faith. This is something that will not be done unless we do it. It is in the process of doing it that grace is received for its accomplishment.

God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph 6:11).

There is nothing passive about living by faith. **This is something that will not be done unless we do it. It is in the process of doing it that grace is received for its accomplishment.**

Right here we come to grips with some serious misconceptions of spiritual life. Satan, through demonic doctrines, has spread throughout the Christian community that in salvation everything is done for us. If the required activity is

First, regarding putting on Christ, it is written, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ HAVE put on Christ"* (Gal 3:27). Other versions read, *"have clothed yourselves with Christ"* ^{NASB,NIV,NRSV} The book of Romans has also affirmed we have been *"baptized into Christ"* (6:3). Yet, those affirmed to have already put on Christ, are admonished in our text, ***put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.*** are these texts in conflict with one another?

Second, regarding putting on the *"new man,"* it is written, ***And HAVE put on the new man, which is renewed in***

knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10). Yet, those in Christ are admonished, "And that ye **put on the new man**, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24). Once again, are these texts in conflict with one another?

Reconciling the Texts

There is a sense in which we have put on Christ, and one in which we have not. We have put Him on by faith, becoming identified with Him through faith, and accepted in Him by grace. We are no longer separate from Him, but have been "joined" to Him (1 Cor 6:17). Yet, this is all by faith. The treasure we have is in "earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). We are occupying a war zone, hounded by foes within and without. There are influences all about us that deplete our strength, erode our energies, and compete for our attention.

When we began our new life, we did so having "put on Christ." But this was not a once-for-all transaction. We also believed on Him, and that was not a one-time event either. Because we are not yet in our native habitat, we must continue to believe, and continue to "put on Christ." It is as though we begin each day afresh, by faith clothing ourselves with the Son of God, hearing Him anew, and following Him wherever He leads.

The justified ones "shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11), not by a once-for-all decision! When we were baptized into Christ, we became "alive unto God" (Rom 6:11). We stay alive by our faith. When we began our new life by putting on Christ. We maintain that life by continuing to put Him on. There is a sense in which new life begins every day. That is because we face new challenges, and expand our spiritual life into new frontiers. As we grow in Christ Jesus, we put Him on, covering the expanded areas.

We are not only saved by the "washing of regeneration," but by the "renewing of the Holy Spirit" as well (Tit 3:5). Putting on Christ, as admonished in our text, relates to the renewing of the Holy Spirit – that continual work, whereby we are being changed from glory unto glory, and conformed to the image of God's Son. The putting on of Christ of Galatians 3:27 relates to the washing of regeneration, or

the beginnings of our new life in Christ.

This is matter that requires a great deal of proclamation and exposition in the modern church. It is evident from the condition of multitudes of professing Christians that this is not known. Spiritual staleness has settled upon many souls. There is no freshness in their spirits. They are not living by "every Word of God" (Lk 4:4), and do not enjoy the "communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14). They are not "filled with all joy and peace in believing," nor are they

His character and life. And how is that done? It is by means of the promises – by believing them, meditating upon them, and making it our aim to experience them. They are the appointed means to obtaining Christ's nature, which is, from the viewpoint of our text, putting Him on.

The particular thrust of this text is that we are to prepare for eternity. The night is far spent, and the great and notable day of the Lord is fast approaching. Our only hope is to be found like Christ Jesus when His glory is

This is matter that requires a great deal of proclamation and exposition in the modern church. It is evident from the condition of multitudes of professing Christians that this is not known. Spiritual staleness has settled upon many souls.

"abounding in hope" (Rom 15:13). Why does this condition exist?

Our text provides the answer. It is because they are not putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. They have too much of themselves showing, and too little of Christ Jesus. **Simply put, they are not living by faith.** They are not depending on the Lord Jesus to lead and feed them. They have taken matters into their own hands, and are actually living as though Christ did not even exist.

While we have been "made partakers of Christ" (Heb 3:14), it remains a work in progress. We have received "of His fulness," but not the whole of it (John 1:16). There remains vast portions of the "Divine nature" that is yet to be experienced. We have been given "exceeding great and precious promises" that by means of them, we "might be partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). That process is precisely what is meant by the admonition, "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

How can Christ be "put on" apart from faith? Putting Him on is appropriating

unveiled – to be as He is "in the world" (1 John 4:17). It is to be found with faith when He comes (Luke 18:8). All of the effort and activity required for that preparation is summarized in these words: "put on Christ."

The Spirit is calling us into a fuller realization of the life we experienced when we were raised from the waters of baptism "by the glory of the Father." Putting on Christ is nothing less than walking "in the newness of life" (Rom 6:4).

Many with whom I am acquainted have placed a great emphasis upon our baptism into Christ. In fact, among several of them, this is nearly all they talk about. It is the dominating theme of their religious conversations. Our text lays a solemn obligation upon all such people – those who have seen the relevance of baptism, and its relationship to salvation. They are now to move forward, laying hold of the fulness of the life that began at their baptism. They must not linger on the banks of the Jordan, but launch our into the deep, letting down their nets, so to speak, for a great catch of life.

MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH

^{14b} . . . **and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**” You see with what care the Spirit speaks to us of managing our lives. We are stewards of life from God, and that stewardship is to be handled with the greatest care. What is required of us necessitates diligence, hope and zeal. We will not be able to do this without the Lord, but we are well able to do it while walking with Him in the light. It is imperative that we see the essentiality of this word.

NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH

“**Make NO provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**” Other versions read, “**and make NO provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts,**”^{NASB} “**and DO NOT think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature,**”^{NIV} “**and make NO provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires,**”^{NRSV} “**and DO NOT take forethought for the flesh to fulfill its lusts,**”^{DARBY} “**and DO NOT give thought to the flesh to do its desires,**”^{BBE} “**and DONT think of ways to indulge your evil desires,**”^{NLT} and “**and STOP worrying about how your disordered natural inclinations may be fulfilled.**”^{NJB}

words translated “*the flesh*” are **τῆς σαρκός** (tas sar-kos). That expression (“*THE flesh*”) is found at least nineteen times in the New Covenant writings (John 3:6; Rom 6:19; 8:3,5,6,7; 9:8; 13:14; 1 Cor 5:5; Gal 5:17,19; 6:8; Eph 2:3; Col 2:11,13,18,23; 1 John 2:16; Jude 23). It cannot be defined etymologically. Lexically, the word means “the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is permeated with blood (of both man and beasts).”^{Friberg Greek Lexicon} The Spirit, however, expounds the expression doctrinally, so that when we hear the words “*the flesh*” we will have a proper frame of reference outside of the wisdom of men. The following references show how the Spirit uses this expression, “*the flesh*.” Taken seriously, they will develop a certain abhorrence within the sensitive soul. Sometimes the words are translated “*carnal*.”

Scriptural Representations

- ❑ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh (John 3:6).
- ❑ It brings with it infirmity (Rom 6:19).
- ❑ The holy Law of God was “*weak through the flesh*” (Rom 8:3).

- ❑ The flesh lusts against the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:17).
- ❑ The works of the flesh lead to condemnation (Gal 5:19-21).
- ❑ Those sowing to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption (Gal 6:8).
- ❑ Prior to our new life, we lived in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling its desires (Eph 2:32).
- ❑ In our baptism, we were circumcised with the circumcision of Christ, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11).
- ❑ Prior to being in Christ, we were dead in our sins and the uncircumcision of the flesh (Col 2:13).
- ❑ The mind of the flesh puffs one up (Col 2:18).
- ❑ External rules cannot remove the lusts of the flesh (Col 2:23).
- ❑ The lust of the flesh belongs to the world order, and is not of the Father (1 John 2:16).
- ❑ Believers are to hate even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 23).

“*The flesh*” is the part of us that is not born again. While it includes our bodies, it is not confined to them. “*The flesh*” includes a certain mind set (“*mind of the flesh*”), and has strong desires (“*desires of the flesh*”). As to its origin, “*that which is born of the flesh is flesh*.” It is traced back to Adam, not Christ. It is what is “*natural*,” or without the Divine nature, about us (1 Cor 2:13). “*The flesh*” is nothing less than “*the old man*,” which is to be “*put off*” (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9).

There are desires resident in the flesh that pull us away from God and Christ. They dull the appetite for glory, and make the present world seem primary.

What is “the flesh?”

The strength of the prohibition is evident. It is imperative that we know what “*the flesh*” means, for too much depends on our response to this admonition. Most versions translate the word “*flesh*” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NAS, NAU, NRS, WEBSTER, DRA, DARBY, BBE, YLT, NAB). Some of the modern paraphrased translations read “*sinful nature*,”^{NIV} footnote reads “or the flesh” “*evil desires*,”^{NLT} and “*disordered natural inclinations*.”^{NJB} The

- ❑ Those living according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh (Rom 8:5).
- ❑ The mind of the flesh is death (Rom 8:6).
- ❑ The mind of the flesh is enmity against God, is not subject to the Law of God, nor can it be (Rom 8:7)
- ❑ The children of the flesh are not the children of God (Rom 9:8).
- ❑ We are to make no provision to fulfill the desires of the flesh (Rom 13:14).
- ❑ There is such a thing a delivering someone to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the last day (1 Cor 5:5).

The Meaning

Therefore, the admonition to make no provision for the flesh means we are not to give the advantage to the natural, or unregenerate part of us. There are desires resident in the flesh that pull us away from God and Christ. They dull the appetite for glory, and make the present world seem primary.

While “*the flesh*” speaks of natural part of us, it has more regard to Adam, than to mere life in the body. The Spirit does not mean we are not to provide for food, clothing, and shelter. A father, for example, must make such provisions for his family, or he has denied the faith and

is worse than an infidel (1 Tim 5:8). Also, parents are to “lay up” provisions for their children (2 Cor 12:14). These are not the desires of which He speaks. However, in this matter of life-sustaining provisions, we are not to be consumed with care for them, as though we had no heavenly Father (Matt 6:25).

“The flesh,” however, is not content with food and raiment. It cries out like the blood-sucking leech, “Give, give” (Prov 30:15). It competes against the Holy Spirit, seeking to nail us down to this world, and thus thrust us out into eternity unprepared and subject to condemnation. In his delineation of things that never have enough, Solomon made no mention of “the flesh” (Prov 30:15). That is something that was not revealed to the wise man. The truth of “the flesh” could not be revealed until Jesus took away the sins of the world.

“The flesh” is everything about us that is rooted in the temporal, or connected with death. It is the entirety of what cannot enter into glory, and the whole of what has been contaminated by sin. It has a mind that is focused on the earth, and desires that strongly crave only what is temporary, with no eternal value.

What Are We To Do?

We are not to give “the flesh” the upper hand. Making “no provision” for it is never giving it the advantage, or making it easy for its desires to be fulfilled. When Satan throws the “fiery darts” of allurements at us, tempting us to plot out what we can do for our flesh, we

are to resist him, “steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet 5:8-9). When looking toward the future, our dominant consideration is to be ready to die, ready for the end of the world, and ready for the return of Christ. Our labors are devoted to being ready to leave the world, ready to reign with Jesus, and ready to stand before the

Our commission is clear. We are not to live in such a manner as to make sin easy to erupt. Our path must not lead us into an area where the lusts of the flesh awaken. Our associates are not to be such as cause our “old man” to become vibrant and alert. It is possible to have “the flesh” awakened by what we hear,

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judgment seat of Christ. We are determined to be ready for the grave and ready for glory.

The “desires” of the flesh are distracting ones. They throw up a distracting cloud between us and the will of the Lord. They move us to forget what God has prepared for those who love Him, and provoke us to think of what we can do for ourselves in this present evil world. “The flesh” desires the pleasures that last only for “a season” (Heb 11:25), and shuns those which are at the Father’s right hand, and last “forevermore” (Psa 16:11).

and given the advantage by what we see. In our thinking, as our minds survey certain bastions of thought, we can give the advantage to our flesh. The summons from the Throne is, “make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”^{NASB}

May you, dear child of God, be given grace to see the seriousness of the exhortation, and be persuaded of the availability of all the heavenly resources you require to fulfill it. Your faith is fully capable of doing these things. Not only that, your life depends upon your involvement in what God has given you.

CONCLUSION

It is at once apparent that life in Christ requires the consistent involvement of the child of God. One cannot be passive and obtain the victory. It is not possible to be indolent, of a slow heart, or conveyed about with the cares of this world, and live pleasingly to the Lord. The blessings and benefits you require can only be obtained in close proximity to God – when your faith is strong, and you are engaged in a fervent quest to obtain the prize set before you.

Putting on Christ requires a hearty effort, but that effort will not be in vain. The necessity for putting on Christ has been produced by the effects of sin. Our entire person was impacted by Adam’s transgression, into which we fully and heartily entered. There are still patches of carnality that are upon our persons, even though we have been washed, sanctified, and justified. They are the remnants of the old man that have remained for us to drive out, like Israel

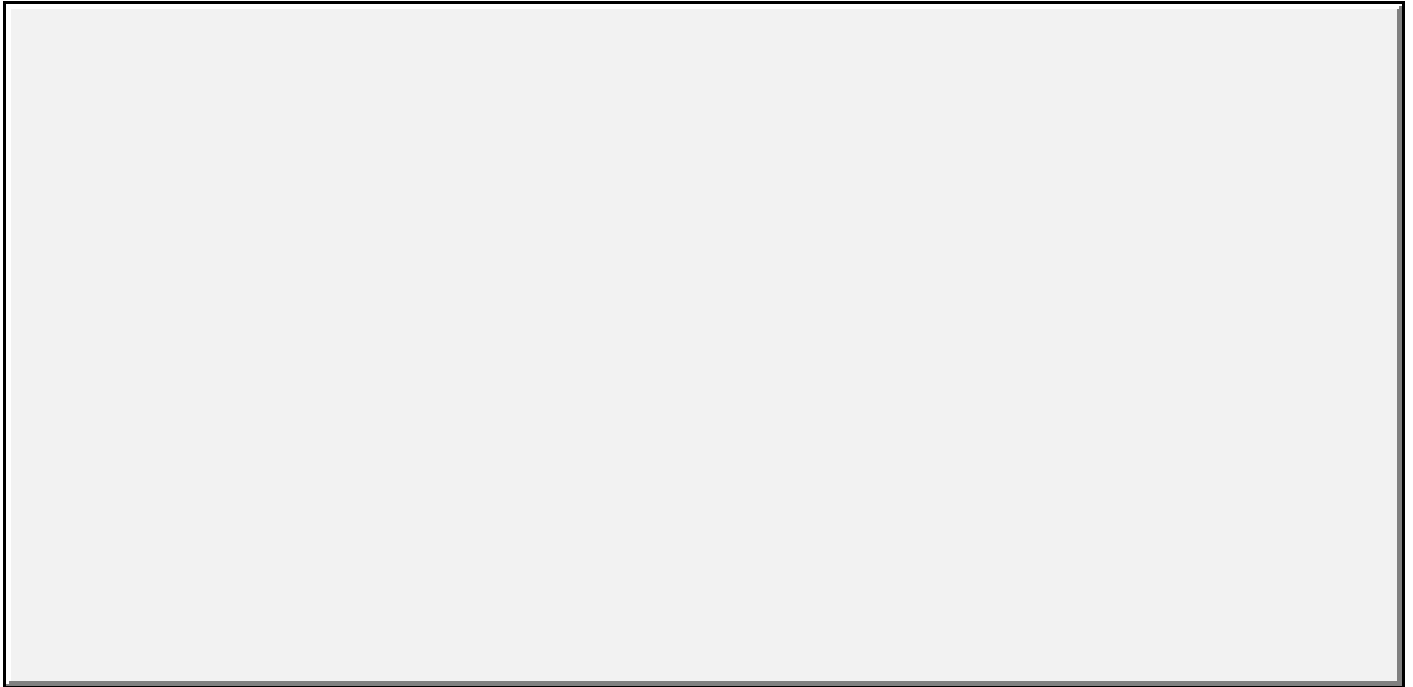
drove the heathen out of the promised land. If we fail to do this, those Adamic remnants will prove to be our undoing.

Concerning the enemies that remained in the promised land, it was said to Israel, “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in

the land in which you live. And it shall come about that as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you" (Num 33:55-56). Just as surely as Israel needed to heed those words, we do well to take heed to what our text has declared.

The reason for mortifying the deeds of the body is so that we may obtain the benefits Jesus procured for us and distributes to us. The reason for putting off the old man, is in order that we might put on the new man. The reason for

making no provision for the flesh, is that we might make a place in which the Holy Spirit of God may work. In all of this effort, we will be sustained by Divine power and upheld by the grace of God. We will not be disappointed.



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 43



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version; NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

LIBERTY and JUDGMENT

14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. ⁴ Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. ⁵ One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹ For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." ¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.^{NKJV} (Romans 14:1-13)

INTRODUCTION

With great care, the Holy Spirit has undergirded our faith with the fact of our salvation. We were not saved by our own works, or because we managed to measure up to the requirements of the Law. Salvation has come to us by God's grace and through our faith – neither of which can be a source of fleshly boasting. Of ourselves, we could not lay hold of God's grace, nor could we bring ourselves to

believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is an important truth to be seen here. Sin has utterly corrupted everything about us. As individuals, "there is none righteous," and as doers, "there is none that doeth good" (3:10,12). Those are absolute and unwavering realities. Confined to the realm of nature, whether in ourselves, or those about us,

we are described as "having no hope" (Eph 2:12). It is only as Christ Jesus enters the picture that hope begins to rise. It is only when God begins to work that anything of substance begins to happen. Apart from that, we are impotent to help ourselves, or deliver ourselves from sin and its alienating effects. This is fundamental to sound doctrine, and cannot be effectively contradicted. It is a

OUTLINE

- < RECEIVED, BUT NOT IN DISPUTATION (14:1)
- < BELIEVING and WEAKNESS (14:2-3)
- < YOU ARE NOT THE JUDGE (14:4)
- < DIFFERING VIEWS, YET BOTH ARE RECEIVED (14:5-6)
- < WE ARE NOT ISLANDS UNTO OURSELVES (14:7-8)
- < LORD OF ALL (14:9)
- < WHO DO YOU JUDGE YOUR BROTHER? (14:10-12)
- < NO MORE! (14:13)

postulate that is found throughout Scripture. It is what necessitated the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is why the remission of sins is required, and is the reason for the conferment of righteousness upon the basis of faith. **If there was any vestige of moral ability retained in fallen man, none of these things would be required.**

With unusual power, the book of Romans underscores these things.

- ' Salvation requires Divine "power" (1:16).
- ' A righteousness for man is revealed through the Gospel (1:17-18).
- ' We are justified freely by God's grace and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24).
- ' God justifies the ungodly, counting their faith to them as righteousness (4:5).
- ' We are "justified by faith," and have peace with God only "through our

Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1).

- ' We have been "made righteous" (5:19).
- ' Our spiritual life is traced to being raised with Christ, after having died with Him (6:1-6).
- ' Eternal life is "the gift of God" (6:23).
- ' We have been "delivered" from the condemning Law (7:6).
- ' We have been "made free" from the law of sin and of death" (8:2).

All of this may appear to have little to do with our text. However, we must be diligent to avoid such an erroneous conclusion. The reasoning of the fourteen chapter is based upon the factual presentation of the first eight chapters.

If we have been accepted by God upon the basis of grace and through faith, we can in no wise become harsh judges of our brethren! That is the reasoning of this marvelous chapter. It is not intended to be a proclamation of what qualifies or disqualifies the child of God. Rather, it affirms that those whom God has accepted cannot be excluded by others who have been received by Him.

The judgment of our peers is not the basis for Divine acceptance. We were not received by God upon the basis of their assessment, and we cannot be excluded from Him because of it.

Our text will show us that a thorough understanding of all things is not required for God to receive us. For that very reason, it cannot be the basis for our acceptance of one another. This does not imply that what men know and acknowledge is totally unimportant. Those who deny Jesus is the Christ, are not accepted by God, and cannot be

accepted by His people (1 John 2:22). The person who does not "confess" that Jesus Christ "is come in the flesh," has not been received by God, and is not to be received by His people (1 John 4:3).

There are, however, areas of knowledge in which considerable variance can exist among believers. The variance itself is not honorable, and is not to be treated as though it was. There is a level of spiritual understanding that is juvenile, and out of which men must eventually grow. That level is associated with time, which means properly nourished spiritual life will grow and advance. The Spirit rebuked certain Hebrew believers because "when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Heb 5:12).

While the faith of the child of God is being developed, Divine acceptance is still realized. As we will see, care must be taken not to alienate people whose faith is weak. Instead, care must be taken to see to it that their faith grows and becomes strong, thereby giving glory to God. The manner in which this is done may very well involve "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). That is not, however, the approach of our text. Here we will see the advancement of a weaker brother hinges upon our acceptance of him, and consideration of him in our conduct.

We will also see that the weaker brother is more prone to harsh judgment. **In Christ juvenility does not make us more gentle.** Instead, it promotes judgmental attitudes that are strictly forbidden by both the Word of the King and the nature of His Kingdom.

RECEIVED, BUT NOT IN DISPUTATION

"^{14:1} Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things." At once we see that certain differences exist among the people of God, even though they have all been received by Christ to the glory of God. While it is the fervent desire of godly men

and women that we be of one mind in everything, the stark reality of the case is that this condition does not exist. Some people neutralize this reality by simply ignoring the differences. Still others remove the challenge by viewing their own particular group as the only one

received by God. These are not acceptable approaches, for our text will call for the consistent and loving consideration of Christ's own brethren.

RECEIVING BRETHREN

"Receive one . . ." Other versions

read, “welcome him,”^{RSV} “accept him,”^{NIV} “take unto you.”^{DRA} The point here is not simply seeing a person as harmless, or not causing trouble for him. **To receive someone is to acknowledge God has received him.** It is to consider him one of “us,” so to speak. Those who are “received,” and the ones who “receive” them, belong to the same group, or body. It is to take one as a companion, receiving into friendship and personal involvement.

It will become apparent to you that this is a scathing condemnation of all forms of denominationalism, or sectarianism. While men have grown accustomed to this ungodly phenomenon, God has not. There are, to be sure, valid reasons for separating from others. Some of the reasons include immortality (1 Cor 5:11), men of perverse disputings, who teach that gain is godliness (1 Tim 6:5), and those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof (2 Tim 3:5). Another reason for withdrawal is the refusal to work (2 Thess 3:6-10).

These are quite different from the considerations of our text. They all postulate people with corrupt hearts, a disdain for the truth of God, and involvement in iniquity. This text deals with a different kind of condition.

WEAK IN THE FAITH

“ . . . who is weak in the faith.” Here is a person whose faith is weak. It is not an enviable position, yet one that can be corrected. **A person with weak faith cannot see the whole picture.** There are areas where his understanding is flawed. Yet, he is not a rebel, nor is he fighting against the Lord or resisting His Spirit. This is the person who does not have a grasp of the truth itself, but sees eternal realities like the partially-healed blind men – “men as trees walking”(Mark 8:24). **Things regarding practical conduct are not clear to such a person. They do not doubt the fact of God or Christ, but do not see the implications of the truth.**

The Conscience

Yet, we will find this individual has a good conscience, and refuses to contradict it. He is devoted to God, and seeks to

please him, even though his understanding is deficient. **We are dealing here with the area of the conscience, which is a sentinel with some jurisdiction over the mind.** The conscience is not infallible, and can even be technically wrong. Yet, God has made no provision for it to be violated. The conscience can be brought into a fuller conformity to the mind of the Lord. However, whatever its present degree of abidance, it is to be honored.

One of the commendable things about Paul, even before he was called into the Apostleship, was that he lived “in all good conscience” continually (Acts 23:1). Even though he was formerly wrong in his perception of Christ, he did live in a conscientious effort to please God. It was

The conscience is not infallible, and can even be technically wrong. Yet, God has made no provision for it to be violated. The conscience can be brought into a fuller conformity to the mind of the Lord. However, whatever its present degree of conformity, it is to be honored.

that very posture of soul that contributed to his recovery, and the more precise instruction of his conscience.

While a “good conscience” is not the basis for Divine acceptance, it is an appointed means of arriving at the truth of God, and is thus to be maintained.

A person who is “weak in the faith” has an untrained, but sincere, conscience. This is one whose “senses” have not yet been “exercised to discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14). Our text now addresses how such a person is to be regarded, and how he is to be treated. It will greatly assist us to remember that we were all in this category at one time. **No person begins life in Christ in a mature state.** Yet

all begin in a state of Divine approval, being “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 12:6).

Receiving a person with “weak faith” does not constitute an approval of what that person conceives to be right and wrong. Nor, indeed, does it mean such an individual is to set the tone for the rest of the assembly, or the body of people with whom he is associated. The instruction that follows will make that quite clear.

DISPUTING OVER DOUBTFUL THINGS

“ . . . but not to disputes over doubtful thing.” Other versions read, “but not to doubtful disputations,”^{KJV} “but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions,”^{NASB} “but not for disputes over opinions,”^{RSV} and “without passing judgment on disputable matters.”^{NIV}

“Doubtful disputations” refer to matters of reasoning, or opinion. They have to do with perception, not the love and embrace of the truth itself. The idea is that we are not to attempt to press our view of the truth upon a believer who does not perceive the reasoning that conflicts with his own. This is a transgression that is so common in the contemporary church that nothing is thought about strong and extended disputations over human reasonings. One person has well said, “If a statement of

the will of Christ from the Scriptures has not the effect of producing conviction, lengthened discussions are more likely to increase prejudice than to resolve doubts.”
Robert Haldane, 1816

At once this will be seen as a weakness, particularly to the maintenance of an institutional structure and the vaunting of human opinion. However, it must be remembered that this is an observation inspired by the Holy Spirit. The protection of a new child of God, or one who has not yet perceived the scope and implications of the truth, is to be regarded as more important than the justification of our view of the truth.

Reasonings, Views, and Opinions

Care must be taken not to assume reasoning upon the truth, having a view of it, or entertaining an opinion, is wrong. If that was the case, receiving a brother with different persuasions would not be the point. Instead, entertaining a personal view of the truth would be soundly condemned. But it is not. It is what we do with our views, and how tightly we hold to them, that becomes the issue.

If our view of HOW the truth is to be applied makes us judgmental of those whom Christ has received, we have stepped over the lines of both propriety and charity. If the *“end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned”* (1 Tim 1:5), we can ill afford to entertain views that drive wedges between the people of God.

The Fourth Chapter of Ephesians

An outline of proper agreement is found in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. This is an exposition of *“the unity of the Spirit.”* It outlines for us things on which we must strive for agreement. It also provides a considerable latitude for growth in our understanding. *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the*

Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:1-6).

Notice the pivotal issues with which we are confronted. (1) Walking worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

If our view of HOW the truth is to be applied makes us judgmental of those whom Christ has received, we have stepped over the lines of both propriety and charity.

(2) Maintaining a lowly, meek, longsuffering, and forbearing spirit. (3) Making every effort to keep the unity created by the Holy Spirit. (4) Keeping the unity of the Spirit within the framework of peace. (5) Key realities include Christ’s *“body,”* the Holy Spirit, the hope to which we have been called, the Lord Himself, our baptism into Christ, and our God and Father who is at work in every aspect of the Kingdom.

While there may be varying perceptions of these realities, the realities

themselves are not questioned by those who live by faith.

“Doubtful disputations” pertain to man’s reasoning upon these, and lesser, matters. Men are not to avoid such reasonings as though they were unlawful. They are, however, to zealously avoid them becoming the basis for the fellowship of other members of Christ’s

body, or their approval or disapproval of fellow believers.

This will become more apparent as we walk through this remarkable text. The mandate for those who are strong in Christ is **not** prove their position, or argue their perceptions with those who cannot presently see them. They are called to support the weak, and to be mindful of their conscience before the Lord. They are to be helpers of their joy, not those who have dominion over their faith (2 Cor 1:24).

BELIEVING AND WEAKNESS

“² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.”

The Spirit now provides us with two concrete examples of the principle before us. He will put the truth squarely before us, calling upon us to adapt it to our own situation. **It should be apparent that the points of variance are not central in the matter of being accepted by God.** Nor, indeed, are they inconsequential. Views are held as before the Lord, and few things can be of any greater importance. What is now discussed are not matters of

right or wrong, but matters about which endless disputation and division are unwarranted. As might be expected, this will contradict much of what goes on in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

EATING ALL THINGS

“For one believes he may eat all things . . .” Other versions read, *“One believes he may eat anything,”* ^{RSV} *“One man’s faith allows him to eat everything,”* ^{NIV} *“One man has faith that he may eat all things,”* ^{NAS} and *“One man is assured that he may eat all things.”* ^{DARBY}

This is a personal persuasion – a matter of the conscience. This individual

is **not** compelled to maintain a certain diet. His conscience allows him to eat all foods. He might reason much like the Apostle Paul. *“I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself”* (Rom 14:14). Such a person could eat meat of all kinds, even though prohibited by the Law of Moses. He could also eat meat that was offered to an idol, knowing that an idol was really nothing, and thus could not defile the meat offered to it. It was with this in mind that Paul directed those who could purchase meat at the market that had been offered to idols, *“Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake; for the*

earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness. If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake" (1 Cor 10:25-27.

However, as we will see, freedom to do a thing does not mean we are under compulsion to do it. Nor, indeed, are we at liberty to drive a wedge between our brethren and ourselves over such freedoms.

HE WHO IS WEAK

" . . . another, who is weak, eateth herbs." Other versions read, "but he who is weak eats only vegetables,"^{NKJV} "while the weak man eats only vegetables,"^{RSV} and "but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables,"^{NIV}

It is vital that we see the person with view is "weak." His grasp of the truth is not firm, and his faith is weak – not in the sense of being sinful, but in the sense of not seeing clearly.

It is vital that we understand the person whose view is "weak." His grasp of the truth is not firm, and his faith is weak – not in the sense of being sinful, but in the sense of not seeing clearly. Notwithstanding, this person's convictions are just as strong as the one who can eat "all things."

The person with understanding might wonder how a person could possibly be driven to such a conclusion – namely that meat could not be eaten. After all, Jesus "purged all meats," thereby sanctifying them as food. His words on the subject are clear. "Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?" (Mark 7:18-19). The NIV reads, "(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.""). Thus,

Jesus set aside all of the dietary prohibitions of the Law with a single word!

Heaven confirmed the same to Peter as he was instructed concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles. The Apostle was confronted with a large sheet held by the four corners, "Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." When commanded, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat," he responded, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." Three times the sheet was lowered to him, and three times Peter responded with those words. Additionally, three times the voice spoke to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:13-17). Eventually, Peter was shown that just as surely as God had lifted the ban on

eating certain foods, so the ban on the Gentiles hearing the Gospel had been lifted (Matt 10:5-6; Matt 15:24).

Now, in Christ, commanding that people "abstain from meats [foods]" was a sign that one had been overcome by the doctrine of demons. As it is written, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the

latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:1-5).

Now, in the fuller light of the Gospel, food can be seen from an entirely different perspective than that of the Law. "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them" (1 Cor

6:12-13).

Still, the person "who is weak" is not able to perceive this, and continues to reason that it is wrong to eat certain foods. Such a person is to be "received" without engaging in endless disputes concerning the matter. The reason for this reception, as we will see, is the tender conscience of the weaker brother. His conscience is not yet fully formed, nor has his senses been "exercised" to discern both good and evil.

DO NOT DESPISE THE WEAKER

"Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not." Other versions read, "Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat,"^{NASB} and "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not."^{NIV}

The individual enjoying greater liberty, and freed from the prohibitions of ceremonial Law, will tend to look down on "the weaker," viewing him as disobedient to words of Jesus Himself. However, such a response is strictly forbidden. The weaker brother is not to be set at nought as though he was foolish. He is not to be attacked with Scripture, as though he was the enemy. Just because the weaker brother cannot take hold of the teachings of Christ, he is not to be treated with contempt, or hounded with arguments.

DO NOT JUDGE THE STRONGER

" . . . and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him." Other versions read, "and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him,"^{RSV} and "and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him."^{NIV}

There is a critical distinction to be seen in the responses of these two individuals. The first is tempted to look down on, or hold in contempt, the brother who is persuaded he cannot properly eat all foods. The second brother, who "is weak," tends to be judgmental, even condemning the person whose conscience allows him to eat all things, while he himself is convinced that is improper.

It is the weaker brother who continues to be dominated by the spirit of Law, and is harsh toward

his brethren. It will only require a small amount of thought for experienced believers to see the truth of this. Those who major on things that are unlawful do have a tendency to condemn. Those who major on liberty have a tendency to despise. Neither attitude is correct.

GOD HAS RECEIVED HIM

Solemnly, the “weaker” brother is admonished to recognize that God has “received,” or “accepted,” the stronger one. For years, I had considered God’s acceptance to refer to the weaker brother. But this is not at all the case. This is a word for the brother who is “weak in faith,” the one whose conscience and understanding is not yet mature. Such an one is not to be allowed to direct the assembly of the saints, or bind his views upon them. He is not to condemn a fellow believer simply because he eats meats, or is at liberty to eat all foods.

God “receives” those who believe on

His Son and conduct themselves in all good conscience. Peter said it this way in his confession to Cornelius, “*But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him*” (Acts 10:35). That word certainly does not rule out faith in Christ, for Peter was sent to Cornelius that he might hear the Gospel, believe, and be saved. It does, however, confirm the nature of our God to look upon men’s hearts.

The person who eats meats is thus seen as one who is standing in the **liberty** wherewith Christ has made him free (Gal 5:1). Perceiving both the manner and the privileges of the covenant, he has not sinned before God by eating all manner of foods. God has received him, and therefore no man can sit in judgment upon him.

APPLYING THE TEXT

It is the business of every believer to apply this text to himself. There are those

who major on what they CAN do, while others emphasize what they CANNOT do. Our text assumes that both are motivated by their conscience, and are earnestly seeking to please the Lord. God does not condemn either party, but receives them both. The person enjoying liberty must not look down upon those who remain in the “I-cannot-do-that” stage. Nor, indeed, is the person who is held in by prohibition free to sit in judgment upon those who do not abide by their rules or perceptions.

The truth of the matter is that no person can bind his conscience upon another, regardless of the weightiness of their consideration. Nor, indeed, is their conscience to be the subject matter of their discussion, if it erupts in disputation. This may appear to be compromising at the first. However, our text will so elaborate upon this matter as to remove all doubt concerning its truthfulness. The hub upon which fellowship turns is not human opinion.

YOU ARE NOT THE JUDGE

“Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.”

The words before us apply to both the stronger and the weaker brother – but particularly to the weaker. Contrary to the opinion of some, the weaker brother tends to be the most disruptive, because he lacks a working knowledge of the liberty that is in Christ Jesus. However, the stronger brother is not excluded from this word. He is not at liberty to despise the weaker brother, which despite will eventually lead to a judgmental attitude also.

JUDGING ANOTHER’S SERVANT

“Who are you to judge another’s servant?” These are unusually strong words, and are designed to convict the person who is loose in their attitude toward fellow believers. This passage is generally thought to apply to the stronger brethren, who are thought to condemn

the weaker ones. But this is not at all the case. Strength does not lead to a condemning attitude, which observation

Contrary to the opinion of some, the weaker brother tends to be the most disruptive, because he lacks a working knowledge of the liberty that is in Christ Jesus.

ought to be apparent. If being “strong” makes one condemning, in what sense is the individual said to be “strong.” The strong are **not** admonished not to condemn, but **not to despise**, and to be mindful of the tenderness of the weak. Thus chapter fifteen begins, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (15:1).

This word, then, is particularly addressed to the “weak,” who tended to judge those who were “strong.” Thus, we see that “the weaker brother” is not ignored, or treated with soft gloves, as though he were fragile. Instead, the Spirit speaks with great strength in dealing with the weaker one. **Since the one who is weak thinks about what cannot be done, the Spirit gives him something from which he is to refrain – judging another man’s servant!**

To “judge,” in this case, is to condemn as a breaker of the Law. In a secondary sense, it can also refer to despising a weaker brother, although that is not the thrust of this word. Both attitudes fail to take into account that the other person is serving the Lord in what he does. The stronger brother, in despising the weaker, fails to see that he is really attempting to serve God in all good conscience. Thus he is viewed with contempt, as though he was

simple and unworthy of fellowship.

The emphasis here, however, is on the weaker brother, who feels he cannot eat meat. Not willing to keep his view to himself, the “weaker” cannot conceive of the stronger one serving God in his attitude, but sees him as a breaker of the Law. Thus he condemns him, judging him as outside of the will of God.

God has not given His children the right to sit in judgment upon one another, even though this exercise is widely practiced. This is particularly true of those whose conscience and faith are weak. Such individuals are not suitable judges of who is accepted or not accepted by God.

It is a particularly reprehensible thing when a person who is “weak in the faith” takes it upon himself to judge, or condemn, one of God’s servants. Such an one is not compelled by the truth itself, but by his own meager comprehension of the truth. He has not taken the “lowest room,” as Jesus said (Luke 14:10).

TO HIS OWN MASTER

“... To his own master he stands or falls.” Other versions read, “It is before his own master that he stands or falls,”^{RSV} “They are responsible to the Lord, so let him tell them whether they are right or wrong,”^{NLT} and “Whether he deserves to be upheld or to fall is for his own master to decide.”^{NJB}

In the last analysis, it is God “with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). We will give an account to Him, not our brethren. Nor, indeed, are we to expect our brethren to give an account to us for what they do. The meaning is that God alone will determine whether a person stands or falls. Our judgment will have nothing whatsoever to do with it. We are not capable of making our brethren stand, and thus are not allowed to sit in judgment upon them.

MADE TO STAND

“... Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” Other versions read, “and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand,”^{NASB} “And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand,”^{RSV} and “Yes, his place will be safe, because the Lord is able

to keep him from falling.”^{BBE}

Remember, this is God’s word to the “weaker” brother, who has dared to judge the stronger for his failure to abide by the prohibitions by which he lives. There is no doubt that the Lord is also able to make the “weaker” brother stand, in spite of his weak conscience and faith. But that is not the point of this text, for the stronger brother has not consigned the weaker one to failure, or judged him to be outside of Divine favor.

Scriptural examples of “weaker” brothers imposing their views upon others are found several places in Scripture. Some Jewish brethren, for example, sought to impose circumcision upon

were summarized in the words “touch not, taste not, handle not.” The saints were told such approaches were entirely improper. “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:20-23).

**The Point
The point of the text is that**

God has not given His children the right to sit in judgment upon one another, even though this practice is widely practiced. This is particularly true of those whose conscience and faith are weak. Such individuals are not suitable judges of who is accepted or not accepted by God.

others as a necessity to salvation (Acts 15:1). On one occasion, Paul had Timothy circumcised because of Jews who held to this position, yet were not judgmental of others who did not (Acts 16:3). On the other hand, he refused to circumcise Titus because of Jews who insisted that it was necessary (Gal 2:3-4). Although their conscience may have compelled them to think circumcision was necessary, Paul would not allow them to bind their conscience upon himself and Titus.

Other weaker brethren sought to impose rules concerning eating, drinking, holy days, new moons, and sabbath days, on the Colossian brethren. God’s word to the church there was this: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Col 2:16-17).

Still other “weaker brethren” sought to enforce rules of life upon believers that

standing is not dependent upon rule-keeping. The individual is sustained by living within the dictates of a “good conscience.” All efforts to impose a private conscience upon another brother are vain, and must be avoided. God does not sustain our brethren when they subscribe to our convictions. He sustains each individual through their faith and perception. It is our business to honor that arrangement.

Spiritual life is not maintained by eating or not eating foods, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17). Therefore, we are neither the better nor the worse because of what we do in those areas. Knowing that in our hearts will assist us in not despising weaker brethren who have strong, but immature, persuasions in those matters. It will also cause us to refrain from judging those whose conscience allows eating.

Whatever our convictions in matters

of this kind, we must be willing to leave our brethren in the hands of the Lord. Our remarkable propensity to judgment must be mortified, and the mantle of love cast over the lives of our brethren. They may have differing views from you in

music preference, clothing, medication, domestic procedures, and times of devotion and prayer. They may not see eye to eye with you on dietary practices, education, or owning modern conveniences. Yet, you have no right to

judge them, or to impose your conscience upon them. You can require no more from them in order for you to receive them, that God requires of them for Him to accept them. You simply are not allowed to be more demanding than your God.

DIFFERING VIEWS, YET BOTH ARE RECEIVED

“⁵ One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.” In bringing the matter of particular days into the discussion, it becomes apparent that a variance between converted Jews and believing Gentiles is being accentuated. This is also confirmed by the instruction of the Spirit to the church at Colossae (Col 2:16). The mere whims of men are not the consideration in the word concerning either meats or days. Some believers still had a conscience molded by the Law, and did not see the full implications of being freed from Jewish obligations.

Having made those introductory remarks, there are principles here that may very well be applied to situations where individuals hold to traditions they have borrowed from mere men – like the “*tradition of the elders*” of Jesus’ day (Matt 15:2). The point being developed, however, is that **men cannot view with disregard or contempt those whom God has received.** Nor, indeed, can they sit in judgment upon those who are His conscientious and willing servants.

ESTEEMING DAYS

“⁵ One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike.” One must approach this text with great care, else he will drop into the chasm of confusion. There have been days

that God has blessed more than other

The fact that the Apostles did not bind Jewish days upon Gentile converts says more than all of the fanciful arguments that can be adduced by Sabbath keepers and the likes.

days, such as the day Israel was delivered from Egypt, the day Christ arose from the dead, and the day of Pentecost. Under the Law, the seventh day was particularly blessed by God (Ex 20:10). This day, together with various Jewish feasts, are no doubt the focus of this word.

I cannot conceive of the Spirit addressing the separation of days apart from the Law, which did distinguish between foods to be eaten and days to be observed. Notwithstanding, there is a principle here that can be of benefit even to those unacquainted with the special days outlined by the Law.

The point is that within the body of Christ, there **can be** a difference of opinion – a differing manner in which men reason. These are thoughtful individuals who are honoring their conscience. One regards one day to be more significant than another. Others take every day to be dedicated to the Lord. The fact that the Apostles did not bind Jewish days upon Gentile converts says more than all of the fanciful arguments that can be adduced by Sabbath keepers and the likes. When instructing converted Gentiles concerning foundational laws to

be kept, the Apostles and elders outlined the following: “*abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood*” (Acts 15:20). Their reasoning on the matter is found in the 29th verse of the fifteenth chapter of Acts. “*That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.*” There is no mention of the Sabbath day, or the various feast days, so highly regarded by the Jews. It is my judgement that Jewish days are the point in question.

What About the First Day of the Week

Some contend this verse confirms the relative unimportance of “*the first day of the week.*” They argue that no single day is actually greater than another, and that every day is “*alike.*” First, the intent of this passage is not to confirm that all days are really identical. The person regarding “*every day alike*” does not consider every day without significance. Rather, he regards every day as **consecrated to the Lord.** Under the Law, the Sabbath day was related to the Lord Himself. It was “*the Sabbath of the Lord thy God,*” being “*blessed*” and “*hallowed*” by Him (Ex 20:10-11). Also, the day of Atonement, various feast days (*Passover*--Ex 12:6; Lev 23:5-6; Num 28:16-25; Deut 16:1-8), *Pentecost*--Ex 34:26; Lev 23:10-14; Num 18:16-25), and *Tabernacles*--Ex 23:16; Lev 23:33; Deut 16:13-15), were high days, regarded much like the Sabbath, in that no servile work occurred during them. These were days of forced remembrance and dedication to God. They were designed for people whose hearts were prone to forget the Lord, yet who wore His name.

The "Lord's day" (Rev 1:10), or "the first day of the week," has been consistently honored by the people of God, but not as a mere ceremony, as were the feast days. The "first day of the week" simply does not fit into the category of meats and holy days, which were Jewish distinctions outlined in the Law. The Spirit has made a point of telling us that believers met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). The reason for meeting, however, was quite different than the inculcation of a Law. This was the day Jesus rose from the dead (Mark 16:9), and the day on which He twice appeared to His disciples following His resurrection (John 20:19,26). It was also the day on which Pentecost occurred, which was fifty days following the Passover (Lev 23:16). The association of the first day of the week with these events gives it a signification that cannot be easily forgotten.

The reason for the individual not regarding one day above another also confirms this cannot be referring to the first day of the week: "and he who does **not** observe the day, **to the Lord he does not observe it**" (verse 6). This can only refer to Jewish feast days, which were not honored in deference to the Lord Jesus Christ. I would think it difficult, indeed, to conceive of a follower of Christ **not** having a regard to "the first day of the week," in order to display his devotion to Christ.

BE FULLY CONVINCED

"Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." Other versions read, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind,"^{KJV} "Let each man be fully assured in his own mind,"^{ASV} "Let every man be certain in his mind,"^{BBE} and "Each person should have a personal conviction about this matter."^{NLT}

Here the personal nature of faith is brought to the forefront of our thinking. It is out of order for one believer to attempt to bind his personal persuasions upon another. **The faith of one person cannot sustain another.** Nor, indeed, is it right to attempt to please God by measuring up to the convictions of another individual.

While it is not common to think in this manner, here is what the Apostle is saying. **Every child of God is to be so serious about and devoted to the Lord, that he will do nothing except what he is persuaded pleases the Lord.** This is involved in living "in all good conscience before God" (Acts 23:1). Life is thus lived "from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith"^{NKJV} (1 Tim 1:5). This is "holding faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim 1:19). It is having "a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Heb 13:18). It is living by faith.

Every believer is to live within the light they have received. That is in walking "in the light as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7). One brother or sister cannot walk, or live, in the light another person has received. In fact, we are bound to live within the light we have received, else we have sinned against the Lord.

The person who is "fully convinced," or "fully persuaded," is constrained by his faith, not the requirements of men, to live for God. **There is no provision in Christ Jesus to live in a doubting and vacillating manner.** Later, the Spirit will say of this very subject, "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin" (verse 23). To be "fully persuaded," therefore, is the opposite of doubting whether the matter is right or not.

All believer are to live within the light they have received. That is in walking "in the light as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7). One brother or sister cannot walk, or live, in the light another person has received. In fact, we are bound to live within the light **we** have received, else we have sinned against the Lord.

This is an area of conscience, where the individual must be directed from within, not by the preferences, or even insight, of other members of the

household of faith. There are matters that are not left to the area of conscience, such as living in fornication, idolatry, adultery, sodomy, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, and extortion (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21). On such matters, persons "fully persuaded" they can indulge in such things have been deceived, for such cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. There is no room for growth in these areas. They are to be forthrightly eliminated from our lives.

Matters of conscience, however, are not so. They are areas in which further insight can be granted without the individual living in sin, though in lesser light.

Following Humanly Devised Routines

A word should be said here about a current phenomenon that is sweeping the Western Christian world. All manner of workshops and seminars are regularly offered to the people of God regarding disciplines of life. People are being directed to live in an artificial manner, without being "fully persuaded" in their own mind. Those who have attempted to live in such a manner find it most difficult. They are led to live independently of faith and understanding, actually depending upon the wisdom of someone else.

All of these areas deal with matters of conscience. They include family life, financial stability, and even the winning of souls. But all of them have this in common: they make no place for the conscience of the believer, or being "fully persuaded" in one's "own mind." Believers are admonished, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). That involves the area presently considered: being "fully convinced in his own mind."

There is, therefore, a sense in which the believer stands alone, sustaining an individual relationship to the Lord. There is another sense in which he is not alone, and is thus to be mindful of his brethren.

UNTO THE LORD

"He who observes the day, **observes**

it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.” Other versions read, “. . . observes it for the Lord . . . does so for the Lord . . . for the Lord he does not eat,”^{NASB} and “observes it in honor of the Lord . . . eats in honor of the Lord . . . abstains in honor of the Lord.”^{RSV}

This is living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and walking in the light (Heb 10:39; Gal 5:25; 1 John 1:7). Such life allows for advancement in the Lord, and direction by Him. **It should be clear that no other person has dominion**

over your faith (2 Cor 1:24). The persuasions of one believer cannot be bound upon another, for we belong to the Lord. The presence of this condition requires that we be forbearing of one another in love (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13).

In Christ, we will fellowship with individuals who do not see things exactly as we do. While there is nothing wrong with sharing our perceptions, those perceptions must not allow us to despise or judge brethren who do not see things as we do. God has “called us to peace” (1 Cor 7:15). That “peace” involves allowing our brethren to be “fully convinced” in their own minds, in a way that does may agree with our own persuasions. Brother love,

however, can overcome this circumstance.

Before God it is honorable to live “unto the Lord,” whether we eat meat or do not! This is because the individual is living by faith, even if it is “weak.” The pledge of the Lord is, “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). Even if that faith is “weak,” or in a beginning state, the believer will be sustained. For this reason, there is no point at which we can cease to live to please the Lord, or “by faith.” We may never back away from the Lord, living only within the light of human reasoning and personal preference. This is not simply living in the persuasion that we are right. Rather, it is offering our life as a deliberate sacrifice to God.

WE ARE NOT ISLANDS UNTO OURSELVES

“For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”

The Spirit now places before us a Kingdom principle that will help us *abound in love toward one another*. Here is one of the pillars of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This principle allows us to have differing persuasions in smaller and inconsequential matters. While we are “the body of Christ,” we are also “members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27). Each one sustains a vital union with the Lord in both life and death. That union allows for personal persuasion: yes, even demands full persuasion. **None of us are at liberty to be carried along by the faith of one of our peers, however valid that faith may be.** Each believer is personally responsible for the light he has received. He is responsible to live within the confines of that illumination, all the while expecting the light to shine “ever brighter unto the perfect day.”^{NKJV} (Prov 4:18).

There is no such thing as spiritual life that does not grow.

Where growth in Christ is absent, “newness of life” has been stifled. In accordance with our text, that life can be

or when we die.”^{NLT}

Life is lived is toward the Lord: that is, within a personal consciousness, or awareness of the Person and will of God. Faith does not allow the individual to live solely for the gratification of personal desires.

Here the Spirit emphasizes the direction of true spiritual life. **Life is lived toward the Lord: that is, within a personal consciousness, or awareness of the Person and will of God.** Faith does not allow the individual to live solely for the gratification of personal desires. The believer is not the center of his own universe. A selfish person is a godless person, living without regard to the will of God, or the welfare of those who are in Christ Jesus.

Whether in life or in death, we are not the heart of things. Our life is not for self, nor is our death. If we live only for self gratification, we have missed the purpose for life. If we die only to escape the hardships of life, taking our own life, we have also failed to glorify God in our death.

LIVING UNTO THE LORD

“For if we live, we live to the Lord.” Another version reads, “for if we live, we live **for** the Lord.”^{NASB} The direction, or focus, of spiritual life is “to the Lord.” The reason for life, in all of its facets, is “for the Lord.” Thus life is lived with an acute awareness of the Person, Presence, and will of the Lord. The purpose for life

suppressed by attempting to live within the framework of someone else’s persuasions. This verse reveals why all such attempts are absurd.

TO HIMSELF

“For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.” Other versions read, “For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;”^{NASB} “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone,”^{NIV} and “For we are not our own masters when we live

is to be pleasing to God, and to acquire His "Well done!"

That kind of life cannot be accomplished if I attempt to live with the persuasions of someone else – persuasions I do not understand. **Even though my brethren's convictions are sound,**

we confess with David, "My times are in Thy hand" (Psa 31:15). Thus we can devote ourselves to living for the Lord, without being distracted by morose thoughts of dying. In dying, we will move higher, not lower. We will advance, not retrogress. If we live by faith, God will not let us die without finishing our course. He

account of himself to God" (14:12).

Both life and death are a stewardship given to us by the Lord. By virtue of that circumstance, they "belong" to us. Again, it is written, "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, **or life, or death,** or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:21-23). God sustains the believer in handling this stewardship.

Our persuasions determine how we live and how we die. If we borrow the persuasions of others, we will not be able to live or die to the glory of God. We dare not eat meat or refrain from eating meat simply because our brethren think it best.

yet if I cannot comprehend them, I cannot live by them. That would involve living in doubt, which is never appropriate (Rom 14:23).

One of the curses of sectarianism is that it compels people to live by convictions that are not their own. Thus, they do not live for the Lord, but for the institution. Their trust is in the explanations and convictions of others. Although this is quite common, it is altogether unacceptable. We will further see that living "to the Lord" and "for the Lord" is in no way a liability. Nor, indeed does it place the believer in danger.

DYING UNTO THE LORD

"... and if we die, we die to the Lord." Thus, because life is lived for the Lord, death becomes "gain" for us (Phil 1:21). It only serves to move us from the war zone to the place of ultimate peace and rest. Death is a transition point, not a termination point. It moves us into another type of activity, it does not end all activity.

In dying to the Lord, we commit our death as well as our life to Him. Thereby

will allot us sufficient time to complete the work He has given us to do.

Thus, when our time to die comes, we will be able to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8).

The persuasion of these realities will move us to be considerate of our brethren, allowing them to live within the boundaries of their own faith.

WE ARE THE LORD'S

"Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." Other versions read, "So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord,"^{NIV} and "So in life and in death, we belong to the Lord."^{NLT}

Because we "belong to the Lord," we are accountable for our own faith, and the development of our own convictions. We will give an account of ourselves to the Lord. As it is written in this very passage, "So then every one of us shall give

The relevance of this situation is this. Our persuasions determine how we live and how we die. If we borrow the persuasions of others, we will not be able to live or die to the glory of God. We dare not eat meat or refrain from eating meat simply because our brethren think it best. Nor, indeed, are we allowed the luxury of esteeming certain days or regarding them all alike because that is the conviction of those with whom we fellowship. Our persuasions must be our own, driven by our own faith, and carried along by our personal convictions. We do not come into this world in crowds, live our life in gatherings, or die in groups. Faith is not dispatched from God in batches, nor does it consist of a body of well thought out doctrines, as some surmise.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Some might be tempted to become more independent than our text suggests. While we cannot be carried to the Lord in the basket of borrowed thought, neither are we to consider our brethren's thoughts useless and without personal value to us. The strong can gain from the weak, and vice versa.

Because we love the brethren, and because we are members of one another, due consideration should be given to one another's persuasions. Often that consideration will be the very means the Lord uses to bring us higher, broadening our spiritual perspective.

LORD OF ALL

⁴⁹ For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. This is the Spirit's exposition of why we neither live nor die to ourselves. Here He expounds why faith is personal,

and why we are individually accountable to the Lord for how we live – even for the preferences and perceptions we embrace.

TO THIS END

resurrection and exaltation, the Spirit will not allow such reasoning.

LORD OF THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

“ . . . that He might be Lord of both

Jesus has “*the keys of death and of hell (Hades).*” That is another way of saying He is Lord over those areas. No believer is put to a disadvantage by being among “*the dead.*” The Lord is over that domain. If Abraham could comfort Lazarus, how much more can He who is Lord “*of the dead*” bring solace to those who “*die in the Lord?*”

Is There A Conflict?

How does this harmonize with Christ’s statement, “*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*” (Matt 22:32)? Jesus was affirming that those who had died were, in the ultimate sense, still alive, for God is the God of living people, not those who are nonexistent. He further meant that those who are not in some sense existing and alive cannot be raised from the dead. In the resurrection, spirits are reunited with their bodies. Because Christ Jesus is Lord “*of the dead,*” He will be able to accomplish this union. In the meantime, He is able to console and comfort the saints who have passed on, and await that union (Rev 6:9-11).

The Living

These are **believers** remaining in the body. Although Jesus is Lord over all spirits, yet He is so in a particular way for those who have been joined to Him. He is over them to bless and sustain them, protect and direct them. He is Lord of their enemies, and the One who dispatches angels to aid them. He distributes spiritual graces to them, directs them, and “*ever lives to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:15). They are also answerable to Him.

Notice how the question is asked. The Spirit does not ask why the critical individual judges another person, but why he judges his “brother.” Connection with the Lord Jesus necessarily implies connection with one another.

“*For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again . . .*” Other versions read, “*For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life,*”^{NIV} “*For this is why Christ died and came to life,*”^{NLT} and “*For this is why Christ died and came to life.*”^{NAB}

This is spiritual reasoning at its highest level. It bears no resemblance whatsoever to the manner in which “*the natural man*” thinks. There is a revealed purpose for which Jesus died, rose, and lived again. The phrase “*lived again*” refers to Christ’s intercessory “*life*” at the right hand of God, by which we are saved (Rom 5:10). Here, then, is the grand purpose for all that is associated with Christ’s Manhood – His death, resurrection, and enthronement in heaven. While religious men are prone to view Christ’s death in isolation of His

the dead and the living.” Here is the common purpose that demanded Christ’s death, resurrection, and present intercession. Here is the fruitage of those grand events. **Christ’s vicarious death, triumphant resurrection, and effective intercession qualify Him to be the reigning King over the domain of the dead and the living.**

The Dead

“*The dead*” has specific reference to those who have died **in the Lord**. These are not, however, slumbering spirits who will remain unconscious until the morning of the resurrection. As it is written, “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them*” (Rev 14:13).

WHY DO YOU JUDGE YOUR BROTHER?

“¹⁰ ***But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*** ¹¹ ***For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.”*** ¹² ***So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.***”

with us on this matter. Where this is

being addressed. To put it another way,

This is spiritual reasoning at its highest level. It bears no resemblance whatsoever to the manner in which “the natural man” thinks.” There is a revealed purpose for which Jesus died, rose, and lived again.

The Spirit will reason extensively

done, an area of special culpability is

this is an aspect of religious life in which

the Devil is particularly active. We are not to be “ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor 2:11), and therefore the Spirit opens one of them to us. He does not do this on a philosophical level, or merely as a matter of information. If we will hear his reasoning with understanding, he will allow us to ourselves answer any questions about whether or not it is proper to sit in judgment upon the people of God, or to despise them as if they were unworthy of our love and attention. It is the manner of the Spirit to teach us in this way, involving us in the teaching, calling for us to respond to His interrogations.

WHY DO YOU JUDGE?

“But why do you judge your brother?” The RSV reads, “Why do you pass judgment on your brother?” The first reference to judging viewed the one being judged as a “servant” belonging to someone else (verse 4). Now that same is viewed in regard to his relationship to the one doing the judging. He is a family member – **a brother**.

This is addressed to the one who is “weak in faith,” for he is the one prone to judge his brother, seeking to impose his limited views upon him (verse 3). Notice how the question is asked. The Spirit does not ask why the critical individual judges **another person**, but why he judges his **“brother.”** Connection with the Lord Jesus necessarily implies connection with one another. Further, our association with Jesus is upon the basis of “grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). **How is it, therefore, that one brother would require more of another than the Lord Himself requires?** Judging, in this sense, comes down to requiring something of an individual that they are judged to be lacking? Let the person who does not think he can eat meat explain WHY he sits in judgment upon his brother for eating meat. Let the person who exalts one day above another provide an explanation for why he judges his brother for not entertaining the same view as himself.

Both are areas that have been mentioned, together with a host of others,

as areas of opinion, or reasoning. They are not the response of the soul to a Divine demand. Rather, they represent the interpretation of Scripture – conclusions that have been reached through the process of reasoning. Although the person doing the judging deems himself worthy of such an activity, the Spirit says his conclusions are evidence of a faith that is “weak.”

To “judge” means to condemn as the worst, and call his profession into question at the best. The acceptability of the person being judged is thus questioned. His sonship is brought into doubt, and his heart assessed as faulty, and his motives impure. Ignorance is imputed to the individual, and he is viewed as living in contradiction of the Living God. Now, why would any one view his brother in such a manner? What would provoke such an assessment? It is certainly not love, which “seeketh not her own,” and “is not easily provoked” (1 Cor

This does not mean foods and days themselves are to be regarded with contempt. It does mean they are not to be points of emphasis. It also means our decisions concerning them, and other like matters, are driven by faith and conscience, not Divine law.

13:5). While the weak person may affirm they are seeking the welfare of the individual, that is not the truth, for judgment, in the sense of our text, does not seek to do good. It rather seeks to disqualify someone God has “received.”

You will note that the Spirit demands an answer from the one who dares to judge those to whom he is related by grace. It is not that He is seeking an answer. The very question He asks dries up the answers of those “weak in faith.” **Their judgment, while issued under**

the guise of spiritual strength, is actually an expression of weakness. It is not a sign of wisdom, but a display of spiritual juvenility.

WHY DO YOU SHOW CONTEMPT

“Or why do you show contempt for your brother?” Other versions read, “why dost thou set at nought thy brother?”^{KJV} “why do you despise your brother?”^{NASB} “why do you look down on your brother?”^{NIV} and “why dost thou make little of thy brother?”^{DARBY} The first reference to despising the one with weak faith viewed that individual in regard to his relationship to God: God had “received him.” Now, that same person is viewed as part of the same body as the one who despises him – **a brother**.

This is addressed to the individual who looks down upon the brother that has not yet attained to a mature view of things. Such restrict their lives because they do not see the scope of their freedom in Christ. Yet they are doing so in all good conscience, seeking to please the Lord in their abstinence from meat, or the observance of an holy day. Now, what would provoke any follower of Christ to show contempt for, or despise, a person who was living with an aim to please God?

In this case, the stronger brother does not condemn the weaker one, but despises him. He does not think him worthy of high regard, even though he is living as best as he can within the boundaries of his conscience. It is not enough to simply refrain from judging our brethren. We must not allow ourselves to lightly regard them, despise them, or look down upon them as inferior. They are still begotten of God, are living by faith (weak though it may be), and have an inheritance in heaven. What would move a soul to despise such a person? Certainly not love! When the love of God is “shed abroad in our hearts” by the Holy Spirit, it will never move us to look accommodatingly upon those who have also been given the Holy Spirit.

Do Not Take It Too Far!

This does not mean foods and days themselves are to be regarded with contempt. It does mean they are not to be points of emphasis. It also means our decisions concerning them, and other like matters, are driven by faith and conscience, not Divine law. They represent areas that do not immediately impact upon our relationship to God. They are to be viewed as “unto the Lord,” or within the greater framework of our identity with Him through Jesus Christ.

WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” A day has been appointed when the whole body of Christ will stand before the real judgment seat – “the judgment seat of Christ.” Jesus alone will judge His people! As it is written, “The Lord shall judge His people” (Heb 10:30). The saints will judge the world and angels (1 Cor 6:1-3), but the Lord Himself will judge them! His judgment will be the last word, and it will not go well with those whose judgment has been in sharp conflict with His!

This same “judgment seat” is also mentioned in the book of Second Corinthians. In that text, the emphasis is placed upon being ready to appear before Christ. “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 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 5:9-10). Notice the additional words, “that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”^{NIV}

Why Bring Up The Judgment Seat?

It may appear strange that the Spirit would introduce the judgment seat of Christ in treating the subject before us. It may even appear to be a brief diversion from the matter of loving one another. But that is only a fleshly view. The relevance of these words is confirmed by the fact that God inspired them to be said in precisely this manner. There is a practical side also.

The knowledge of this awesome occasion is, among other things, designed to keep us from judging or despising our brethren. It will require all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength to prepare for that appointed confrontation. While we desire to do everything within our power to assist our brethren to be ready for “the day of the Lord,” there is a place and time when we must allow them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). Further, they must be allowed to do this without being intimidated by the persuasions of their brethren, or inhibited by their attitudes toward them.

Do not imagine that the key issues of the day of judgment will center around food and days! Whatever importance you may assign to those things now, they will appear quite small compared to knowing God and being persuaded of His exceeding great and precious promises. While this should be

There is an appointed day when we will stand before God without regard to whether others have been accepted or not. Together we will bow the knee to the Lord, and together we will confess to God, or “give praise to God.” We will not praise one another, but the Lord who purchased us with His blood, and brought us to glory.

exceedingly apparent, many have not taken hold of its truth. A few statements pertaining to Divine acceptance will serve to accentuate the thrust of the time when we all stand before “the judgment seat of Christ.” Note the general tone of these statements. That tone allows for growth, and thus for forbearance among believers.

“And by him **all that believe** are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:39)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: 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)

“He that **loveth his brother** abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” (1 John 2:10)

“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that **doeth the will of God** abideth for ever.” (1 John 2:17).

“Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that **acknowledgeth the Son** hath the Father also.” (1 John 2:23).

“And he that **keepeth his commandments** dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” (1 John 3:24)

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and **he that dwelleth in love** dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:16)

“He that **hath the Son** hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:12)

When reading statements of this magnitude, some immediately begin to consider what requirements are **missing** in them. They cannot conceive of them being thorough chronicles, but view them as partial statements. They imagine that they are a piece of a much larger puzzle.

This, however, is not a proper assessment of these texts. **They are summary statements that are of themselves complete.** When, for example, I view the city of New York from an aircraft that is 30,000 feet in the air, I have seen the entire city, not merely a portion of it. In fact, the summary view is the most complete view, taking in all of the details that can only be viewed at the ground level. The higher and summary view of New York does not contradict the view from one of its streets. Rather, it adds perspective, revealing that what I saw in the street was only a part of a vast city I could not comprehend from that level.

Thus it is with these statements. They are a higher view that shows the

total reason for Divine acceptance. Having faith is a large view, not a detailed one. Recognizing believers as our brethren is a summary view, not a specific one. Doing the will of God is a summarization, not a particularization. Acknowledging the Son is a global view, not a regional one. Keeping His commandments is a summary view, not a detailed one. Having the Son is an overall view, not an aspect of a larger view.

The Point

All of this bears upon the subject before us. **We are to receive our brethren from the higher point of view – as those who have faith, are brethren, and are doing the will of God from the heart.** They are to be perceived as those who acknowledge the Son, keep His commandments in their hearts, and have the Son. We dare not look at them from the “street level” of applying the truth, or the still lower level of conforming to things as we have seen them – even if our view is precisely correct. **God accepts us upon the basis of the higher view.** Because we are His children, and are the products of His work, we are obliged to view our brethren in the same manner.

A Brief Explanation

Time does not allow me to go into an extensive commentary on this subject at this time. Nor, indeed, would it be proper, for it would detract from the teaching of the present Spirit. Suffice it to say, there are a great number of things that fall into this category: i.e., **matters of conscience.** These are not things concerning which there is no word from God., Rather, they are matters that do not impact directly upon our acceptance with God. They are areas in which growth can be realized from one position to another. While the individual may have strong convictions on these things, he is not allowed to impose those convictions upon others souls. Neither, indeed, can they become the basis for despising, or looking down upon other brethren, or even taking it upon oneself to sit in judgment upon them. If this passage was strictly honored among believers, a significant number of sectarian walls would fall down

immediately.

WE WILL ALL ACKNOWLEDGE HIM

“For it is written: ‘As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.’” This is a reference to Isaiah 45:23. “I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” It is utterly impossible for this not to take place. God has said it in righteousness and

We will acknowledge our salvation is owing to Him, not to the fact that we did or did not eat meat. We will publically recognize that He is why we have been accepted, not that we have or have not kept certain days.

will not retract it. **Every created personality will bow the knee before Him, and every created tongue will declare that He is surely and unquestionably the Lord.**

There is an appointed day when we will stand before God without regard to whether others have been accepted or not. Together we will bow the knee to the Lord, and together we will confess to God, or “give praise to God.”^{NASB,NRSV} We will not praise one another, but the Lord who purchased us with His blood, and brought us to glory.

We will acknowledge our salvation is owing to Him, not to the fact that we did, or did not, eat meat. We will publically recognize that our faith in Him is why we have been accepted, not that we have, or have not, kept certain days. Salvation is infinitely larger than diets and the keeping of days. Surely there is no doubt about these things.

WE WILL GIVE ACCOUNT FOR OURSELVES

“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” The words “So then” express that the conclusion that follows is required by the statement of verse eleven: i.e., “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” Examining this inspired conclusion confirms that bowing the knee and confessing with the tongue will not be mere routines, or technicalities. The Spirit reveals that confessing He is Lord is not simply saying “You are the Lord!” While that will no doubt be involved, there is much more to it than that.

The Judge is Jesus

Even though our text declares we will give an account of ourselves “to God,” it is to be understood that it will be immediately to Jesus Christ. He is the One God appointed to execute the judgment. As it is written, “Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness **by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead**” (Acts 17:31). Peter also drew attention to this point. “And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that **it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead**” (Acts 10:42).

Jesus Himself affirmed, “For the Father judgeth no man, **but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him**” (John 5:22-23). Again He said, “And hath **given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man**” (John 5:27). Therefore, our regard for His “brethren” (Matt 12:49-50; 25:40; Heb 2:12) will be revealed in the day we “all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Bowing the knee to God, and confessing He is Lord, involves giving an account of ourselves to God. It includes explaining why we handled our

stewardship the way we did. It takes in an accounting for how we regarded the brethren of Jesus. If men took it upon themselves to judge their brethren, they will have to account to God for why they chose to do so. If they looked down upon Christ's brethren because of their imperfect views, they will have to explain to the Lord their reason for doing so.

It only requires a modicum of thought to perceive that giving explanations to God are quite different from giving them to one another. We may very well become adept at giving an

for how they treated other believers. If they condemned those whom God accepted, they will be required to account for it. If they passed over deeds God disapproved, they will have to account for it. If they looked down upon those who were precious to the Lord because of their sensitivity, an assembled universe will hear their attempt to explain such conduct.

I do not believe it is possible to ponder this appointed circumstance and be inconsiderate in our treatment of fellow believers. As soon as we hear

therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Lk 6:36-38).

Christ's Word's Confirmed

The Psalmist put it in these words, *"With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward"* (Psa 18:25,26). James said it this way: *"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment"* (James 2:13).

It simply is not possible to be inconsiderate of the people of God with impunity. The eye of the Lord is ever *"upon the righteous,"* not only to hear their cries, but to defend them (Psa 33:18,19).

Jesus taught us there is a direct correlation between our eternal destiny and how we regard His brethren. Our reaction to them directly relates to our relationship to Him (Matt 25:31-46). **It will not go well for those who take it upon themselves to despise those who are living by faith, or those who are bold enough to sit in judgment upon them.** It is to our eternal advantage to remember His words now. They will assist us in having proper regard for His people. A simple, yet convicting, awareness of this will keep us humble, and remove a judgmental spirit from us.

Since we will ultimately appear before the same judgment seat, and all appear on an equal level, we must dispense with judging one another here. To judge another in the sense of our text assumes one is superior to another, else how could judgment be passed.

account for our persuasions and actions to men. It will be quite a different story, however, when we give an account of ourselves to the Living God.

There is an aphorism that is common among the Jews. "When a man removes out of this world, he gives an account to his Lord, of all that he has done in this world." Zohar in Genesis, fol. 49.3

Giving an account of ourselves to God involves persona as well as behavior, words as well as deeds, determinations as well as objectives. Believers will account

statements of this kind, the spotlight is immediately thrown upon our own persons. It is our persuasions and manners that then become the focus of our attention. We want to bring advantages to our brethren, making every possible allowance for their acceptance.

The Words of Jesus

We will joyfully do this when we recall the words of our Savior: *"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you"*^{NASB} (Matt 7:2). Through the Holy Spirit, Luke gave this account. *"Be ye*

NO MORE!

"¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." Here is the only valid conclusion to the words of the Spirit. It is the only appropriate response to the

sobering words we have heard. **It is the Divine manner to demand an answer from us.** We cannot simply listen to Him, then walk away as though His words had no impact upon us. We see this "way" of the Lord in His response to the patriarch Job. *"Gird up now thy loins like a man;*

for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me" (Job 38:3).

In our text, as in several other places, the Lord does not leave it to us to come up with a response on our own. Rather, He declares what we are to do,

taking away every opportunity for the flesh to insert itself. He will leave us with no alternative, for no other response is acceptable. This is the only conclusion God will receive from us.

yourself the evil person"^{NKJV} (1 Cor 6:11-13).

We will not be able to look to the linguist to resolve the seeming difficulty

This is a judgment that is in order: a firm determination not to make it more difficult for any of our brethren to go to heaven. This will not happen apart from a deliberate judgment – a spiritual determination that leads to a firm resolution to be nothing but an advantage and a help to our brethren.

JUDGING ONE ANOTHER NO MORE

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore." Other versions read, *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another,*"^{NIV} *Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another,*"^{NRSV} *Then let us not be judges of one another any longer,*"^{BBE} and *So don't condemn each other anymore.*"^{NLT}

Since we will ultimately appear before the same judgment seat, and all appear on an equal level, we must dispense with judging one another here. To judge another in the sense of our text assumes one is superior to another, else how could judgment be passed. Yet, one believer is not above another, for all have been accepted by grace through faith, and neither grace nor faith is meritorious, for they both come from God.

The fact that this admonition is given confirms that a propensity to judge is found within us. It is part of the remnant of the flesh that is to be subdued.

What About Judging Those Within?

Elsewhere we are instructed to judge those who are within the fold of Christ, but not those without. On the surface, this appears to contradict our text. It is written, *But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from*

related to these texts. The Romans text admonishes us to judge one another no longer. The Corinthians text demands that certain within the body of Christ **be** judged by us, and done so with determination. The same root Greek word is used in both texts (6D\T). It is a strong word denoting evaluation, and even condemnation. On the one hand, judgment is strictly forbidden. On the other hand, it is strongly urged.

The difference in the texts is found in the surrounding circumstances. In the Corinthian text, the issue was a fornicator within the church. This was not a matter of conscience, but one in which strictly forbidden sin was preferred and being committed by one who wore the name of Christ. The church could not allow this to continue in their fellowship, for it was not allowed by God Himself. God is pledged to condemn those who live in fornication, and that without a single exception. The guilty party was not living *unto the Lord,*" but unto self, and thus was to be judged. Even then, the intent was not to condemn, but to provoke a return to the Lord. Thus, the Corinthians were admonished, *To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (1 Cor 5:50).

In the Roman text, all parties were living unto the Lord. There was no desire to break the law of the Lord, or to indulge the appetites of the flesh. In fact, both parties were maintaining a good conscience before the Lord. Both were living by faith, even though the faith of one was *weak,*" or in an immature state.

God received both because of this, which made it totally wrong for either to be judged as disobedient, or despised as though involved in wilful sin.

Where this type of judgment, forbidden by the Lord, is found, the word of exhortation is strong and without question. *Let us not judge one another anymore.*" There is to be an immediate cessation of such judgment because it contradicts both the nature and the purpose of the Living God.

RESOLVE THIS

... but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." Other versions read, *but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way,*"^{KJV} *but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way,*"^{NASB} *but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another,*"^{NRSV} *Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian's path,*"^{NLT} and *but keep this in mind, that no man is to make it hard for his brother, or give him cause for doubting.*"^{BBE}

Here is an area where determination is required. A conscious decision is to be made, and a resolution to follow through with it. In fact, this is a form of judgment, flowing from discernment. Instead of judging our brethren, we are to *judge this rather.*"^{KJV} I prefer the King James Version here. The same root Greek word is used. The Spirit is making a play on words, showing that judgment itself is not wrong, but the manner in which it is used.

This is a judgment that **is** in order: a firm determination **not** to make it more difficult for any of our brethren to go to heaven. This will not happen apart from a deliberate judgment – a spiritual determination that leads to a firm resolution to be nothing but an advantage and a help to our brethren. Sound preaching and teaching will lead the people of God into this determination. However, where a sectarian approach is taken, the very judgment that is forbidden will actually become more prominent.

This word is particularly addressed to the strong brethren, who are to live

with a godly regard for those who are weak in the faith. Their strength is to be channeled into godly determination not to cause the weaker brethren to stumble. It is not likely that a weaker brother could cast a stumblingblock in the path of the stronger, unless it was to provoke a fleshly response by harsh judgment. The weaker brother is not the focus here.

The idea here is that the stronger can relinquish personal liberties in order to protect the weak.

This will be particularly expounded in verses fourteen through sixteen. I will therefore forgo any further comments on this matter until we cover those verses.

The point here is that a determination

must be made by the stronger not to make it more difficult for the weaker brother by insisting on exercising all personal liberties. Those liberties can be waived for the sake of another. The grace of God will both provoke and enable its recipients to be willing to forfeit activities their conscience allows, in deference to those who do not yet realize those liberties.

CONCLUSION

We have been introduced to the type of freedom for which Christ has made us free. As it is written, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free”* (Gal 5:1). An essential aspect of this marvelous liberty is being able to refrain from doing lawful things, but not compulsory, things.

This is not a self-centered freedom, but one that takes into account the sincerity and spiritual condition of our brethren. We have been freed from sin, and liberated to be righteous. We have been freed from the dominion of Satan, and liberated to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We are free to do what the Lord requires of us. We are free to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. We are no longer slaves to sin, self, or the traditions of men. We are free to relinquish personal preferences in order to assist our brethren to advance in the faith.

Freedom in Christ does not equal release from compulsion. It does provide for compulsion on a higher level: *“The love of Christ constraineth us”* (2 Cor 5:14). There is a principle of motivation that is more lofty than personal pleasure, and self-satisfaction. Jesus lived this principle out for us. As it is written, *“For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me”* (Rom 15:3).

If Jesus did not seek His own satisfaction, but allowed the *“reproaches”* of a fallen race to fall upon Him, will He not strengthen us to bear the infirmities of the weak? When we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, how will anyone be able to explain a refusal to forbear conscientious brethren, when Jesus *“bore*

our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24)?

The Bane of Institutionalism

Within an institutional setting, an acute consciousness of the faith of others is rarely noted. There is a sense in which lifeless religion promotes intensely personal, and even carnal, interests. Life is thus lived in glaring contradiction of our text: *“For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone”*^{NIV} (v 7). The organization is thus allowed to overshadow all other relationships. If the organization is flourishing in the eyes of men, nothing else really matters. If the institutional wheels are well oiled, that is really all that matters. Somehow, in strict accordance with the *“mind of the flesh,”* a *“church”* that is flourishing in the eyes of the world is thought to compensate for inferior spiritual conditions. Little thought is given to individuals within the group being spiritually unstable or weak. Living within the confines of a *“good conscience”* and *“faith unfeigned”* is rarely considered, much less emphasized. No small number of us have been caught in this maelstrom of the flesh, and have paid dearly for it.

The average spiritual fare that is being served up to the people of God is a reproach to the Lord of heaven and earth. It rarely produces the thought of salvation being *“great”* (Heb 2:3), or God being able to *“do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”* (Eph 3:20). Consequently, the brethren of Christ are viewed according to the flesh, instead of according to the Spirit. This is a gigantic spiritual liability within the Western world. One can scarcely find an assembly in which this circumstance is not in pandemic proportions. Appearance has been given greater weight than

substance, a most serious condition.

The Reasoning of the Spirit

The reasoning of the Spirit is in stark contrast to this way of thinking. We do not live to ourselves alone, but *“to the Lord.”* And, if we do not live unto ourselves, much less can we live unto the institution! The institution did not die for us, reconcile us to God, or transform us. Our aim is not to see the institution flourish, but individuals mature in the faith!

I realize this has a strange sound to it, and can be considered in a negative and condemning sense, as though we were to have no regard for the church of our Lord. But this is not the case. By *“institution,”* I mean a religious body that is governed by the principles of this world. It is not driven by the Spirit of God, but by human wisdom and influence. It can function without the *“communion of the Holy Spirit”* (2 Cor 13:14), the tutelage of Jesus (Eph 4:20-21), or fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3).

Turning Away from Lifeless Religion

This is what the Spirit calls a *“form of godliness that denies the power thereof”* (2 Tim 3:5). It is a religious body in which the flesh is not subdued, and the *“new man”* is not nourished and given the preeminence. In such a powerless environ, vice can flourish, and sin erupt to the consternation of those dwelling there. God’s people are admonished to have nothing to do with such environments. In the words of the Spirit, *“from such, turn away”* (2 Tim 3:5b).

Such an aggressive action might very well be interpreted as a violation of our

text. There is, however, a most critical factor that is to be taken into consideration. Our text presumes a godly environment in which individuals are living in all good conscience before the Lord. When this is taking place, godly tolerance and forbearance are to be exercised. Where this is not happening, there is no need to consider this text. There are other matters that must first be addressed. If life is not being lived “unto the Lord,” there is no such thing as “weaker” and “stronger” brethren. Both of those words presume living “unto the Lord.” But where such a life is not found, there is only carnality and Divine

rejection. **God does not receive a person whose life fails to take Him into account. There is no Divine acceptance where life is not devoted to God.** The pledge of Jesus is, “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it” (Luke 17:33). To live in strictly self interests is to be on the broad road that leads to destruction.

When we were baptized into Christ, we were ushered into a spiritual realm where death to sin was experienced, and life toward God (Rom 6:11). Our members, or means of expression, are now to be yielded unto God as those who are

alive from the dead (Rom 6:13). I do not believe it is possible to support the supposition that God will receive anyone who fails to do this.

Having said that, it is possible to live unto the Lord, heartily and conscientiously, while having a deficient spiritual perspective. It is also possible to so live and not have sufficient regard for less-advanced brethren. This passage has alerted us to these conditions, moving us to be considerate of our brethren. Personal care is to be taken not to cause personal offences, whether in inconsideration or in harsh judgment.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 44



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version; NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

THE LAW OF LOVE

14:14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. ²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. ²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin. ^{NKJV} (Romans 14:14-23)

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit has reminded us that we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He alone, therefore, is the Lord of the conscience – the One toward whom our lives are to be directed. Through the Apostle, the Holy Spirit will now show us that knowing the truth intellectually is not enough. Further, the acme of knowledge is not knowing “the will of God for my life,” as many imagine.

Being able to distinguish right and wrong is not an end of itself. That is, one has not reached maturity in Jesus simply because good and evil can be accurately identified and distinguished from one another. Spiritual life demands that we handle the truth – that we know how to use it. While it is imperative that our senses be “*exercised to discern both good and evil*” (Heb 5:14), this text will

confirm we are stewards of that discernment – to use it for the glory of God and the edification of our brethren.

However, the Spirit will not leave the subject of right and wrong up in the air, as though every person had a right to a private opinion of the matters under consideration. He is not defending the rights of the individual, but the sanctity of

OUTLINE

- < NOTHING IS UNCLEAN OF ITSELF (14:14)
- < CONSIDERING YOUR BROTHER (14:15)
- < THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM (14:16-17)
- < ACCEPTABLE AND APPROVED (14:18)
- < THINGS TO PURSUE (14:19)
- < DESTROYING THE WORKS OF GOD (14:20a)
- < EVERYTHING IS PURE . . . BUT (14:20b)
- < SOMETHING GOOD THAT IS OFTEN NEGLECTED (14:21)
- < HAVE IT TO YOURSELF! (14:22)
- < DOUBTING AND CONDEMNATION (14:23)

the conscience. He will show us that there is a solid and reasonable view of things that are clean and unclean. These are issues that have to do with the ceremonial law, not the Law as inscribed on the tables of stone. At this point, some discussion should be given to the ceremonial law, as distinguished from the Ten Commandments, and the Divine elaboration upon them.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments are referred to as *"the words of the covenant"* which God made with Israel. They were written on the tables of stone (Ex 34:28). These commandments were a moral image of God, providing an index to His nature, particularly as compared with those to whom the Law was given. This Law was given *"that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God"* (Rom 3:19). It precisely defined sin, showing its moral essence, or the kernel of its substance. As it is written, *"for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Rom 3:20).

While, in Christ, we are not under this Law as a covenant, we are given no liberty to break it. Conscience or not, no believer in Christ is allowed to live in violation of these commandments. Disobedience consistently constitutes sin, whether the individual thinks he is right

or not.

What About the Sabbath Day?

An extended commentary

In the discussion of "days," some attention should be given to the Sabbath day. There is considerable confusion on this subject. It is good that we have an understanding that will assist us in living with a pure conscience before the Lord. Among the Christian community, there is no question about the applicability of nine of the ten commandments.

- ' *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain."*
- ' *"Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not kill."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not steal."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."*
- ' *"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's."* (Ex 20:3-17)

On these, there is general unanimity among professed believers. They remain in effect, with no license being given for them to be broken.

It is the fourth commandment that has produced much controversy among men. *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."* The Divine elaboration is, *"Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it"* (Ex 20:8-11).

Sabbatarians, or those who feel this commandment is still binding upon men, charge there is no provision for failing to keep the Sabbath, or seventh day, holy. This day – the seventh day – they affirm, is not to be viewed as food and days are considered in our text.

First, note the distinctiveness of the fourth commandment. All other commandments, with the exception of the fifth one, are prohibitions. They outline things that are NOT to be done. Only the fifth commandment also deals with something that is to be done. That commandment is also the only one that is attended with a promise. Special reference is made to it in an Apostolic admonition to children (Eph 6:1-3).

The Scriptures particularly tell us we are to allow no man to bind Sabbath days upon us (Col 2:16). The fourth chapter of Hebrews speaks of a higher and more glorious Sabbath into which believers now enter. The text reads, *"For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world'"* (Heb 4:3). The remainder of that chapter elaborates on the subject, associating these words with the day on which God "rested" after creation (4:4-6).

What it boils down to is this. The Jews kept the seventh day, and that with a great deal of reluctance, for their hearts were far from God. Those in Christ, on the other hand, enter into a perpetual Sabbath that greatly delights the Lord, and them as well. They have entered into the real Sabbath (and the word "rest" in Hebrews 4:3 is the word for Sabbath). Their rest consists of ceasing to depend on their own works for their salvation (Heb 4:10).

We are under no obligation to keep the seventh day holy. By virtue of our faith, we have entered into God's own "rest," which the Jews were forbidden to enter (Psa 95:11; Heb 3:11; 4:3,5). By trusting in Christ, we are keeping the Sabbath in the highest and most holy sense.

The Ten Commandments are a reflection of the image of God. They are good, and holy, and just, as Romans 7 declares (verses 12-14). But they are NOT the basis for determining whether a person is righteous or not. That is determined by personal faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:13; Phil 3:9). And remember, being righteous or holy before the Lord is everything. If we are not righteous, there is no hope of being forever with the Lord. The Gospel announces that God's own righteousness is available to men through faith and in Christ Jesus (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-22).

As for the Sabbath day, Israel, who received the commandment, never really entered into God's rest, or Sabbath—even though they kept the Sabbath day. That is precisely the point of Hebrews 4:1-11. God did not merely intend for men to set aside a day to rest from their labors. His intention was for them to "enter" into His rest. By that, the Spirit means God's desire is for men to enter into His joy and satisfaction in what He has achieved. His accomplishments reach their apex in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That is where God

Himself finds the greatest satisfaction (Isa 53:11-12). It is, in the truest sense of the word, where He "rests."

There is a greater rest that was typified by the Law's Sabbath day, but never fulfilled by it. That is the rest of faith, and is discussed at length in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. A parallel is made between the fourth commandment Sabbath and the rest of faith. The Sabbath day was bound upon Israel because their hearts were hard. They would have forgotten God altogether if He did not demand they remember Him on that day, dedicating it exclusively to Him. In Christ, however, our nature is changed, so that we actually know and delight in knowing the Lord. Now every day becomes a Sabbath so far as sanctifying the Lord in our memory.

This does not mean keeping the Sabbath is wrong. We are not better for keeping it, either. You have not sinned in attending church Saturday evening. That, of course, is not to be equated with keeping the Sabbath day holy.

It is never right to demand that everyone keep the Sabbath day—even though no individual is condemned for choosing to do so. Colossians 2:16 forbids us to judge one another on this matter. The recollection of God as the Creator of the universe is wonderful—but it is certainly not the highest or most glorifying view of our God. Intimate fellowship with Him by faith is more wonderful. That is why Scripture affirms, "We which believe do enter into rest" (Heb 4:3). The word used in that text is "sabbaton," or Sabbath. It is a higher and more extensive rest which overshadows, but does not obliterate, the former Sabbath. The Sabbath day commandment has not been obviated by a different commandment, but by a greater rest. It is something like the light of the sun removing the light of the moon. That rest is nothing less than satisfaction with the atoning death of Christ. When we enter into that rest, we cease depending on our own accomplishments, resting, as it were, from them.

When comparing the New and Old covenants, our approach must be correct. The New Covenant is a different kind of covenant, not at all like the Old Covenant. God said it this way, "I will make a new covenant. . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt" (Heb 8:8-9, NIV). The latter part of that chapter confirms this is the covenant Jesus is presently mediating. It is not a covenant of DOING, like the Old Covenant was. In fact, the Spirit makes this parallel in commenting on the nature of the New Covenant. "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says: Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down) or Who will descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is

near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom 10:5-10).

This is a foundational teaching. The Old Covenant put the entire responsibility in the hands of man. Believing, or faith, are not mentioned a single time in all of the Law—including all of the commandments, all of the directions, and all of the Levitical law. It was a system of doing. In the New Covenant, God does the foundational work, then calls upon us to believe it. He then accepts us upon the basis of our faith, and works with us to fulfill His will (Phil 2:12-13). The entire New Covenant is summarized in a few words. Jeremiah foretold it in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Spirit later gave it again in Hebrews 8:8-13. It is again summarized in Hebrews 10:16-17. In all of these references what the Lord does is the total emphasis. There are no "ifs," and there are no commands. If you will read those texts, you will find the following affirmations. (1) God will put His laws into the mind. (2) He will write his laws on the heart. (3) He will be God to the people. (4) The people will be His people. (5) Every one in the covenant will know Him, or be familiar and in love with Him. (6) He will not remember their sins any more. All of those things are promises—promises to be believed. They can only be possessed in Christ. Further, our faith will compel us to do anything and everything He commands us. Other scriptures that affirm the nature of the New Covenant, and how radically it differs from the Old Covenant are as follows. Jeremiah 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:10.

The "First day of the week" is frequently mentioned in Scripture, and always with a note of approval. This is specifically said to be the time when Jesus rose from the dead. "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week . . ." (Mark 16:9). This is also the day on which Jesus, following His resurrection, first appeared to His disciples. "Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:19). It is also the day on which He appeared the second time to His disciples. John refers to it as eight days following the first appearance, which would put it on the first day of the week. "And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!'" (John 20:26).

In addition, the day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week. This feast took place 50 days after the high Sabbath of the paschal week (Lev 23:15-16). The Sabbath from which the count was made

occurred the day after Jesus was crucified, and was the reason why His body was taken down from the cross (John 19:31; Mark 15:42). It was also the Sabbath honored by the women who came to anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:54-56). Fifty days from that Sabbath day was the first day of the week—the Day of Pentecost, on which the Spirit was poured forth.

We are categorically told that the early disciples came together to break bread "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). When instructing the Corinthians on setting aside special monies for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul specified that it be done on "the first day of the week" (1 Cor 16:2). As the church progressed, from Ignatius (A.D. 30-107) onwards, we "have a complete chain of evidence that The Lord's Day became the regular Christian name for the first day of the week."

Suffice it to say, there is solid ground for perceiving as "the Lord's Day" the first day of the week. This was the day on which natural light was created (Gen 1:3-5). It was the day on which Christ Jesus arose from the dead (Mark 16:9). His two recorded appearances to His disciples occurred on this day (John 20:19,26). The day of Pentecost took place on this day (Lev 23:15-16), and the early church is said to have gathered together on the "first day of the week" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). This is not simply another day! The events that took place on the first day of the week are conducive to godly recollections that sanctify the soul.

THE CEREMONIAL LAW

The ceremonial law is distinguished from the moral law, or ten commandments. This law consisted of certain types and shadows of the salvation that would be effected by the Lord Jesus Christ. At the heart of the ceremonial law were the various sacrifices. Seven types of sacrifices were offered under the Law. (1) Sin—Lev 4, (2) guilt (or "trespass"^{KJV})—Lev 5, (3) burnt—Deut 33, (4) peace—Ex 24; Lev 7, (5) grain (or meat^{KJV})—Lev 2 and 6, (6) heave and wave—Ex 25, 30,35, and (7) the red heifer—Num 19.

In association with these sacrifices, the ceremonial law also distinguished between clean and unclean animals (Lev 11:1-47; Deut 14:3-21). These distinctions were not intended to be permanent, but served to train the conscience of the people to make distinctions regarding what was to be offered unto the Lord. The distinctions themselves were shadows and types, and did not reflect the inherent quality of the

various forms of life.

In a sterling example of the incompatibility of the ceremonies of the Law with new life in Christ Jesus, the Spirit forbids believers to alter their lives because of the pressure of those who still honor the ceremonial law. *“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.”* These are all perfunctory distinctions – things having to do with the ceremonial law. The reason for this prohibition is quite clear. *“These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”* Col 2:16-17. ^{NIV} **Since the Object, Jesus Christ, toward which these ceremonies and conventions pointed**

has come, they are no longer binding upon the people of God. Types, however valid and meaningful they may be, must give way to the Person of Jesus Christ. There is a superiority in the Lord Jesus Christ that does not require continued allegiance to the introductory types and shadows of the Old Covenant – distinctions in meats, drinks, and days.

All of this provides a background for our text. **The Spirit is not referring to varied human opinions that are driven by mere social custom, and have nothing to do with living unto the Lord.** This teaching is not dealing with nominal opinionated views, but with issues of faith: i.e., with how a person lives unto the Lord. Nothing must be allowed to constrain the individual to live

in contradiction of his conscience. No laws can be imposed upon believers that are not integral to the New Covenant itself.

Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is not a system in which the regulation of human conduct is preeminent. Having been reconciled to God, and given the Spirit of adoption, believers operate according to a higher principle. They have received a new heart and a new spirit, and are no longer hostile toward the Living God (Ezek 36:25). Their life tends toward God, not away from Him. They have a preference for the Lord, not the world. His law is written upon their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 10:16). Now we are *“taught”* within the context of Divine fellowship, not in shadows and types (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 2:27).

NOTHING IS UNCLEAN OF ITSELF

^{14:14} ***I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*** Now, Paul rises above the controversy itself. As with the wings of an eagle, he soars into the domain of the heavenlies, showing us a higher view of the subject. He will confirm why the one who cannot eat all meats is actually the weaker brother, although he is unreservedly accepted by God in Christ Jesus. The persuasion Paul now embraces is the result of a change of mind. Once a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; Phil 3:5), he had lived within *“the strictest sect”* of the Jews (Acts 26:5). If there were Jews who still had scruples about the distinction of meats under the Law, Paul would have them know he was more than casually acquainted with such a persuasion. Convictions, however, can be changed, and more precise and accurate views can be embraced in all good conscience. The strength of his argument will assist brethren in being forbearing of one another until a greater degree of spiritual maturity is realized.

KNOWING AND BEING CONVINCED

“I know and am convinced . . .

*“Other versions read, “I know and am persuaded,”^{KJV} “I am fully convinced,”^{NIV} “I know and am confident,”^{DRA} “I have known, and am persuaded,”^{YLT} and “I know and am perfectly sure.”^{NLT} **Knowing has to do with the mind. Being convinced, or persuaded, has to do with the heart.** Knowing takes hold of the fact. Persuasion sees the relevancy of the fact. Knowing is the realization of the truth. Persuasion is understanding what*

Many of the religious views of our day have neither knowledge nor conviction in them. They are not the result of apprehending the truth, and have little to do with a compelling conviction. Nevertheless, these two qualities are the only valid reasons for embracing a particular view of Kingdom behavior. The traditions of men, however valid they may appear, cannot produce these essential lineaments

Knowing takes hold of the fact. Persuasion sees the relevancy of the fact. Knowing is the realization of the truth. Persuasion is understanding what to do with it. Knowledge and conviction are the products of faith. They are the result of believing the Lord, and they impact upon human conduct.

to do with it. **Knowledge and conviction are the products of faith.** They are the result of believing the Lord, and they impact upon human conduct. They exert great power upon us.

BY THE LORD JESUS

“ . . . by the Lord Jesus . . . ” In this case, knowledge and conviction, or persuasion, are not the mere products of thought. They are not the result of an

independent reasoning process, or logical approach to the truth of God. **They are the result of exposure to “the Lord Jesus.”** It is not that the Savior specifically declared what Paul has embraced. Rather, it is that the Gospel that was revealed to Him, together with the exposition of Divine intent, led him to this conclusion. **Faith will bring us to certain conclusions.**

It is quite possible that Jesus told

with the Gospel of Christ.

To summarize the meaning of these words, because of Paul’s fellowship with Christ, he has been brought to the following persuasion. Jesus sanctions what he is saying, and it is in full accord with the life that is in Him.

NOTHING UNCLEAN OF ITSELF
“ . . . that there is nothing unclean of itself . . . ” Other versions

It is not that Jesus teaches us the necessity of putting off the old man and putting on the new man. Rather, His matchless teaching empowers us to get the work done. It produces a knowledge and persuasion that moves us to bring our lives into accord with the Gospel of Christ.

Paul what had also been revealed to Peter (Acts 10:15). However, even then, Peter was brought to the conclusion that “*I should not call any man common or unclean*” (Acts 10:28). Yet, I do not understand this revelation to be of the same detailed sort as that Paul received concerning the Lord’s table (1 Cor 11:23-30). Also, Jesus no doubt taught Paul what He had taught the twelve concerning the inability of what enters into a man to defile him (Mark 7:18-19).

I gather, therefore, that the teaching of Jesus had shed light on matters regarding the ceremonial law. Such teaching is spoken of in this way: “*But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Eph 4:20-24). It is not that Jesus teaches us the necessity of putting off the old man and putting on the new man. **Rather, His matchless teaching empowers us to get the work done.** It produces a knowledge and persuasion that moves us to bring our lives into accord

read, “*that no food is unclean in itself,*”^{NIV} and “*that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat.*”^{NLT}

No food, whether it be meat or herbs, is inherently unclean or unholy. Some men, however, are fond of leading us to believe this is not so. Particularly in our day, when men are bowing down to “science,” and to those of corrupted religious persuasions, views are being embraced that sharply clash with this text. Under the Law, certain meats were said to be “unclean” (Lev 11:4-8). One might conclude that Divine prohibition suggested that a certain inferiority or contamination existed in those foods – that His direction was given in the interest of maintaining good health. In fact, some do teach this is the case. Our text, however, affirms that nothing could be further from the truth. No food is of itself impure and unsuitable for consumption: i.e., “*there is nothing unclean of itself.*”

Here, the word “*nothing*” refers to foods, not to sinful acts, such as fornication or idolatry.

The Eating of Blood

Immediately, the issue of eating blood might come to mind. This was

forbidden before the Law, by the Law, and after the Law. **Before the Law,** God said to Noah, “*But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat*” (Gen 9:4). **By the Law,** God said through Moses, “*For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood*” (Lev 11:11-21). **After the Law** the Apostles declared, “*That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well*” (Acts 15:29).

Blood was never intended to be a “*food*.” It is not in that classification. There is a sanctity associated with blood because it is the Divinely appointed means of sustaining life. It also points to the means by which we were reconciled to God, and put at peace with Him – the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13; Col 1:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19). The point of this prohibition is that men must never come to a point where life itself is despised.

As to meats that have been offered to idols being forbidden, **it is the awareness of that association that prohibits their consumption.** That is why those who purchased meats were not to ask about the meat they procured. “*Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake; for the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness*” (1 Cor 10:25-26).

Food Is Sanctified

Having said all of that, the cleansing of all meats (Mark 7:19), does not mean they are consumed without some regard for their origin. We do not eat like animals, but as those who know it is God who “*giveth us richly all things to enjoy*” (1 Tim 6:17). Even though nothing is “*unclean of itself,*” yet it is to be received with thanksgiving, and sanctified by prayer. Thus it is written, “*For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer*” (1 Tim 4:4-5). Other versions read, “*because it is consecrated by the word of God and*

prayer,"^{NIV} "it is made holy by the word of God and by prayer,"^{BEB} and "the word of God and prayer make it holy."^{NJB}

Thanksgiving and Sanctification

Even though "there is nothing unclean of itself," it is not automatically holy. Rather, it is made holy, or made suitable for consumption, when it is "received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim 4:3). It is "sanctified by the Word of God," which has affirmed "there is nothing unclean of itself." It is also "sanctified by the Word" that was spoken by Jesus Himself. "... that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?" (Mark 7:18-19). Additionally, it is "sanctified by the Word of God," which affirms, "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats" (1 Cor 6:13).

Even the common activity of eating is thus related to the Living God. No aspect of life is to be lived independently of Him.

Sanctified By Prayer

Even though God has formally sanctioned the consumption of all foods, yet the element of prayer is to be remembered. While men may be quite casual about this matter, God is not. Food is made acceptable by "prayer" as well as the "Word of God." Even the Israelites were reminded to relate their food to the blessing of the Lord. "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee" (Deut 8:10). Our matchless Lord did not distribute food to the multitude until He had looked up into heaven and blessed and broke the bread (Matt 14:19). He did the same when He broke the seven loaves and the fishes (Matt 15:36). Even when He instituted the Lord's supper, He blessed the bread before giving it to His disciples (Matt 26:26). When Paul took food in the

presence of those with whom he was sailing, "he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all" (Acts 27:35).

Thus, the acceptance of all foods is to be seen as more than a mere legal provision. There is the matter of it being

corrupted conscience! The just "shall live by faith," and the conscience is an aspect of that faith. Even though the conscience is technically incorrect, it may not be violated. An inaccurate conscience causes faith to be "weak," or juvenile. Yet, even though the individual is "weak in the faith," he cannot eat without regard to that

Thus, if the weaker brother is convinced God does not allow him to eat meat, his persuasion makes the meat unlawful for him. It does not constitute the meat itself unclean, for others can eat of it without sinning against God. But he cannot, and must not, do so.

sanctified by our thankful reception of it and prayers. I have frequently seen believers who thought themselves so free that they could eat food without giving thanks to God. Such food is not sanctified for human consumption, even though it has been cleansed by the word of Jesus.

BUT TO HIM . . .

"... but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." Other versions read, "but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean,"^{KJV} "but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean,"^{NASB} "But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean,"^{NIV} and "but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean."^{NRSV}

Here we come to grips with the extreme sensitivity that is related to spiritual life. **While nothing is of itself unclean, it can become unclean because of the condition and the perception of the individual.** Nothing is so pure that it cannot be defiled by a

faith. No believer is free to violate their conscience. Such violation drives a wedge between the individual and God, causing them to live without regard to Him.

The rule of the Kingdom is, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Again it is written, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Col 3:17). This cannot be done if the weaker brother conducts himself contrary to his conscience. If a person does what he is convinced God has forbidden, he has, in a very real sense, sinned against God. He has refused to live by faith, and has allowed himself to live independently of his personal convictions Godward.

Thus, if the weaker brother is convinced God does not allow him to eat meat, his persuasion makes the meat unlawful for him. It does not constitute the meat itself unclean, for others can eat of it without sinning against God. But he cannot, and must not, do so.

CONSIDERING OUR BROTHER

"¹⁵ Yet if your brother is || grieved because of your food, you || are no longer walking in love. Do not

The Law of Love provides a spiritual environment in which progress can be made toward glory--by Given O. Blakely

destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Here the Spirit elaborates on a former word: *“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself”* (verse 7). We have been *“added”* to Christ’s church (Acts 2:47), placed in Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:18), and are *“are members one of another”* (Eph 4:25). Although we are individuals, with individual faith and life, we are not independent of the other members of Christ’s body. The liberty that we enjoy in Christ Jesus is personal and extensive. Yet, it is to be tempered with loving consideration for our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

Something to Remember

It must be remembered that this passage is dealing with those who are conscientiously living for and unto the Lord. Regardless of the strength of their faith, or the breadth of their spiritual understanding, the purpose of their lives is to please the Lord.

It must be remembered that this passage is dealing with those who are conscientiously living for and unto the Lord. Regardless of the strength of their faith, or the breadth of their spiritual understanding, the purpose of their lives is to please the Lord. If they do not eat meat, or if they observe certain days, they do so *“to the Lord”* (verse 6).

This text has nothing whatsoever to do with carnal scruples or fleshly opinions and preferences. I say this because of the relative rarity of finding individuals in our society whose sole purpose is to please the Lord. Individuals who do not live for the Lord are characterized as *“those who are defiled and unbelieving,”* to whom *“nothing is pure,”* whose *“mind and conscience are defiled”* (1:15). Our text does not suggest we alter our conduct because of the persuasions of such people. Even if they are religious people, if they are factious and condemning, we will not shape our lives to please them. Thus Paul writes,

“And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal 2:4-5). His consideration was for the genuinely sincere believers at Galatia, not factious *“false brethren”* who were imported to cause trouble and dissension among the saints.

Our text will focus on those who are actually living by faith, for no other individuals are acceptable to God. If it is argued that we cannot misrepresent God before the heathen, it must be

remembered that those who are living by faith have no mind to do such a thing. **If living wholeheartedly for the Lord causes offense among the ungodly and profane, we are not to be concerned about it.** Of course, such living is not to be taken for granted.

A GRIEVED BROTHER

“Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food.” Other versions read, *“For if because of food your brother is hurt,”*^{NASB} *“If your brother is distressed because of what you eat,”*^{NIV} *“If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat,”*^{NRSV} *“And indeed, if through any kind of food you are causing offense to a brother,”*^{NJB} and *“And if because of food your brother is troubled.”*^{BBE}

Care must be taken to view this text in the Spirit, and not in the flesh. Two things may be seen here. **First**, the weaker brother is made to view the stronger one as a transgressor, for he is doing something his weakened conscience

is persuaded is wrong. **Second**, the weaker brother senses that he is being despised rather than loved. This is what causes the grief or injury. The offending party is thus **perceived** as having no regard for either God or man.

The word *“grieved”* is an especially strong expression. It means to cause distress, pain, and sorrow. This is more than a mere emotion, or fleshly reaction. It is pain in the heart, caused by what is perceived as disobedience and a lack of concern. This verse postulates that great sorrow is caused to the believer when those who profess Christ’s name live in a manner that chaffs against the other believer’s conscience.

But there is another sense in which the weaker brother is grieved. The grief involves more than an attitude toward the offending brother. **The idea is that the weaker one, seeing his brother do what he conceives to be wrong, would himself engage in the same deed, thereby violating his conscience and bringing condemning sorrow upon himself.** This, we will find, is the primary sense of the text. The weaker brother is made to alter his conduct because of what he sees his brother do, even though it violates his conscience to do so.

A Scriptural Example

An example of this type of conduct is mentioned by Paul. It regards the demeanor of Peter. The occasion was a gathering in Antioch. When first coming there, Peter had eaten with the Gentiles with no reservations whatsoever. Yet, when certain people came from James, he separated himself from the Gentiles, fearing those who practiced circumcision. As a result of his conduct, other Jews joined him in withdrawing from the Gentiles. Barnabas himself was even carried away by the hypocrisy. The record reads like this. *“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy”* (Gal 2:11-13).

Peter's conduct suggested the Gospel was more for the Jews than for the Gentiles, and that circumcision was of great significance in Christ Jesus. Subtle pressure would be put upon the Gentiles to be circumcised, even though the Gospel of Christ had no such requirement, nor gave any hint of necessity. Paul therefore sharply rebuked Peter, saying, "*You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?*"^{NIV} (Gal; 2:14). Thus, although the Gentiles were serving God with a pure conscience, without being circumcised, they would be forced to subscribe to requirements their conscience did not allow. Thus, they would cease to live by faith, and begin to live according to lifeless tradition – a manner of life that God does not receive.

By the same token, the Jewish believers, who were actually the weaker ones, would be led to believe their penchant for circumcision was acceptable. They would also tend to believe they were superior, and had advanced far beyond their Gentile brethren.

WALKING IN LOVE

"...you are no longer walking in love." Other versions read, "*now walkest thou not charitably,*"^{KJV} "*you are no longer walking according to love,*"^{NASB} "*you are no longer acting in love,*"^{NIV} and "*you are no longer being guided by love.*"^{NJB}

Under the Law, the "second" commandment was, "*thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Lev 19:18; Mark 12:31; Rom 13:9). In Christ Jesus, the matter of brotherly love, or love for the household of faith, takes the precedence. "*For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*" (1 John 3:11). This love is not a second requirement, but is merged together with the faith that saves the soul. "*And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us*"^{NIV} (1 John 3:23).

This love is not an emotion, but a frame of mind and heart. It constrains one to consider others who are in Christ,

producing a determination to cast no stumbling block in their path, or make it more difficult for them to live unto the Lord.

The individual who has no regard for the people of God, who are living solely for the Lord, has abruptly ceased to live in love. That is a polite way of saying they no longer love the brethren, for they have disregarded them in a determination to do what they have been freed to do – regardless of the impact it has upon those whose faith is weak. It simply is not possible to love the people of God while trampling upon the convictions to which their faith has brought them.

DESTROYING SOMEONE

"... Do not destroy with your

It simply is not possible to love the people of God while trampling upon the convictions to which their faith has brought them.

food the one for whom Christ died."

Other versions read, "*Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died,*"^{NIV} "*Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died,*"^{NRSV} and "*Do not let your food be destruction to him for whom Christ went into death.*"^{BBE}

The very idea of destroying someone for whom Christ died is most arresting! To "destroy" means to put out of the way altogether – to thrust out of the way that leads to life. It means to bring them to nothing, and cause them to cease to exist. That is the meaning of the word "destroy."

There are theologies that deny such a thing is possible. Those embracing such doctrines would point to the promise

that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38-39). They would remind us that God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24-25), and make us to stand (Rom 14:4). No one, they would declare, is able to pluck us out of Jesus' hand, much less the hand of His Father (John 10:28-29). And, indeed, these statements are all true. However, all of them deal with influences external to our own persons – to opposing forces that seek to wrest us from the hands of our Lord.

Our text deals with quite another matter. Here, the conscience of the weakened believer is thrust into the background, and the individual ceases to live by faith – an absolute requisite for justification. At the precise point a person ceases to live by faith, salvation is no longer effective, and grace is no longer available. Is it not written, "*for by grace are you saved THROUGH FAITH*" (Eph 5:8). **If it is true that we hold all spiritual benefits by faith, then it is also true that they are forfeited when faith no longer dictates our walk.** Thus, the person is "destroyed," for they are attempting to live in the energy of the natural man. In violation of their own conscience, they have altered their conduct because of the persuasions of someone else. Even if those persuasions were technically correct, and did not condemn the person holding them, yet it was altogether improper for them to be applied to a person who did not discern them. **Spiritual life must be maintained by personal identity with God through faith, NOT persuasions of others.**

This Must Be Seen

The teaching of this section must be properly seen. This is not an appeal to fleshly sentimentality that seeks to cater to the carnal opinions of our brethren. The point that has been made throughout this Epistle is that spiritual life is maintained by personal faith. The righteousness of God is received and maintained by faith (1:17). **At no point can spiritual life be sustained independently of faith.** What is more, if we shape our lives in violation of our own conscience, we have actually ceased to live by faith, for faith

works hand-in-hand with our conscience. **When the conscience is violated,**

destruction begins to occur within the human spirit. In all of its greatness,

salvation makes no provision to ignore the conscience.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

“¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” It is possible to do something good, or acceptable, yet have it yield bad results. This condition is owing to the complex moral arena that we occupy. The Spirit will now elevate our thinking in order that we may be encouraged to live toward the Lord in godly consideration of our brethren.

DO NOT LET IS HAPPEN

“Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil.” We neither live nor die *“to ourselves.”* We are a spectacle to heavenly hosts (1 Cor 4:9), perceived by peers (Matt 5:16), and the target of a host of dark and wicked spirits (Eph 6:12). These are all active personalities, registering an impact upon the sons of men. It is this circumstance that allows for good to be evil spoken of.

This is not the *“good works”* to which we have been ordained, that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10). God has made no provision for the cessation of such activity. This *“good”* is an aspect of our liberty. It refers to conduct that is offered conscientiously to the Lord, yet is not compulsory. It is involved in the saying, *“Unto the pure all things are pure”* (Tit 1:15).

Elsewhere the Spirit speaks of these *“good,”* but optional matters. *“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”* (1 Cor 6:12). This context also has to do with meats, and the liberty to eat all manner of food. **However, being free to eat foods, does not mean we are obligated to do so.** It is not proper to allow our fleshly appetites to become our lords, to the disregard of our brethren. Some things are not *“expedient,”* ^{KJV} *“profitable,”* ^{NASB}

“helpful,” ^{NKJV} or *“beneficial.”* ^{NIV} Personal advantage is not always the best advantage. This is confirmed by our blessed Lord, who sheathed His own advantage, that He might bring eternal benefit to us.

Again it is written, *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”* (1 Cor 10:23). One of the primary purposes of spiritual life is to bring edification and strength to our brethren – to give them the advantage

faith of the stronger brother is thus perceived as a deliberate ignoring of the Law of God.

Something to Consider

Although I have touched upon this already, it will bear some repetition. Should the weaker brother demand that the stronger adhere to his diminished vision, adherence to such a demand cannot be justified. In such a case, the stronger should give place *“by subjection, no, not for an hour”* (Gal 2:5). Thus Paul refused to circumcise Titus (Gal 2:3).

Our text is dealing with sensitive, yet uninformed brethren, who alter their conduct because of what they behold. It is not speaking of those who demand that men alter their conduct to suit their own unenlightened demands.

in life. This is a fundamental consideration. As a group we are admonished, *“Let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Cor 14:26). As individuals we are exhorted, *“Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification”* (Rom 15:2).

In this text, *“good”* is *“spoken of as evil”* when it is perceived as a transgression of the Law, even though freedom has been granted to do it. If the *“good,”* or acceptable thing, that we do moves us to despise our weaker brethren, it becomes *“evil,”* for it no longer has the power to edify.

For the person who perceives that God no longer distinguishes between foods, the consequent liberty experienced is also *“good.”* Yet, if that liberty becomes a snare to weaker brethren, it will be spoken of as *“evil.”* What is allowed by the

He would not allow weaker brethren to make harsh demands upon them, and neither should we.

Our text is dealing with sensitive, yet uninformed brethren, who alter their conduct because of what they behold. It is not speaking of those who demand that men alter their conduct to suit their own unenlightened demands.

WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT

“... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.” Other versions read, *“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking,”* ^{NASB} *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking,”* ^{NIV} and *“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink”* ^{NRSV} This is a fundamental Kingdom distinction.

This is the first, and only,

time the word “Kingdom” appears in the book of Romans. It is found nowhere else in this book, in any translation, or in the Greek text. Objectively, the word itself means a domain or rule. “*The Kingdom of God*” refers to the domain where God is working – fulfilling His purpose. It is a realm where His will is being done, and His “*eternal purpose*” is being brought to culmination. Here, in His Kingdom, is where Divine attributes are brought to bear upon a specific objective – one determined by God Himself.

Righteousness from God. The Gospel reveals a righteousness that comes from God, and is appropriated by faith (1:17).

Power and Godhead revealed. Through creation, God has revealed His own power and Divinity, or Godhead (1:19-20).

Judgment of the Gentile world. Because of their thanklessness, and refusal to retain Him in their knowledge, God delivered the Gentiles over to corrupt living and a reprobate mind (1:24,26,28).

Coming judgment. God will judge

The Law. Having died to the Law, God has delivered us from its condemning power in order that we might be married to Christ (7:4-6).

Freed from condemnation. God does not condemn those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).

Good is being worked. God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (8:28).

All of God. From beginning to end, salvation is of the Lord. Foreknowledge, determination, calling, justification, and glorification, are all His work, and His alone (8:29-30).

Security. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (8:35-39).

Divine choice. Divine choice is the dominant choice in the execution of His will (9:7-13).

Divine will. The experience of both mercy and hardening are traceable to the will of God (9:15-33).

Revelation. God revealed Himself to those who were not seeking for Him (10:20).

A remnant. There yet remains a remnant according to the election of grace (11:6).

Grafting. God is able to graft Israel into their own tree once again (11:23). God grafted believing Gentiles into a tree from which they did not come (11:24).

Turning ungodliness. The Deliverer will yet turn away ungodliness from Jacob (11:26-27).

Power. There is no power that does not come from God (13:1).

Standing. God is able to make a believer stand (14:4).

“The Kingdom of God” refers to the domain where God is working – fulfilling His purpose. It is a realm where His will is being done, and His “eternal purpose” is being brought to culmination. Here, in His Kingdom, is where Divine attributes are brought to bear upon a specific objective – one determined by God Himself.

Subjectively, “*the Kingdom of God*” refers to the manner in which God is being served. It describes a domain where the constituents are in willing subjection to the Lord, and in whom He is working.

Until this verse, the reign of the Almighty – His Kingdom – has been referred to in various ways.

The Apostleship. Paul credits His Apostleship to His own call and separation to the Gospel (1:1).

The Gospel of Christ. The Gospel is declared to be what God promised through the prophets, and fulfilled in the person of Christ (1:2-3).

The resurrection of Christ. In His resurrection, God declared Jesus to be His Son with power (1:4).

Divine resources. Grace and peace are said to be from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7).

The powerful Gospel. The Gospel of Christ is God’s own power, in order to effect salvation (1:16).

the secrets of men through Jesus Christ (2:16).

Divine assessment. God has assessed the entire world as unrighteous and without any goodness (3:10-18).

Justification. God justifies men freely by His grace, and through Jesus Christ (3:24).

Propitiation. God has placed Jesus before the world as a covering for sin, and a means of deliverance from condemnation (3:25-26).

Righteousness. God accounts men to be righteous upon the basis of their faith in Christ (4:4-7,24-25).

Peace. We now have peace with God because He has justified us through faith (5:1).

A new Man. Through one Man, Jesus Christ, God has delivered men from the curse incurred from Adam (5:12-19).

Eternal life. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (6:23).

While the words “*Kingdom of God*” have not appeared prior to this verse, we have read of its meticulous execution among the sons of men. **The cause of all things has been traced back to God Himself.** As it is written, “*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*” (11:36). Ultimately, all will stand before Him to give an account of themselves, “*for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*” (14:10). It is God’s Kingdom! He is the Ruler in both heaven and earth, and His rule cannot be successfully contested. **If men do not receive His beneficent rule, they will receive His**

unrelenting judgment.

THE POINT

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink.” The Divine rule is not evidenced in dietary restrictions or indulgences. Such things do not require faith, grace, or the strengthening of the Holy Spirit. While God does have a right to tell us what to eat and what to drink, that is not what He does. That did not require the death and resurrection of His Son. It does not require His enthronement or the return of Jesus to receive us to Himself.

If the kingdom of God consisted of eating and drinking, it would be a sin to fast. But it does not consist of such things, for they are all transitory. They do not blend with the eternal order, and thus cannot be the basis of God’s fellowship with us or support of us.

It is what we ARE that is the issue with God, and meats and drinks cannot change or improve what we are. As it is written, *“But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse”* (1 Cor 8:8). God’s people should be wise enough to apply this principle to a host of things that have been the cause of division among those professing the name of Christ Jesus.

WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS

“ . . . but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Other versions read, *“For the kingdom of God is . . . a matter . . . of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*^{NIV} Here are the essential elements of the Kingdom of God – and they are all gifts from Him. Where these are present, the God of heaven is at work, blessing, upholding, and strengthening. Where these are not found, God is not working all things together for the good of the individual or people.

“The Kingdom of God” is not a synonym for the church, as some suppose. It is larger than the church, and is not dependent upon the church. God’s Kingdom is the domain in which He executes His will, and fulfills His determined purpose. Unlike the kingdoms

of this world, it is a dominion that cannot be shaken or moved. As it is written, *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire”* (Heb 12:28-29). Rather than the church being the Kingdom, it is comprised of individuals who have *“received”* the Kingdom. They are the ones who are being profited and helped by the reign and working of the Almighty God.

Now, what may we expect to find

“righteousness” of our text is *“imputed”* righteousness (4:11,22-24; James 2:23). It takes place when we are *“made the righteousness of God in Him (Christ)”* (2 Cor 5:21). This is *“the gift of righteousness”* that is realized through faith (5:17; Phil 3:9).

When men are brought into Divine favor, and *“accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6), it does impact upon their demeanor. From an experiential point of view, this is being born again, or made a partaker of the Divine nature. There are acts of obedience related to this experience, such as

Now, what may we expect to find where the Lord is working among people? What qualities or traits will be found in those who have received this Kingdom? Will they be noted for their diet? Will participation in or abstinence from meats and drinks be the telling mark found upon them?

where the Lord is working among people? What qualities or traits will be found in those who have received this Kingdom? Will they be noted for their diet? Will participation in or abstinence from meats and drinks be the telling mark found upon them? What will evidence that God is among them, working in them *“both to will and to do of His own good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). That is the issue before us.

Righteousness

While *“righteousness”* certainly involves behavior, it is much larger than behavior. Right conduct springs from righteousness, it is not the origin of it. As it is written, *“every one that doeth righteousness IS born of Him”* (1 John 2:29). And again, *“he that doeth righteousness IS righteous, even as He is righteous”* (1 John 3:7). **Doing righteousness, therefore, is the evidence of Divine acceptance, not the cause of it.**

God has *“MADE”* us righteous, *“For as by one man’s (Adam) disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One (Jesus) shall many be made righteous”* (5:19). The

repentance, the confession of Christ, and baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:37; Rom 6:3-4). There are also certain evidences of this righteousness that faith will produce, like the love of the brethren, living by every word of God, and abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 John 3:14; Matt 4:4; 1 Pet 2:11). However, it is the experience of being made righteous that is the point of our text. God’s righteousness imputed to us is the fountain from which the *“fruits of righteousness”* are generated in us (Phil 1:11).

Where a *“righteous man”* is found (James 5:16), the Kingdom of God is being made known. There is a place where God is *“working . . . that which is well pleasing in His sight”* (Heb 13:21). The Kingdom of God *“is a matter of righteousness!”*

Peace

As with righteousness, *“peace”* comes from God. It is not the product of human activity. It cannot be produced by man, or be generated by nature. Jesus declared He would give His own peace to His disciples. *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart*

be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Not only does the believer receive "the righteousness of God," he also receives the peace of Jesus. **This is a peace that settles the heart, enabling the believer to live in a hostile realm without being shaken and distraught.** Even though troublesome times may be around the trusting ones, yet peace keeps their "hearts and minds" (Phil 4:7).

A person without "the peace of God" (Col 3:15) will not himself be peaceable. Those who "make peace," or are "peacemakers" (James 3:18; Matt 5:9) are those who have received "peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:21; Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phile 3; 2 John 3; Rev 1:4). **The presence of that peace is evidence of the Kingdom of God.** It is another proof that He is "above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:6).

Joy in the Holy Spirit

This is a rational joy – one that proceeds from spiritual insight and understanding. It is called "joy in the Holy Spirit" because it is the result of His marvelous work. Thus we read of "joy" being part of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22). It is precisely called "the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 1:6). God Himself "fills" us with "all joy... through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13).

In the world, joy is often the result of being forced out of one's right mind: i.e., through drunkenness, pleasure, or some other unnatural means of exhilaration. Within the Christian community, there are even some who see the joy of our text as something forcibly brought upon believers, so that they are pushed from rationality into a state of ecstasy. Thus, in recent years, we have heard of "laughing in the Holy Ghost."

God's people must come away from such crude and carnal views. The "joy" of our text has an object. It is not a mere fleshly experience. We "joy in God" (Rom 5:11), "joy in the God of our salvation" (Hab 3:18), and "joy in the strength" of the Almighty (Psa 21:1). We "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 4:4), "rejoice in God's salvation" (1 Sam 2:1), and "rejoice in

Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3). We "rejoice in hope" (Rom 5:2; 12:12), "rejoice in light," or spiritual illumination (John 5:35), and "rejoice in the truth" (1 Cor 13:6).

This joy, which is an essential aspect of the Kingdom of God, is related to thought, not surface or fleshly feelings. **The Holy Spirit shows us the truth, opening it like a flowering blossom to our hearts, and it causes joy.** The Holy Spirit does not bring us joy by throwing it upon us like a mantel. Rather, He effectively teaches us of "all things,"

in themselves" (John 17:13). **Anything related to the Kingdom of God finds its apex in the Person of Jesus Christ.** He, then, becomes the Means through which the benefit is received.

Who would dare to say Jesus had a surface or giddy joy that was wholly unrelated to thought, sobriety, and understanding?

How Does this Compare?

And, how do these wonderful benefits compare with "works of

Who would dare to say Jesus had a surface or giddy joy that was wholly unrelated to thought, sobriety, and understanding?

thereby enabling us to "abide" in Christ (1 John 2:27). He also "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," thereby producing great joy (Rom 8:16). He leads us forth in the mortification of the deeds of the body (Rom 13-14), thereby bringing great joy to us. He plays a vital role in our washing, justification, and sanctification (1 Cor 6:11), which are also causes of great joy. What marvelous joy is related to the experience of being changed "from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of our God" (2 Cor 3:18).

See, this is spiritually intelligent joy. It is related to thought, perception, insight, and understanding. It is a supernatural joy because it requires Divine activity. Wherever this joy is found, the Kingdom of God is found.

Christ's Own Joy

Jesus told His disciples the joy they would receive was actually His own. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). In His intercessory prayer for those who would believe on Him, He prayed, "And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled

righteousness which we have done" (Tit 3:5). How do they compare with the visible church, which some insist is the Kingdom of God? How do they compare with an earthly government in the flesh, over which Jesus will supposedly preside?

In keeping with our text, how does eating or not eating meat compare with "righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit?" Eating or not eating meat is something men do. Righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are unfading realities that God gives. How does haggling over days compare with the possession of this holy triad?

If men seek to make an issue of something, let it be over whether or not righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are possessed. If the Kingdom of God is a matter of these things, then we must not rest until we possess them! No person who is deficient in these things is where he can be in Christ Jesus. Salvation provides for all of these, and that in abundance. Furthermore, the recognized possession of them assists the believer in bringing other things into proper perspective. Such a person will not be hasty to judge or despise his brethren. He will value them too highly to do that.

ACCEPTABLE AND APPROVED

“¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.” Remember, the issue of this text has been Divine acceptance, and the acceptance of one another. God does not receive us because of what we have done, but because of our faith in Christ. Thus, we are to receive one another upon the same basis, even if, for a time, we have differing views of such things as meat, drink, and days.

SERVING CHRIST IN THESE THINGS

Here is a most arresting expression. Not only are righteousness,

the *servants* of righteousness . . . yield your members *servants* to righteousness unto holiness . . . But now being made free from sin, and become *servants* to God” (6:6; 7:6,25; 6:18,19,22).

Newness of life ushers us into Divine employment. Salvation is not only deliverance from something, it is translation into something. As it is written, “*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated* (Conveyed ^{NKJV}, or transferred ^{NASB}) *us into the kingdom of His dear Son*” (Col 1:13). Our presence in “*the Kingdom*” is

judgment, this perception is an area of great deficiency in the professing church. There is a reason for this. **God’s people need to be reminded of what they have received in Christ Jesus.** They need to be told they have received the righteousness of God – yea, have been made the righteousness of God in Christ. The joyful sound of being given peace and joy in Christ should frequently fall upon their ears. If believers do not hear much of these things, it will be unusually difficult to comprehend them, for “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*”^{NASB} (10:17).

Serving Christ

We are said to “*serve Christ*” because we have been “*joined*” to Him, and have thus become members of His body. The church, or the redeemed of the Lord, is called “*His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*”^{NKJV} (Eph 1:23). The “*redeemed of the Lord*” (Psa 107:2) are the ones through whom Jesus expresses Himself. They are the actual extension of His Person, being made “*partakers of Christ*” (Heb 3:14). His Spirit dwells within them, constituting them legitimate sons and workers (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6). He is their reason for living, and they have entered into His labors. They not only “*suffer with Him*” (Rom 8:17), they also “*live with Him*” (Rom 6:8) and are “*joint heirs*” with Him (Rom 8:17). Their life is no longer their own, for they have been brought into a fuller and more profitable existence. With Paul they confess from the heart, “*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*”^{NKJV} (Gal 2:20). **That is serving Christ!**

Productivity

Spiritual productivity is directly related to “*these things*”: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. In is “*in*” them that Christ is served. If these are not found in the individual, Christ is not being served.

ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

It is imperative that the individual be accepted by God. Nothing is of any

When serving God becomes a burden, and allegiance is given to His will in a begrudging manner, the work becomes unacceptable.

peace, and joy, within us, we serve Christ “*IN these things*.” **Because they are all perceived to some degree by faith, they also become an environment in which spiritual life is expressed.**

There is a spiritual surrounding, or environment, in which Christ is to be served. That environ is “*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*.” These are not simply possessions, they are resources. The strong implication of this verse is that those who judge or despise their brethren are not living within the influence of these gifts. They are, in fact, living in the flesh, which type of living is soundly condemned by the Lord (8:5-13).

Serving Christ

One of the objectives of our salvation is service, or being used by God. This has already been declared in Romans. “. . . henceforth we should not **serve** sin . . . that we should **serve** in newness of spirit . . . So then with the mind I myself **serve** the law of God . . . Being then made free from sin, ye became

one of activity. Here, we become “*laborers together with God*” (1 Cor 3:9).

This service is not simply doing things. It is not mindless activity, or zealously fulfilling an institutional agenda. **It is more than simply doing what we are told to do.** Valid service takes place “*in these things: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*.” **The more dominant they are, the more pleasing the service is to God.** When serving God becomes a burden, and allegiance is given to His will in a begrudging manner, the work becomes unacceptable. But where these glorious possessions are found and flourishing, the individual will confess with the Psalmist and the Lord Jesus Himself, “*I delight to do thy will, O my God*” (Psa 40:8; Heb 10:6-9).

By saying “*in these things*,” at least two things are meant. **First**, the individual actually possesses righteousness, peace, and joy. **Second**, there is a perception of them that fuels the service of the believer. In my

favorable consequence if God does not receive us. Here, Divine acceptance is viewed from a different perspective. Elsewhere we are reminded God has *“made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6). Too, God is declared to be unashamed to be called the God of those who are **strangers and pilgrims in the earth** (Heb 11:16). He also affirms He will receive those who **come out from among the devil’s crowd, and touch not the unclean thing** (2 Cor 6:14-18). He will honor those who serve His Son (John 12:26).

Another Dimension

Here we see another dimension of Divine acceptance. It is not disassociated from the activity of the saved ones. Serving Christ is not simply an organizational activity. It is not uncommon for people to equate church or institutional activity with serving Jesus. Thus, everyone from those who sweep floors to those who preach the Gospel in foreign fields are said to “serve the Lord.” And, indeed, this may very well be the case.

Our text affirms that the acceptance of the PERSON is based upon serving Christ IN righteousness, peace, and the joy of the Holy Spirit. It is the acceptance of the person that validates the work, and the acceptance of the person hinges upon his acceptance of the gifts of God!

The word “accepted” includes the idea of being well pleasing to God, a circumstance for which the people of God are to earnestly strive (Col 1:10; Phil 4:18; Thess 4:1; 2 Tim 2:4; Heb 13:16). Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are to serving Christ, what salt was to the sacrifices of old (Lev 2:13). They are spiritual condiments, given to us by God

Himself, that make us acceptable to Him.

Sin has so contaminated the human race that Divine graces must be given to us before we can be received by God and bring satisfaction and joy to Him.

Sin has so contaminated the human race that Divine graces must be given to us before we can be received by God and bring satisfaction and joy to Him. Nature cannot yield such benefits

Nature cannot yield such benefits. Further, our attitude towards meats and days does not make us acceptable to God. The gifts must come from God. This is a difficult, but necessary, lesson to be learned by all believers. Christ cannot be served apart from righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Nor, indeed, can men be accepted by God apart from them. God is greatly to be praised for granting these graces to us!

APPROVED OF MEN

This is a general observation, and is not intended to leave us with the impression that the world will love us. Jesus affirmed the world hates the people of God. *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:19).

Our text does not say that men will love and prefer us, but that they will “approve” of us. There are at least four valid views of this challenging expression.

First, redeemed men will “approve”

of us, acknowledging these qualities have brought comfort and encouragement to them.

Second, even those who do not themselves possess righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, approve of

others who do possess them. They know very well that such people bring advantages to every aspect of legitimate society.

Third, those who outwardly oppose the truth, choosing to wallow in iniquity and alienation, know in their conscience that these are comely qualities. Thus, they can be reduced to shame, having nothing evil to say of the people of God.

Fourth, kings, governors, and political officials, powers that have been ordained by God, approve of those who serve Christ in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. They know that such individuals pose no threat to society, but are rather a good and wholesome influence among men. Within the context of the thirteenth chapter, this has particular relevance.

It should be obvious that spiritual life is not simplistic. There is a certain complexity about it that demands Divine involvement. Without this involvement, we cannot serve Christ, be accepted by God, or approved by men.

THINGS TO PURSUE

⁴⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. There are implications in the truth of God that require action on our part. Nothing about salvation lends itself

to being passive and indifferent. Wherever these dreadful characteristics are found among professing believers, the Spirit has been quenched, the gifts of God rejected, and the Son of God spurned. Much of the religious counseling and professional

diagnosis of our day could be eliminated by simply acknowledging this truth. That acknowledgment would provoke an earnest effort to do what our text exhorts.

THEREFORE

This word is based upon the declaration of verses seventeen and eighteen. Because the Kingdom of God consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, and because only the person who serves God *“in these things is accepted by God and approved of men,”* the following admonition is required. It is the only acceptable conclusion to what has been affirmed. Truth does have a compelling quality about it – a sort of moral force that pressures one to either yield to the Lord or become obstinate against Him. There will be no neutral ground. As Jesus said, *“He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad”* (Matt 12:30). And again, *“For he that is*

PURSUE CERTAIN THINGS

In Christ, there are things from which we must flee, or take swift flight. Among them are fornication (1 Cor 6:18), idolatry (1 Cor 10:14), the love of money (1 Tim 6:10-11), and youthful lusts (2 Tim 2:22). Not only are we to deny, or reject, such things, we are to aggressively run from them as Joseph did from Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39:12), and Lot did from Sodom (Gen 19:20).

There are other things that are to be pursued, or *“followed after.”*^{KJV} These are things that require us to *“make every effort to do.”*^{NIV} It is as though they were moving things. **They have been given by God, and they are, as it were, gradually**

Things Which Make for Peace

Just as surely as there are things that tend to agitate and cause disruption, there are things that contribute to peace. Other versions render this expression *“leads to peace,”*^{NIV} and *“tend to peace.”*^{DARBY} If there are those among us who have weak faith, and are unable to see with spiritual clarity, we are admonished to receive such without subjecting them to *“doubtful disputations.”* Their deficiencies can be resolved within a spiritually peaceful climate. They can best grow and *“go on unto perfection”* where the winds of controversy are not blowing.

If the weaker among us are tempted to stir up controversy with their juvenile questions, let them also pursue things that *“make for peace.”* Let them consider that those who do not see things their way are not necessarily the worse for it. More mature views will be cultured if the smoke of argument does not fill our assemblies. Let us follow hard after things that encourage and promote peace, for *“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (James 3:18). Many a soul has been beat down by the hammer of debate, and swept off their feet by the current of contention. Let us engage in a fervent quest for things that cause peace to dominate, ruling both the heart and the mind.

Things That Make for Edification

In this world, there are influences and approaches that tear down, as well as those that build up. A conscious choice must be made by all believers to pursue things that make for *“the building up of one another.”*^{NASB} There is no position that is worth tearing down a tender spirit, breaking a bruised reed, or quenching a smoking flax.

There are things that tend to edify. It simply is their nature to build up faith, encourage struggling hearts, and promote hearty spiritual growth. After all, edification is one of the fundamental activities in which we are to be engaged. We are to speak in order *“that the church may receive edifying”* (1 Cor 14:5). We are even admonished to *“seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”* In fact, this is the very way in which we are to be *“zealous of spiritual gifts”* (1 Cor 14:12). In our assemblies, *“Let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Cor 14:26). All

It is as though they were moving things. They have been given by God, and they are, as it were, gradually returning to Him. If we desire to have them, we must run quickly after them, ourselves intent upon obtaining the promised land. They are moving at such a pace that unless we run after them, they will elude us, or drift from us.

not against us is on our part” (Mark 9:40).

The remarkable level of indifference that exists in the nominal church is staggering. It is not from God, and nothing God has given in Christ Jesus contributes to such a state. The presence of this condition confirms that the truth of the Gospel has not registered upon the heart and conscience of multitudes that profess faith. That circumstance, however, is not an innocent one. Beneath it lies a fundamental attachment to this present evil world. That is what has yielded spiritual ignorance and indifference. Even the spiritual novice is deeply devoted to God, even though the breadth of understanding is very small. Where such devotion is lacking, there is much digging and dunging that is to be done – an abundance of convicting and encouraging ministry. Unless this is done, and a favorable response is produced, there is no hope of the person being saved (Luke 13:7-9). While that may appear to be inordinately strong, it is well to hear it with faith, and proceed accordingly.

returning to Him. If we desire to have them, we must run quickly after them, ourselves intent upon obtaining the promised land. They are moving at such a pace that unless we run after them, they will elude us, or drift from us.

From another perspective, we are in a world that is drifting away from glory. The current of time and circumstance pull away from the Lord, not toward Him. If we do not eagerly pursue the things of the Kingdom, a vast chasm will form between us and them. It is possible for that chasm to become so broad, it simply cannot be crossed. Thus we are warned, *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away”* (Heb 2:1).

The failure of professed *Christians* to engage in the pursuit of proper things accounts for the weakened condition of the church – particularly that of the Western world. It is a most serious circumstance that requires diligence and boldness among all who proclaim the Word of the Lord.

of Christ's gifts to the church have been given "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). No corrupt, or defiled, speech is to erupt from our mouths. Rather, we are to communicate with "that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph 4:29). Believers are not to allow themselves to be pulled into "fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith" (1 Tim 1:4). The lack of profitability is like a pool of poison.

We do not come together to merely be distracted from the challenges of life. We are not seeking to be entertained, or to find solace in light-hearted laughter and humor. Edification is what we need. We come to receive things that contribute to spiritual growth, maturity of understanding, and stability of character. Faith requires these things.

It Is Personal

Notice the personal nature of this text. While edification surely takes place when the church comes together, our text says, "things wherewith **one may edify**

another." Other versions read "building up of one another,"^{NASB} "mutual edification,"^{NIV} and "mutual upbuilding,"^{NRSV}

Every believer has the capacity to contribute to the spiritual growth of another believer. It is inherent in the new man. They also have the fleshly capacity to make it more difficult for their brethren to "grow up into Christ in all things" (Eph 4:15). Each one is to engage in the eager pursuit of things that leave the people of God stronger, more encouraged, and more determined to dwell forever in the courts of the Lord.

DESTROYING THE WORKS OF GOD

^{20a} **Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.** Other versions read, "For meat destroy not the work of God,"^{KJV} "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food,"^{NASB} "Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God,"^{ASV} "Do not let the work of God come to nothing on account of food,"^{BBE} "for the sake of victuals cast not down the work of God,"^{YLT} "Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat,"^{NLT} and "Do not wreck God's work for the sake of food."^{NJB} The seriousness of the text is so apparent it takes a calloused spirit and a hard heart to fail to see it!

THE WORK OF GOD

In our text, "the work of God" is the believer himself. We are, after all, "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph 2:10). In this case, "the work of God" is in a tender and fragile state. It is like a bruised reed or a smoking flax that can easily be broken or quenched. This is a young life that requires tender and loving care, not harsh demands and a diet of controversy and argumentation.

Here is a text that contrasts sharply with certain strains of theology. Some would strongly object to the very notion that the work of God could be destroyed. To them, such a thought is a reproach to God. However, it is God who said this, so He cannot be reproached for saying it. It is man's view that is flawed,

not the Word of the King!

How do you suppose it will go on the day of judgment for those who destroyed the work of God?

What of those who tore down what God worked, or overthrew Divine workings? What will be the lot of those who caused the work of God to come to nothing, tearing apart what He started, and wrecking what God has done?

ADVERSE AFFECTATION

How do you suppose it will go on the day of judgment for those who destroyed the work of God? What of those who tore down what God worked, or overthrew Divine workings? What will be the lot of those who caused the work of God to come to nothing, tearing apart what He started, and wrecking what God has done?

Do you imagine that such a thing is not possible? Is your theology so stilted that it moves you to oppose the word of the Lord – words that have come from His own mouth? There are teachers who "overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim 2:16). There are words that are successful in "subverting the hearers" (2 Tim 2:14). There are also those who "by good words

and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom 16:18). There is the possibility of God's people being "deceived with vain words" (Eph 5:6).

Jesus spoke of those who "take away the key of knowledge," who did not enter the Kingdom themselves, and "hindered" those who wanted to enter (Luke 11:52). He also declared a dreadful judgment upon those who caused even the least of those believing in Him to stumble (Matt 18:6).

The church at Galatia began in the faith and in the Spirit, yet were "bewitched" by professed believers into "not obeying the truth" (Gal 3:1). There was a false prophetess in Thyatira that seduced Christ's servants "to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (Rev 2:20).

LIABILITY IN JUVENILITY

There is a certain liability in spiritual juvenility. The Divine workings that have begun in believers can be abruptly terminated by the inappropriate influence of professing Christians. If this were not the case, there would be no warnings against deception, and no exhortations to go on to perfection. Those who are infant-like in the faith are like "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph 4:14). Care must be taken not to suffocate them with opinion, or stifle their life with inconsideration.

The Corinthians

There is a similar case in the book of First Corinthians that will serve to clarify this matter. Within the church at Corinth there were legitimate believers who did not know there was only one God. Having come from an idolatrous background, they were still convinced a very real god was related to the idols they formerly worshiped. If they ate meat that was offered to this idol, they thought of it as meat offered to that idol, and thus their conscience became defiled with the notions of a competing god. Here is what the Spirit says. "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but

to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols. **So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ**"^{NIV} (1 Cor 8:9-12). It is scarcely possible for something to be more serious. Destroying a brother, sinning against a brother, wounding the weak conscience of a brother, and sinning against Christ! **Do not think for a moment that your actions are inconsequential!**

THE SENSE OF DESTRUCTION

The destruction of reference does not mean the offender has actually taken the life from the weaker brother. Rather, he has set in motion a process that will eventually thrust the person from God. When the conscience is defiled, the person cannot approach to God, which approach is imperative to the sustaining of spiritual life. You cannot "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need" if you do not come to the Lord (Heb 4:16).

To eat with a consciousness of an idol, or thinking about the idol, is giving homage to it. It is a form of worship that results from thinking the idol is a legitimate God.

DESTROYING FOR MEAT

A legitimate liberty of one can become the occasion of destruction of another. Here is a person who knows nothing is unclean of itself. He has been brought to see that all food can be thankfully and lawfully eaten. He can do it "unto the Lord," knowing that he, and his eating, are accepted by God.

However, there is this weaker brother, who is convinced God still does not allow all meats to be eaten. His view is technically wrong, yet he is zealously seeking to serve God by refraining from eating meats. Out of a good, yet immature, conscience, he eats only "herbs," or vegetables. How should the one that eats meat conduct himself before this person? Should he insist upon his own way, claiming he is free to do what he knows is of itself proper and right?

one God, the Father, from Whom all things came and for Whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. **But not everyone knows this.** Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled"^{NIV} (1 Cor 8:5-8).

To eat with a consciousness of an idol, or thinking about the idol, is giving homage to it. It is a form of worship that results from thinking the idol is a legitimate God. Only growth in Christ will destroy this erroneous view.

How, then, is the stronger brother to conduct himself before such an one? "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block

A "defiled conscience" is the result of going against what faith has led you to embrace. When that faith is "weak," or in its incipient phase, it will not allow the believer to engage in uncertain things, or issues that are not clear to the understanding. If men do not honor that conscience, the working of God will be destroyed, for a defiled conscience will drive them out from the sustaining presence of the Lord.

A weaker brother, then, is "destroyed" when he is led by a stronger brother to do things his weaker faith does not allow. Thus, he ceases to live by his own faith (Hab 2:4), feeble though it may be. However, life cannot be sustained independently of faith, for "the just shall live BY faith." Although rarely declared, among the churches, this is an extremely important facet of truth.

EVERYTHING IS PURE . . . BUT

"^{20b} **All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.**" Other versions

The Law of Love provides a spiritual environment in which progress can be made toward glory--by Given O. Blakely

read, *“All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense,”*^{NASB} *“All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble,”*^{NIV} *“Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat,”*^{NRSV} and *“Remember, there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves. But it is wrong to eat anything if it makes another person stumble.”*^{NLT}

Here is a word addressed to the stronger brother – the one who knows no food is inherently unclean. By faith – mature faith – he knows he is at liberty to eat *“all things.”* Yet, what is of itself right becomes wrong if it yields effects that contradict God’s purpose. Remember, *“the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith”*^{NKJV} (1 Tim 1:5). Our love for God, the truth of God, and the people of God, is not a mere emotion. It flows out from a three-fold well. (1) A pure heart, (2) a good conscience, and (3) sincere, or unfeigned, faith. Precious are the benefits of this well!

While the conduct of the stronger brother does not erode his own faith, corrupt his own conscience, or defile his own heart, it does have an adverse impact upon the weaker brother. All three areas become corrupted when the weaker brother sees the stronger one eating, for example, meat offered to idols. The weaker is thus emboldened to do what his heart does not allow. His conscience, although it cries out to abstain, is ignored. His faith, already weak, is thrown down to the ground, as he is moved to act in compliance with another brother’s views, and not his own.

These results make the otherwise allowed eating of meat *“evil.”* It is *“wrong”* because of what it produced, not because of the nature of eating meat, or because of the meat itself. If what I do causes wrong results in others, it is *“evil”* for me to do it. This is not something for discussion, but something to be embraced on an intensely personal level.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

It is man’s tendency do make laws for his brethren, seeking to impose rules

that God has not imposed upon them. So it is with this very text. It is not intended to make us hyper sensitive about what others think. This is not speaking of people who hold private opinions, but do not do so unto the Lord. There are people who may have a personal dislike for the way you do things. While you should not go out of your way to offend them, you are not obliged to change your conduct to suite their fleshly fancies. This is a word concerning conscientious worshipers of God, whose senses have not yet been exercised to discern good and evil (Heb 5:14). There is a great difference between altering your conduct because of what a hypocritical Pharisee thinks, and doing so because of the thoughts of a tender Mary Magdelene.

It is possible to greatly displease God by seeking to please men. As it is written, *“For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ”*^{NKJV} (Gal 1:10). Our text is not urging us to be *“men pleasers,”* something strictly forbidden by God (Eph 6:6; Col 3:22). Rather, it is urging us to be considerate of sensitive, yet undiscerning brethren.

SOMETHING GOOD THAT IS OFTEN NEGLECTED

“²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.” Having identified conduct that is *“evil,”* the Spirit now points us to what is *“good.”* In both cases, the determination depends not upon the substance ingested, or the propriety of the deed itself. It is the effect of the activity, or lack of the activity, that makes it *“good.”* It is good that believers consider the effects of what do. What kind of fruit grows on the tree of their words and deeds?

IT IS GOOD

“It is good neither to eat meat (‘flesh’ KJV) nor drink wine . . .” Just as there are no foods that are inherently evil, and thus to be avoided, so there are none that are constitutionally good, and thus to be ingested. Also, indulging in eating and drinking is not of itself good or evil.

However, what comes from it can surely establish whether it is good or evil.

bind upon him! God does not obligate us to do everything that is of itself right.

Just as there are no foods that are inherently evil, and thus to be avoided, so there are none that are constitutionally good, and thus to be ingested. Also, indulging in eating and drinking is not of itself good or evil.

Again, this is word addressed to the stronger brother. The Spirit does **not** say to the weaker brother, *“It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine ,”* for he is not yet able to receive that word. What his conscience forbids, God does not

A Word About Meat

The word rendered *“meat”* is a more precise word than used in verses 15,17, and 20. There, the word can translated *“food,”* for it stands for the

foods in general, including all manner of meats as distinguished by the Law. Certain meats, termed “*unclean*,” were forbidden to all Israelites. Certain fruits, such as the grape, and raisins derived from it, were forbidden to the Nazarites, whose sole purpose was to serve the Lord (Num 6:3). They could eat “*nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk*” (Num 6:4). Thus, prior to this verse, the word “*meat*,” or “*food*,” referred primarily to the distinctions of food outlined in the Law of Moses, and secondarily to meats related to idols.

Here, the word focuses on flesh in particular, which appears to take idolatry into primary consideration, as in the eighth chapter of First Corinthians.

A Word About Wine

I am quite sure you have heard younger disciples boldly proclaim there is nothing wrong with occasionally imbibing strong drink. And, indeed, the Word of God does not declare such a thing is sinful – **unless** you are speaking to a Nazarite (Num 6:2-3), or a priest that is going into

been established that such can be indulged without sin, yet another matter is to be considered. Even though my freedom in Christ allows such things, here is a case where it is “*good*” **not** to indulge in them. **There is, then, a higher principle than law. All things cannot be determined as good and evil simply by viewing them as lawful or unlawful.** As we will see, we do not live by a lifeless code. There are times when judgment is required. In this case, that judgment relates to the effect of our indulgence upon a weaker brother.

ANYTHING BY WHICH . . .

“ . . . *nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*” Other versions read, “*or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall,*”^{NIV} “*any other activity which might cause a brother to fall away, or to be scandalised, or to weaken,*”^{NJB} and “*or to do anything which might be a cause of trouble to your brother.*”^{BBE}

Now we make a quantum leap from the consideration of food and drink

Earlier (Acts 18:18), Paul had shaved his head after taking a vow. But this time it was different. He took four Jewish men who were reaching the culmination of their vow. They were required to spend seven days in the Temple. Paul paid the Temple fee for them, and waited until a sacrifice had been offered for each one of them (Acts 21:24-26). This is something that would have altogether unacceptable to many.

In this case, the activity would have been ignoring the Jewish ritual, and going on with life in the freedom that is in Christ Jesus. Paul had been formally released from the necessity of Jewish vows, shaving his head, paying Temple fees, and subscribing to a sacrifice for the ones making a vow. He was under no obligation to do such things. Yet, he did them in the interest of showing young Jewish converts that he was not a mere reactionary against Jewish tradition. He refused to do anything that would cause them to stumble, be offended, or made weak.

Jesus Pays the Temple Tax

A similar occasion arose when those who received the temple tax said to Peter, “*Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?*”^{NKJV} This tribute money was established under the Law as a means of supporting the upkeep of the tabernacle, and later, the temple (Ex 30:13; 38:26). Without any hesitation, Peter answered that Jesus did, in fact, pay such taxes. Later, when he came into the house, Jesus spoke first to him saying, “*What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers.*” When Peter answered, “*From strangers.*” Jesus said to him, “*Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you*”^{NKJV} (Matt 17:24-27).

Jesus had pointed out to Peter that, being the Son of God, and The disciples being His followers, they were exempt from the Temple tax, even as the Levites. Yet, because not paying the tax would “*offend*” the collectors, He miraculously supplied the tax for Himself and Peter. Thus, He lived out the principle that is taught in our text.

Now we make a quantum leap from the consideration of food and drink to “anything,” or “any other activity,” that could possibly cause our brother to stumble, be offended in his conscience, or become weaker still in his faith.

the tabernacle (Lev 10:9). Samson’s parents were warned not to allow him to drink any strong drink (Judges 13:4-7). The angel of the Lord even forbade the soon-to-be-mother of Samson to drink any strong drink (Judges 13:14). Solomon said it was out of order for kings and princes to drink strong drink (Prov 31:4). The parents of John the Baptist were forbidden to allow him to drink any strong drink (Luke 1:15).

After every view of “*meat*” and “*wine*” has been heard, and even if it has

to “*anything*,” or “*any other activity*,” that could possibly cause our brother to stumble, be offended in his conscience, or become weaker still in his faith. It is “*good*” to refrain from any activity that would lead a weaker brother to a wrong conclusion, therefore defiling his conscience, and moving him to live other than by faith.

The Case of Paul

Here is the principle that constrained Paul to shave his head and observe the Jewish custom of taking a temple vow, in order that Jewish believers not be offended.

A SELFLESS SPIRIT

In Christ, we receive new hearts and a new spirit that constrains us to live

above purely self interest. It seems to me that enough cannot be said on this subject in a day when self and rights have been

exalted above the Author of life. A society bent upon pleasure knows little of the things affirmed in this text.

HAVE IT TO YOURSELF!

“²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.” Now the Spirit enunciates a principle of life that will bring great advantage to the whole body of Christ. He will show there is room for private persuasions. Yet, those persuasions can be kept to ourselves without making any effort to bind them upon those who cannot perceive their validity. I will tell you that very few have seen this truth. It is like a precious golden nugget that is hidden deep in the earth. It requires considerable faith and effort to take hold of it.

DO YOU HAVE FAITH?

“Do you have faith?” Other versions read, *“So whatever you believe about these things,”*^{NIV} and *“You may have the faith to believe that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing.”*^{NLT}

This does not refer to the faith that is common among all of God’s children – the *“one faith”* (Eph 4:5), or *“common faith”* (Tit 1:4). That faith is certainly not to be kept within ones own self, for it is *“the word of faith”* that we preach, or declare (Rom 10:8). Paul was noted for *“preaching the faith”* that he once sought to destroy (Gal 1:23). Jude urged that we *“earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). Such faith centers in Jesus Christ and what He has done in our behalf and for us. It is the faith that comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). This is not the faith that is to be kept to ourselves.

The *“faith”* that is mentioned here refers to personal persuasions that relate to our liberty in Christ Jesus. It is the same thing mentioned in verse 5: *“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be **fully persuaded** in his own mind.”* Faith is a persuasion, and can apply to personal insights and convictions that are not common among believers. The heart can be convinced of

the acceptability of our actions.

In Christ, you have firm persuasions that are of great assistance to you – valid persuasions that are given and honored by the Living God. Do you have such convictions? Here is the Word of the Lord for you.

HAVE IT TO YOURSELF

When given the opportunity to represent the King before the sons of men – and particularly those who are in Christ Jesus – why should we parade before them our own private conclusions about life in Christ Jesus.

“Have it to yourself before God!” Other versions read, *“have as your own conviction before God,”*^{NASB} and *“keep between yourself and God.”*^{NIV} Is it not enough to hold such matters in confidence before the Lord, with whom you have to do? Are we so presumptuous as to think our persuasions are intended to be for everyone or that they are the standard of the Kingdom of God?

When it comes to putting persuasions before men, why not confine ourselves to what was preached and written by the Apostles and Prophets, whom God appointed as the foundations of the church (Eph 2:20). When given the opportunity to represent the King before the sons of men – and particularly those who are in Christ Jesus – why should we parade before them our own private conclusions about life in Christ Jesus. Where in all of Scripture is there a precedent for such a procedure?

If there are things that you can do with all liberty before the Lord, yet which could lead others to a wrong conclusion, or lead them to live in contradiction of their

own conscience, *“have it to yourself.”* Hold it as private property. Why should your private persuasions cause disturbance in the church, or be the cause of confusion to another believer?

This is a strong word, but it is a necessary one. Many offenses have been caused by those who are overly zealous to share such convictions. People have thus

received the wrong impression about believers, and about the Lord Himself. Many a person has actually thought less of Jesus and His great salvation because of the unwise presentation of positions and persuasions instead of Jesus Christ and the grace of God.

It is not our work to promote our personal view or conviction! That is not what God has called us to do! Our testimony is not to be what we are convinced is the right way to live, but to affirm what God has done in us through Christ Jesus. There are sufficient testimonies of godly men and women in Scripture to direct our efforts in this area. Time must be spent in calculating the effect our convictions have upon other people – whether they are helpful or harmful. If they are harmful because of the weakness of our brethren, we do not have to declare them. We simply keep them to ourselves before God. **Thus we can enjoy our liberty in Christ, and protect the weaker brethren at the same time.**

Of this verse, Chrysostom (347-

407 AD) wrote, "Hast thou an enlightened faith, showing thee the unimportance of these observances? Do not parade it needlessly before men." PULPIT COMMENTARY

THE HAPPY MAN

"Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." Other versions read, "Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve,"^{NRSV} "Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by doing something they know is all right,"^{NLT} and "Blessed is the person whose principles do not condemn his practice."^{NJB}

This has reference to a good and uncondemning conscience. The "happy" person is one who is blessed, fortunate,

and living with great benefit. The benefit, or blessedness, is that his conscience approves wholeheartedly of what he does. **He can offer his life, and the manner in which it is lived, to the Lord, without the slightest twinge of his conscience.**

While this is a much-to-be-coveted experience, it is not that common. Untold numbers of people live in violation of their own principles. However, when such a life is lived because of the unthoughtful example of professing Christians, a most serious circumstance exists.

There is a peace and joy that attends a clear and approving conscience. We do take our brethren into

consideration, but we basically live before the Lord, grateful for the privilege of serving Him without condemning ourselves. This principle applies equally to the person who feels he cannot eat meat, and to the one who knows he can. Both can be happy and blessed before the Lord. The weaker faith of the less advanced brother need not rob him of joy. He can still live in all good conscience before the Lord. The enlightened persuasions of the stronger brother do not need to make him unmindful of others. He also can live with joy for what he has liberty to do. Both brethren can live with a conscience that does not condemn them, which conscience is a jewel of great price! A clear conscience brings untold benefits to us, not the least of which is Divine approval.

DOUBTING AND CONDEMNATION

"²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." Here is a verse that towers above human reasoning. It stands in stark contradiction of an institutionalized religion that is driven by demand instead of "faith working through love"^{NKJV} (Gal 5:6).

HE THAT DOUBTS

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith." Other versions read, "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith,"^{KJV} "But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith,"^{NRSV} "But anyone who eats with qualms of

activity, particularly toward the Lord, **not** convinced that it is proper. It may involve going along with the crowd, so to speak. It may be something private, unknown by anyone but oneself. But the person has questions about whether or not it is really right and acceptable before God. It is something the person cannot offer to God, for there is a question about the matter. If such a person proceeds to do what he doubts is right, he "is condemned."

Here is a verse that towers above human reasoning. It stands in stark contradiction of an institutionalized religion that is driven by demand instead of "faith working through love"

Expressions of this sort do not conform to the "fashion of this world" (1 Cor 7:31). This is "the mind of the Spirit" (Rom 8:27), brought to bear upon the affairs of men. Here the Lord reveals to us the manner in which life in Christ is to be lived. Such living is not mere conformity to a code of ethics, a set of moral laws, or a prescribed discipline of life. All of these are popular with men, but none of them reach deep enough to sustain a life that is acceptable to God.

conscience is condemned, because this eating does not spring from faith."^{NJB}

This verse is particularly strong, and rightly so, for it is dealing with the citadel of spiritual experience.

He Who Doubts

This does not refer to doubting God, His promises, or the Word of God. This is doubt concerning the eating of meat, observance of days, and such like. It refers to a person who engages in an

On a practical basis, this would be the person who believed the distinctions of meats outlined in the Levitical law were also binding upon those in Christ. It would also be the person who believed eating meat that had been offered to idols constituted honoring that false god. If such a person, because of pressure of others, or any other reason, proceeds to eat anyway, he "is condemned."

Condemned If He Eats

The word is strong - "condemned" The KJV says "damned." Does this mean the person is condemned to hell by God? Indeed not, for we have already been told that God has "received Him" (14:3). **This is the condemnation of ones own conscience.**

The Gentiles

This kind of condemnation was mentioned in the second chapter. Referring to the Gentiles, who were guilty of ignoring their conscience, it is said, “*their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another*” (2:15).

David

This is the kind of condemnation David experienced when he numbered Israel. It is written, “*And David’s **heart smote him** after that he had numbered the people*” (Sam 24:10).

The Woman Taken in Adultery

It also is seen in the men who brought a woman taken in adultery before Jesus, demanding that she be stoned. When the Lord challenged those without sin to cast the first stone, “*they which heard it, **being convicted by their own conscience**, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last*” (John 8:9).

In these cases, the conscience rose up and judged what was already done. In our text, it sounded an alarm **before** the act was done. However, the individual paid no heed to his conscience. Instead, he sought to emulate his brother, and thus was condemned by his conscience, not merely warned.

First John

John referred to this kind of condemnation, confirming that it erodes confidence and keeps our prayers from being answered. “*For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God*” (1 John 3:20-21). The idea is that if our heart condemns us, with only partial knowledge, we are to consider that God knows all things. That can be a blessing or a curse, a benefit or a judgment. The text elaborates no further on that matter, and we should take care not to carry the text further that the Spirit did.

Note, however, that confidence before God can only come if our heart does NOT condemn us. Also, the next verse parallels our text. “*And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that*

are pleasing in His sight” (verse 22).

The Relevance of the Matter

This is no light matter, for our lives can be lived unto the Lord only with the approval of our conscience. If we live contrary to our own convictions, our hearts grow hard and our souls become calloused. In such a state, like Adam, we are prone to flee from God instead of running to Him. Should this circumstance continue, and with the passing of time, all

the backdrop of a former declaration, “*the just shall live by faith*” (1:17). **If God has decreed that spiritual life is expressed and maintained by faith, then activities that are done apart from faith cannot be right.** They are sin, for they have violated the very principle of spiritual life. To go against the light produced by faith, however faint it may be, is sin. There are those who “*rebel against the light*” (Job 24:13), choosing to live in contradiction of the

Every work that does not have the consent of our conscience, and does not proceed from faith, is sin. That is, God has made no provision for us to live without regard to Himself and His will.

life will eventually fade away.

If the objective of the commandment involves a “*good conscience*” (1 Tim 1:5), and if faith is to be held, and live lived out, in the container of a “*pure conscience*” (1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3), and the conscience must be “*pure*” in order to serve God (Heb 9:14), **then the conscience is to be honored, and its demands heard!** If your conscience condemns you, you have no satisfactory evidence that God does not do so also. Whether or not that is an accurate appraisal of the situation is not the point. The very thought of Divine disapproval puts a person in a backward stance. Only the energy of faith can push the soul forward, and faith works in concert with the conscience.

WHATEVER IS NOT OF FAITH

“*... for whatever is not from faith is sin.*” Other versions read, “*and everything that does not come from faith is sin,*”^{NIV} “*If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning,*”^{NLT} and “*and every action which does not spring from faith is sin.*”^{NJB}

Here is a definition of sin that is not generally known. It is given against

persuasions of their own faith.

To put this another way, whatever is done without being fully persuaded it is right before the Lord, is sin! That is the unequivocal meaning of this passage! No believer should do anything he doubts is proper! However, care must be taken not to assume that if a person thinks something is right, it **is** right. Persecuting the church, for example, was a sin of the greatest magnitude, even though Saul of Tarsus thought it was right (Acts 22:3-5).

Ponder the weight of this statement! **Every work that does not have the consent of our conscience, and does not proceed from faith, is sin.** That is, God has made no provision for us to live without regard to Himself and His will. Of whatever value appearance may seem, God looks upon the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Part of what He sees is the response we have to our conscience, and how our faith permeates what we say and do. If men believe “*with the heart*” (Rom 10:10), then we all do well to listen to our heart, and be sensitive to our conscience.

If we do not listen to our own conscience, what evidence is there that we

will listen to God Himself, who gave us our conscience? If God cannot be pleased “without faith” (Heb 11:6), how can

anything unrelated to faith be pleasing to Him? Remember this saying: “everything

that does not come from faith is sin.”^{NIV} It will rescue you from many evils.

CONCLUSION

This section of Scripture is a powerful example of the nature of brotherly love. It takes into consideration the sensitivity of the conscience and the tenderness of faith. It refuses to cause disruption in the assembly of the righteous, or within the citadels of the heart of an immature believer. Jesus has invested too much in His people for us to be unmindful of them!

Also, we must encourage one

another to live within the boundaries of our own convictions. **No believer should attempt to force his view upon those who find it difficult to understand it – even if that view is absolutely correct.** This by no means suggests that we must live in a state of frustration, placing restraints upon our liberty, and living as though tied up with seven green Philistine withs (Judges 16:7). We can have our faith unto ourselves, living happily before the Lord

in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free (Gal 5:1).

We are not only free to do things which faith has convinced us are proper, we are also free to forgo that liberty in the interest of our weaker brethren. Whether weak or strong, Christ has freed us to live for God, heartily, and with the full consent of our conscience. We can live without our conscience or God condemning us, and be the happier because of it.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 45



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version; NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

^{15:1} We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. ³ For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. ⁴ For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. ⁵ Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: ⁶ That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ^{NKJV} (Romans 15:1-6)

INTRODUCTION

There are some acclaimed scholars who question that the last two chapters of Romans are actually a legitimate part of the book. Arguing from the absence of these chapters from certain manuscripts, they conclude it is an addition to the Apostle's writing. While the arguments, unworthy of mention here, may appear to be weighty, there really is no need to consider them. There is nothing in chapters fifteen and sixteen that conflict with the teaching of the first fourteen chapters, or detract from their power and usefulness. In fact, as I will show, they are a very reasonable extension of the teaching. Because I find it exceedingly difficult to believe such profitability can be mere coincidence, I will proceed with

the firm conviction that these are nothing less than the words of the Holy Spirit. There is no need to prove that this is the case, if the purpose of the Spirit is obviously served.

How does a perceptive person address the church – the people of God? What should they be doing? What type of encouragement is given to them in order to facilitate the doing of these things? It should not surprise you that inspired words written to the churches are consistent in their thrust. There is no deviation from Apostolic emphasis. The alarming thing is that it does not accord with the messages to which countless thousands of believers are regularly

subjected. For some, evangelism is the primary theme. For others, the family is the center of attention. Still others hear regularly about the church itself, a supposed pattern that is seen of it in Scripture, and who has the authority within its ranks. Some just go through the Bible in an academic manner with no real emphasis at all. What approach does the Holy Spirit take?

There are, of course, sundry instructions, rebukes, and corrections in the Epistles. There is, however, a general direction in which all words to believers are pointed.

CONSISTENT DOCTRINE

OUTLINE

- < A WORK FOR THE STRONG (15:1)
- < PLEASING AND EDIFICATION (15:2)
- < CHRIST DID NOT PLEASE HIMSELF (15:3)
- < THINGS WRITTEN BEFOREHAND (15:4)
- < GRANTED TO BE LIKE-MINDED (15:5)
- < ONE MIND AND ONE MOUTH (15:6)

The following is not intended to be an exhaustive listing, but only a representation of the nature of Apostolic writings – how they were directed to speak to those who are in Christ Jesus. These statements represent the thrust of their teaching. **At no point are these subjects approached as theological novelties, areas where there is room for opinion, or matters that are optional.**

Christ's role in salvation. The appointed means through which men are reconciled to God, sustained in their quest for glory, and directed in involvement with God, is clearly declared to be Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22-24; 8:31-34; 1 Cor 5:7; 15:3; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:7; 2:13-15; Col 1:14; 1 Thess 1:10; Tit 2:14; Heb 2:10-18; 1 Pet 1:2,18-19; 1 John 1:7; 2:2; 3:16).

The Lord's return. Preparation for the return of the Lord is fundamental to sound teaching. The proclamation of Christ's second appearing, together with a strong summons to be ready for it, are found throughout writings to the churches (1 Cor 1:7-8; Phil 3:20-21; Col 3:4; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:15-17; 5:23; 2 Thess 1:7-10; 1 Tim 6:14; Tit 2:13; James 5:7-9; 1 Pet 5:4; 2 Pet 3:3-10; 1 John 2:28; 3:1-3).

Living by faith. Life itself is to be lived by faith. Faith must be strong, fought for, and nourished by the good Word of the Lord (Rom 1:17; 3:22; 5:1; 2 Cor 1:24; 5:7; Gal 3:11,22; Eph 3:17; Phil 3:9; Heb 10:38-39).

Our adversary. From the standpoint of our adversary, we are urged to arm ourselves, be vigilant, and put on the whole armor of God.

There is a constant note of warning

about Satan, as well as the surety he can be resisted in faith (1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 2:11; 6:14-18; Eph 6:10-18; 1 Thess 3:5; 1 Pet 4:1; 5:8-9; James 4:7).

The day of judgment. The appointment and surety of the day of judgment is consistently held before the saints. They are strongly urged to live in view of that day, zealously preparing for it (Rom 2:5-12; 1 Cor 3:13; ; 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Thess 1:7-8; 2 Tim 4:1,8; Heb 9:27; 1 Pet 4:5-7; 2 Pet 2:9; 1 Pet 4:17; Jude 24).

STRENGTHENING THE CHURCH

Although it is commonly taught that the primary purpose of the church is to reach the lost, this is nowhere stated or suggested in the *"Apostles' doctrine."* This traditional emphasis is so strong, that it is considered heresy to emphasize anything else. It is not unusual to find churches judged to be successful or unsuccessful purely upon the basis of the number of converts they garner.

Let it be clear, I am speaking here of an emphasis, not of the work of preaching the Gospel to every creature. Jesus came to *"seek and save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10), thereby sanctifying that activity. However, the burden of His ministry, and the great teaching He gave, was not in the market place or the houses of publicans and harlots. His teachings were primarily directed toward His disciples and those who went to the synagogues (Matt 4:23; 5:1; 9:35; 13:10ff; Mark 1:39; 9:31; Luke 4:15). Although He taught the people and

believer or believers were encountered, our Lord always focused upon them. The only preference He had over them was fellowship with the Father Himself. I know of no exceptions to this rule.

This inclination is confirmed by what He did following His ascension to, and enthronement in, heaven. Scripture says is this way. *"Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men . . . And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers"* (Eph 4:8-11). And what was the purpose of these marvelous and indispensable *"gifts"*? The answer provides the focus of Divine power, and the emphasis behind Divine workings. *"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Eph 4:12).

Confirming this accentuation, the Father Himself is said to pay special attention to the righteous. *"The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry"* (Psa 34:15; 1 Pet 3:12). Additionally, Jesus *"ever lives to make intercession"* exclusively for those who are coming to the father through Him (Heb 7:25). The Holy Spirit is given to them in order to assist and empower their service in the Kingdom, and preparation for the world to come (Ron 8:13-14,26; Gal 4:6). Additionally, the vast multitude of holy angels are charged with ministering to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). *"All Scripture"* has been inspired of God in order that

Whenever a believer or believers were encountered, our Lord always focused upon them. The only preference He had over them was fellowship with the Father Himself. I know of no exceptions to this rule.

the multitudes, He declared those who did the will of His Father were his *"brother, and sister, and mother"* (Matt 12:49-50). His focus was on believers. Whenever a

"the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). There can, then, be no deficiency in Scripture.

These people – the saints of God – are the only people on the face of the earth who have an inheritance in heaven (1 Pet 1:4). They alone have access to God through faith (Eph 2:18), are upheld by His grace (1 Cor 15:10; Rom 5:2), and are privileged to be called “*the sons of God*” (1 John 3:1). They stand unique among all peoples, being “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,*” and a “*peculiar people*” (1 Pet 2:9).

THE RELEVANCE OF THESE THINGS

These observations are highly

relevant to our text. They lay a firm foundation for the necessity of edifying the people of God. The fourteenth chapter urged a godly consideration of one another. War must be made upon dissension, argumentation, and discussions that are disputational in nature. Despising, or looking down upon the people of God is strictly forbidden. This is more than a mere law, to be fulfilled begrudgingly.

We will find that the purpose is to edify one another, and disputation and

despising conflict with that purpose. Both tend to tear down rather than build up, and are thus strictly forbidden. Believers are brought into the very work of God and Christ – nourishing and caring for the church (Eph 5:29).

As we will see from our text, the edification of one another is not simply a noble option. It is an absolute requirement. The nature of our salvation demands it. Our presence in a world dominated by the devil necessitates it, as your walk of faith will confirm.

A WORK FOR THE STRONG

“^{15:1} We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” This is the only reasonable conclusion to what has been said in the fourteenth

(14:4b). Each believer is to be “*fully persuaded*” of the propriety of what they do (14:5). None of us live or die in isolation of

Everything that is supplied to us makes for the development of a strong faith. Weakness is consistently associated with beginnings and spiritual juvenility. At the very best, it is related to being young in Christ, and under no conditions is that circumstance to remain.

chapter. A brief synopsis of that chapter follows. It will serve to set the stage for the considerations of this chapter.

- ‘ Those whose faith is yet infantile, or “*weak*,” are to be received, but not in the climate of disputation (14:1).
- ‘ The “*strong*” are not to despise those whose faith does not allow them to do what God really allows (14:2).
- ‘ The person who adheres to strict, yet unrequired, laws, is not to judge those who do not subscribe to those laws (14:3).
- ‘ We are not allowed to judge those whose faith moves them to conscientiously serve God (14:4a).
- ‘ God is able to make the believer stand

- others (14:7).
- ‘ We are the Lord’s in both life and death (14:8).
- ‘ Christ died, arose, and lives again in order to be over both the living and the dead (14:9).
- ‘ We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (14:10).
- ‘ We will all bow the knee to Christ and confess to God (14:11).
- ‘ We will all give an account of ourselves to God (14:12).
- ‘ In view of this, judging one another is strictly forbidden (14:13a).
- ‘ Care must be taken not to make it more difficult for those who are living by faith (14:13b).
- ‘ The acceptability of certain things which are allowed, but not required,

- by God, is determined by the perception of the individual (14:14).
- ‘ If what we do, although right of itself, hurts our brother, we have ceased to walk according to love (14:15).
- ‘ The Kingdom of God does not consist of foods and procedures, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (14:17).
- ‘ Those who serve Christ with righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit are received by God and approved of men (14:18).
- ‘ We are to aggressively seek to give our brethren the advantage in life by engaging in things that contribute to a peaceful environment and building up the saints (14:19).
- ‘ It is good not to do anything that causes our brethren to stumble, or live in contradiction of their conscience (14:20).
- ‘ Faith is to be held personally, and often privately. There is no need to bind personal perceptions on others who cannot comprehend the sense of them (14:21-22).
- ‘ God will only receive from us what proceeds from our faith (14:23).

WE THEN THAT ARE STRONG

“*We then that are strong . . .*” This is strength in faith, not mere moral strength, or those with firm persuasions. There is something important to be seen in this expression. The norm for the Kingdom is “*strong*” faith, not “*weak*” faith. By saying “*WE that are strong,*” Paul shows that the aim is to be strong,

not weak. Such words are not to be taken as representative of only a few superior brethren, but as the Kingdom standard. Here is an expression of life that is lived in *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

The notion that those who are *“strong”* are unusual and few in number ought not to be entertained. Our father Abraham, the standard for believers, is said to have been *“strong in faith, giving glory to God”* (4:20). Those who are not strong are to make it their business to become strong in the faith, that they too may give appropriate glory to God. Who is willing to contend that anything about salvation contributes to weakness in the faith? Everything that is supplied to us makes for the development of a strong faith. Weakness is consistently associated with beginnings and spiritual juvenility. At the very best, it is related to being young in Christ, and under no conditions is that circumstance to remain.

Being *“strong”* is, in fact, knowing the mind of the Lord. It is having a Divine perspective of things, or being able to see things as they really are. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to clarify spiritual issues that are otherwise mysterious and unknowable. Hence, those who are *“strong”* are those who see more clearly and know more thoroughly. That this is not unusual is seen in the fact that such clarity and knowledge is available to all who are in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:15-10; Col 1:9-11; 2 Tim 2:7).

BEARING THE INFIRMITIES OF THE WEAK

“ . . . ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.” Other versions read, *“ought to bear with the scruples of the weak,”*^{NKJV} *“ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength,”*^{NASB} *“ought to bear with the failings of the weak.”*^{NIV} Notice how a deficiency in spiritual understanding is described: *“infirmity,” “scruples,” “weakness,”* and *“failing.”*

It is not unusual to find professed believers considering weakness in the faith, or the inability to take hold of the things of God, as inconsequential. It will prove challenging, indeed, to find a *“church”* where those who cannot grasp the things of God are considered *“weak.”*

In fact, much of the *Christianity* of our day actually fosters spiritual weakness. That is why it is so common. But this does not represent the *“mind of the Spirit”* (Rom 8:27)! Nor, indeed, is it the trait of *“the mind controlled by the Spirit”*^{NIV} (Rom 8:6).

Here is a condition that requires special instruction for the whole church. Being *“weak in faith”* necessitated exhortations to both the weak and the strong. How can such a condition, therefore, be viewed as picayune, or unworthy of extensive teaching and exhortation? What person with *“spiritual understanding”* Col 1:9) would allow for the presence of such a state to go unchallenged? Being *“weak in the faith”* is a circumstance that must be addressed. Special care must be taken to bring those in such a condition to stronger

The stronger are not merely to tolerate those with the infirmity or weakness of immature faith. Nor, indeed, are they to ignore it as though it did not exist. **It is a serious condition because of where it leads.** While it is true that a fervent desire to serve and please the Lord can often be accompanied by infirm understanding, that condition is not intended to be a permanent one. There is not one particle of virtue in it.

Here, bearing the infirmities of the weak means to *“bear with,”* or be patient and *“forbearing one another with love”* (Eph 4:2). In this way, the burden of spiritual ignorance upon the weak will be greatly alleviated. In this instruction, we see that *“weak faith”* constitutes a burden for the one in that condition. **It is more difficult to live for the Lord, resist the devil, and grow in grace and**

You will find that anything that is temporary, whether the things of this world, or a state of spiritual immaturity, consistently introduces danger and jeopardy.

faith. Additionally, those who are strong must be reminded to give special attention to such people. Anything requiring such extensive care is not normal, and must not be treated as though it was.

Now, a special word is addressed to the strong concerning the matter. Their lives are impacted by the weakness of other brethren. They cannot simply ignore it, but must adjust their lives to patiently await the further development of their weaker brethren, and that without despising or looking down upon them. They are to *“bear the infirmities of the weak.”* **Remember, “the weak” refers to those who are wholeheartedly serving the Lord, but are doing so with infirm understanding.** This is not a summons for those who see clearly to be tolerant of carnal-mindedness and indulgence in iniquity. God does not tolerate carnal mindedness, and neither can we.

truth in such a circumstance. Spiritual life cannot easily be sustained in a state of juvenility and a lack of *“spiritual understanding.”* Such a condition, while initially common to those coming into Christ, is not intended to be a permanent one.

You will find that **anything that is temporary, whether the things of this world, or a state of spiritual immaturity, consistently introduces danger and jeopardy.** One way to offset that danger and encourage spiritual growth, is to be considerate of such brethren, not imposing upon them unreasonable demands, or viewing them as being inferior. *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.”*

Another thing to see here is that a profound love for and consideration of the brethren actually promotes growth in Christ.

Such mindfulness produces an environment in which greater understanding can be developed. It also makes spiritual immaturity more perceptible to those possessing it.

This form of reasoning contradicts the reasoning of the flesh. Flesh reasons that those with rudimentary understanding must be straightened out. It does not consider that a person can live “unto the Lord,” even though their view of Him and His great salvation is elementary. Let it clear, a juvenile state is not an enviable one. Yet, the secret to advancing beyond it is not found in harsh and hasty demands. Nor, indeed, will spiritual progress be made if the weaker brethren are despised and ignored.

Bearing the infirmities of the “weak” is something that faith is

calculated to accomplish. It is, furthermore, well suited for such an assignment. Faith both equips and strengthens the believer to do God’s will. **By bearing with the weak, the strong will not become weaker, but the weak will become stronger.**

NOT PLEASING OURSELVES
 “. . . and not to please ourselves.” Here, to “please ourselves” means to cater to our own views, without any regard to how they are viewed by others. It means to be determined to take delight in our own preferences, even if it causes our brethren to be offended or made weak.

In Christ, a selfish or self-centered life is strictly forbidden. **Christ has delivered us from a world that is bounded by its own preferences and**

perceptions. Faith does not live purely for self, but for the Lord, and with a mind to bringing advantages, not disadvantages, to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In this particular text, pleasing self would involve refusing to forgo the freedom to eat meat, even though it meant pressuring a weaker brother to eat meat in violation of his own conscience. The standard of our conduct is not our own happiness, however desirous that may be. It is more noble to seek the welfare and advantage of others. As it is written, love “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor 13:5). And again, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil 2:4). While it may appear on the surface that this will bring great disadvantages and frustration to us, we will find this is not at all the case. We are always the better for doing this.

PLEASING AND EDIFICATION

“² Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.” There is a common objective in salvation – one that applies to the entire body of Christ. The perception of this objective provides the proper incentive to effectively address special areas of concern – like the one presently being considered: i.e., the reaction of the strong to those who are weak in the faith. It is a Kingdom principle that details are best handled within the greater framework of Divine purpose. **It is imperative to see that we are not simply to fulfill special rules for special occasions. Rather, instruction concerning particular details are always given in view of spiritual principles that apply to all situations.** We have an excellent example of this in the verse before us.

EVERY ONE OF US

“Let every one of us . . .” There is a danger in directing teaching to only a segment of the body of Christ. It certainly is not unlawful to do so, for this is often found in Scripture. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

“Let **him that stole** steal no more”

(Eph 4:28).

“**Husbands**, love your wives” (Eph 5:25).

“**Wives**, submit yourselves unto your own husbands” (Eph 5:22).

women marry” (1 Tim 5:14).

“**The elders** which are among you I exhort” (1 Pet 5:1).

Teaching regarding these special

The point is that teaching addressed to special individuals, or to special occasions, obtains power only within the framework of universal responsibilities.

“**Children**, obey your parents in the Lord” (Eph 6:1).

“**Masters**, give unto your servants that which is just and equal” (Col 4:1).

“**Servants**, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh” (Eph 6:5).

“I say therefore to **the unmarried and widows**” (1 Cor 7:8).

“**Young men** likewise exhort to be sober minded” (Tit 2:6).

“I will therefore that the **younger**

groups is certainly to be heeded, and never to be despised. However, it is never the central theme of Scripture, nor is such teaching extensive. Those who are familiar with Scripture know that **words addressed to special people are always couched within the setting of such things as redemption, the judgment, the coming of the Lord, etc. They are never an end of themselves.** There is such a remarkable consistency in this that it will become apparent to those who are pure in heart.

This principle contributes to the profitability of all Scripture. There is no book of the Bible written, for example, to husbands, wives, children, elders, or widows. If it is countered that First and Second Timothy and Titus were written to young men, it must also be remembered that they were written in such a manner as to edify the entire body. What older person, young woman, or husband has not profited exceedingly from these books?

The point is that teaching addressed to special individuals, or to special occasions, obtains power only within the framework of universal responsibilities. This is exemplified in this text.

With great care, the Spirit shows us that Divine direction is not merely for a part of the body of Christ. In salvation, no place has been made for spectators. It is never in order for members of Christ's body to listen as though they were

whatsoever to do with special people or circumstances.

PLEASE HIS NEIGHBOR

"... please his neighbor..." All major versions use the word "please." This word means to accommodate ourselves to the interests and welfare of others. It is the positive way of not placing a stumbling block before our brethren, or causing them to be offended. This is involved in being "approved of men" (14:18). It means that our conduct is perceived by the people of God as proper, and not in contradiction of His will.

This is not being a pleaser of men. As Paul wrote, "for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10). We are emphatically exhorted to avoid being "men pleasers" (Eph 6:6; Col 3:22). The difference in pleasing our neighbor and not being a pleaser of men is found in the objective.

Men pleasers have no other

opportunity, let us do good unto all men, **especially unto them who are of the household of faith**" (Gal 6:10). Because "we are members one of another" (Eph 4:25), we have obligations to one another. Our text is urging us to live in view of those responsibilities.

I cannot leave this section without once again drawing your attention to the blight of religious institutionalism and sectarianism. In the wake of an emphasis upon the institution, the personal desire to edify one another is lost. **In such a setting you will rarely find one person seeking to build up the faith of another, or bring eternal advantages to them.** Men have led us to believe the preservation of the organization is the main thing. Our text informs us that the building up of one another is fundamental. This represents a significant departure from the thrust of contemporary *Christianity*. I am not intending to be a mere reactionary in making these remarks. The fruit produced by institutionalism confirms the truth of what I say.

GOOD TO EDIFICATION

"... for his good to edification." Other versions read, "for his good, leading to edification,"^{NKJV} "for his good, to build him up,"^{NIV} "for the good purpose of building up the neighbor,"^{NRSV} "for his good, to make him strong,"^{BBE} "with a view to what is good, to edification."^{DARBY}

The ultimate "good" that can be brought to brothers and sisters is to assist them to be strong in the Lord. There will come times when we must minister to their temporal needs, and other practical helps. However, even in those things, the primary purpose is to build them up in the most holy faith. Our aim is to contribute to their spiritual maturity and readiness to stand before the Lord. Anything that does not build up the believer, making him stronger and more stable, is not "good" in the sense of this text. Something that complicates spiritual growth, or makes it unlikely, is evil, and is to be avoided.

Ordinarily, edification does not take place unintentionally. I understand that there are times when words and actions especially minister to people to whom they

Men have led us to believe the preservation of the organization is the main thing. Our text informs us that the building up of one another is fundamental. This represents a significant departure from the thrust of contemporary Christianity.

excluded from the instruction. Here, after addressing the "strong" and those "weak in the faith," the Spirit turns to the whole household of faith and says, "Let every one of us!" What He will now declare reveals that the instruction given to the strong and the weak is their way of fulfilling the lofty principle to be put before us. That principle is something to be fulfilled by "every one of us."

This principle had eluded "the strong," who tended to despise the weak. It had also escaped those whose conscience was "weak," who sought to impose their unenlightened opinions upon others. **What is being said to them is in the interest of fulfilling this greater principle, which has nothing**

purpose that to lessen opposition against themselves. They seek comfort for the flesh, and are not thinking of serving God. Such are self-centered with considerations that extend no further than their personal and temporal interests.

Those who please their neighbor have the purpose of God in mind, and seek to avoid causing His people to stumble. Their aim is to help their neighbor, not enhance their own reputation and circumstance.

In this text, our "neighbor" refers to other members of the body of Christ. They are not our only neighbors, but our most immediate and relevant ones. As it is written, "As we have therefore

were not specifically directed. Yet, even then, the purpose of such words and deeds was to bring honor to the Lord. **However, we are not to rely on our brethren being helped by unintentional activities. We must make it our aim, or objective, to**

build up the people of God. Our attention is to be shifted from self to those for whom Christ died, and for whom He presently intercedes (Heb 7:25). We are to join the holy angels in ministering to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). We are to participate with the

Holy Spirit in changing the saved *“from glory unto glory”* (2 Cor 3:18). **If Jesus, the holy angels, and the Holy Spirit are engaged in benefitting God’s people, what possible reason can be adduced for us failing to do so?** Let your words and deeds lead to edification.

CHRIST DID NOT PLEASE HIMSELF

“For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me.” All *“sound doctrine”* finds its ultimate demonstration in the Lord Jesus Christ. You might say doctrine is enfleshed in Christ: i.e., *“the Word became flesh”* (John 1:14). As *“the Truth,”* Jesus lived out what the Apostles and Prophets taught. We have a most excellent example of this in this text.

EVEN CHRIST PLEASSED NOT HIMSELF

“For even Christ pleased not Himself . . .” Other translations read, *“For Christ did not give pleasure to Himself,”*^{BBE} and *“Christ did not indulge His own feelings, either.”*^{NJB} One of the hallmarks of our salvation is that it required Jesus to *“empty Himself,”* or make Himself *“of no reputation”* (Phil 2:7). When found in the crucible of unspeakable suffering, He cried out, *“not My will, but Thine, be done”* (Lk 22:42). As He ministered among men He confessed, *“I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me”* (John 5:30). And again, *“And I seek not Mine own glory”* (John 8:50). With great power He said, *“My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work”* (John 4:34). Again He said, *“For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”* (John 6:38).

Jesus did not seek His own ease, but the will of God, which was to *“save the world”* (John 12:47). He did not seek His own comfort, but chose a path wherein He had no place to *“lay His head,”* in order that He might accomplish the will of God (Matt 8:20). He was the ultimate *“Servant,”* and a servant does not seek His own will, but the will of His master.

From an earthly point of view, if anyone had a right to live for Himself, it was the Lord Jesus Christ. He *“did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth”* (1 Pet 2:22). While among men, He was, in fact, *“above all”* (John 3:31). Yet Jesus did not live for Himself. It must be noted that **the life of Jesus cannot be lived with purely selfish interests** – and this is the life that we have received and is

wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.” He who knew God the most suffered the most!

Jesus Himself revealed the relevance of this to His disciples. *“It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call*

Self pleasing deadens the soul, so it cannot feel the words spoken against the Lord. The one who lives for self is blissfully unaware of the blasphemies and offences that are all about them.

“made manifest in” our *“body”* (2 Cor 4:10-11)! **Therefore, a lack of consideration for those who are in Christ Jesus reveals a lack of Jesus Himself.**

AS IT IS WRITTEN

“ . . . but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me.” Other versions read, *“The insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me,”*^{NIV} *“the bitter words of those who were angry with You came on Me.”*^{BBE} This is a quotation of Psalm 69:9. It is also referenced in Psalm 89:50-51, where the impact of bearing such reproach is mentioned. **“Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD;**

them of His household?” (Matt 10:25).

There is a twofold sense in which the reproaches of those who reproached God fell upon Christ. First, the people actually spoke against the Lord Jesus Himself, and that because of His identity with the Father. Second, Jesus was so united with the Father, that He took personally words that were spoken against the Lord. He felt the weight of the words spoken against the Father. Such a thing would not have been possible if Jesus lived to *“please Himself.”* **Self pleasing deadens the soul, so it cannot feel the words spoken against the Lord.** The one who lives for self is blissfully unaware of the blasphemies and offences that are all about them. They are only interested in how men speak of them, having no regard for those opposing God.

The reasoning here is this: those who are in Christ Jesus should not balk when they are asked to follow the footsteps of their Lord. If Jesus was willing to forfeit His own interests in order to bear the vicious scoffing of men, cannot we forfeit our interests in order to strengthen our brethren? Indeed, ours is the lesser work, into which we ought to joyfully enter!

It should be apparent that people

teachers ought to use many illustrations. I have often heard such men upbraid young preachers because they did not lace their lessons with illustrations from contemporary life and humorous anecdotes. Their suggestions must be put aside in favor of the Word of God, which sets the Divinely sanctioned manner of teaching before us. They are the mere prattling of novices and the uninformed.

As in this text, the loftiest example

If you cannot find a proper illustration in Jesus, what you are teaching cannot be fundamental. At the very best, you are dealing with things tangential. You should make it your business not to spent long in such teaching, even if it is legitimate.

who court the favor of those who speak against the Lord are most unchristlike. Jesus said, *“Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!”* (Lk 6:26). How serious a transgression it is, therefore, to shape our lives so as to gain favor from them. To do such is to *“please ourselves.”*

A PRINCIPLE OF TEACHING

There is a principle of teaching here that is worthy of notation. Contemporary teachers of homiletics, or the art of preaching, are fond of saying

and illustration is the Lord Jesus Himself. The truth of God has been lived out in Him, and He provides the best and most pungent illustration of that truth. When, therefore, you want to show people how the truth is to be applied, point to Jesus. All valid doctrine will find expression in Him. **If you cannot find a proper illustration in Jesus, what you are teaching cannot be fundamental.** At the very best, you are dealing with things tangential. You should make it your business not to spent long in such teaching, even if it is legitimate.

Secondly, illustrations can be found among the great persons of Scripture. From Moses and the Prophets: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, etc. From the Apostle’s doctrine: the woman at the well, Nicodemus, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Peter, Timothy, Titus, and others. In these people the effects of the truth are appropriately displayed.

Thirdly, the great events of Scripture provide an example of Divine workings and purpose. From Moses and the Prophets: the fall of man, the flood, the tower of Babel, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the taking of Canaan, the Babylonian captivity, Nebuchadnezzar, etc. From the Apostles doctrine: the day of Pentecost, the conversions in the book of Acts, the persecution of the early church, the situations in various churches that required correction, etc.

There is a wealth of Divinely orchestrated illustrations in the Scriptures, and they are to be used. The proper use of these people and occasions will provide an accurate portrayal of the outworking of truth. It will also produce a working acquaintance with the Word of God that is indispensable to living soberly and godly in this present world.

The relevance of these observations will be confirmed in the following verse. The Scriptures have been deliberately written in order to give the people of God the advantage in life. Nothing has been left to happenstance, or in the total power of men.

THINGS WRITTEN BEFOREHAND

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

Paul is showing us the relevance of citing a verse from Psalms to confirm we are not to please ourselves. Contextual advocates do not know how to use the Scriptures in this fashion. They are fond of speaking of “the author’s intended

meaning,” historical backgrounds, and cultural nuances that, they say, shape the meaning of Scripture. What will such teachers do with Paul, who reaches back nearly eight hundred years, extracts an expression from the Psalmist, applies it to Jesus, and thereby justifies the teaching that we are not to please ourselves. I do not mean to ride this subject like a hobby-horse, but such approaches to Scripture have greatly harmed the body of Christ. They simply do not edify.

This is one of the great defining verses of Scripture, and therefore is of unusual importance. The perception of the truth it reveals will shed light on many things. It nails into our conscience a sense of what Scripture is all about. It also explodes the myths created by men concerning the integrity of Scripture.

Creating Doubt Concerning Scripture

Those who throw the shroud of doubt upon Scripture by speaking of various

original texts, more reliable texts, and even textual corruption, are a great hindrance to the body of Christ. They would have us believe that only those who know “the original language” can understand the Word of God – which saying is a totally false. Jesus did not speak in this manner of Moses and the Prophets, writings that had been translated and copied numerous times. You will never find Jesus causing people to doubt Scripture, or question its integrity. Nor, indeed, did any of the Apostles contribute to such a conclusion.

Textual criticism, misnamed *higher criticism*, is only another name for unbelief. The church must be purged from such men, for they are prevailing upon the masses to close their Bibles and rely upon self-professed experts to tell them its meaning. Whatever reasons are brought forward to justify a critical view of Scripture, they must be “cast down” with spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:4-5). **You cannot have the Living God calling upon us to trust in and learn from the Scriptures, while men attempt to persuade us they may not be valid.** If the same One who inspired Scripture cannot maintain its integrity, how will we be able to believe He can “keep us from falling” (Jude 24-25)? If His power cannot keep His Word, how can it keep us (1 Pet 1:5)?

Self-professed scholars may think all of this to be a mere tirade against scholarship. However, whatever calls the Word of God into question, or discourages any child of God from believing he can possess its true meaning, is not of God. Such views contradict Divine affirmation. If what these men say is true, the text before us is robbed of all power.

THINGS WRITTEN AFORE TIME

“For whatsoever things were written afore time . . .” Other versions read, “For whatever was written in earlier times,” NASB “For everything that was written in the past,” NIV “For whatever was written in former days,” NRSV “Now those things which were put down in writing before our time,” BBE “Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago,” NLT and “And all these things which were written so long ago,” NJB Be clear, this is not speaking of mere history.

Although numerous writings existed at the time, the Spirit refers exclusively to Scripture, which was given “by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16-17). He does not refer to Plato, Socrates, or even Josephus. He will show us that while these things were written “in the past,” they are not confined to the past. The writings of reference are not relics, but something needed for the sustaining of spiritual life.

A Perspective of Teaching

A perspective of preaching and teaching is developed here that is worthy

the preeminent one.

The Impact of Questioning the Bible

If this is true, and it surely is, think of the impact of the view that Scripture has been greatly corrupted. **If men have, in fact, caused Scripture to become distorted, the purpose of God has been frustrated.** It is not possible to prove such a postulate, for it runs counter to everything God has revealed about Himself. **If God could, at the very threshold of humanity, reveal His intention to the arch foe Satan, with no possibility of it being**

You cannot have the Living God calling upon us to trust in and learn from the Scriptures, while men attempt to persuade us they may not be valid. If the same One who inspired Scripture cannot maintain its integrity, how will we be able to believe He can “keep us from falling

of a brief comment. Although this verse appears to be unrelated to the subject at hand, Paul does not fear briefly commenting upon it. Obviously, he does not see this as a distraction, or moving to another subject. **There is an interrelationship in all Scripture that allows for such manners.** This represents the proper handling of the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15), when men can bring them to bear upon any subject or strain of teaching. It is good to seek such versatility in our teaching.

WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING

“ . . . were written for our learning . . . ” Other versions read, “was written for our instruction,” NASB “was written for our instruction,” NIV and “was written to teach us.” NIB It is not that Moses and the Prophets purposed to write for our benefit, although it was revealed to the Prophets that this was the case (1 Pet 1:12). The writing was under Divine supervision, and with a Divinely established purpose – “our learning.” **This was not the only purpose for which those things were written, although it can be argued that it was**

overtaken (Gen 3:15), how could mere men neutralize His word? He is a fool who supposes such a thing is possible Suffice it to say, there would be no point to this verse if there was any question at all about the total accuracy of Scripture.

A Consistent Teaching

Earlier in this book, we are reminded that the record of Abraham being made righteous was written “for our sake” (4:23-24). We are also reminded that what was experienced by Israel “happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor 10:11). History, then, has been orchestrated, and Scripture written, in order for our learning and admonition. What, then, can justify the remarkable ignorance of Scriptures extant today.

It is no wonder that Jesus spoke of the Scriptures as testifying of Him (John 5:39). Early believers were considered “more noble” because they “searched the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11). The Scriptures are for the advancement of the

believer, for promoting spiritual learning, the knowledge of God, or familiarity with the ways of the Lord.

Scripture Is Not A Charm

Whether intentional or not, the Scriptures are often treated like a magical charm. People imagine that there is safety or virtue in having a Bible in their home or possession, while they remain fundamentally ignorant of what it contains. Untold multitudes delight in confessing they believe every word in the Bible, even though they have scarcely read anything in it. Perhaps they would not speak in this manner if they were better acquainted with what the Scripture says.

Moses and the Prophets

The *"things written afore time"*

thought of God in the world that did not have its genesis in Scripture. Apart from Scripture, we do not have the faintest idea about salvation, grace, Divine love, an eternal inheritance, or the end of the world. We are wholly reliant upon Scripture for an understanding of the day of judgment, the necessity of atonement, and the availability of remission. Truly, they were written for *"our learning."*

Let it be clear, there is nothing pointless in Scripture, and thus no part of it is to be neglected. The more we are subjected to them, the more we learn, for they are written for our learning. No part of the Bible is *"nothing but leaves"* (Mark 11:13). To put it another way, there is precious fruit in every Scriptural text to be eaten and digested. No part of the Bible

teaches us (Eph 4:20-21), will teach us in direct proportion to our knowledge of Scripture.

PATIENCE AND COMFORT OF THE SCRIPTURES

"... that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures . . ." Other versions read, *"that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope,"* ^{NASB} *"so that through endurance and the encouragement of the,"* ^{NIV} *"so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures,"* ^{NRSV} *"so that through quiet waiting and through the comfort of the holy Writings,"* ^{BBE} and *"They give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises."* ^{NLT}

Here personality is assigned to the Scriptures. They become the source from which needful graces are obtained. This ministry of Scripture unveils something of the meaning of Christ's words: *"the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63b). God declared His Word works, accomplishing what He has determined. *"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but **it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it"*** (Isa 55:10-11).

This condition is what accounts for the Word of God growing (Acts 12:24a), increasing (Acts 6:7), being multiplied (Acts 12:24b), and prevailing (Acts 19:20). In all of those cases, it was both spoken and received. What marvelous things are realized *"through the Scriptures!"*

Patience

"Patience" is required because of the adversities and trials we face in this world. This quality refers to endurance, perseverance, and continuance. The word includes the idea of constancy, or steadfastness, as well as that of endurance and survival. **The person with "patience" does not live by fits and starts, fighting the good fight of**

Nothing in Scripture is dispensable. Nothing is optional, to be placed on the shelf of neglect. The Holy Spirit did not move men to write things we do not need to know. Further, if the Scriptures were written for our learning, we should be about the business of learning from them.

refers to the writings of Moses and the Prophets, which men call the "Old Testament." There is no section of Scripture so little known among professing Christians as this. Some have even created theologies that teach men they have no further need for this part of the Bible. It was only for the Jews, they say. But our text says it was written *"for our learning."*

Unlearned and Disadvantaged

If the Scriptures have been written for our "learning," then those who do not know them are "unlearned." The deplorable level of ignorance concerning Scripture that exists in the church is a transgression of the greatest sort. **If God had the Scriptures written to give us an advantage, we are never more disadvantaged than when we are ignorant of them.** There is not a valid

is mere history. No inspired writing is the privately conceived opinion of its writer. Nothing in Scripture is dispensable. Nothing is optional, to be placed on the shelf of neglect. The Holy Spirit did not move men to write things we do not need to know. Further, if the Scriptures were written for our learning, we should be about the business of learning from them.

It is not possible for spiritual advancement in any sense to be realized independently of the Scriptures. Even your fellowship with the Lord depends upon your relationship to His Word, by which you live (Matt 4:4). **If you come away from the Scriptures to have fellowship with God, you leap into the dark, and will be controlled by imaginations.** Those who treat the Scriptures with neglect, or even disrespect, have thereby revealed their distance from the God who gave them. The Lord Jesus, who personally

faith only occasionally, while having long periods of spiritual inactivity.

“Patience” carries the idea of being dependable, and able to endure lengthy periods of hardship and challenge. There is determination in “patience,” and a constant vision of the goal as well. The person with “patience” can determinedly go into a den of lions or a furnace of fire. The threats of the enemy do not push such a person off of the narrow way. Hardship does not remove him from the highway of holiness.

Our text says that such “patience” comes through the Scriptures. By this, the Spirit means that the Scriptures fuel patience. They contain words that strengthen an enduring spirit like food nourishes the body. The Lord has placed accounts in Scripture that help to produce endurance in His people. There are teachings and exhortations in Scripture that reveal the sense, or rationality, of “patient continuance” (Rom 2:7). They also confirm the utter insanity of dropping out of the race, or thinking it can be won without running at all.

If it is true that such “patience” is the result of exposure to the Scriptures, then perseverance is impossible for those who are fundamentally ignorant of them. The possibility of finishing the race that is set before us is directly proportionate to our familiarity with the good word of God.

Comfort

Endurance is not the only thing required to complete our race. We also need comfort, consolation, and encouragement. This is encouragement through counsel, exhortation, or entreaty. The human spirit must be lifted up, encouraged, and helped to see the truth of God, if we are to persevere.

It is not coincidence that the Holy Spirit is called “the Comforter” (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). Some versions translate “Comforter” as “Helper,”^{NKJV,NASB} “Counselor,”^{NIV} or “Advocate.”^{NRSV} Because the Scriptures were written under His direction (2 Pet 1:21), the nature of the Spirit Himself is found in them. **What He is said to do, is also affirmed of the Scriptures.** The two cannot be separated.

The Scriptures comfort or encourage us because of the many promises affirmed therein. They do so through the various accounts of triumphant faith. They confirm to us that the mighty God of heaven undergirds those who embrace His purpose, and are willing to do His will. Who can describe the impact that accounts like David and Goliath, Daniel and the lion’s den, and the three Hebrew children and the fiery furnace, have had upon the faithful? What of the conquering of Jericho, the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah, or the slaying

written, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). The purity God requires is not possible without the “hope” to which He has begotten us. Uncertain disciples cannot become or keep pure. Life is too challenging for those who are unsure of their eternal destiny.

This hope does not come through prayer, but “by the patience and comfort

To be encouraged and consoled is good, but that is not enough either. We do not live by patience, nor are we saved by comfort. They are both blessed and obligatory, but they are streams that empty themselves into a vastly larger depository. That depository is hope, by which “we are saved”

of the hosts of threatening Sennacherib! What determinations to be faithful to God have been aided by Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones, and Daniel’s stone hewn out of a mountain without hands! And, what of the unlikely exaltation of Moses, Joseph, and Daniel! Indeed, we do receive comfort “of the Scriptures.”

MIGHT HAVE HOPE

Patience and comfort are not ends of themselves. There is a purpose for them both – an objective that is higher than patience and hope themselves. It is not enough to merely plod along in the life of faith every day. To be encouraged and consoled is good, but that is not enough either. **We do not live by patience, nor are we saved by comfort.** They are both blessed and obligatory, but they are streams that empty themselves into a vastly larger depository. That depository is hope, by which “we are saved” (Rom 8:24-25).

God has begotten us again to a “living hope,” or one that dominates and is triumphant. That hope is the engine that promotes personal purity. As it is

of the Scriptures.” If the Scriptures are strange to me, hope will not be within me. If the Word of God makes no sense to me, I will not be persuaded “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12).

The postulate of this text is that if we have hope, we will triumphantly cross the finish line!

This “hope” is described as “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil” (Heb 6:19). It keeps the soul from drifting aimlessly upon the sea of life. It sustains the soul in times of trial and discouragement. Hope is like a bright star that cannot be hidden by the dark clouds of difficulty. It penetrates through the darkness, convincing the soul of a “better country” (Heb 11:16), and a morning that will dawn with full and undiminished joy for the believer (Psa 30:5).

Because hope is anchored in heaven, the “powers of the world to come” are brought to us through it (Heb 6:5). The effectiveness of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, and the holy

Prophets is traceable to more than their accounts in Scripture. The Word of God has made us aware of these holy men, and has acquainted us with both their manners and triumphs. But these men are still alive, for God is still their God. God *"is not the God of the dead, but of the living"* (Matt 22:32). They are now among the *"great cloud of witnesses"* that surrounds us (Heb 12:1). In ways

transcendent to our intellect, we are helped by these noble souls whose records are in the Bible. We have been called into their fellowship (Heb 12:23), and their effectiveness to us now is owing to their persons, not merely a historical record of them.

This is another reason why the Scriptures bring us patience and comfort,

thereby causing hope to flourish within us. All of this helps us to be gracious and forbearing of the household of faith, assisting us in the sacred work of bearing with their infirmities, and not allowing them to be an occasion for the flesh. There is no way to fully measure the impact of a thriving hope upon the soul. It tends to lift the spirit, giving a reason keep the faith and finish the race.

GRANTED TO BE LIKE-MINDED

"⁵ Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be

as it really was all along. When once it dawns upon the human spirit that the

I am always edified by the consideration of God's extensive involvement in our salvation. It is a circumstance that my former theology did not easily allow. I was led to believe that the preeminent role in salvation was that of man himself

LIKE-MINDED one toward another according to Christ Jesus. I am always edified by the consideration of God's extensive involvement in our salvation. It is a circumstance that my former theology did not easily allow. I was led to believe that the preeminent role in salvation was that of man himself – that he largely determined the strength with which he addressed matters of salvation as well his eternal destiny. It was not a very comforting view, for my own weaknesses constantly confronted me. It was not a moral weakness, pulling me into immorality, but a lively awareness that God required more of me than I seemed able to give. Of course, my theology comforted me with thoughts like, "We are all sinners. The only difference is that we are forgiven." Or, "After all, we are only human." Or, "If we do our best, that will be enough." Or, "God understands, and really does not mean we have to do everything He requires." . . . etc.

All of that is as foolish to me now

demands of God are very real, and that we do not have the option of ignoring or mitigating them, the involvement of God in our salvation becomes a most comforting thought. Before dealing with this verse, allow me to confirm to you that what it declares is in strict accord with the rest of Scripture. God is consistently declared to interface with His people.

Commitments to Israel

*" . . . I will **cause thee** to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it"* (Isa 58:14).

*" . . . and I will **cause you** to dwell in this place"* (Jer 7:3).

*" . . . I will this once **cause them** to know, I will **cause them** to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The LORD"* (Jer 16:21).

*"A new heart also will I **give you**, and a new spirit **will I put** within you: and*

I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and ***I will give*** you an heart of flesh. And ***I will put*** my spirit within you, and ***cause you*** to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them" (Ezek 36:26).

Commitments to Those in Christ

*"That He would **grant you**, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened** with might by His Spirit in the inner man . . ." (Eph 3:17).*

*"Now the Lord of peace Himself **give you** peace always by all means . . ." (2 Thess 3:16).*

*"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are **taught of God** to love one another"* (1 Thess 4:9).

*"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, **may give unto you** the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him"* (Eph 1:17).

*"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, **from God the Father** and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph 6:23).

*"And the Lord **make you to increase** and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you"* (1 Thess 3:12).

*"And the Lord **direct your hearts** into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ"* (2 Thess 3:5).

*"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, **make you perfect** in every good work to do His will, **working in***

you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb 13:20-21).

*"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, **make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you**"* (1 Pet 5:10).

These are only a very small sampling of the texts that affirm the participation of God in our personal lives. These things are not intended to suggest we have no involvement ourselves. They ARE intended to confirm we cannot fulfill our responsibilities without the Lord. There is no point in salvation where we grow beyond the need for God to *"work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure"* (Phil 2:13). Blessed, indeed, is the person who knows this and relies upon it. Such will be given great advantages.

THE GOD OF PATIENCE AND CONSOLATION

"Now the God of patience and consolation . . ." Other versions read, *"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement . . ."*^{NASB}

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement . . ."^{NIV} and *"May the God of steadfastness and encouragement . . ."*

^{NRSV} This is staple fare for the righteous – hearing who God is. Later in this book, the Spirit will refer to God as *"the God of hope"* (15:13) and *"the God of peace"* (15:33; 16:20). Elsewhere He is referred to as *"the God of all comfort"* (2 Cor 1:3), *"the God of love and peace"* (2 Cor 13:11), and *"the God of all grace"* (1 Pet 5:10).

This language holds forth God as the Source of what we need. James reminds us that *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). How precious it is to consider these things.

God is the God of patience because He gives patience, and the God of comfort because He gives comfort.

Notice, the very things said to come to us through the Scriptures, are

now traced back to God Himself: *"patience and comfort"* (15:4). **It is the relation of Deity with the Scriptures that gives them power.** That is why we can *"live by every word of God"* (Lk 4:4). It is what makes them *"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Now the Apostle prays a blessing

Yet, this is accord is consistently set before the people of God as something to be attained. *"That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God . . . be of one mind . . . with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel . . . having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind . . . be ye all of one mind . . . Be of the same mind one toward another . . . be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8; Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 1:10).

There is no point in salvation where we grow beyond the need for God to *"work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure"* (Phil 2:13). Blessed, indeed, is the person who knows this and relies upon it. Such will be given great advantages.

upon the brethren. He calls upon the *"God of patience and consolation"* to do something special among the saints. It is a work worthy of God, for it can be done by no one else.

GRANT YOU TO BE LIKE-MINDED

" . . . grant you to be LIKE-MINDED one toward another . . ." Other versions read, *"grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,"*^{NASB} *"give you a spirit of unity among yourselves,"*^{NIV} *"grant you to live in harmony with one another,"*^{NRSV} *"make you of the same mind with one another,"*^{BBE} *"grant you to think in harmony with one another,"*^{NAB} *"help you live in complete harmony with each other,"*^{NLT} and *"give you all the same purpose."*^{NJB}

Who is able to measure the Divine impact that would be brought to bear upon the church if this prayer was being raised up to God? The lack of like-mindedness among professed believers is staggering. It is the cause of all sectarianism, factionism, and division. It is the source of endless debates and theological confusion.

Is there any question about the priority of this matter? And yet one can scarcely find a single congregation that enjoys any measurable degree of spiritual oneness. It is no wonder that the church is virtually powerless, for *"every city or house divided against itself shall not stand"* (Matt 12:25).

However, our text brings this down to the personal level – that of one believer with another. Some brethren cannot to be received, while others are despised. We are not to be peaceable with some of God's children, and judgmental toward others. Emphatically, believers are exhorted, *"be at peace among yourselves"* (1 Thess 5:13). That involves seeking to edify one another. It means self interests are to be forfeited when Christ's brethren can be advantaged by that forfeiture.

Such a work is too challenging for *"the natural man."* In fact, it is utterly hopeless. Some measure of like-mindedness may be achieved for a fleeting moment, but our text is not speaking of that type of unanimity. This is precisely why *"the God of patience and consolation"* is called into the picture. We need His help!

The Role of Patience and Consolation

Patience, or endurance, and consolation, or comfort, are to like-mindedness what the showers are to parched ground. They promote being of the same mind, for those who are “enduring all things” tend to think alike. Their focus tends to be the same. Those who are walking in “the comfort of the Holy Spirit” are being led toward the same values and objectives.

All of God’s gifts are designed to orient us for glory, and insulate us against the eroding effects of this present evil world. That very circumstance causes the recipients of patience and consolation to be drawn together. Apart from the experience of those Divinely originated

attitude of Christ Jesus,^{NLT} and “*following the example of Christ Jesus.*”^{NJB}

The idea here is that it is a unity with Christ that produces a unity with one another. Christ is “one” with His people, for they have been made “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17). They are “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30). Any disunity among the members is clearly not of Christ, for He dwells in their hearts by faith (Eph 3:17), and manifests Himself to them (John 14:23).

There is nothing about Christ or His salvation that will drive a wedge between those who are joined to Him. He who loves us (Gal 2:20), cannot move us to

The holy angels are also joined to the purpose He is fulfilling, and enter heartily into their work. Wherever there is an individual who has His commandments, keeps them, and loves Him, Jesus says, “I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). Of such a person, Jesus also says, “My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23). The measure of the individual’s faith is not the determining factor for Divine fellowship. Whether or not everything is seen clearly does not determine if the Father and Son take up their abode with us. Rather, it is the person’s sensitivity to, and love for, the Savior that is the qualification for the blessing.

We cannot expect more for fellowship with us than Jesus requires for fellowship with Himself

Such an attitude is not according to Christ. It contradicts His spirit as well as His word. But when we are LIKE-MINDED, looking in the same direction, desiring the same habitation, and sustained by the same God, we are living “according to Christ.” It is a blessed privilege, indeed, to be in such accord with the Savior.

Jesus Did Come to Bring Division

It is quite true that Jesus did not come to bring peace, but a sword, setting one person against another (Matt 10:34-36). However, that division was not among believers, but involved a division between believers and unbelievers, wheat and tares, the righteous and the unrighteous.

When division is found among the people of God, it has not been caused by Jesus. Someone has made a place for the devil, for “God is not the author of confusion” 1 Cor 14:33).

There is nothing about Christ or His salvation that will drive a wedge between those who are joined to Him. He who loves us (Gal 2:20), cannot move us to despise one another. He who did not come to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47), will not move us to judge one another. He who prayed that we might be “one” with Himself and the Father will not promote division among us.

mercies, however, like-mindedness will remain a mere idea with no hope of ever being fulfilled.

ACCORDING TO CHRIST JESUS

“ . . . according to Christ Jesus.”

Other versions read, “as you follow Christ Jesus,”^{NIV} “in accordance with Christ Jesus,”^{NRSV} “as you follow Christ Jesus,”^{NIB} “in harmony with Christ Jesus,”^{BBE} “in keeping with Christ Jesus,”^{NAB} “with the

despise one another. He who did not come to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47), will not move us to judge one another. He who prayed that we might be “one” with Himself and the Father will not promote division among us. Such things are “not according to Christ”^{NKJV} (Col 2:8).

Jesus Is the Measure

Jesus is the measure of all valid Kingdom activity. He works in perfect concert with the Father and the Spirit.

ONE MIND AND ONE MOUTH

“⁶ That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There is a purpose for God ministering patience and consolation. There is a high and lofty reason for refraining from

efforts to please ourselves, and seeking to please our brethren “unto edification.” Being “LIKE-MINDED one toward another” is not an end of itself, and ought not to be so considered. While some make unity their primary objective, our text

reveals it is really secondary.

GLORIFYING GOD WITH ONE MIND AND ONE MOUTH

“That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.” Other versions

read, *“that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God,”* ^{NASB} *“so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God,”* ^{NIV} *“so that together you may with one voice glorify the God,”* ^{NRSV} and *“Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God.”* ^{NLT}

This is not speaking about, what men are now calling, a praise and worship service, although prayer and praise are surely involved. This involves more than perfunctory actions. The mind is included as well as the mouth.

If Christ has *“received us to the glory of God”* (Rom 15:7), then God is also glorified by our reception of one another. In that reception, we acknowledge the saints are God’s workmanship and Christ’s brethren.

The thought occurs to me that God cannot be glorified by a church that does not receive one another. Neither, indeed, can He be honored by those who are in fundamental disagreement with one another. As soon as contention, the despising of brethren, and judgmental attitudes surface, God ceases to be glorified in the sense of our text. I say “in the sense of our text,” because God will eventually be justified in all of His sayings. He will disown those who have disowned or despised His people, for they have exhibited a spirit that has its genesis with Satan, and is *“not according to Christ.”* If we knew nothing more than this, we would vigorously shun any attitude that moved us to look down upon, or judge, those who are living with a good conscience before the Lord. If they have a weak and immature faith, we will not despise them. If they are freed by their conscience to do things our conscience does not allow, we will not judge them. In this manner, an environment is produced in which God can be glorified. The absence of these qualities produces a arena in which God is not glorified.

God Glorified

What does it mean to glorify God? Is this a synonym for praise? It is true that we are *“a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Pet 2:9). However, praise and glory are

not the same thing. Praise has to do with singing or articulating honor to God – thankfully acknowledging what He has done. Various instruments can be used to praise the Lord, such as the trumpet, psaltry, and harp (Psa 150:3-4).

Glorifying God goes even deeper than praise. It is more than acknowledgment of His greatness and virtues. Glorifying God has to do with bringing Him honor. It involves magnifying the Lord, so that His Person overshadows everything else. His prominence is more clearly seen when He is glorified.

In the unity of God’s people, the power of the Gospel and the effectiveness of the grace it announces is seen, thereby bringing glory, or honor, to God. This is the kind of glory or honor mentioned in First Corinthians. If, in the course of their

admonition to all believers is, *“be of one mind”* (2 Cor 13:11). As we strive, or work, together, it is to be *“with one mind”* (Phil 1:27). This is *being “of one accord, of one mind”* (Phil 2:2).

Being of *“one mind”* is not seeing everything the same way – although that is certainly the ideal. Our text has already acknowledged that some do not see eating meat the same way. Others do not consider days in the same manner. To be of one mind is not to see to it that there is perfect accord in our views of meats and days. Those areas are not high enough for the challenge of *“one mind.”*

Our minds are to be gathered together around Christ Jesus. *“One mind”* speaks of perceiving Him as the Son of God, and Him in whom we are made complete. *“One mind”* focuses on standing before Him faultless, and labors to that

God will eventually be justified in all of His sayings. He will disown those who have disowned or despised His people, for they have exhibited a spirit that has its genesis with Satan, and is *“not according to Christ.”*

gathering, a wave of insightful speaking took place, and a stranger, unlearned in the ways of God, came in, upon hearing it *“he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth”* (1 Cor 14:24-25). Through their unified speaking, God was glorified, and honor was brought to Him.

In this sense, glory is not the praise itself, but results from the praise or prophecy.

One Mind

Before there can truly be *“one mouth,”* there must be *“one mind.”* This is a single mind-set that reflects *“the mind of Christ”* (1 Cor 2:16). This is the standard for those in Christ. The

end. The brother who feels he cannot eat meat, and the one who knows he can eat meat, can be perfectly joined together *“in the same mind.”* They can live for the same purpose and the same Person. They can maintain a pure conscience, and wait for the coming of the Lord. They can be determined to suffer for Christ, stand against the wiles of the devil, and obtain the prize. That is the *“one mind”* that brings glory to God.

And how is this *“one mind”* realized? It is the product of God’s own working. It is God Himself who grants us to be *“LIKE-MINDED one toward another”* (verse 5). There is no question about us entering into the process. After all, we are the ones who are admonished to not please ourselves, but please our neighbor to his edification (verses 1-2). But it is God who causes us to be LIKE-

MINDED.

A Principle to be Seen

There is a Kingdom principle to be seen here – a way in which the benefits of God are realized. It is AS we are engaged in pleasing the Lord that grace is given to us. When we extend ourselves to do what God has said, we will experience the power of God, thereby causing our efforts to be effectual.

It is much like the palsied man who was let down through the roof to the feet of Jesus. Although he had never walked, Jesus said, “Arise, take up thy bed, and walk” (Mark 2:9). Jesus said the same thing to a man by the pool of Bethesda. He had not walked for thirty eight years, yet Jesus said, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk” (John 5:8). In both cases, human effort was met by Divine

One Mouth

When God grants His people to be “*LIKE-MINDED toward one another*,” it affects their mouths as well as their minds. In fact, the mind and the mouth become coordinated when Divine power is realized. It is not possible to “*speak the same thing*” unless we have “*one mind*.”

An Example of “One Mouth”

An example of “*one mouth*” is seen in one of the prayers of the early church. At one point, “*the rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem*.” They called Peter and John to task for preaching the Gospel, and “*commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*” (Acts 4:5-18). Because they could find no cause to

oppositions of kings and princes were vain, and that they were but vassals of God, fulfilling His desire, while He overturned their’s. They articulated how Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel had conspired against Jesus, only to “*to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done*.” Their faith rose to the occasion, as with “*one mouth*” they called upon the name of the Lord. “*Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus*” (Acts 4:29-30). The fact that God was glorified is confirmed by what followed their prayer. “*And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness*” (verse 31). A marvelous and unparalleled unity swept through that holy band of people, as they cut loose from the world in a remarkable way. With great power the Apostles gave witness to the resurrection of Christ, and “*great grace was upon them all*” (verses 32-33). God was glorified

If we desire to glorify God with “one mind,” we must first extend ourselves to receive one another without disputations, and cease from judging one another. It is essential that we seek to edify one another. Where that effort is missing, the pursuit of unity and “one mind” are vain pursuits.

Prior to that event, there was an intense interest among the disciples in edifying one another. After Jesus had ascended into heaven, “*all continued in prayer with one accord*” (Acts 1:14). Without so much as a note of disagreement among them, they depended upon the Lord to guide their choice of Judas’ replacement (1:15-26). When the day of Pentecost was “*fully come*,” they were “*all with one accord in one place*” (Acts 2:1). Even after 3,000 souls were added to the church (2:41), they all continued “*daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people*” (2:46).

power, thereby producing the desired effect. If either man would have remained on their bed, making no effort to rise and walk, both would have remained there. Their faith brought them into the process in which God empowered them to do what nature was impotent to accomplish.

So it is with our text. If we desire to glorify God with “*one mind*,” we must first extend ourselves to receive one another without disputations, and cease from judging one another. It is essential that we seek to edify one another. Where that effort is missing, the pursuit of unity and “*one mind*” are vain pursuits. God will not empower those who are not engaged in the work of edifying one another. However, where people are serious about that activity, God will grant them to be “*LIKE-MINDED*,” and they, in return, will glorify Him.

punish them, however, they “*threatened them*,” and “*let them go*” (Acts 4:21). What they then did is noteworthy.

Upon being let go, Peter and John immediately went to “*their own companions*,” reporting the things that had been done. Upon hearing of the threats of the very people who killed Jesus, the magnificent unity of the believers surfaced. It is written, “*And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said . . .*”

Their prayer evidenced strong faith and insight, as they recalled pertinent Scriptures, and confessed they knew their God was able to deliver them. With “*one mouth*” they glorified God. They confessed He was the God who made heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. They acknowledged that the

When Peter and John were released from prison, their “*companions*” were still together in both mind and body. There were no divisions among them, and they were seeking to “*please*” their “*neighbor*.” In that state, God granted them to be “*LIKE-MINDED*,” and they followed through by glorifying Him with “*one mind*”

and one mouth.”

Our text, then, is not mere theory. It has been lived out by others before us, and we do well to follow in their steps.

THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

God is “our Father” who is in heaven, and we rejoice in that circumstance. **However His primary relationship is to Christ Jesus, not to us!** The Holy Spirit makes a frequent point of this, hereby confirming its importance: “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 1:3; Eph 3:14; Col 1:3). He is also called “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 11:31; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). Additionally, we read of Him as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:17).

Let it be clear, **the working of God does not center in us, or even in the church. The locus of the Kingdom is Jesus Himself.** Everything God gives comes through His Son. Everything He receives comes through Him as well. God receives no glory that

does not come through and because of Jesus. He gives no graces and no benefits that are not administered by the Lord Jesus Christ! We do well, therefore, to

Himself for me” ^{NKJV} (Gal 2:20). And again, “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). When that kind of spirit pervades the church, the blessing of God is on the

When that kind of spirit pervades the church, the blessing of God is on the way. He will grant it to be “LIKE-MINDED,” that with “one mind and one mouth” they may glorify Him. A commonality will thus be found in our focus, as well as our thinking and speaking.

consider Jesus the center of our lives.

Allow me to state this in the words of Scripture. “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

way. He will grant it to be “LIKE-MINDED,” that with “one mind and one mouth” they may glorify Him. A commonality will thus be found in our focus, as well as our thinking and speaking. How blessed it is to be involved in such a marvelous working – and it is all according to Divine purpose.

CONCLUSION

There is a certain refreshment that comes from seeing and participating in these things. Test and see if this is not the truth. When the saints are seeking to edify one another, the blessing of God is upon them. There is a greater degree of spiritual understanding, and less of a

brought to our Lord.

Conversely, where edification is not the focus, all manner of fleshly expressions begun to erupt. When edification has no place in the church, the flesh comes off of the cross on which God

All of this occurs because God does not dwell where there is no interest in strengthening and encouraging His people.

However, where self interests are forfeited in order to give advantages to those who are living by faith, “great grace” will surely be experienced.

Conversely, where edification is not the focus, all manner of fleshly expressions begun to erupt. When edification has no place in the church, the flesh comes off of the cross on which God placed it. Leaders tend to be more corrupt, and people tend to be more foolish. The Word of God loses its place of prominence, and opinions are given too much weight.

I cannot close this lesson without again emphasizing the active role God Himself plays in our salvation. His is not a mere historical role, but a contemporary one. He is in the business of giving grants – granting, for example, that we be “LIKE-MINDED.” He can give us patience, and desires to do so, for He is the “God of patience.” He can give us comfort, seeing to it that we are encouraged and strengthened on our way to glory, for He is “the God of comfort.”

proneness to despising and judging one another. In an environment of edification, we progress toward having one mind and one mouth. Consequently, more glory is

placed it. Leaders tend to be more corrupt, and people tend to be more foolish. The Word of God loses its place of prominence, and opinions are given too much weight.

You cannot give God too much credit in our salvation, even though some

theology leaves people thinking that is possible. God is glorified when we see and confess His prominence and incessant activity in salvation. No person should draw back from honoring Him by confessing His indispensable involvement.

Also, in order to ensure that we do not come short of the goal, or that we are

not found without the required resources, everything comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. The excellence of this arrangement is seen in the fact that He is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. This is because He was tempted in all points like as we are, although He was without sin. God honors Jesus for the great work He has done in

our behalf. When we will serve Jesus by living for Him, or "according to Christ," God will also honor us. Jesus said, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor" (John 12:26). Now, that is the kind of blessing you want to obtain, and in Jesus, you surely can!



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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 46



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

GLORIFYING GOD TOGETHER

15:7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. ⁸ Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, ⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." ¹⁰ And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" ¹¹ And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples" ¹² And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope." ¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ^{NKJV} (Romans 15:7-13)

INTRODUCTION

While we are all individual believers, that is not all we are. We are part of an exceeding large number – the “*body of Christ*,” and are “*members in particular*” (1 Cor 12:27). This vast multitude is described as being “*out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*” (Rev 5:9). So far as territory is concerned, the larger part of this number are “*Gentiles*.” Although the covenantal workings of God were **not** directed to the Gentiles, or “*nations*,” yet they have become participants in His “*great salvation*.” The Gentiles were, in a very real sense, “*not a people*” (1 Pet 2:10).

This is a most marvelous consideration! The Spirit has affirmed that God’s earlier dealings were confined to the Jews, “*to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever*” (9:4-5). They are the “*good olive tree*” into which we Gentiles have been “*grafted*.” They are the “*natural branches*” who shall yet be grafted “*into their own olive tree*” (11:24). The Law, all of the prophets, and

all of the promises, were given to them. John the Baptist came from them, as well as our blessed Savior Himself. And yet, we Gentiles are now found in the Savior that came unto them (John 1:11). “*This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes*” (Psalm 118:23).

All of this is highly relevant to this section of Scripture. The issue of weak faith, the eating of meats, and the observance of days, was, among other things, a result of the mingling of Jew and Gentile in a common “*body*.” Different background! Different spiritual pedigree!

The marvelous accomplishments of redemption result in God receiving great glory from Jew and Gentile--by Given O. Blakely

OUTLINE

- < THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TO DO (15:7)
- < JESUS, A SERVANT TO THE CIRCUMCISION (15:8)
- < THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GENTILES (15:9-12)
- < A FILLING ACCOMPLISHED BY GOD (15:13)

Differing perspectives.

The distinction between Jew and Gentile was the result of God's own working. From the natural point of view, it is the only external distinction among men that was originated and sanctioned by God Himself. Hence, if He has brought both of them together in Christ Jesus, there is no further basis for a distinction between them. In this section of Romans, humanly conceived distinctions erupt in one brother despising another. It also occurs when one brother judges another. In both instances, the action is forbidden by God. The very nature of our salvation also prohibits such attitudes.

In Christ, we have been brought together to serve and glorify God together. **Further, we will see that if that togetherness is interrupted by the carnality and capriciousness of men, no further purpose for salvation exists.** Division among God's people contradicts the prophecies of the prophets, the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, and the words of Jesus Himself. **If what we call "salvation" does not join us together, we lack evidence that we have even been saved at all.** There is simply too much revealed on this subject for it to be questioned.

THE PROPHETS

- ' *"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion."* (Isa 52:6)
- ' *"And I will give them **one heart**, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them."* (Jer 32:39)

*"For then will I turn to the **people a pure language**, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him **with one consent**."* (Zech 52:6)

*"And I will give them **one heart**, and I will put **a new spirit** within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh."* (Ezek 11:19)

JESUS CHRIST

*"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be **one fold**, and **one shepherd**."* (John 10:16)

THE APOSTLES

*"For as we have many members in **one body**, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are **one body in Christ**, and every one members **one of another**."* (Rom 12:4)

*"For we being many **are one bread, and one body**: for we are all partakers of that one bread."* (1 Cor 10:17)

*"For as **the body is one**, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, **being many, are one body**: so also is Christ."* (1 Cor 12:12)

*"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also **ye are called in one body**; and be ye thankful."* (Col 3:15)

THE POINT

The point of all of this is that despising or judging our brethren can only occur when we forget we are "*one body*."

for them (Eph 5:29). He does not judge them because they lack understanding, but teaches them "*as the truth is in Jesus*" (Eph 4:20-21).

When, therefore, these attitudes are found among those professing His name, they reveal, to some measure, an absence of fellowship with Him. **Jesus does not fellowship with individuals in despising those who have believed on Him, regardless of the infancy of their faith. Nor, indeed, does He join with them in judging those for whom He intercedes, because they do not see things exactly as they do.**

It will do no good to attempt to justify despising or judging the people of God. There is no place for it. That is the purpose for this text. However, the Spirit will not simply forbid us to do these things. He will assist us to see why they are utterly unreasonable to faith. He will show us that the purpose of God, when understood, makes no allowance for such conduct. **He will seek to convince us that such an abundance has been revealed about Divine intent, that no question should exist on this matter.** That is something of what is involved in this marvelous text.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I have taken the time to say these things because of my own miserable background. Because of my own ignorance, and the flawed doctrine to which I was subjected, I did exactly what the Spirit here forbids: despising and judging those who have faith in Christ. I know something of the confusion that this

Even though I struggled to disqualify them from Divine acceptance, my own conscience shouted back to me, telling me they were not worthy of being excluded from Divine acceptance. Thus, I should receive them.

Jesus does not preside over multiple bodies, because He Himself is not "*divided*" (1 Cor 1:13). Jesus does not despise the members of His body, but rather nourishes and cares

attitude generates. Frequently, more than I dare to imagine, I confronted people whom my theological stance forced me judge or despise. Yet, many of these very

people possessed spiritual qualities I knew were superior to my own. Even though I struggled to disqualify them from Divine acceptance, my own conscience shouted back to me, telling me they were not worthy of being excluded from Divine acceptance. Thus, I should receive them.

I am exceeding grateful to God for being delivered from this wretched experience. It forced my mouth to speak contrary to my conscience. It even tended to make me more conscience of my own view than of the Word of the Living God.

The Kingdom of Christ and of God is so ordered as to make professing believers miserable and uncomfortable when they do not live

with a mind to please the Lord. Despising and judgmental people are neither pleasant nor peaceful. Their own view of things tends to make them harsh and abrasive. They are inclined to be rude and inconsiderate, to debate and be contentious. It is their religion that makes them this way. Yet, the Lord Jesus does not abandon such people. Rather, through the Spirit He strives with them to bring them into accord with Himself. He labors to assist them to see His people as He Himself sees them. They will never be the worse for accepting those whom He has accepted, and will always be the worse for despising, judging, or even rejecting them. **Such attitudes will not, and cannot, bring any true advantage to those possessing them. They are like an**

eroding leprosy to the soul, which rots both mind and heart. Praise God, there is deliverance from them in Jesus!

Therefore, it should not surprise us that the Spirit speaks to us so extensively about this subject. This is not a light matter. Nor, indeed, is it something optional, that can be ignored with impunity. Rather, this is something that deals with helping or hindering the progress of the people of God. It has to do with being a helper, or comforter, like the Spirit, or an adversary like the devil. We cannot be both, but can only be one. It confirms to our hearts that the people of God have sufficient disadvantages within and without to deal with. They need no further hindrance from us.

THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TO DO

^{15:7} **Therefore receive one** | merely meet the requirements of the

At once it becomes obvious that this is not a mere formality – like recognizing one another as belonging to the same local congregation or denomination. Formalities lacking heart or affection are out of place in the body of Christ.

another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” The exhortation that follows is the only acceptable response to what has been affirmed. (1 The strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. (2 We should not seek to please ourselves. (3 We are to seek our neighbor’s edification. (4 Christ did not please Himself. (5 God will grant us to be like-minded toward one another. (6 The aim is to glorify God with one mind and one mouth (15:1-6).

It is imperative that we conduct our lives in harmony with the truth we have embraced. All too often, this requirement is either ignored altogether, or placed into the background of believer’s thinking. It is thought to be enough to

institution. Or, lower still, to live with a basic regard for satisfying self. But this is not acceptable. First, the truth is to be affirmed “*constantly*” (Tit 3:8), always placing it before the people of God for their consideration. Second, a hearty and consistent effort is to be expended in conforming our lives to that truth. Where either of these is missing, the people are living in transgression, and are outside of the circumference of God’s will.

This does not mean one lacking these things is instantly rejected by God. That should be evident by the word of exhortation that follows. **However, failing to do what is admonished does lead to eventual Divine rejection.** One cannot continue to live in contradiction of

the truth of God without paying the penalty. We must never forget that our Lord’s return will mean the condemnation of all who “*obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thess 1:8). It is with this ultimate reality in mind that we are strongly urged to bring our lives into conformity with the Gospel.

THEREFORE RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER

“*Therefore receive one another . . .*” Other versions read, “*Wherefore, accept one another,*” ^{NASB} “*Welcome one another,*” ^{NRSV} and “*So then, take one another to your hearts.*” ^{BBE} At once it becomes obvious that this is not a mere formality – like recognizing one another as belonging to the same local congregation or denomination. **Formalities lacking heart or affection are out of place in the body of Christ.**

The word “*receive*” is a profound word with Kingdom depth. Etymologically, it comes from *προσλαμβάνεσθε*, which here means “to grant one access to one’s heart; to take into friendship and contact.” ^{THAYER} The Basic Bible English (BBE) version captures this sense of the word: “*So then, take one another to your hearts.*”

To “*receive one another*” in this

manner cannot not accomplished through law, or out of a sense of mere obligation. This is more than the intellect, or any other natural human faculty, can do. Yet, it is imperative that it be done. The answer, of course, is found in God granting us to be *“like-minded toward one another”* (verse 6). It is realized when *“grace and peace”* come to us *“from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (1:7).

All of the capacities to fulfill this word were granted when we were *“baptized into His (Christ’s) death”* (Rom 6:3). In that experience, we became *“dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (6:11). Furthermore, we are no longer *“under the Law, but under grace”* (6:14). We are not debtors to the flesh, or natural part of us, to follow its depraved prompting (8:12). If we sense any inadequacy in ourselves, God has given us His own Holy Spirit, who *“helpeth our infirmities”* (8:26-27). Jesus is also making intercession for us (8:34), powerfully communicating to us every resource that is required to please God in all of our manners.

What possible reason can be adduced for NOT receiving one another? There is nothing about salvation that inhibits the fulfillment of this word. Our reconciliation to God does not work against it. The fact that *“there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus”* (8:1) contributes to the fulfillment of this requirement. The fact that we were all *“digged”* from the same *“hole of the pit”* (Isa 51:1), forbids an uncomely view of one another.

“Receive one another!” Receive one another as *“members of one another”* (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). Receive one another as belonging to Christ Himself – *“of His flesh, and of His bones”* (Eph 5:30). Receive one another as *“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”* (Rom 8:17). Receive one another as having been delivered from the separating influences of flesh and blood! As a believer you are reminded, *“ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet 1:18-19).^{NKJV} There is no need to remain

shackled to lifeless traditions that were handed down to us!

CHRIST ALSO RECEIVED US

“ . . . just as Christ also received us . . . ” Other versions read, *“just as Christ also accepted us,”*^{NASB} *“just as Christ has welcomed you,”*^{NRSV} and *“as Christ took us.”*^{BBE} And how was it that Christ received us? What did He look for in us? What moved Him to receive us unto Himself. Did He not invite us to come to Him when we were *“weary and heavy laden.”* And did He not receive us when we consented to *“learn from”* Him (Matt 11:28–29)? Did He not promise, *“him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out”* (John 6:37)? He has extended Himself to make us welcome in His presence!

one another!

Let no believer demand more for fellowship with himself than God and Christ require for fellowship with Themselves.

It may appear quite unnecessary to say such a thing, but it is very needful. We have not been received by God because of the correctness of our theology, or the absence of all flaw.

TO THE GLORY OF GOD

“ . . . to the glory of God.” Other versions read, *“in order to bring praise to God,”*^{NIV} *“for the glory of God,”*^{NRSV} *“unto the honor of God,”*^{DRA} and *“for the sake of God’s glory.”*^{NJB} How marvelous to consider the glory of God!

What does it mean for God to

Make no mistake about this, God Almighty is glorified by Christ’s reception of those who were “dead in trespasses and sins,” yet have come to Him for remission and acceptance! He is glorified because He Himself drew us to Christ

It was our faith that brought us to Christ! That is what moved Him to receive us! It was our faith that moved God to *“purify”* our hearts (Acts 15:9). We were sanctified, being made acceptable to God, by our faith (Acts 26:18). The very righteousness of God was given to us *“by faith”* (Rom 1:17; Phil 3:9). We were *“justified by faith”* (Rom 3:28; 5:1). We are categorically told we *“are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:26).

Initially, that faith was certainly not mature faith. It was hearty, and it was *“with the heart”* (Rom 10:10), but it was only the beginning. Much like the blind man from Bethsaida, we saw the truth of God like *“men as trees walking”* (Mk 8:24). We knew there was more than we saw, and so did the Lord. Yet, He *“received us”* – not upon the basis of the fulness of our faith, or the precision of its vision, but upon the basis of faith itself. That is precisely how we are to receive

receive glory from something? **It means that His power and Presence are seen in what has been accomplished. There is an obvious association of what is seen and done with the Living God. He is the explanation for what is accomplished!**

Make no mistake about this, God Almighty is glorified by Christ’s reception of those who were *“dead in trespasses and sins,”* yet have come to Him for remission and acceptance! He is glorified because He Himself drew us to Christ (John 6:44,65). He is honored because we are *“made accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6). What occurred when Jesus received us revealed what a marvelous work was accomplished by the Father. He put us into Christ, making Him to be our *“wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Cor 1:30). Heaven saw the working of God in our repentance, and rejoiced to the glory of the Father (Luke 15:7). When Jesus *“received us,”* it confirmed the immutability of God’s

promise, who at the threshold of human history declared the “Seed” of woman would bruise the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). His promise of a New Covenant in which God would remember sins no more was corroborated (Heb 8:8-13).

Christ “received” us from God the Father. That is precisely why He frequently referred to those who had been

“given” to Him (John 6:39; 10:29; 17:9,11,24). In His last prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus referred to those who had been given to Him, and what the Father’s will was concerning them. “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (John 17:1-2).

Christ received us without question. What possible reason can be presented for believers not receiving one another? It is a sin of the greatest magnitude to refuse to receive those whom Christ Himself has received. **Such conduct brings no glory to God, and no promise of eternal life is given to those who do not bring glory to God?**

JESUS, A SERVANT TO THE CIRCUMCISION

“^s Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers . . .” Although men often fail to place a high value upon the promises of God, they are always held in the highest regard in Scripture. It is through His promises that we become “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). Some have even concocted theologies that present God as having voided His promises. Such views particularly relate to Israel, to whom God is thought to no longer have any commitment. In dealing with chapters nine through eleven, I have already shown the utter folly of such views. Here again, however, the Spirit brings up God’s commitment to Israel. It is as though He

become . . .” Another version reads, “Christ hath been made.” ^{ASV} This is something the death, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus led to. It is an objective accomplished by His atonement. **It refers to the fulfillment of the prophecies given to Israel concerning a Messiah, or “Christ.”** It represents a ministry for which His vicarious atonement qualified Him.

Throughout the Christian world, there are simplistic views of the statement, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb 13:8). This statement deals with Christ’s essential nature, not his ministry and activities. There was, for example, a time when He was “in the form of God” and

does not imply He always did that, is still doing it, or will always do it. There is no basis for such a supposition. It reflects a simplicity that is not honoring to Jesus Christ. There are certain consistencies taking place in “the day of salvation.” However, many of them will be abruptly terminated when Jesus returns in all of His glory to “judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31). His patience with sinners will come to a grinding halt. The testing of the righteous will end.

Why Say All of This?

All of this may appear highly irrelevant to some, and even questionable. Our text, however, postulates Jesus **becoming** something. Just as surely as there was a beginning to His manhood, Jesus has present ministries that had a beginning. Before He became flesh and dwelt among us, He was not interceding for those coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25).

In particular, our text, like much of Apostolic doctrine, is declaring the activities of Christ Jesus following His enthronement “on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). There is a strange absence of this kind of preaching in our day. No person should imagine that godliness and strong hope can be promoted while men have a sparse knowledge of what Jesus is doing now – in “the day of salvation.” We will find this passage to be conducive to understanding, spiritual strength, and the culture of a living hope.

A SERVANT TO THE CIRCUMCISION

“ . . . a servant to the circumcision

Although men often fail to place a high value upon the promises of God, they are always held in the highest regard in Scripture. It is through His promises that we become “partakers of the Divine nature”

insists that we consider them.

A theology that holds the Jews, or “the circumcision,” in disdain is a restrictive one. In this particular text, reasoning concerning the redemption that is in Christ Jesus involves Jesus being a “servant to the circumcision.” As we will see, this is a contemporary circumstance, and not a mere historical one.

JESUS CHRIST HAS BECOME

“Now I say that Jesus Christ has

“was God” (Phil 2:6; John 1:1). There was also a time when He “became flesh,” and “humbled Himself and became obedient” (John 1:14; Phil 2:8). There was a single period of time when He was “tempted in all points like as we are” (Heb 4:15), and even “suffered being tempted” (Heb 2:18). He also “was made to become sin,” and “tasted death for every man” (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:9). These are not matters that apply to “yesterday, today, and forever.”

The fact that Jesus did something,

... "Other versions read, "was a minister of the circumcision,"^{KJV} "hath been made a minister of the circumcision,"^{ASV} and "Christ's work was to serve the circumcised."^{NJB}

The argument being presented is that Christ has embraced both Jew and Gentile, and therefore we should embrace one another. This is not, then, a view of what Jesus did in the past, but what He is doing now. The Spirit is **not** saying that Jesus formerly ministered to the circumcision, but now, instead, is ministering to the Gentiles. Rather, He is saying that **our Lord is currently ministering to both. He begins, however, with the Jew.**

This is a proper beginning. The Gospel, after all, is God's power in order to salvation "to the Jew first" (1:16). The punishment of every soul that does evil is "to the Jew first" (2:9). The promise of "glory, honor, and peace" to those who do good, is also "to the Jew first" (2:10).

"The Circumcision"

The Jewish people, or "the children of Israel," are frequently called "the circumcision." They are never referred to in this manner in Moses and the Prophets, but quite often in the New Covenant writings.

The Former Use of the Word

In fact, the word "circumcision" occurs only one time from Genesis through Malachi, and then it was not a matter of teaching (Ex 4:26). The word "circumcise" is used six times. One was to Abraham (Gen 17:11), three had reference to the spiritual circumcision of the heart (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4), and two to Joshua's re-circumcision of the children of Israel (Josh 5:2,4).

"Circumcised" is used twenty four times in Moses and the Prophets. Eleven of them related to the covenant God made with Abraham (Gen 17:10,12,13,14,23,24, 25,26,27; 21:4). Four were in reference to the sons of Jacob dealing with the men who ravished their sister Dinah (Gen 34:15,17,22,24). Two related to the Passover Feast (Ex 12:44,48). One was a directive under the Law (Lev 12:3). Three were associated with Joshua's re-circumcision of Israel (Josh 5:3,5,7). One

related to God's punishment of both Jew and Gentile (Jer 9:25).

The word "circumcising" occurs one time in Joshua 5:8, and is connected with his re-circumcision of Israel.

I have given you thirty-two uses of the word "circumcision," and its derivatives. All of them pertained to Abraham and his descendants. A few of them were promises of an effective circumcision to come, but even those were promises to Israel, not the Gentiles. Because of this unique identity, those who

that "circumcision" refers to all who are in Christ Jesus. The word is used in that sense: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3). Believers are so identified because they "are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col 2:11). **However, that meaning must not be imposed upon our text, for the Spirit is showing us how Christ has received both Jews and Gentiles.** In

Jesus is a "Servant to" the Jews, not a servant of them! He does not come to serve their desires, but to serve to them the promises of God. He is the fulfillment of all that was promised them through Abraham and the Prophets.

were not Jews were called "uncircumcised," a term denoting Divine favor was not toward them (Judges 14:3; 15:18; 1 Sam 14:6; 17:26,36; 31:4; 2 Sam 1:20; 1 Chron 10:4; Isa 52:1; Jer 9:26; Ezek 28:10; 31:18, etc).

Circumcision was Abraham's "token" of the covenant God made with Him - the covenant of which we have been made partakers in Christ Jesus (Gen 17:11). Stephen referred to it as "the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8). Paul called it "the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith" that Abraham had before he was circumcised (Rom 4:11).

Because of these things, the fleshly descendants of Abraham are called "the circumcision" in the New Covenant writings. (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Rom 3:30; 4:9, 12; 15:8; Gal 2:7-9,12; Eph 2:11; Col 4:11; Tit 1:10). **This is how the word is used in our text: it is speaking of the Jews.** Jesus is declared to have become a minister to the Jews.

I say this because some might be tempted to spiritualize the text, saying

this text HE is emphasizing the two bodies of people that have been brought together, rather than the single body into which they have been merged. **These two bodies, Jew and Gentile, represent the only fleshly distinction God has made among peoples.**

"Servant to"

Jesus is a "Servant **to**" the Jews, not a servant **of** them! He does not come to serve their desires, but to serve to them the promises of God. He is the fulfillment of all that was promised them through Abraham and the Prophets. He comes to them from the Father, to fulfill His good pleasure toward them.

FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD

"... for the truth of God . . . " Other versions read, "on behalf of the truth of God."^{NASB,NIV} "to give effect to the undertakings given by God,"^{BBE} "to show God's truthfulness,"^{NAB} "to show that God is true,"^{NLT} and "fulfilling the truthfulness of God."^{NJB}

The phrase "the truth of God" refers to the truthfulness of God Himself. He is true to His word, and faithful to His

unchanging character. Here is a point that is of utmost importance to God: that men see **He is true to His word!** This is precisely why it is written, *“God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us”* (Heb 6:17-18). Speaking as a man, there was no need for God to confirm His word with an oath, for God cannot lie. Oaths are ordinarily necessary because of the proneness of men to lie. But God cannot lie. He cannot misrepresent, exaggerate, or go back on

Thus, Jesus is represented as becoming a minister to the Jews in order to fulfill what God had promised them. **He did this so that God would be seen as true and faithful.** It is essential that we see this, for men too easily disassociate the fulfillment of God’s promises from themselves. Great bodies of theology have been developed by religious skeptics to account for why God did not do what He promised. For example, some teach the Lord has scrapped His plans for Israel, and has developed a new plan for the Gentiles. Others, sensing the absurdity of such a position, declare that God stopped the prophetic time clock to work for a while with the Gentiles. When this temporary work is completed, He will turn

Purpose In Ministry

One further thing can be seen in this affirmation – something that will assist believers in becoming spiritually stable, thereby bringing glory to God. If Jesus ministers in order to confirm that God is true, we do well to pledge ourselves to do the same. When things do not go our way, we ought not view the Father and the Son as though they had abandoned us. God did not send Jesus to solve all of our self-diagnosed problems, or fulfill all of our self-conceived plans. The Lord Jesus is serving God, not men. **At no point is He depicted as serving the personal interests of individuals whether they be Jew or Gentile.** Those, therefore, who come in the name of the Lord to solve the problems of men, have thereby betrayed they are not from God.

Speaking as a man, there was no need for God to confirm His word with an oath, for God cannot lie. Oaths are ordinarily necessary because of the proneness of men to lie. But God cannot lie. He cannot misrepresent, exaggerate, or go back on His word or His oath

If this seems heartless, we must remember that Jesus Himself has been anointed to *“bind up the broken hearted”* (Isa 61:1). He is the one who gives “rest” to those who are *“weary and heavy laden”* (Matt 11:28-29). While the redeemed play a measurable role in this noble work, their primary involvement is getting the people to Jesus Himself. Salvation joins the individual to Jesus, making *him “one spirit”* with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17).

His word or His oath (example, *“as I live,”* Rom 14:11). The particular oath to which the Hebrews text refers is recorded in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, following Abraham’s intention to sacrifice Isaac as he was commanded. *“By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee . . .”* (Gen 22:16-17). It was imperative that Abraham, as well as we, be assured of the integrity of God’s word. **Although He Himself has no need to swear in such a manner, men are so accustomed to disappointment and frustration that the Lord graciously condescends to our frailty by extending Himself to make us confident.** This is why unbelief is such a despicable sin. When God has gone to such great lengths to assure us He had told us the truth, He will not excuse those miserable sinners who refuse to believe Him.

again, they say, to the Jews. Such evil men can easily explain why they conceive of God as having no present dealings with the Jews. But when they have finished with their babblings, our text declares that Jesus **has become** a minister to them, to show the truthfulness of God, not to unveil a Divine change of plans.

This Is Pertinent to Our Text

These things are highly pertinent to our text. We have, after all, been grafted into the Jewish olive tree, and have thus become partakers of the promises that were given to them.

Additionally, Jesus is presently ministering to believers among the Jews without regard to their various levels of understanding. He has *“received”* them because they have received Him! That ought to be enough to constrain us to receive one another without imposing any additional requirements.

CONFIRMING THE PROMISES

“ . . . to confirm the promises made to the fathers.” Jesus is now (has become a minister) fulfilling to the Jews the promises that were made to *“the fathers,”* Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In particular, these are the Messianic promises of *“the Seed”* through whom the world would be blessed (Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). In general, they are the promises of moral and spiritual change that would be wrought in them. How blessed it is to consider some of them.

- ‘ *“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live”* (Deut 30:6).
- ‘ *“And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh”* (Ezek 11:19).
- ‘ *“And I will bring the blind by a way*

that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isa 42:16).

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Heb 31:34).

Much is made of this by Christ’s ambassadors. *“Of this man’s seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus” (Acts 13:23). “And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again” (Acts 13:32-33).*

On the day of Pentecost, Peter’s entire message proclaimed the fulfillment of promises made to Israel (Acts 2:16-21,25-28,34-35). Later, after healing an impotent man, Peter declared that in Jesus, God had fulfilled what He had shown through the mouth of the prophets (Acts 3:18). Peter told Cornelius that all the Prophets had given witness to Jesus (Acts 10:43). James saw the ministry of Jesus as fulfilling the words of the Prophets (Acts 15:15). Paul affirmed the ONLY things he declared are those which Moses and the Prophets *“did say should come” (Acts 26:22).*

The Importance of this View

The fact that Jesus is presently ministering what God has promised, or confirming the promises He has given, is a vital aspect of the Gospel. Most people are not only unaware of this, but have little knowledge of the promises of God themselves. They are largely ignorant of the fact that God DID make remarkable commitments concerning the thorough resolution of the dilemma caused by sin. These promises are appropriately called *“exceeding great and precious promises,”* by which we are brought to participate in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

A New Kind of Preaching

With the current emphasis upon

psychological approaches to human difficulties, a new kind of preaching has evolved. It is a “God-will solve-all-of-your-problems” kind of preaching. In it, human difficulties, on a personal level, are accented, often blown completely out of proportion. The minister or church who meets these humanly defined “needs” is thought to be the most successful and relevant. **Life is thus viewed through the philosophical filter of human experience rather than Divine assessment.** Therefore words like “sin,” “transgression,” and “iniquity,” have

viewed as fallen (Rom 3:23), disobedient and deceived (Tit 3:3), dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-2), and vassals of the wicked one (1 John 5:19). By nature their hearts are hard (Rom 2:5), their minds blinded (2 Cor 4:4), and their ears dull and uncircumcised (Matt 13:15; Jer 6:10). They are *“servants of sin” (Rom 6:17,20), “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18), and “without God and without hope in the world” (Eph 2:12).*

As important as personal circumstances may appear to be, they are

The minister or church who meets these humanly defined “needs” is thought to be the most successful and relevant. Life is thus viewed through the philosophical filter of human experience rather than Divine assessment.

been replaced by “disease,” “substance abuse,” “child abuse,” “spousal abuse,” “mistakes,” “emotional stress,” and other similar terms. All of this, of course, is the jargon of the world, and represents its feeble attempt to identify the problems of mankind.

Within such a context, the promises of God have absolutely no relevance, unless they can be construed to bear directly upon what men conceive to be their problem. **To put it in other words, if God is not interested in men’s problems, what He says must seen as relatively unimportant.** All of this may appear quite innocent. Actually, however, it represents a major intrusion of the devil and his hosts of darkness. Whatever pushes the promises of God into the background cannot be good. Something that represents the ministry of Jesus as focusing upon personal and temporal needs cannot be from God.

The heavenly manner of preaching is to provide the Divine assessment of the situation. This is done from a heavenly point of view, and is universal in its scope. Further, it is a view that has been revealed. Thus humanity is

not the primary circumstances, and neither Christ nor the Gospel **focuses** upon them. It is only when these are addressed that the more obvious matters can be satisfactorily dealt with. All of this may appear cold and heartless to those stuck in the mire of the flesh. But for those who walk with God, they know this is the appointed way of deliverance, victory, and fulness of joy.

Jesus is then presented as God’s appointed resolution to these conditions. The promises of God are proclaimed as having to do with these things from the very beginning. Thus, what God said He would do is seen as having to do with our real condition. **For this very reason, the conforming of men and women into the likeness of God’s Son (Rom 8:29), or the Holy Spirit changing them from glory unto glory (2 Cor 3:18), is directly related to the promises of God.** Thus, it is written, *“ . . . glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:3-4).*

Jesus has entered into the ministry of fulfilling the promises of God, which

are the appointed means through which we are changed into Christ's image. **This being so, how can any progress toward the Divine likeness be accomplished where the promises are not held before the people of God?** It is no marvel that the modern

church is filled with all manner of problems, both moral and spiritual. It is also no wonder that so little of Jesus is seen in the religious masses. If the promises of God are withheld from them, they are, by that very circumstance,

confined to an unalterable state, for change comes through these exceeding great and precious promises. That is precisely why so much of contemporary preaching is nothing more than a miserable band-aid for the souls of men.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GENTILES

"⁹ . . . and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: 'For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name.'¹⁰ And again he says: 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!'¹¹ And again: 'Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples'¹² And again, Isaiah says: 'There shall be a root of Jesse;

attended by a certain sense of marvel and wonder. It is consistently seen as a great depiction of the mercy of our God. Once again, it is not common for such wonder to be experienced in the modern church. In fact, there are even doctrines being perpetrated that cause men to be arrogant about the Gentiles acceptance. They are moved to boast themselves "against the [Jewish] branches" (Rom 11:18). Such

wert grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree" (Rom 11:17). "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:6). "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Eph 2:13-14). "Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace. And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph 2:15).

Considerable space is now given to the matter of the Gentiles' acceptance. This not because they are more significant than the Jews, but because their acceptance is more remarkable. From a human point of view, there is less reason to expect Gentiles to be received by Christ than for Him to receive the Jews.

And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope.'

The Spirit now begins to reason with us about the remarkable acceptance of the Gentiles. Christ has also received them through their faith. **Even though they, as a whole, did not have previous exposure to God's promises, yet He is fulfilling the same to them also.** Thus, no believing Jew should recoil at the idea of receiving a Gentile brother or sister in Christ. Nor, indeed, should they seek to impose upon them rules that were peculiar to the Lord's dealings with the children of Israel.

THE MARVEL OF GENTILE ACCEPTANCE

Wherever the Holy Spirit deals with the acceptance of the Gentiles, it is always

things ought not to be!

The Gentiles are never represented as taking the place of Israel! If men imagine that such representations are in God's Word, let them produce them. Let them show us where God ever said He would transfer all of the promises of His goodness away from the Jews and to the Gentiles. Where is it ever said that their tree would be plucked up by the roots, and another planted in its place?

The Gentiles are never said to be received INSTEAD of, or in the place of, the Jews. Rather, they are received WITH them. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: 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). *"Thou, being a wild olive tree,*

Jews and Gentiles were joined together in the guilt of sin (Rom 3:9), and in Christ they are joined together in redemption and justification. Those who are "called" come from "both Jews and Greeks" (1 Cor 1:24), and, by virtue of that common call, constitute one body.

Acceptance Not Taken for Granted

Still, such acceptance is not to be taken for granted. Considerable space is now given to the matter of the Gentiles' acceptance. **This not because they are more significant than the Jews, but because their acceptance is more remarkable.** From a human point of view, there is less reason to expect Gentiles to be received by Christ than for Him to receive the Jews. After all, the promises were all given to the Jews (Rom 9:4), and Jesus Himself came to them (Matt 15:24; John 1:11). Peter declared that Jesus was sent "first" to the Jews (Acts 3:25-26). When Jewish flesh looks at this, it tends to become arrogant. When Gentile flesh beholds it, it tends to

despair. Neither reaction is proper. The Jews must consider that they heard the Gospel first for the fathers' sake, and because of the promises that were directed to them. The Gentiles must consider that the Jews heard the Gospel first in order that the Lord might remain righteous in accepting both Jew and Gentile in the Beloved.

The Impact of this Realization

Much of the arrogance and pride of the modern church would be quickly removed under the impact of this realization! In a manner that challenges our hearts and minds, the Spirit will show us that **Gentiles owe their salvation to the unprecedented mercy of God.** They have been permitted to join with the natural branches, not replace them. The Gospel has not been preached to them because they are better than the Jews.

You can only imagine the great joy that must have come to early Gentiles who tasted of the bread that was placed exclusively upon the Jewish table. Who can forget the Gentile centurion who pled for Jesus to come and heal his servant. He knew Jesus was a Jewish Messiah, but sensed there was mercy for him also. He exhibited such faith that Jesus "marveled," declaring to them who followed Him, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt 8:10). That centurion received his request!

And what of the Grecian woman, "a Syrophenician by nation," who besought the Savior to cast the demon out of her daughter? Jesus told her He was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and that it "is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs" (Mk 7:26; Matt 15:24). Yet, she continued to plead with Him, saying the dogs could eat the crumbs that fell from the Jewish table. Taking note of her faith, Jesus said to her, "For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter" (Mk 7:29).

Do you imagine that the Centurion and the Grecian woman were haughty in their view of the Jews? Do you not see that both of them realized they had become partakes of a benefit that

belonged to others? Both of them would no doubt highly value the mercy of the Lord. **You would hear neither of them speaking of their worthiness, or boasting of how Jesus preferred them to the Jews.** After all, the One who blessed them was not walking in their cities, nor was He being followed by hosts of Gentiles. It was not their prophets who had spoken of this Man, nor did they have special Scriptures that spoke of Him. They certainly did not boast themselves "against the branches."

Proper Views and Good Attitudes

A proper view of the acceptance of the Gentiles will promote a similar attitude among us. That is why this perspective must be declared and perceived. **A glad day has indeed come**

given to the Gentiles. **All of them were given by Jewish prophets to the Jewish people.** It is as though God could not hide His gracious intention to bless the Gentiles, even though they knew nothing of that purpose.

GENTILES GLORIFYING GOD FOR HIS MERCY

"... and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy . . ." Most versions read exactly the same. One version reads, "and He came so the Gentiles might **also** give glory to God for His mercies to them."^{NLT}

A two-fold reason is declared as being fulfilled by Jesus' present ministry.

To be a minister to the Jews, for the

In a manner that challenges our hearts and minds, the Spirit will show us that Gentiles owe their salvation to the unprecedented mercy of God. They have been permitted to join with the natural branches, not replace them. The Gospel has not been preached to them because they are better than the Jews.

when you can see the marvelous display of God's mercy and kindness in receiving the Gentiles! It will promote a proper regard for your Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ. It will also prompt fervent prayers for the veil to be lifted from the eyes of those who do not yet believe. Those who see this truth do not find it hard to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psa 122:6). They can join with Paul in saying, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom 10:3).

With great care, we will be told our Savior did not spring from a Gentile nation, or a Gentile person. How, then, dare any Gentile believer judge their Jewish brethren.

The following passage will cite several prophetic references to the Gentiles. They are all magnificent, bringing great refreshment to the soul. None of the references, however, were

fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers.

In order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His great mercy.

The latter purpose will now be developed in a most glorious manner. The Lord will confirm to us that all of this is by Divine intent – a purpose which was established before the foundation of the world. The acceptance of the Gentiles is not a consequence of the rejection of the Jews, for Jesus is presently fulfilling to them the promises made to the Fathers.

Glorify God for His Mercy

The "mercy" of God speaks of His kindness and good will toward those who do not deserve it. It is coupled with God's desire to help, lift, and save, so that He is seen to have kindness and good will because He wants to have it. His mercy is not heartless pity, but the evidence of His great heart and desire to bless. His mercy includes the offering of clemency, whereby

sins can be remitted and renewal experienced. The mercy of God causes His compassion to rise at the pitiful sight of sinners. God is intent upon showing mercy, and when His will so dictates, there is nothing that can prohibit the triumph of that mercy. Thus it is written, *“I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy”* (Ex 33:19; Rom 9:15).

While, in Christ, the Jews are particularly beholding the truthfulness and faithfulness of God, **the Gentiles are especially beholding His mercy.** This does not mean the Jews do not behold His mercy, or that the Gentiles do not perceive His faithfulness. The Spirit is here speaking of a dominant perception.

His person, highlighting something that was not clearly seen before.

In our text, the Gentiles are said to glorify God for His mercy – insightfully pointing out that Divine quality. They are not exclusive in this ministry, but join with believing Jews in magnifying this Divine trait. The notes of glory from them, however, will rise to a crescendo at the sound of *“MERCY.”* That is the only way they can account for their salvation – Divine mercy! They cannot boast of having a Law, a Divine service, the Prophets, or the promises. If ever there was a trophy of Divine mercy, the Gentiles are it. That is the point of this word.

When Abraham’s servant had found

prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles (Rom 9:23-24). In the illuminating and cleansing impact of His glory, unspeakable change and growth take place. That is involved in the meaning of the expression *“the riches of His glory.”* Those very riches are revealed to be the resource from which the Holy Spirit strengthens us with might in the inner man (Eph 3:16).

Mercy is a prominent aspect of God’s Person. To put it another way, **those who glorify God for His mercy have seen Him in a fuller and more effective way.** It is essential to behold God as the Creator of all things. It is even more essential to see Him as *“The God of my mercy”* (Psa 59:10). The Gentiles have *“obtained mercy”* through the unbelief of the Jews (Rom 11:30). Further, through the mercy extended to the Gentiles, the Jews *“also may obtain mercy”* (Rom 11:31). Is it not fitting, therefore, that the Gentiles *“glorify God for His mercy?”*

As Gentiles who were without hope, our salvation is accounted for in these words: *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)”* (Eph 2:4-5). Again, it is written, *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us”* (Tit 3:5). And again, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Pet 1:3).

As for us Gentiles, it is written, *“Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Pet 2:10). God has determined that this aspect of His Person – His mercy – will be made known from the Gentiles. His great salvation is calculated to do precisely that. The Gospel of Christ, which is His *“power unto salvation,”* magnifies His mercy, declaring both its value and effectiveness.

Look for the Evidence

Where people do not speak often,

Mercy is a prominent aspect of God’s Person. To put it another way, those who glorify God for His mercy have seen Him in a fuller and more effective way. It is essential to behold God as the Creator of all things. It is even more essential to see Him as “The God of my mercy”

When the Gospel is declared to the Gentiles, and they believe it, the mercy of God will shine forth like a day star. It will be seen to be most prominent.

Glorifying God

To *“glorify God”* means to make Him known, to enhance His reputation, and to magnify Him. Although He is present throughout His creation, *“who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Eph 4:6), yet He remains obscure to the eyes of men. When He is glorified, that obscurity is removed, and men are enabled to see more of Him. It is something like what occurred when Jesus strode along the banks of the river Jordan. To the multitudes, He was *“the Carpenter”* (Mk 6:3). They were totally unaware of His real person. However, when John the Baptist saw Him, he glorified Him saying, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). He drew attention to

the appointed wife for Isaac, he confessed that God had not left Abraham destitute of *“His mercy”* (Gen 24:27). **He was glorifying God for His mercy.** When the ark of the covenant was brought back to the city of David, he first delivered a song of thanksgiving into the hands of Asaph the musician. In it He said, *“O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever”* (1 Chron 16:34). **He was glorifying God for His mercy.** The 136th Psalm contains the words *“for His mercy endureth for ever”* in every one of its thirty-six verses. **The Psalm is glorifying God for His mercy.**

Vessels of Mercy

Those who enjoy the salvation of God are appropriately called *“vessels of mercy.”* The Gentiles have graciously been included in this category. It was God’s intention all along *“that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore*

and with insight, about the mercy of the Lord, there is a but a small vision of God – if, indeed, there is any at all. Throughout my life, I have seen that **those with a propensity to Law, patterns, and procedures, speak very little about the mercy of God.** They are more apt to attempt to glorify God for a pattern than for His rich mercy. All such failures to glorify God for His mercy are a gigantic contradiction of Divine purpose. **If Jesus is presently ministering in order that the Gentiles may “glorify God for His mercy,” then where that is not occurring Jesus is not ministering.** That is a rather elementary observation, but it is far reaching in its implications.

See the Text Correctly

It is essential that we perceive this text correctly. This is not a declaration of the law of the Kingdom. It is not the announcement of an edict that is to be carried out by men, like the decrees of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius (Dan 3:28-29; 6:25-27). Rather, this is the announcement of Divine intent or purpose. This is a declaration of what Jesus is presently doing among the Gentiles. The text is not seeking to impose the glorification of God for His mercy upon the people. **Rather, it aids us in recognizing where the Lord Jesus is at work.** Our response should be to judge ourselves and our surroundings by this criterion. When we find men glorifying God for His mercy, it will gender confidence and thanksgiving in our hearts and mouths. Where such evidence is not found, men should engage in a fervent quest for such glorification to occur. **You may rest assured that where this is not found, Divine recognition and blessing will not be realized.**

I WILL CONFESS YOU AMONG THE GENTILES

“. . . as it is written: *For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name . . .*” Here is the first pillar of support for the declaration made: *“that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.”* Here is how that intention is being fulfilled. This is how Jesus is presently ministering among the believing Gentiles.

This is a reference to Psalm 18:9. *“Therefore will I give thanks unto Thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto Thy name.”* This particular Psalm is also recorded in Second Samuel 22:49. It is an unusually long Psalm, and was written by David upon the occasion of his deliverance *“out of the hand of Saul”* (2 Sam 22:1; Psa 18:1). In it, David is not speaking of his own intentions, but **God is speaking through David of His own immutable purpose in Christ Jesus.**

A Similar Expression

A similar expression is found in the twenty-second Psalm, although the giving of thanks is there said to be among David’s brethren. *“I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee”* (Psa 22:22). The relevance of this text is that it is quoted in the second chapter of Hebrews, which is also an exposition of Christ’s present ministry. *“For both He that sanctifieth [Jesus] and they who are*

We are speaking of the ministry into which Jesus has come as a result of His vicarious death and triumphant exaltation. This is a preeminent ministry, not a secondary one. It blends most precisely with God’s own *“eternal purpose”* (Eph 3:11). This does not negate or diminish other aspects of His present reign. It does, however, give effectiveness and meaning to such things as guiding, feeding, and sustaining the saints. **It is within the framework of this primary ministry that all other blessings occur.**

The Focus of Jesus’ Present Ministry

While yet among us, our Savior declared this fundamental work. His death, resurrection, and enthronement, were in order to make this ministry effective. Furthermore, salvation cannot be initiated or maintained without it.

Matthew 11:27-30

“All things have been delivered to

Jesus is not merely reciting some interesting or novel facts. The Father delivered all things into the hands of the Son in order that He might make the Father known. The necessity of this revelation is seen in that fact that no one knows either the Son or the Father.

sanctified are all of One [the Father]: for which cause He [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare Thy [the Father] name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee [the Father]” (Heb 2:11-12). Thus, Jesus is seen as presently ministering among His people, the church. He is extolling and revealing the Father as He dwells among them.

The Point of the Text

The point of both Psalmic texts is the same: Jesus is ministering among His people. **The particular focus of our text (Rom 15:9) is that He is doing so among the Gentiles in order that they may glorify God for His mercy.**

Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 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 11:27-30).

Jesus is not merely reciting some interesting or novel facts. The Father delivered all things into the hands of the Son in order that He might make the Father known. The necessity of this revelation is seen in that fact that no one knows either the Son or the Father. Nature is not able to produce

such knowledge. Of himself, man has no capabilities in this area, for both the Father and the Son are beyond the perimeter of natural capacities.

Thus Jesus comes to “*reveal*” the Father, in order that men may properly respond to His word of grace. What is more, Jesus is kindly disposed to do this, for He invites all who are burdened under the yoke of sin and death to come to Him. He will teach them of the Father, for He wants to do so. If His greatness and glory tend to cause us to fear, we must remember He is, in this ministry, “*meek and lowly*.” He will effectively teach us, and we will be the better and the happier for it. The ministry of Jesus, when it is received, yields nothing but goodness. We are always the better for learning from Him “*the truth as it is in Jesus*” (Eph 4:20-21).

First John 5:20
“And we know that the Son of God

a substitute for the Word of God. Rather, it is the key to understanding the Bible.

As we should expect, knowing God is not an academic matter, like knowing **about** God, or having an intellectual grasp of what He has said. The God taught by Jesus is “*the true God*,” and knowing Him “*is eternal life*.” That is the meaning of this verse, and it is confirmed by Christ’s own words in John 17:2. “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*”

The focus of Jesus’ present ministry is the exposition of God. Said another way, it is to acquaint us with God in order that we might fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). This is what Jesus is declaring among the Gentiles. It is the theme of His song. He does not come to teach us of political, social, or domestic affairs, but to “*show us the Father*.” The reason for this

marvelous knowledge.

- ‘ God prefers it to sacrifices and burnt offerings (Hos 6:6).
- ‘ It is a shame not to possess it (1 Cor 15:34).
- ‘ Wayward and competitive thoughts are against it (2 Cor 10:5).
- ‘ The knowledge of God is the area in which we are to increase (Col 1:10).
- ‘ Grace and peace are multiplied to us within the context of “*the knowledge of God*” (2 Pet 1:2).
- ‘ We escape the pollution of the world through this knowledge (2 Pet 2:20).
- ‘ Jesus justifies men “*by His knowledge*” (Isa 53:11).
- ‘ Wisdom and revelation are experienced “*in the knowledge of Him*” (Eph 1:17).
- ‘ Although God has given us “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*,” they are obtained “*through the knowledge of Him*” (2 Pet 1:3).

When our text says of Jesus, “*I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name*,” it is speaking of the teaching ministry of the Lord Jesus. He is giving them an understanding of God, which is precisely why they glorify Him for His mercy. Now, under the indispensable ministry of the Son of God, those who “*knew not God*” (Gal 4:8) have come into a saving acquaintance with Him. It is no marvel that such people “*glorify Him*” for His mercy!

Vast bodies of people who are called *Christians* have rarely heard or considered these things. Yet, they are associated with Divine acceptance, the ministry of Jesus, and Christ receiving us to the glory of God. I cannot conceive of anything being more basic and more needful. It is of great concern to me that it is common for church leaders to totally ignore these things. Such a condition reveals an alienation from the life of God that, if not corrected, will lead to eventual destruction. God will not honor a religious system that makes no room for the ministry of His exalted Son. It is on the part of wisdom, for us to react to these lifeless systems in the same manner.

GENTILES REJOICING WITH HIS PEOPLE

“... And again He says: ‘*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!*’...” Again,

He will effectively teach us, and we will be the better and the happier for it. The ministry of Jesus, when it is received, yields nothing but goodness. We are always the better for learning from Him “the truth as it is in Jesus”

is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). The words “*is come*” parallel the words of our text, “*Christ has become a servant*”^{NKJV} (15:8), and “*I will confess to thee among the Gentiles*” (15:9). In other words, this is what Jesus is doing now, during “*the day of salvation*” (2 Cor 6:1-2).

The understanding that Jesus is ministering (“*has given us an understanding*”) pertains to God Himself. Through His teaching, He is showing the Father to us, unveiling both His purpose and His intentions to our hearts. For some, it is necessary to say that this is not

should be very apparent. God’s gift is “*eternal life*” (Rom 6:23), and political, social, and domestic issues are all temporal. Consequently, they can only be properly addressed within the framework of “*eternal life*,” which is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

The Role of the Knowledge of God

The unlearned will suppose that the knowledge of God is too weighty for the novice, and is applicable only to the spiritually mature. But this is not at all the case. The knowledge of God is actually the common denominator among the people of God: “*they shall ALL know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them*” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11).

Ponder what is said of this

the Spirit is showing us that the Gentiles have joined with those of Israel who have believed. The church is the particular focus here, for the Spirit is teaching us concerning accepting one another. He does this by first showing Christ has received us both. Then He confirms that Jesus teaches us both. Now He reminds us that God has exhorted us both to “Rejoice” for His great salvation and abundant mercy.

Before Moses died and was buried by God Himself (Deut 34:6), God moved Moses to speak to the people about His vengeance against all who stood against Him. He would vindicate His name in such a manner as to provoke praise in all who discerned it. The verse we are presently considering is found couched in that very speech. **“Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people: for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries, and will be merciful unto His land, and to His people”** (Deut 32:43).

Nestled in Moses’ words God delivered a prophesy concerning the unified rejoicing of the Gentiles with “His people,” the Jews. Harmonious rejoicing would come from those who had been separated from one another by a “middle wall of partition” (Eph 2:14) erected by God Himself. That “partition” was the covenant of the Law, which served to formally distinguish the Jews from the Gentiles. However, because Christ is “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom 10:4), Jew and Gentile can rejoice together in Christ Jesus.

In order to check the rise of pride in the Gentiles, they are said to rejoice “with His people,” the children of Israel. It is understood that God will recognize such rejoicing. How, then, could men stoop to not receive one another?

In this passage, we see there are only two categories of people: the “Gentiles” and “His people.” This is the only fleshly distinction God recognized, and it is utterly destroyed in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). What will be the Divine reaction to those who honor such spurious distinctions as that of race or religious sects and denominations? The people of God must be able to adapt this text to the

condition of the contemporary Christian community.

PRAISE THE LORD AND LAUD HIM

“... And again: *‘Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples ...’*” First, we were told that, according to Divine intent, Jesus declares God’s name among the Gentiles. *“For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.”* Then we were reminded that the Gentiles would rejoice with God’s people. *“Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people.”* Now the Spirit tells the Gentiles to praise and laud the Lord as one great body: *“all you peoples.”*

Other versions read, *“Praise the Lord ALL you Gentiles, and let ALL the peoples praise Him,”* ^{NASB} *“Praise the*

Christ Jesus, it was not at all apparent to those before the exaltation of Jesus. Even the early church struggled with the acceptance of the Gentiles. Through a special vision and extended revelation, God made the acceptance of the Gentiles known to Peter some ten years after Pentecost (Acts 10:9-48). The Apostles and elders of the early church even came together to consider whether the Gentiles had, in fact, been received by God without due recognition of circumcision Acts 15:2-19).

The 117th Psalm is understood to be a celebration of the deliverance of Israel from the Babylonian captivity. It was a call for the nations to behold in Israel the working of the Lord, and to join in His praise. Now the Spirit shows us that the Lord intended a much loftier revelation.

This is reference to Psalm 117:1. “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!” ^{NKJV} This particular Psalm is the shortest chapter in the entire Bible, consisting of only two verses. It is also the middle chapter of the Bible.

Lord, ALL you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him, ALL you peoples, ^{NIV} *“Praise the Lord, ALL ye Gentiles: and magnify Him, ALL ye people,”* ^{DRB} and *“Praise the Lord, ALL nations, extol Him, ALL peoples.”* ^{NJB}

This is reference to Psalm 117:1. *“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!”* ^{NKJV} **This particular Psalm is the shortest chapter in the entire Bible, consisting of only two verses. It is also the middle chapter of the Bible.** How fitting, therefore, that it speaks of praising God and loudly extolling, or lauding, Him. It also reveals God’s merciful kindness, its greatness, and the enduring nature of His truth: *“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples”* (Verse 2).

The clear implication of the 117th Psalm is that God’s salvation was to extend throughout the entire world. While that may seem very apparent to those in

In His mercy and lovingkindness, He would gather the nations together with His people in one grand chorus of praise.

The Prophets frequently allude to the turning of the Lord’s attention to the Gentiles. The Messiah would *“bring forth judgment to the Gentiles”* (Isa 42:1), and be *“a light of the Gentiles”* (Isa 42: 6). God declared, *“I will lift up Mine hand to the Gentiles”* (Isa 49:22), and *“they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles”* (Isa 66:19). Jeremiah must have startled his peers when He prophesied, *“the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit”* (Jer 16:19). Before the pen of Prophets was sheathed for over four hundred years, Malachi wrote, *“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles”* (Mal 1:11).

Now, our text declares these prophecies have come to pass. Men are no longer to conduct themselves as they did prior to Christ. There is no longer a race of men, descended from Adam, who have exclusive rights to praise the Lord. God has assembled a great congregation consisting of “all peoples,” and calls upon them to praise and laud Him in fulfillment of His word through the holy Prophets.

Because men can only praise God if they know Him, this text confirms the effectiveness of the ministry of Jesus. It is His tutelage that leads them to praise the Lord with “His people.” These references are not intended to be used as the hammer of Law, but to announce that Jesus is doing precisely what God said He would. The Spirit is calling upon the saints to fall into line with the Lord Jesus, and join together in praising and extolling the mercy of God. The extolling of God for His mercy

This text refers to Isaiah 11:10. “*And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people.*” Jesse is the father of king David (1 Sam 16:18-19). The prophecy of Isaiah was given during very grievous times. The meaning is that Jesse’s root appeared dry and shriveled – unable to produce any more branches or shoots. But the root would show its liveliness by producing its premier Branch, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is, in a sense, the “Root” itself, for without Him, there would have been no purpose for Jesse’s root at all.

For this reason, Revelation 5:5 and 22:16 refer to “*the Root of David*” and “*the Root and offspring of David.*” That is, David sprang from Christ, who created all things. Christ Jesus, so far as His earthly lineage was concerned, sprang forth from Jesse in general, and David in particular. When He was born, the “Root” appeared. Sixth months after Elizabeth conceived

seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell [Hades, not the lake of fire], neither His flesh did see corruption . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:29-31,36).

The Lord Jesus, therefore, is the ultimate offspring of both Jesse and David. He is also the reason for them both.

REIGNING OVER THE GENTILES

“*. . . And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles. . .*” The marvel of Isaiah’s prophecy is not merely that Jesus would spring forth “*as a Root out of dry of dry ground*” (Isa 53:2), but that He would “*reign over the Gentiles.*” Isaiah’s prophecy reads, “*to it [the Root] shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest shall be glorious*” (11:10b). The NIV clarifies this word for us. “*In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious.*”

A “*banner*” is a standard, or ensign, around which men gather. In Israel, every tribe had a banner, or flag. Each tribe pitched their tents around this standard. As it is written, “*And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts*” (Num 1:52). Isaiah pictured the Messiah as a standard, ensign, or flag. “*He shall stand as an Ensign for the people.*” Of Him Isaiah also said, “*And He shall set up an ensign for the nations*” (Isa 11:12).

But our text declares Jesus will “*reign over the Gentiles.*” How does that agree with Isaiah’s word of God raising up a Person unto whom the Gentiles will gather? The answer is glorious! **Christ’s reign is evidenced in the gathering of the Gentiles to Himself.** While yet among us, Jesus alluded to this ministry. “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me*” (John 12:32). And again, “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*” (John 10:16).

The Spirit is calling upon the saints to fall into line with the Lord Jesus, and join together in praising and extolling the mercy of God. The extolling of God for His mercy is of greater importance than our private views of one another.

is of greater importance than our private views of one another. God had to remove what we were in order to bring us together. It is only by clinging to the flesh that believers can despise or judge one another. It should not be necessary to comment on the reprehensible nature of such activities. Earlier in this book the Spirit said, “*they that are in the flesh cannot please God*” (8:8). That certainly applies to any who refuse to join in the vast chorus of praise with the redeemed.

A ROOT OF JESSE

“*. . . And again, Isaiah says: ‘There shall be a Root of Jesse. . .’*” Other versions read, “*The Root of Jesse will spring up,*”^{NIV} “*The Root of Jesse shall come,*”^{NRSV} and “*The root of Jesse will appear.*”^{NJB}

John the Baptist, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. He told her she was going to bear the holy child Jesus. He would be “*called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*” (Lk 1:32-33). On the day of Pentecost, Peter confirmed the reign to have taken place commensurate with Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God. “*Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he*

The coming of the Gentiles to Jesus was evidence of His reign. It was He who *“opened the door of faith”* to them (Acts 14:27). If Jesus was not the King, sitting upon the throne of David, the Gentiles would never have come to Him! Their desire to come to Him, together with their faith, confirms Jesus is enthroned.

Reigning over the Gentiles does not speak of subduing enemies, but of providing for friends. It is not the language of casting down, but of lifting up. This is precisely the kind of reign proclaimed by the Gospel. *“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 5:31). **The reign over the Gentiles, therefore, affirms that they too will be given repentance and forgiveness of sins.** Therefore, who is the person who will dare to judge or despise those to whom the Lord of glory has given repentance and forgiveness of sins? That is the point of this passage!

HOPE FOR THE GENTILES

“ . . . In Him the Gentiles shall hope.” The KJV reads, *“trust”* instead of *“hope.”* There is no conflict in the readings, for hope is an aspect of trust, and those who trust are, indeed, *“saved by hope.”* You cannot trust in the Son of God without having hope, and you cannot hope without trusting in Him. Hope and trust are two sides of the same coin. Trust relies completely upon the Lord, and hope expects good things to come from it.

Isaiah wrote, *“to It shall the Gentiles seek,”* or *“rally.”* That is, the Gentiles will see the utter futility of everyone else, and will flee to the Savior for refuge, to lay hold of the hope that has

all Gentiles, and were evidence of the power of heaven working among men. Our text has affirmed that Jesus has been raised up as the Divine rallying point for all peoples.

The church is not the rallying point. A theological position is not the point of gathering. Not even a worthy cause is to be set forth as the point of union. Jesus Christ, and Him alone, is the One into whom things are being gathered. Those who are gathered to Him are to receive one another.

been set before them in the Gospel. As already stated, Jeremiah gives a most vivid depiction of this gathering of the Gentiles to Jesus. *“ . . . the Gentiles shall come unto Thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit”* (Jer 16:19). Who is it that can make such a marvelous thing as this come to pass. Let the motivational expert step forward and see if he can lead the whole city of Nineveh to repent (Jonah 3:5-10; Matt 12:41)! Let the trained leaders of the day see if they can persuade the entire city of Samaria to believe (Acts 8:5-6). Let those schooled in oratory and skills of persuasion see if they can compel a city of cultic devotees to come together and burn all of their books of curious arts (Acts 19:19). These were

The church is not the rallying point. A theological position is not the point of gathering. Not even a worthy cause is to be set forth as the point of union. Jesus Christ, and Him alone, is the One into whom things are being gathered. Those who are gathered to Him are to receive one another. They are to blend their hearts and voices in praise to God for His abundant mercy. No person who has been drawn to Christ is to sit in judgment upon another who has been drawn to Him. No individual who has fled for refuge to the Son of God is to despise another who has also fled to Him. If Christ has received us, we are to receive one another! These things are quite plain to faith.

A FILLING ACCOMPLISHED BY GOD

“¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” In order for effective unity to be experienced among God’s people, a filling is required. If the tendency to judge another man’s servant lingers among us, a filling is needed. If there are those who dare to despise one of the brothers or sisters of Jesus, it is necessary that they be filled. This filling cannot be accomplished by an institution. It does not happen automatically. The Kingdom of

God is characterized by life, not automation.

By saying *“Now,”* the Spirit is showing us we can participate in the blessings of the Lord. This prayer has to do with assisting us in receiving one another as Christ received us to the glory of God. This is one of the great texts of Scripture, confirming the marvelous effectiveness of Christ’s atoning death.

THE GOD OF HOPE

“Now may the God of hope . . . ”

Here is a strong Apostolic desire. It is driven by a profound fellowship with both the Father and the Son. It fueled by faith and buttressed by hope. **It is the expectation that God Himself will do something for His people.** The focus of this prayer is the promise, *“In Him shall the Gentiles trust,”* or *“hope”*^{NKJV} (verse 12). In voicing this petition Paul is saying, *“May the very God upon whom the Gentiles have come to hope produce the things for which I pray.”* **He prays because all of his admonitions are powerless if God does not come to**

the aid of the people.

“The God of hope” is the God who gives hope, and the One in whom hope resides. It is He, and He alone, who has “given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace” (2 Thess 2:16). When David found himself relying implicitly upon the word of God, he confessed to Him, “Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which **Thou hast caused me to hope**” (Psa 119:49). Other versions read,

do for His people? What would be effective in causing brethren to receive one another as Christ has received us to the glory of God? What precious gift would remove from them the tendency to judge or despise one another?

Filling is an aspect of spiritual life that is most precious. We can be filled with “knowledge” (Rom 15:4), “comfort” (2 Cor 7:4), and “with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). We can be filled with

God is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17). Now he prays that joy will pervade every aspect of our persons – that the cheerfulness of faith would dominate us.

Joy is of such remarkable power that it is said of the churches in Macedonia, “that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality” (2 Cor 8:2). Although themselves suffering and afflicted, their joy moved them to give beyond their means to the needy brethren. They were “filled with all joy.”

Being filled with joy is the result of perceiving that He who is in us is greater than He that is in the world (1 John 4:4). Joy comes when we consider what we have been delivered from, and what we have been promised. It erupts when we recall what we were, and what we have become in Christ Jesus. Pondering the threats of wicked men will not bring joy, but considering the goodness of the Lord will.

Put this to the test, and see if it does not prove to be true. When you are filled with joy, you are least apt to judge your brethren. When joy floods your heart, you will not despise your weaker brethren. Rejoicing in the Lord makes you more kind, more forbearing, and more considerate. It is no wonder the Apostle prays that the God of hope would fill us with “all joy.”

FILLING WITH PEACE

“... fill you with all... Peace...” “Joy and peace” blend well together. When peace does not rule our hearts (Col 3:15), joy cannot fill us. An unsettled person is not a rejoicing person, and a sad soul tends to be agitated within. Peace is something Jesus gives us (John 14:27), but it takes a further blessing for us to be filled with it.

Because God fills us with this peace, it is called “the peace of God which passes understanding.” The truth of this is confirmed in the keeping power of this peace. As it is written, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). Because it comes from God, this peace can enter a heart

Here is what we need, and here is what we can have. Filled with all joy! That is like a double superlative: “filled” and “all.” The God of hope can so fill us with joy that it will erupt in a prison, at the hearing of God’s Word, or in the contemplation of our hope.

“made me hope,” ^{NASB} and “given me hope.” ^{NIV} **When it comes to hope, God is at the helm.** The ability to hope, which is an aspect of faith, comes from Him. Also, hope is fixed in Him: i.e., we are relying upon Him fulfilling His promises and guiding us with His eye (Psa 32:8).

“Hope” is a fundamental consideration for those who are in Christ Jesus. We rejoice in hope (Rom 5:2), are “saved by hope” (Rom 8:4), and are called “in one hope of our calling” (Eph 4:4). Our helmet of protection upon our minds is “the hope of salvation” (1 Thess 5:8), and it is an anchor for the soul, both steadfast and sure (Heb 6:19). Hope speaks of confidence, assurance, and expectation. It motivates us to purify ourselves, “even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). It is a “better hope” (Heb 7:19) a “living hope” (1 Pet 1:3), and joins together with our faith “in God” (1 Pet 1:21).

The “God of hope” is the One related to all of those essentials. He is the Source from which they come, and the Object toward which they are directed.

FILLING WITH JOY

“... fill you with all joy...” What would you pray for the “God of hope” to

“the Spirit” (Eph 5:19), the “fruits of righteousness” (Phil 1:11), and “the knowledge of His will” (Col 1:9). We may also be personally “filled with joy” (2 Tim 1:4) – our text says “all joy.”

Many of God’s children attempt to live on meager spiritual supplies. Their cup does not overflow (Psa 23:5), and they appear to have too much of the world in themselves. The very fact that a prayer like this is in the Scriptures indicates the unacceptableness of attempting to live without the fulness that is found in Christ Jesus. If holy men prayed that we might be filled, you may conclude that we need to be filled. Spiritual life is designed to be lived while in possession of the rich supplies of grace. **Many of the difficulties believers encounter is owing to their attempt to live at a comfortable distance from God. Such efforts are totally futile.**

Here is what we need, and here is what we can have. **Filled with all joy!** That is like a double superlative: “filled” and “all.” The God of hope can so fill us with joy that it will erupt in a prison, at the hearing of God’s Word, or in the contemplation of our hope. Previously, Paul reminded us that the Kingdom of

that is unwillingly disquieted, and call an end to inner turmoil. We are commissioned to allow this peace that comes from God to do its work within us. *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts”* (Col 3:15).

You cannot conjure peace up in your heart. Nor, indeed, are there experts in peace who can pour it into your heart and mind. This is a peace with which only the living God can fill you. However, He is surely disposed to do this. That is why Paul prays that He will.

IN BELIEVING

“ . . . fill you with all joy and peace in believing . . . ” Other versions read, *“fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,”*^{NIV} and *“make you full of joy and peace through faith.”*^{BBE} Here is how it works. As you work on believing, God supplies your need. Joy and peace do not stand on their own. They flourish where faith exists, but wither and die where it is lacking. **It is not possible to be filled with joy and peace while being ruled by unbelief.**

The association of believing with rejoicing is confirmed in First Peter. *“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, **yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls**”* (1 Pet 1:8-9). Faith is the channel through which these blessed gifts are realized: *“fill you with all joy and peace **IN believing.**”*

If, therefore, you can believe, all will be well. You must understand that this has to do with the Gospel, and the blessed Savior it proclaims. It will do no good to believe God can do this or that for you, if you do not believe *“the record that God gave of His Son”* (1 John 5:10). But if you do believe that record, your faith becomes the appointed means through which God can *“fill you with all joy and peace.”* This is a marvelous arrangement.

ABOUNDING IN HOPE

“ . . . that you may abound in hope . . . ” Other versions read, *“that you may overflow with hope,”*^{NIV} *“so that all hope may be yours,”*^{BBE} and *“you may be rich in hope.”*^{NJB} In many believers, hope is

like a person in the throes of death. It seems to be gasping for breath, as the individual is beaten down by the circumstances of life. You can scarcely find a person who exudes great confidence and a joyful expectation of the coming of the Lord. The absence of these qualities reveals a lack of hope.

It is affirmed that *“we are saved by hope”* (Rom 8:24). But hope that hobbles along on frail legs cannot sustain the soul, much less provoke the zealous cleansing of the defilements of *“flesh and spirit”* (2 Cor 7:1). Nevertheless, these are things that need to be done. Believers are solemnly exhorted, *“Save yourselves from*

expended with any degree of consistency. If some effort is put forth, it will be short lived, at the very best.

It is general knowledge that an enormous percentage of those who profess faith in Christ fall away. Here is the reason why they do. They are not abounding in hope. Candidly, they are not convinced that what God has promised belongs to them. It is to be acknowledged that no believer is exempt from such tendencies. That is exactly why Paul prayed this prayer. He knew we needed an abounding hope, and that salvation was designed to produce it.

As you work on believing, God supplies your need. Joy and peace do not stand on their own. They flourish where faith exists, but wither and die where it is lacking. It is not possible to be filled with joy and peace while being ruled by unbelief.

this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). Again we are admonished, *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Phil 2:12). What of the challenging word, *“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Tim 6:12). Or, *“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8).

Settle it in your heart, these are not optional matters. Imaginations are to be cast down, and wayward thoughts taken captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5-6). Most believers know this – at least theoretically. But, how are these things to be accomplished? If God requires them of us, we dare not view them as things that cannot be accomplished.

The answer is found in hope – *“abounding in hope.”* The person who is persuaded God is able to keep what they have committed to Him, will set about to eliminate uncomely things from their lives. They will press toward the mark, with the confident expectation of obtaining the prize. However, where hope is lacking, such efforts will not be

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . by the power of the Holy Spirit.” The joy we need comes from the Lord -- He fills us with it. The peace we need also comes down from above – the Lord fills us with it. Both joy and peace are made effective and dominant through our faith, and the grace of God brings that to us (1 Tim 1:14). But even that is not enough for us to abound in hope. In order for spiritual virtues to flourish, they must be enhanced by the Holy Spirit. At no point does the Lord leave us to ourselves, our intellect, our will, or our strength.

In this regard, hope does not make us ashamed, *“because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us”* (Rom 5:5). The *“power of the Holy Spirit”* is not experienced through natural senses. It is transcendent to flesh, which cannot be trusted in the first place. How could God *“condemn sin in the flesh”* of His holy Son (Rom 8:3), then confirm the power of the Holy Spirit by means of our *“sinful flesh?”* What form of reasoning would support the supposition that the God who demanded

that we crucify the flesh (Gal 5:24), would confirm the presence and ministry of His Holy Spirit through the fleshly senses?

I am aware that many teach the

words. The necessary prelude to this mighty working is also stated, so that there can be no question on this subject. First the God of hope – not the God of feeling – fills us with all joy and peace,

Where believing, joy, peace, and hope are weak, the power of the Holy Spirit is not being displayed, regardless of the experiences men claim to have. On the other hand, where men are strong in faith, giving glory to God, and where joy and peace are joined together with an abounding hope, the power of the Spirit is being experienced.

Holy Spirit registers confirming feelings upon the carnal senses. They imagine that He is felt by the part of us God condemns – the part that must be changed before we can dwell forever in the courts of the Lord! The very thing, therefore, that contributed to our alienation from God, is now perceived as the means through which the Holy Spirit confirms His presence with us and power in us.

Proper Views Are Encouraged

While I do not make a test of fellowship over this matter, I am compelled to remind you of the text before us. It speaks of *“the power of the Holy Spirit.”* It reveals something this power accomplishes, declaring it in no uncertain

both of which are rational in nature. Neither joy nor peace are mere feelings of exhilaration. They both have an impact upon our hearts and minds. Nowhere does it say they effect our bodies. Our bodies are to be brought unto subjection by us.

What is more, God fills us with joy and peace *“in believing.”* This involves our persuasion that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). It is related to believing the record He has given of His Son -- the Gospel of Christ. It includes the embrace of His promises, and the acceptance of His commandments. Believing is done with the heart, and it purifies the heart from corrupting influences (Acts 15:9).

Working within the framework of those realities the *“power of the Holy Spirit”* causes us to abound in hope. Hope is not a mindless emotion. It is not something that is conjured up in dreams, or in a state of unconsciousness. Hope is of such a character that one can give a *“reason”* for possessing it to those who ask about it (1 Pet 3:15).

For the most part, the Christian world is divided into two warring factions concerning the Holy Spirit. One sees His power as overt, for they know little about living by faith. The other treats the Holy Spirit as a theological relic, consigned to the past, when really big things were done. That side also knows little about living by faith.

Our text has associated the Holy Spirit of God with believing, joy, peace, and abounding hope. **No one should imagine that any of these things will flourish where flawed views of the Spirit Himself are entertained.** Make no mistake about this. Where believing, joy, peace, and hope are weak, the power of the Holy Spirit is not being displayed, regardless of the experiences men claim to have. On the other hand, where men are strong in faith, giving glory to God, and where joy and peace are joined together with an abounding hope, the power of the Spirit is being experienced. That is a condition that calls for thanksgiving, particularly among we Gentiles.

CONCLUSION

It may appear that Paul has taken a great detour in his exhortation to receive one another, as Christ has received us to the glory of God. However, this is not the case at all. Through the Spirit, he is showing us what produces the unity that he urges. Jesus has received us to the glory of God, but there were many accompaniments that were required before that reception could be realized. Sin had to be put away by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb 9:26). The devil who deceived the whole had to be destroyed (Heb 2:14). Principalities and power that

held humanity in bondage had to be “spoiled” (Col 2:15). The gigantic debt that had been created by our infractions of God’s holy law had to be blotted out (Col 2:14). Because we were enemies, we had to be reconciled to God (Rom 5:10). Because we were vassals of the evil one, we had to be sanctified (Heb 10:14). Because we were altogether unrighteous, we had to be made the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). We had to be raised from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-3), and made alive unto God (Rom 6:11). The *“middle wall of partition”*

that stood between Jew and Gentile – a wall imposed by God Himself – had to be taken down (Eph 2:14). *The “new and living way”* into God’s presence to be opened (Heb 10:20), and a highway raised up in the desert (Isa 35:8). The wells of salvation had to be opened (Isa 12:3), and the veil covering the most holy place ripped in two (Matt 27:51). A way had to be made for God to be *“just”* in the justification of sinners (Rom 3:26).

Do not imagine for a single moment that Jesus could have *“received us”*

independently of these accomplishments. He has all power in heaven and earth, but He could not “receive us” until these issues were settled. God Almighty reigns in heaven, and is *the “Governor among the nations,”* but He could not be righteous and just in giving us His righteousness while our debt remained.

The good news is that all of these things have been accomplished by Christ Jesus. He can now receive us without compromising His own nature. God can justify us, and be just and righteous in

doing so. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus is forward to receive us. He is not looking for flaws, but for faith. He knows a man can be imperfect, and still have faith. He will receive people because they believe, and are willing to turn from idols to serve the living God, and wait for Him to return from heaven.

I suppose these things are obvious to all – and yet, there is a sense in which they may remain obscure. Wherever a weaker brother stands in judgment of a stronger one, or wherever a stronger one

looks with despite upon a weaker one, a serious condition exists. Such people are demanding more from their brethren than the Lord Jesus demands, and require more than the God of heaven requires.

There is no need to attempt to justify such actions. They cannot be justified. If Jesus has received us, then we are obliged to receive one another. If God is glorified by Jesus receiving us, He is also glorified when we reflect His mind by receiving one another. These are things to ponder, embrace, and fulfill!

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 47



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

FROM JERUSALEM TO ILLYRICUM

^{15:14} Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. ¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient; ¹⁹ in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand." ^{NKJV}
(Romans 15:14-21)

INTRODUCTION

There have been a variety of stern and weighty words delivered to the brethren in Rome. A recollection of some of them will serve to set the stage for the text before us.

- "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (2:1).
- "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things,

and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" (2:3).

- "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (2:5).
- "Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written" (2:23-24).

- "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee" (11:21).
- "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (13:11-12).
- "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he

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OUTLINE

- ▶ CONFIDENCE CONCERNING SAINTS (15:14)
- ▶ BOLD WRITING (15:15)
- ▶ MINISTERING AND OFFERING (15:16)
- ▶ A REASON TO GLORY (15:17)
- ▶ GOD WORKING THROUGH A MAN (15:18-19)
- ▶ I MADE IT MY AIM (15:20-21)
- ▶ HINDERED FOR A REASON (15:22-23)

standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand” (14:4).

- ❑ *“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (14:10).*
- ❑ *“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way” (14:13).*

Now, with great care, the Apostle assures the brethren in Rome that he has not spoken to them as though they were wayward and thoughtless souls. **Strong exhortations and solemn warnings are not delivered in a spirit of criticism.** Nor, indeed, are they suggestions that the people of God have become reprehensible and worthy of condemnation. They are designed to awaken believers to alertness and vigilance, both of which are essential to living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

Many a timorous soul does not see these things. They hear words of warning as though they were addressed to them

personally, without regard to anyone else. While there may be times when such responses are in order, they generally tend to close the ears rather than open them, and to harden the heart rather than make it supple and responsive.

IN THIS WORLD, THE SAINTS HAVE TWO NATURES

As long as they are in this world, or *“in the body,”* the saints have two competing natures.

The Flesh

The remnants of the Adamic nature remain with them. This is the nature passed along to all of Adam's progeny, when *“by one man's disobedience many were made sinners”* (Rom 5:19). This nature is called *“the flesh”* (Rom 7:25), *“my flesh”* (Rom 7:18), *“the natural man”* (1 Cor 2:14), the *“old man”* (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), and *“our members that are upon the earth”* (Col 3:5).

This part of our being is tied to our bodies, and will remain with us as long as we are in the body. Because this part of our persons is hostile toward God, it is to be *“crucified”* (Gal 5:24), *“mortified”* (Rom 8:13), and *“no provision”* made for it (Rom 13:14).

The New Man

Those who are in Christ Jesus possess a new nature. It is described as

described as a change from one stage of glory to another – a work wrought by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

THE CIRCUMSTANCE

The circumstance of the hostility between these two natures is what occasions all exhortations, beseechments, and admonitions. Even though believers may not have lapsed into extreme spiritual insensitivity, yet that capacity remains in them as long as they are in the body. Thus, strong texts like those mentioned above, are to be received by all saints. They are not to be considered applicable only to those who have indulged in the transgressions that have been mentioned.

This condition is also what allows for comfort to be ministered in the very Epistle containing strong rebukes. The rebukes are delivered to the flesh. The comforts are addressed to the new creation. This manner of communication can be traced throughout the Epistles.

- ❑ **Believers are addressed as those who are called by God, accepted in Christ, and having full access to God.**
- ❑ **Expressions of the flesh are soundly condemned, and believers are urged to rid themselves of all forms of sin.**
- ❑ **Promises, prayers, and spiritual advantages are set before believers to encourage and stabilize them in the faith.**

This consistent approach confirms

As long as they are in this world, or *“in the body,”* the saints have two competing natures.

being *“born of God”* (1 John 5:4), and is a *“new creation”* (2 Cor 5:17), *“created unto good works”* (Eph 2:10). This is the *“new man”* (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), *“inner man”* (Eph 3:16), and *“inward man”* (Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16). This is presently the part of us that is being *“conformed to the image”* of God's Son (Rom 8:29). That conformation is

the nature of life in Christ Jesus – how it is lived in the arena of inner conflict, as well as oppositions from the world. That is precisely why comforting words like those that follow can be delivered after all manner of rebuke and correction. We have every reason to be thankful for this Divine and profitable arrangement.

CONFIDENCE CONCERNING SAINTS

“ 15:14 Now I myself am confident || concerning you, my brethren, that you || also are full of goodness, filled with all

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knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” From time to time, it is needful to assure the saints of our confidence in their progress. While this is not common in our day, it represents a Divine manner of stimulating spiritual life and sensitivity. If, indeed, we do have a “*new man*,” he ought to be addressed. There are words God has inspired that particularly apply to the “*new creation*,” and they are to be spoken without fear of contradiction. The Lord Jesus Himself followed this procedure. A few examples of this can be seen in His message to the churches in *Asia*.

□ **THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS.** Jesus recognized and commended their

recognized their works, charity, service, faith, and patience. He also commended them because their latter works were more than their former. Notwithstanding, He held against them the fact that they allowed a false prophetess among them to seduce His servants. He held before this church the promise that those who overcame would be given power over the nations, and would be given the “morning star” (Rev 2:18-28).

□ **THE CHURCH IN SARDIS.** The Lord saw very little in Sardis that could be commended. He did mention some things that remained that could be strengthened. Urging them to recall

Whatever an individual has that has come to him through Christ Jesus – however miniscule it may appear – is to be nourished, cultured, and fanned into a flame.

works, labor, patience, and that they could not endure evil men. They also hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which Jesus also hated. The Lord held against them the fact that they had left their first love. He promised those who overcame that He would give them access to the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev 2:1-7).

□ **THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS.** Jesus commended them for holding His name fast, and not denying His name – in a place where Satan had his throne. This faithfulness took place in a time of fierce persecution, when Antipas was martyred for Christ. Yet, Jesus had some things against this church, for they had some among them who taught the doctrine of Balaam, casting stumbling blocks before Christ’s servants. Still, He held the promise before them that those who overcame would be given to eat hidden manna, and would be given a new name, known only to those receiving it (Rev 2:12-17).

□ **THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA.** Jesus

how they had received, he exhorted them to hold fast and repent. He also confessed there were a few souls there who had not denied His name. After telling them they had a name that they were alive, but were actually dead, He held out a precious promise to them. Those who overcame would be clothed in white raiment, would not have their name blotted out of his book of life, and would have their name confessed before the Father and the holy angels by Himself (Rev 3:1-6).

□ **THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA.** This was the only Asian church of which Jesus said nothing good – other than acknowledging them as His own. They had a completely erroneous view of their condition, imagining they had no need of anything. Yet Jesus counseled them to procure what they sorely needed from Him personally. He then held before them two most unusual promises. First, He affirmed that He would personally sup with any individual who would grant Him access to their person. Second, He said the ones overcoming would be granted to sit with Him in His throne (Rev 3:14-

21).

I have taken this time to confirm the manner of the Kingdom, and to substantiate how the Apostle reflects this fashion in his writings. It is important that the people of God see this Kingdom quality. **Whatever an individual has that has come to him through Christ Jesus – however miniscule it may appear – is to be nourished, cultured, and fanned into a flame.**

I MYSELF AM CONFIDENT

“Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren.” Other versions read, “I myself also am persuaded,” ^{KJV} *“I myself also am convinced,”* ^{NASB} *“I myself feel confident about you,”* ^{NRSV} and *“am assured of you.”* ^{DRA}

This is the language of faith, and is often articulated by holy men. “. . . *having confidence in you all . . . I have confidence in you in all things . . . the great confidence which I have in you . . . I have confidence in you through the Lord . . . we have confidence in the Lord touching you . . . Having confidence in thy obedience”* (2 Cor 2:3; 7:16; 8:22; Gal 5:10; 2 Thess 3:4; Phil 1:21).

This kind of confidence is also expressed in other ways.

- “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me” (Psa 138:8).
- “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).
- “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess 5:23-24).
- “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess 1:11).
- “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet 5:10).
- “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory

for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb 13:20-21).

The work of God is helped along by expressions of confidence in His great and effective power. He is, after all, "able to make" believers stand (Rom 14:4). He can "make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor 9:8). He is fully "able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

This confidence is produced when faith is perceived in a person or group of persons. Paul testified that he was bound to give thanks for the Thessalonians because their faith was growing exceedingly, and their love toward each other was abounding (2 Thess 1:3). They maintained their faith and persevered in all of their persecutions and tribulations (2 Thess 1:4). These conditions justified the strong confidence Paul had concerning these brethren.

When faith is not prominent in those professing identity with Christ Jesus, it is not possible to have this kind of confidence. In such a case, strong reproofs and exhortations are required to stimulate people to live by faith and walk in the Spirit. No other manner of life is acceptable to the Lord. However, where faith and love are in strong and abundant evidence, saints are to be addressed in the manner of this passage. This tends to encourage faith and stabilize hope. It may be done without hesitation or fear.

FULL OF GOODNESS

"Now I myself am confident . . . that you also are full of goodness. . . ." Every major translation reads exactly the same: "full of goodness." This is a most remarkable expression – particularly when you recall the state of all men by nature: "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (3:12). What a marvelous work has taken place in those once numbered among those who did no good at all. Now, by the grace of God, they are "full of goodness."

This is not "goodness" that has been generated by men. Rather, it has been received from God. When God summarized the revelation of His glory to

Moses, He declared He was going to "make all My goodness pass before thee" (Ex 33:19). As He passed before Moses, sheltered in the cleft of a rock by His hand, He "proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God . . . abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex 34:6). In the well known twenty-third Psalm, David confessed, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psa 23:6). Again, the Psalmist confessed, "Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!" (Psa 31:19).

the idea of moral excellence. Moral excellence is the ability to choose good and reject evil – an ability that is woven into the character of the individual.

To be "full of goodness" is to be consistent in choosing the good things of God and refusing the delusions of the devil. It is to possess the qualities of gentleness and generosity, kindness and purity. This a quality that comes from God, and it reflects His own nature. Goodness is properly traced back to God. Thus we read of "the goodness of God" (Psa 52:1; Rom 2:4). Like the

Here is a Divine quality that is "stored up"^{NIV} for those who fear the Lord. This is a great repository reserved for those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit. There is no limit on the amount of it that can received by faith.

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The word "goodness" is not easy to define. It is a quality that includes generosity, a willingness to give, and uprightness of heart. Ultimately, these are traits of God Himself. Yet, He is "willing more abundantly" (Heb 6:17) to share this "goodness" with those who believe the record He has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11).

Technically, to be "filled with all goodness" means to be filled with a kind and benevolent spirit. This included their love for one another, and toward all saints. They were disposed to give of themselves and be kind. More specifically, I believe, this fulness refers to their disposition to do what the Lord required, and to extend themselves to yield a pure and uncompromising obedience to Him.

"Goodness" is included in the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), and embraces

righteousness of God, this is not a mere human attempt to be like God, but is a participation in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). To be "full of goodness" is involved in being "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19). It is to receive "of His fulness, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

When, therefore, Paul says he was persuaded the brethren in Rome were "full of goodness," he is recognizing a most significant quality. These brethren had the capacity to regard one another just as God regarded them. Unlike the Corinthians, there were not divisions among them. Being full of goodness implies being "kindly affectioned toward one another" (Rom 12:10), "tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (Eph 4:32), and "forbearing one another" (Col 3:13). How marvelous to be confident that certain believers are filled with such a exceedingly great quality!

FILLED WITH ALL KNOWLEDGE

"Now I myself am confident . . . that you also are . . . filled with all knowledge." Other versions read, "complete in knowledge,"^{NIV} "replenished with all knowledge,"^{DRA} "you know these things,"^{NLT} and "fully instructed."^{NJB}

Grace made Paul a prodigious, tireless, effective, and insightful preacher. He preached extensively and effectively--by Given O. Blakely

Now Paul heaps virtue upon virtue. **The blessing of the Lord does not come in sparse measures, and thus the servant of God does not think in small ways!** Here is a condition that is exactly the opposite of men's status by nature. The Divine assessment of men apart from involvement with Deity is, "there is none that understandeth" (Rom 3:12). The lack of the knowledge of reference is what alienates people from the life of God. Thus it is written, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:18).

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"^{NKJV} (2 Pet 1:19).

This type of knowledge enables the individual to fulfill this word: "correctly handling the Word of truth"^{NIV} (2 Tim 2:15). The idea is that the Roman brethren had an understanding of the things of God. We will find this is not mere worldly wisdom. Although an acquaintance with religious history and familiarity with the technicalities of language are not of themselves bad, that is not the type of cognition here

articulated or evidenced such an ambition. I know of few, if any, Christian educational institutions that presently have this as a stated and formal objective. **However, this is a Divine aim, and the whole of salvation contributes to its realization.** The Scriptures are declared to have been inspired by God in order to "make the man of God perfect" (2 Tim 3:17). Christ has given gifts to the church "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). There is no justifiable reason for the church of our day to be ignorant of these realities.

The brethren in Rome, therefore, were not being commended because they had gone further than normal. Rather, they were commended for availing themselves of the things that are provided in Christ Jesus. Anything less than this is spiritually abnormal.

ABLE TO ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER

"Now I myself am confident . . . that you also are . . . able also to admonish one another." Other versions read, "competent to instruct one another,"^{NIV} "able to instruct one another,"^{NRSV} and "able to give direction to one another."^{BBE}

This is the objective of being "full of goodness" and "filled with all knowledge." Having an abundance of goodness and knowledge is not an end of itself. There is an appointed purpose for kindness, gentleness, generosity, knowledge, and understanding. These qualities equip believers to bring certain advantages to one another. To be more specific, they are designed to enable the believer to join the Savior in bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). Jesus is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18), and preparing us for "the great and notable day of the Lord." **While He assists us through our difficulties, subdues our enemies, and provides our daily necessities, that is by no means the burden or fundamental objective of His ministry to us.**

Not a single one of the covenantal benefits is temporal in nature. None of them are primarily external. Consider again how glorious is the revelation of the these benefits.

Keep in mind, our text is not commending a few advanced brethren among the Roman congregation. It is the body of believers themselves that have provoked this confidence in the Apostle.

The Apostle here acknowledges that a fundamental change has taken place in these brethren. Rather than being destitute of this vital knowledge, now they are filled with it. This is a sort of Kingdom intelligence – being conversant with the manner of the Kingdom. In this acknowledgment Paul confirms he is persuaded he has not been speaking mysteries to them. He is convinced a responsive note has been struck in their hearts. They know what he has been talking about.

This is not the rudimentary knowledge that flows from a familiarity with facts and the employment of human logic or reasoning. Rather, this is the knowledge that results from being "enlightened" (Eph 1:18; Heb 6:4), or "illuminated" (Heb 10:32). It is related to the "day dawning," and "the day star" rising in the heart (2 Pet 1:19). Rather than this kind of knowledge excluding an acquaintance with the Word of God, it is the result of faithful and consistent exposure to it – particularly the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Thus it is written of the Gospel, "And so we have the prophetic

acknowledged. There is a superior knowledge that allows one to confidently handle the good things of God. **It involves insight into Divine objectives, and the ability to correlate Scripture with those objectives.** It is not possible to have such knowledge without a significant grasp of the text of Scripture. Nor, indeed, will an intellectual grasp of the Bible bring such knowledge when the heart is not pure and in fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Keep in mind, our text is not commending a few advanced brethren among the Roman congregation. It is the body of believers themselves that have provoked this confidence in the Apostle. The exceeding rarity of such congregations confirms the marvelous achievements of the brethren in Rome. It is certainly a noble goal for any fellowship of believers to strive to be noted as being filled with goodness and knowledge. Such ambitions are virtually unknown among American churches. After over fifty years of extensive exposure to the numerous churches, I can only recall a very few who have ever

- ❑ **A MINISTRY TO THE MIND.** *“I will put my laws into their mind”* (Heb 8:10a).
- ❑ **A MINISTRY TO THE HEART.** *“I will . . . write them in their hearts”* (Heb 8:10b).
- ❑ **A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** *“I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people”* (Heb 8:10c).
- ❑ **A PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.** *“And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest”* (Heb 8:11).
- ❑ **THE REMOVAL OF SIN.** *“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”* (Heb 8:12).

God, Christ Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit ever depart from, or minimize this revealed agenda! Nothing that They do ever upstages this work, or puts it into the background. **At the precise point these things become of little consequence to those who profess faith, their involvement with Deity starts to terminate,** for there are no other reasons for fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Being *“able also to admonish one another”* blends with the work and promises of God. It is harmonious with the intercessory and mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus. It combines with the strengthening and directing ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is all by Divine design and appointment. It is not the result of human wisdom or strategy, but is the consequence of living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

The Thessalonians were exhorted to know and appreciate those who

admonished them (1Thess 5:12). The Colossians were exhorted to be filled with the Spirit and thereby admonish one another (Col 3:16). **Our text acknowledges not only the necessity of this ministry, but the capability of the brethren who are addressed to actually engage in the work.** They did not require the intervention of someone outside of their own fellowship. Paul is not, then, speaking as though their ministry to one another relied upon him. Rather, he is

“longsuffering,” and *“kindness,”* and is *“by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Cor 6:6).

Admonishing one another relates to assisting one another to remain and make progress on the highway of holiness (Isa 35:8). It is associated with provoking one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24). It HAS to do with edifying one another (Rom 14:19; 1 Thess 5:11). Such ACTIVITY moves believers beyond the role of mere spectators. It

Admonishing one another relates to assisting one another to remain and make progress on the highway of holiness

stirring up what is already in them, confirming what they are able to do is in perfect accord with God’s purpose.

With goodness and knowledge combined in the heart of a people, they at once become competent to reprove, correct, and instruct in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). But these virtues – goodness and knowledge – must reside in the people. A *“good man”* is, by Scriptural definition, one who is walking with the Lord. *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD”* (Psa 37:23). *“A good man obtaineth favor of the LORD”* (Prov 12:2). Jesus declared, *“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things”* (Matt 12:35). The *“knowledge”* of reference keeps company with *“pureness,”*

opens both their hearts and their mouths, and makes them *“profitable”* to one another (2 Tim 4:11; Philemon 11).

An Observation

Without being unduly critical, such virtues are exceedingly rare in the contemporary American congregation. It is not unusual to find churches, who have a reputation for being successful, to be able to boast in nothing more than a lot of people and elaborate facilities. The ability to admonish one another is rarely, if ever, mentioned, much less actually displayed. Nevertheless, being full of goodness, knowledge, and the ability to admonish one another, ranks high with God. Where these are found, a good work has been, and is being, done to the glory of God. Such works are to be commended.

BOLD WRITING

“¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God . . .” At no point does life in the Spirit switch to some form of automation that requires no more involvement on the part of

individual or collective believers. It should not surprise us that this is not generally revealed in the conduct and teaching of the average congregation. Many who argue extensively against lifeless views of perseverance, like “once saved always saved,” actually practice

the doctrine. Professed believers are often less zealous than they were when they first came into Christ. Their diligence has diminished, as well as their sensitivity and tenderness. Yet, they imagine themselves to still be accepted by God, even though they are drifting

further and further from the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and the persuasion that God is able to keep what they have committed to Him (2 Tim 1:12).

However, such thoughts are only imaginations, perpetrated and fostered by the wicked one. There is not a jot or tittle of truth in them. God has no delight in those who draw back from Him, even declaring that such are progressing to *“perdition,”* or condemnation (Heb 10:38-39). This is precisely why Paul is elaborating on these things to the brethren in Rome, and us as well. He does not take spiritual life for granted, or suppose that what we have received from God works independently of human involvement.

He had heard of their faith (1:5), and was determined to bring advantages to them *“to the end”* they might be *“established”* (1:9-11). They were, indeed, *“able to admonish one another,”* but that ability must be stirred up and often provoked in order to be effective.

Many a congregation with noble beginnings has fallen asleep simply because it was never stirred by words of admonition and exhortation. Perhaps people thought their leaders were sufficient to carry the congregation forward without too much involvement by all of the brothers and sisters. **When the people of God are not stimulated by powerful exhortations and reminders of the greatness of what they have received, they will make no advance.** That is why Paul writes.

teachest another, teachest thou not thyself. . . Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey . . . For to be carnally minded is death . . . Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? . . . Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee . . . But why dost thou judge thy brother?” (2:1,21; 6:16; 8:6; 9:20; 11:18; 14:10). These solemn sayings were not intended to single out certain people, or denigrate the congregation in Rome. Rather, they were a means of checking the expressions of the flesh, which is every with us.

Third, Paul had not founded the church in Rome, yet had written extensively to them in this Epistle. The flesh would object to this action, saying the affairs in Rome were none of his business. However, he was writing as the appointed Apostle to the Gentiles, and not one who sought to impose his own views on others. He was not a meddler, but an Apostle, ordained to minister the truth to the people of God.

REMINDING YOU

“ . . . as reminding you.” Other versions read, *“as putting you in mind,”* ^{KJV} *“as if to remind you of them again,”* ^{NIV} and *“knowing that all you need is this reminder from me.”* ^{NLT}

The ministry of helping the saints to remember is a vital one. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to *“remind”* them of his ministry (1 Cor 4:17). He reminded Timothy himself of the gift that was given to him (2 Tim 1:6). He admonished Timothy to remind brethren not to strive about words (2 Tim 2:14). He also exhorted Titus to remind brethren to be subject to the higher powers, obey, and be ready for every good work (Tit 3:1). Peter said he would not be negligent to remind the brethren of the things of God, even though they were established in the truth (2 Pet 1:12). He knew that even *“pure minds”* had to be stirred up by holy remembrances (2 Pet 3:1).

While we remain in these *“earthen vessels”* (2 Cor 4:7), the precious things of God tend to get away from us. **Even though God’s laws have been put into our minds and written upon our hearts** (Heb 8:10), **yet continual attention must be given to our hearts and minds in order**

Even though God’s laws have been put into our minds and written upon our hearts (Heb 8:10), yet continual attention must be given to our hearts and minds in order that the writing may remain fresh.

NEVERTHELESS

“Nevertheless . . .” This is a small but meaningful word that indicates an extended thought. It is akin to what we would call an explanation or elaboration. It indicates the further development of a thought. That development is not required because of a fundamental deficiency in the character of the readers, for they were *“full of goodness.”* It is not necessary to speak in this manner because the readers were lacking in understanding, for they were *“full of all knowledge.”* Nor, indeed, did Paul speak in this way because the brethren in Rome were not able to build one another up. They were, in fact, *“able to admonish one another.”* Why, then, continue in this line of thought?

It is because we are *not “sufficient of ourselves”* (2 Cor 3:5). The very nature of life in Christ Jesus requires frequent spiritual stimulus – even from those who may not personally know us. At the point of writing, Paul had never been to Rome.

MORE BOLDLY

“I have written more boldly to you on some points.” Other versions read, *“I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points,”* ^{NLT} and *“rather boldly in some respects.”* ^{NAB}

There is a threefold sense in which this boldness has been evidenced.

First, Paul had admonished them, even though they were, he confessed, capable of admonishing one another. That required some degree of boldness. There is no place for cliques in the work of the Lord. The fact that an individual may never have companied with a particular congregation does not mean he ought not boldly speak of the truth to them.

Second, he had declared some things to them that could be abrasive. You may recall some of those expressions. *“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judges . . . Thou therefore which*

that the writing may remain fresh. This is why Jesus instituted the “*Lord’s supper*” (1 Cor 11:20). It is a feast of remembrance whereby the recollection of the Savior can remain fresh and effective.

Thus Paul writes to bring what the brethren already know to the forefront of their thinking. Life in the flesh tends to push the things of God into the background of thought. Exhortation and admonition bring them into the foreground. There is a reason for the necessity of such stimuli. **When the things of God are not dominant in our thinking, they are no longer effective.** When the truth of God is put into the shadows, while the mind becomes occupied with lesser things, it no longer exercises its power to free the soul.

Those who have a practice of absenting themselves from the fellowship of brethren in Christ (Heb 10:25), or who neglect the reading of, and meditation in, the Holy Scriptures, have put themselves in a situation where the truth cannot flourish in their hearts. In fact, it may not even be able to survive in them. The fiercely competitive moral arena that we

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occupy demands the stirring up of pure minds. They must not be left unattended.

BECAUSE OF GRACE

“... because of the grace given to me by God.” Paul does not write as a meddler in other men’s affairs. Nor, indeed, is he writing as a dictator who demands his own way. He is writing as a “*steward of the manifold grace of God*” (1 Pet 4:10). God had adapted him for this ministry. It was not something he took upon himself. His role in the body of Christ was “*by the grace of God*” (1 Cor 15:10). The manner in which he ministered was “*not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God*” NKJV (2 Cor 1:12). He was fulfilling a Divinely

appointed role in so ministering to them.

Many a soul, attempting to do something in the name of the Lord, has met with miserable failure. Often, this is because they have sought to do something for which grace had not suited them. **While care must be taken not to assume those who appear to fail have really had no grace, care must also be taken not to launch out in the energy of the flesh.**

When it comes to speaking to the saints of God, or caring for the house of God, there is no place for assumption. Those who minister must have some degree of confidence that they are doing what God has given them to do.

MINISTERING AND OFFERING

“¹⁶ ... that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Here is a most interesting perspective. The aim of the Apostle was not merely to correct the brethren in Rome. Nor, indeed, was it only to increase their knowledge of the things of God. His activities were a labor of love, with the firm intent to be a servant used by Jesus Christ. He was seeking to be faithful to his stewardship, for “*it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful*” (1 Cor 4:2). In that activity, Jesus would receive glory, the saints would receive benefits, and he would receive a reward.

A MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST

“... that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ.” Other versions read, “*that I should be the minister,*”^{KJV} and “*to be a*

minister.”^{NIV} This is WHY He was given grace; i.e., in order to be a minister, or servant, of Jesus Christ.

Many think of the grace of God only in regard to the remission of sin, justification, and sanctification. And, indeed, grace is the root for all of those marvelous gifts. But grace also has to do with ministry – with serving the Lord and being a laborer in His vineyard. That is precisely why Peter admonished believers to be “*good stewards of the manifold grace of God... ministering “as of the ability which God giveth*” (1 Pet 4:10-11). In a day of religious professionalism, much emphasis is being placed on *training* laborers for the Kingdom. While this is not an unworthy work, it IS a work unworthy of emphasis. **The key factor in laboring for the Lord is NOT the amount of training one receives, but the grace that has been given to him.**

That grace has adapted such an one for a certain work, and he is to be busy in fulfilling it, as Paul is in fulfilling the work for which grace suited him.

The sense of this verse, then, is this: I have written boldly to you, stirring up your minds with matters already familiar to you. I know you are able to admonish one another because you are filled with goodness and knowledge. Yet, I am doing so because I have been appointed to this work, and have been suited for it by the grace of God. We learn from this that God does not leave His people with limited resources. No congregation is sufficient of itself. If such a thing was possible, it would have been true of the brethren in Rome. Their faith had been spoken of throughout the world. They were filled with all goodness and all knowledge, and were thus able to admonish one another. There were a number of spiritually elite people among them, as is confirmed in the next chapter

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(16:3-15). Paul also knew he would profit from their mutual faith (1:12). Yet he ministered to them in the power of the grace that had been given to him.

TO THE GENTILES

The focus of Paul's Apostleship was the Gentiles – the nations of the world who had been cut off from all affiliation with the Living God. God did not intend for him to labor **exclusively** among the Gentiles. When the Lord sent Ananias to instruct Saul of Tarsus, He told him *"he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and **kings**, and **the children of Israel**"* (Acts 9:15). Indeed, Paul did bear the name of Christ before *"kings"* (Acts 25:22-27; 26:1-11; 27:24), and *"the children of Israel"* as well (Acts 13:14-15; 14:1; 17:1-21; 8:4). However, the burden of his ministry was to the Gentiles, *"which know not God"* (1 Thess 4:5).

God,"^{NIV} *"in the priestly service of the gospel of God,"*^{NRSV} *"carrying on as a sacrificial service the (message of) glad tidings of God."*^{DARBY} Here Paul assumes the role of a priest, **preparing** a sacrifice to offer up to the Lord. The Gospel of God is to that sacrifice what salt was to the sacrifice under the Law: it made the sacrifice acceptable (Lev 2:13).

"The Gospel of God" portrays the Gospel at its most foundational level. This depiction of the Gospel is used seven times in Scripture (Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet 4:17). The Gospel is the good news of the working of God. He *"so loved the world"* (John 3:16), *"sent"* the Son into the world (1 John 4:14), and *"delivered Him up"* for the sins of the world (Rom 8:32). Jesus came to do His will (John 4:34), in bringing us to God.

It is fashionable in some circles to say the Gospel is only preached to those who are **not** in Christ. Our text shines a bright light upon such statements, showing how utterly foolish they are. Rome was a well established church, whose faith had been chronicled throughout the world. They were filled with goodness and all knowledge, and able to admonish one another. Yet Paul ministered *"the Gospel of God"* to them – and that, quite extensively (chapters 3-8).

THE OFFERING OF THE GENTILES

"... that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable." Other versions read, *"that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable,"*^{NASB} *"so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God,"*^{NIV} Here is the priestly service Paul is fulfilling. He is offering up the Gentiles to the Living God. That is why he has salted them with *"the Gospel of God."*

There is a sort of spiritual naivete that is extant in the professed church. It assumes Divine acceptance too easily. Trite sayings like "receive Christ into your heart," and "God loves you just the way you are," blur the truth rather than clarifying it. **Here is Paul, writing to Gentiles who are in Christ Jesus, speaking of making the offering of them acceptable to God.**

The offering of which he speaks is a *"living sacrifice,"* that is, one that is ongoing or continual. The very notion of offering *"the Gentiles"* to God is a most arresting one – particularly when you are speaking of believing and justified Gentiles. It is the flavor of the Gospel that provides for such acceptance. **I have every reason to believe that when the Gospel of God ceases to be declared, the acceptance of the people begins to diminish.** It is as though God will not allow for favor to continue where the proclamation of His love and grace are no longer heard. The ramifications of this are sufficient to promote great sobriety and diligence.

SANCTIFIED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

"... sanctified by the Holy Spirit." That is, the offering up of the Gentiles is made acceptable to God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Further, that sanctifying work depends

See how versatile those tutored by grace become! In this world, specialists often confine themselves to one thing. But it is not so in the Kingdom. Special abilities in one area by no means imply incompetence in other areas.

It was much the same with Peter, who was primarily an Apostle to the Jews, or *"the circumcision"* (Gal 2:7). Yet, he is the very man Jesus used to *"open the door of faith"* to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18).

See how versatile those tutored by grace become! In this world, *specialists* often confine themselves to one thing. But it is not so in the Kingdom. Special abilities in one area by no means imply incompetence in other areas.

MINISTERING THE GOSPEL OF GOD

"... ministering the Gospel; of God." Paul took up collections of money for needy Jewish brethren (Acts 11:28-30; Rom 15:25-27; 1 Cor 16:1-5), but He ministered *"the Gospel of God"* to the Gentiles.

Other versions read, *"ministering as a priest the gospel of God,"*^{NASB} *"with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of*

It is *"God"* that was *"in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them"* (2 Cor 5:18-20). When Jesus delivered us *"from this present evil world,"* it was *"according of the will of God and our Father"* (Gal 1:4). This is marvelous to hear when you consider that sin had alienated us *"from the life of God"* (Eph 4:18). It is no wonder it is called, *"the Gospel of God."*

The Indispensable Role of the Gospel

If men are going to made acceptable to God, the *"Gospel of God"* must be ministered to them. This is not good news that God can meet your need, or answer your problems – although those benefits result from fellowship with Him. The Gospel is not against the background of human misery and hardship, but against the blackness of the alienating effects of transgression, and death in trespasses and sins (Rom 1:1-3:19).

upon the ministry of *“the Gospel of God.”* **The Holy Spirit does not work with the philosophies and reasonings of men. They may have a pleasant sound to them, but they have no utility whatsoever in making men acceptable to God.**

What marvelous involvements there are in people being made acceptable to God! In this text, we are reminded that the sound of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit are indispensable to that acceptance – **and both of those are outside of our own persons.** Although by nature, the Gentiles were *“sinners,”* the Holy Spirit had washed, sanctified, and justified them (1 Cor 6:11). It is His ministry that has made them good enough to be received by a thrice holy God. Salvation itself is related to the *“sanctification of the Spirit,”* as well as *“the belief of the truth”* (2 Thess 2:13).

Even though the saved are said to be *“elect according to the foreknowledge of God,”* that election was carried out *“through sanctification of the Spirit,”* and was in order to *“obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 1:2).

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit separates us from alienating defilements, and puts us in a position where we can be received by God. Without this work, God cannot receive us!

Ponder what is involved in people being offered up to God in a way that is pleasing to Him.

- This acceptance required the tutelage of the Law, or the awakening to our sinful condition (Rom 3:19-20).
- It required the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, enthronement,

and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 4:4; 1 Cor 15:3; Rom 1:4; Eph 1:23; Heb 7:25).

- It was, and continues to be, necessary that *“the Gospel of God”* be ministered (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 15:1-3).
- The convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit preceded our acceptance (John 16:8-11).
- The Holy Spirit initially, and on an ongoing basis, cleanses, sanctifies, and qualifies us for Divine acceptance (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 5:5; 15:13).

Such extensive involvements, when perceived, will contribute to faithfulness and diligence. They also illuminate why the righteous are said to *“scarcely be saved”* (1 Pet 4:18). It is **ONLY** He that is in us that is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). By nature, we are *“not sufficient of ourselves.”*

A REASON TO GLORY

¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. In this verse and those that follow, Paul is providing evidence for his right to speak with such authority. He will point us to the effectiveness of the Gospel that he preached. God Himself had supported his message, which was reason enough for the Gentiles to heartily embrace it.

I HAVE REASON

“Therefore I have reason . . .” There is no reason for men to boast in themselves, for they had to be saved from their own doing. That does not mean that all glorying, or boasting, is unlawful. **There are justifiable reasons for glorying,** but they do not lie in men themselves. It is therefore written, *“But he who glories, let him glory in the LORD”* (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). That is precisely what Paul does in this text.

God had made Paul both adequate and effective, and he gloried in those conditions. Elsewhere he wrote, *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His*

knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things” (2 Cor 2:14-16).

evidence as promotes lawful glorying!

GLORYING IN CHRIST JESUS

“. . . to glory in Christ Jesus . . .” The idea is that Paul is glorying in all of the things Christ has accomplished through him. The New Living Translation captures this sense. *“So it is right for me to be enthusiastic about all*

Paul’s wisdom is not what made him effective. His earthly pedigree and expertise in the Law and the Prophets was not the source of his effectiveness. It was Christ who was living in Him (Gal 2:20), and it is Christ who receives the glory, even though it comes from Paul.

Indeed, Paul confessed *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament”* (2 Cor 3:5-6). How marvelous to have such

Christ Jesus has done through me.” Paul’s wisdom is not what made him effective. His earthly pedigree and expertise in the Law and the Prophets was not the source of his effectiveness. It was Christ who was living in Him (Gal

Grace made Paul a prodigious, tireless, effective, and insightful preacher. He preached extensively and effectively--by Given O. Blakely

2:20), and it is Christ who receives the glory, even though it comes from Paul.

The King James Version reads, *"I may glory through Jesus Christ."* This sense is also included in the verse, that Jesus Himself has enabled Paul to glory in an acceptable manner. He not only worked through Paul's labors, but expressed praise through His mouth. This is the fruitage of being a *"laborer together with God"* (1 Cor 3:9).

THINGS WHICH PERTAIN TO GOD

"... in the things which pertain to God." Other versions read, *"my service to God,"*^{NIV} *"my work for God,"*^{NRSV} and *"the things which are God's."*^{BBE} There are things that we do that are to God, but are

not pertaining to God. Such matters relate to laboring for an earthly master, or children obeying their parents, yet doing it *"as unto the Lord"* (Eph 6:5; Col 3:20). These are not the areas where boasting is acceptable. Nor, indeed, are they the point of Divine emphasis. They are temporal in nature, and morally necessary. Thus, they are to be done *"unto the Lord."*

This text speaks of a more lofty and enduring work. It has to do with the commissions of grace, which enable a person to labor together with God in His great *"eternal purpose"* (Eph 3:11). **Care must be taken in speaking of this matter, lest men view earthly duties with disdain.** Equally, care must be taken

when addressing earthly obligations, lest men conclude in doing them they have fulfilled their duty to God.

God has positioned the members in Christ's body *"as it hath pleased Him"* (1 Cor 12:18). Each position is accompanied with *"a measure of faith"* (Rom 12:3), and enabling grace (1 Pet 4:11). As those various roles are fulfilled in the power of the Spirit, Christ working through the individual, one may glory in Christ Jesus for the effectiveness of that work. That is what Paul is doing in this text. He has seen the work of Christ in himself. The person who sees the sense of this has been blessed. Such will find great satisfaction in their labors, and be able to glory in the Lord.

GOD WORKING THROUGH A MAN

"¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient;¹⁹ in mighty signs and wonders, by the power

his glorying to what the Lord has done through him personally. It certainly is not that he did not give thanks for the work of others. However, when glorying is done in the work of some peer or peers,

truth of this to your heart.

I WILL NOT DARE TO SPEAK

"For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me..." There is something about lifeless theological positions and institutions that contradict the spirit of this expression. There is all manner of speaking today that has nothing whatsoever to do with what Christ has done in the individual. All such speaking, or boasting, is in the work of some other man or men. Paul will not allow himself to indulge in such a display of vanity. He will not speak extensively about things which Christ has not accomplished through him. Such a procedure would bring a great wave of silence in many church circles.

There is something about lifeless theological positions and institutions that contradict the spirit of this expression. There is all manner of speaking today that has nothing whatsoever to do with what Christ has done in the individual.

of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

When it comes to godly boasting, Paul will not glory in the work of another, as though he was an integral part of such a work. He will only glory in what the Lord has done through him! He will not glory in an institution, or a movement, or what the Lord is doing through a particular group. There is a reason for his insistence upon confining

that glorying tends to detract from the Lord Jesus Christ. It is too impersonal, and does not promote thanksgiving as much as the type of glorying Paul here displays. The greater testimony regards the work in you.

Such observations may appear completely inconsequential to some. However, they do have some relevance to a discussion of this text. It is as though every man will glory in something – at least that is the tendency. Far better, therefore, to look for the working of Christ through us personally. Your experience in the Lord should confirm the

Speaking of what God has done through individuals is not uncommon in the Word of God. *"And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them"* (Acts 14:27). *"Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them"* (Acts 15:12). Peter once said, *"Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and*

believe” (Acts 15:7).

Godly people have no cause to be ashamed to declare what the Lord has done through them. They must, however, avoid any tendency to get caught up in the work of others, even though it is legitimate, and is accomplished by Jesus.

Accomplished through Me

“ . . . accomplished through me.”

Other versions read “wrought by me,”^{KJV} “done by me,”^{BBE} and “done through me.”^{NJB}

Herein is a most marvelous Kingdom principle, that Christ does things through people! This is involved in Christ living in us (Gal 2:20), us laboring with God (1 Cor 3:9), and God working in us to will and to do (Phil 2:13).

There remains in religious men the uncomely tendency to think of God as only working independently of the redeemed. Thus, snared by “voluntary humility” (Col 2:18), they do not think of themselves as resources to the Living God. They cannot conceive of the Lord Jesus working through them, but only think of themselves as receiving from the Lord. While receiving from the Lord is not in any way to be minimized, it is the outflow of life that especially brings glory to God. Thus Jesus declared, “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, **out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water**” (John 7:39). It is this outflow that is the subject of Paul’s comments.

IN WORD AND DEED

“ . . . in word and deed . . . ” Here are the two great pillars of Gospel communication: word and deed, i.e., what is said and what is done. Again, men tend to emphasize one of these to the exclusion of the other. The Pharisees said, but did not “do” (Matt 23:3). Jesus spoke of those who said the right thing but “do not the things that I say” (Lk 6:46).

It is said of Jesus that He was “mighty in deed and word” (Lk 24:19). Paul declared there was a perfect harmony between what he said and what he did (2 Cor 10:11). All saints are admonished “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). When words and deeds do not match, God is not in the matter!

MAKING THE GENTILES OBEDIENT

“ . . . to make the Gentiles obedient . . . ” Other versions read, “resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles,”^{NASE} “leading the Gentiles to obey,”^{NIV} and “to win obedience from the Gentiles.”^{NRSV}

There was an immediate objective in Paul’s words and deeds – a reason why he spoke and why he worked. Here he relates that objective with his Apostleship, which was his chief reason for living (Phil 1:23-24). If men gave heed to what Paul said and did, they would become “obedient” to the Gospel! That was his personal objective, and that is what the message he declared was calculated to do.

There are messages that, when they are embraced, do not produce such

counts. Where faith is found, it moves one into the mainstream of the will of God. No one who believes the Gospel will balk at the commandments of the Lord.

Thus Paul’s labors were calculated to bring men into accord with God. He did not speak to entertain men. Nor, indeed, were his words calculated to provide answers to all of their earthly challenges and difficulties. He sought to “make the Gentiles obedient” in what he said, and what he did. That is, indeed, a fitting and noble thing to do!

MIGHTY SIGNS AND WONDERS

“ . . . in mighty signs and wonders . . . ” Other versions read, “Through mighty signs and wonders,”^{KJV} “by the power of signs and miracles.”^{NIV} Paul had been given unique insights from the

. God has given some to see more than others, as He did Paul. He was an extraordinary messenger, who had no peers. As John the Baptist stood taller than all generations before him, so Paul stood taller in the matter of receiving revelations from God.

results. Churches are filled with people who have embraced a message, yet have not become obedient. The message they have espoused is more of a church position or creed than it is Gospel. The danger of such a message is seen in the fact that all who “obey not the Gospel” will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, being “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:8-9).

Whatever one may think of obedience, the Gospel of Christ is calculated to produce it. The Holy Spirit empowers men to do it (1 Pet 1:2), and Jesus is the “Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9).

Primarily, this is speaking of “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26), for the Gospel demands that we believe it. **Where there is no faith, nothing else**

Lord, elsewhere called “the abundance of the revelations” (2 Cor 12:7). He was shown things that were hidden from former ages, not being made known to men “as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:2-5). This revelation was so lofty and extensive that even Peter declared, “our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood” (2 Pet 3:15-16).

Do not think for one moment that all messengers from God are on equal footing, or all see the same things. God has given some to see more than others, as He did Paul. He was an extraordinary messenger, who had no peers. As John the Baptist stood taller than all generations before him, so Paul stood taller in the matter of receiving revelations from God.

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It was this very circumstance that produced the *"mighty signs and wonder"* that accompanied Paul's ministry. An extraordinary message and messenger was accompanied with extraordinary displays of Divine power. Mediocre people and messages need no support from God.

Even so, the Holy Spirit is modest in providing a record of the *"mighty signs and wonders"* wrought through Paul. Here are the ones that are recorded.

- ❑ **Acts 13:8-11.** When opposed by Elymas the sorcerer, Paul struck him blind.
- ❑ **Acts 14:8-10.** A certain man from

were done to *"make the Gentiles obedient."* Is this what occurred in the incidents listed above. What were the results of the mighty deeds wrought through the hands of Paul?

- ❑ **Acts 13:8-11** – *"Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord"* (v 12).
- ❑ **Acts 14:8-10** – *"And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men"* (v 11).
- ❑ **Acts 15:12** – *"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which*

Religious Controversy

Unfortunately, believers have haggled over the possibility of *"mighty signs and wonders,"* battling one another over the position that is taken on them. But only a fool will affirm that such workings are common among any body of religious people. In nearly all cases, they are unusual, and honest people know it. This may be largely owing to the lack of faith among professed believers. It may also be due to the fact that they are not preaching a Gospel God can bless. It seems to me to be a better course to zealously seek to be aligned with the Living God, preaching His Gospel, and seeking His will. If, in the course of such activities, the Lord sees fit to confirm His Word, and buttress our confidence, by stretching forth His hand in miraculous ways, we will be better able to receive it.

Too, if we have not been called to an unusual work, we should not expect it to be supported by unusual signs. It is time for men to cease trying to develop a theological position on miracles, and set themselves to say and do something worthy of the blessing of the Lord. If we learn anything from Scripture, it is that such signs and wonders are not to be taken for granted.

A Case in Point

A salient comment is made in the fourteenth chapter of Acts regarding this observation. The occasion was the preaching of the Gospel in Conium. *"Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands."* The whole city was divided over this situation, *"and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles"* (Acts 14:3-4). Signs and wonders have never occurred automatically. Throughout history, with the exception of the earthly ministry of Jesus, they have been sporadic, with no specific pattern of kind or time. They have been *"granted."* While it is in order to seek such grants (Acts 4:29-30), the burden of our attention must be placed on declaring the Gospel in order to make men obedient.

BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

"... by the power of the Spirit of God..." This is a further explanation of the effectiveness of Paul's words and

It seems to me to be a better course to zealously seek to be aligned with the Living God, preaching His Gospel, and seeking His will.

Lystra, impotent in his feet, and crippled from his mother's womb, was healed by Paul, who perceived he had faith to be healed.

- ❑ **Acts 15:12.** Miracles and wonders were wrought by Barnabas and Paul among the Gentiles.
- ❑ **Acts 16:18.** He drove a demon out of woman who had a spirit of divination.
- ❑ **Acts 19:11-12.** God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, causing diseases to be healed and evil spirits to leave through *"handkerchiefs and aprons"* sent from his body.
- ❑ **Acts 28:8.** Publius, the chief man from the barbarous island of Melita, was healed by Paul of a bloody flux.
- ❑ **Acts 28:9.** Others from the island of Melita were also healed by Paul.
- ❑ **Acts 20:9-12.** Paul raised Eutychus from the dead, after he had fallen from a third story window.
- ❑ **Acts 28:5-6.** After being bitten by a deadly viper, Paul shook the snake off in a fire, not being harmed at all.

Paul specifically related these things to his Apostleship. *"Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds"* (2 Cor 12:12). Our text declares such things

from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (v 19).

- ❑ **Acts 16:18** – *"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house"* (vs 33-34).
- ❑ **Acts 19:11-12** – *"And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver"* (vs 18-19).
- ❑ **Acts 28:5-9** – *"Who also honored us with many honors"* (v 10).
- ❑ **Acts 20:9-12** – This miracle was wrought among the brethren, who, as a result, *"were not a little comforted"* (v 12).

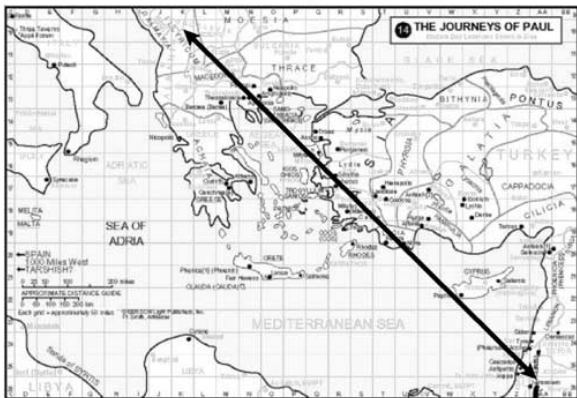
The point to be seen here is that the affects of *"mighty signs and wonders"* also testify to their origin. Paul confesses that their purpose was to *"make the Gentiles obedient."* They also harmonized perfectly with the message that he brought.

deeds. First, they were supported by “mighty signs and wonders.” Second, they were done in “the power of the Spirit of God.” The Holy Spirit revealed the message to Paul (Eph 3:5). He provided the gifts and understanding through which the insightful proclamation was made (1 Cor 2:13). Both the message and the ability to proclaim it came from God.

When Jesus returned from His forty-day temptation in the wilderness, He “returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Lk 4:14). He was thus enabled to fulfill His commission from the Father. This is precisely what Paul is affirming: that He was enabled by the Holy Spirit to fulfill his commission. The work he was given to do was staggering. He was sent to the Gentiles “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (acts 26:18). **What mortal is adequate for such an assignment?** All of these things are normally credited to Deity – never to men. Yet, the Holy Spirit empowered Paul to do these things, making him effective in the work Jesus had assigned to him.

The Holy Spirit will do no less for you. You too have a role to play in the body of Christ – an assigned role. Spiritual ministries are not *up for grabs*, as some imagine. There are delegated abilities that are the domain in which we are to operate. We are, as Peter said, to “minister as of the ability which God giveth” (1 Pet 4:11). The Holy Spirit is active in such a ministry.

FROM JERUSALEM TO ILLYRICUM



“ . . . so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum . . . ”The extent

being spent for the work of the Lord (2 Cor 12:15).

You too have a role to play in the body of Christ – an assigned role. Spiritual ministries are not *up for grabs*, as some imagine. There are delegated abilities that are the domain in which we are to operate.

of Paul’s travels would be considered significant in any age, including our own. Although he first began to preach in Damascus (Acts 9:22), he mentions Jerusalem, because it was the hub from which the Gospel spread: “beginning at Jerusalem”(Lk 24:47). Barnabas brought Paul from Damascus to Jerusalem, where he was “with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem”(Acts 9:27).

Illyricum was between 1,500 and 2,000 miles from Jerusalem, depending on the mode of travel. It was not as though Paul preached in Jerusalem, and then made a quantum leap to Illyricum where he also preached the Gospel. There were countries and regions in between to which he preached the Gospel: Greece, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Galatia, Phrygia, Asia, Italy, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Italy. Countless cities were exposed to the preaching of the Apostle to the Gentiles. These included Tyre, Damascus, Cyrus, Pathos, Salamis, Selucia, Antioch, Derby, Lystra, Iconium, Perga, Attalia, Ephesus, the Isle of Crete, Troas, Corinth, Athens, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Rome. All of these were along the way “from Jerusalem to Illyricum.”

By saying “from Jerusalem to Illyricum,” it is as though Paul said, “I did not run from Jerusalem to Illyricum, but preached in all the countries and cities in between them.” It is obvious that Paul took his commission seriously. He embraced his stewardship with godly zeal, focus, and affection. He is a noble example of spending and

FULLY PREACHED THE GOSPEL

“ . . . I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Paul did not pass through these countries and cities giving an occasional personal testimony. Neither, indeed, did he subject the people to a mere introduction of the Gospel of Christ, setting in motion a followup program for the completion of a Gospel course of study. Rather, he “fully preached,” or proclaimed, the Gospel of Christ.

Some people boast of a “full Gospel.” Paul “fully preached” the Gospel, which of itself is complete, and covers both Divine intent and human need. In another place Paul declared this manner of preaching. “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house”(Acts 20:20). Again, he confessed, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”(Acts 20:27). **A message as grand as the Gospel deserves to be proclaimed in its entirety.** Through it, the love of God is revealed (1 John 3:16), a righteousness from God (Rom 1:17), and the wrath of God against all unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). It is the Gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24), of the Kingdom of God (Matt 4:23), and of a peace that has been between God and man (Eph 6:15). It is the good news of “Jesus Christ,” His Person and His marvelous accomplishments (Mark 1:1). This is “the Gospel of your salvation”(Eph 1:13), and the good news of the “blessed God”(1 Tim 1:11). It proclaims the cursing of Jesus in order to the deliverance of men (Gal 3:13), and that God made Jesus to be sin in order that He might make us the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21).

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This Gospel announces the consecration of a new and living way that leads to God (Heb 10:20), an Intercessor that ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25), and an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us (1 Pet 1:4). He declares that, because of Jesus, God can make us stand (Rom 14:4), and keep us from falling (Jude 24). The Gospel announces the destruction of Satan (Heb 2:14), the spoiling of principalities and powers (Col 2:15), and the end of the Law for righteousness (Rom 10:4). What a marvelous Gospel we have!

The Gospel declares God has given us eternal life in His Son (1 John 5:11). It affirms that the Holy Spirit is given to those in Christ, and will assist them in subduing the flesh (Rom 8:13), enable to abound in hope (Rom 15:13), and offer intercessions for them when they do not know what to pray for as they ought (Rom 8:26-27). The Gospel declares that in Christ there is *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14:17). There is *“no condemnation”* (Rom 8:1), but men are *“made accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6).

Paul *“fully preached”* the Gospel, so that none of its great provisions were hidden, or could not be grasped by faith. Those who received His message would be left with a keen sense of the goodness of God, and the sinfulness of sin. Wherever there was a listening ear, there was no disappointment in the hearts of those who heard Paul preach the Gospel of Christ. Issues were made clear, and Divine provisions were put within their reach. Those who believed his report received a lively sense of Divine adequacy, and were motivated to take hold of it quickly.

I MADE IT MY AIM

“²⁰ And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,²¹ but as it is written: To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.” Here Paul shares something intensely personal – something he did not always divulge. He had an ambition that was not

capabilities, not stifle them.

I MADE IT MY AIM

“And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel . . .” Other versions read, *“I strived to preach the gospel,”*^{KJV} *“I aspired to preach the gospel,”*^{NASB} *“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel,”*^{NIV} and *“it has been my rule to preach the gospel.”*^{NJB} When one is

an aspiration that pertains to their work.

Many would-be servants of the Lord flounder about in indecision, not sure of what they are to do, or how they are to do it. There may very well be a period of time when this condition exists, but one must grow out of it to be an effective laborer for the Lord. Neither the human spirit nor the gifts of God are intended to be held in a state of indecision or a lack of focus.

NOT WHERE CHRIST WAS NAMED

“. . . not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation . . .” This was not an inviolable law by which Paul operated. He was determined to preach the Gospel in Rome, where a well established congregation existed (Rom 1:15). However, as a rule, he aimed at preaching the Gospel among those who had never heard it before.

Many would-be servants of the Lord flounder about in indecision, not sure of what they are to do, or how they are to do it. There may very well be a period of time when this condition exists, but one must grow out of it to be an effective laborer for the Lord.

commanded, yet contributed to the effectiveness of what he was told to do. There is a certain freedom involved in serving Christ. It is not the sort of liberty that gives license to the flesh, but allows the *“workman”* to work in refreshing co-partnery with the Lord. There is room for expanded thought, creativity, and originality – all the while protecting the content and effectiveness of the Gospel of Christ. Laboring together with God tends to expand and enhance human

called to preach the Gospel, he must set about to think how he will do it. John the Baptist preached to Jews, where *“the people were in expectation”* of the coming Messiah (Lk 3:15). But whether it was John, Stephen, Philip, or Apollos, each of them set their minds to do what they were called to do. If it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2), then those who preach and teach must pay attention to what they do. They should have an aim, a purpose,

He shared this same objective with the Corinthians, even explaining it in more detail. *“We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in*

another man's territory" ^{NIV} (2 Cor 10:14-16).

In a meeting with the other Apostles, a pact was struck between them that Peter and the others would preach to the Jews, while Paul would major on preaching to the untaught Gentiles. This was agreed upon because they perceived the grace that had been given Paul – grace that particularly suited him for the work. *"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles;) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision"* ^{NKJV} (Gal 2:7-9).

There is certainly nothing wrong with kindred spirits working together to preach the Gospel in the most effective manner. Some have embraced a view of preaching and teaching that leaves everything up to chance, with no personal perception or planning. While the human mind must not be allowed the place of prominence, it is to be heartily devoted to the work of the Lord, charged with alertness and perception.

Paul's determination not to build upon another man's foundation was noble. It was not prompted by a disdain for other Kingdom laborers, or a disrespect for their accomplishments. However, such efforts are often attended by having to deal with doctrinal corruptions, misapprehensions, and erroneous views of the Kingdom – all of which tend to consume a lot of time. Much of the Epistles is devoted to correcting flawed doctrine and living. Some have imagined that these corrections and reproofs are the Gospel. They are not, Rather, they are necessitated by inaccurate views of the Gospel.

NEW SEEING AND UNDERSTANDING

"... but as it is written: 'To whom He was not announced, they shall see;

*And those who have not heard shall understand.'" Paul had an insatiable appetite for the Lord to be honored and glorified. Here, for example, he refers to a promise given through Isaiah. "So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: **for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider**" (Isa 52:15). Isaiah also*

Here is a man who set himself to fulfill one of the great prophecies of Scripture. He knew that God is able to save with "few" as well as "many" (1 Sam 14:6). Like Nehemiah, he set out to do a gigantic work with but few human resources (Neh 2:12-15). Of course, God has always sought for such a man.

alluded to this in the sixty-fifth chapter of his prophecy. *"I am sought of them that asked not for me: **I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name**" (Isa 65:1).*

Here is a work that brings great glory to God: when a people who had not been cultured to believe the Gospel heartily embrace it. Here is a man who set himself to fulfill one of the great prophecies of Scripture. He knew that God is able to save with "few" as well as "many" (1 Sam 14:6). Like Nehemiah, he set out to do a gigantic work with but few human resources (Neh 2:12-15). Of course, God has always sought for such a man. His eyes continually range too and fro upon the face of the whole earth *"to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him"* (2 Chron 16:9).

The thing to see here is that Paul realized the magnitude of the work to which he had been called. He did not pull his commission down into the plains of human wisdom, but took it and soared into the mountain peaks of Divine possibilities.

Until Christ had risen from the dead and was enthroned *"on the right hand of the Majesty on high"* (Heb 1:3), God *"suffered all nations to walk in their own ways"* (Acts 14:16). They were excluded from *"the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises."* The "fathers" did not belong to them, and the Christ did not

come from them (Rom 9:4-5). Yet, upon hearing the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, they *"turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven"* (1 Thess 1:9-10).

The Gospel was announced to them who did not see, and they saw! A Gospel was delivered to those with no understanding, and they understood. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Psa 118:23)!

Ponder several such incidents that are revealed in Scripture.

- ❑ Upon hearing the Gospel from Philip the evangelist, the whole city of Samaria believed (Acts 8:5-8). Prior to this, Jesus passed through Samaria, but did not preach there, save to a lone woman at the well of Jacob (Lk 17:11; John 4:4-9). They were not cultured to believe, yet they did!
- ❑ An Ethiopian eunuch with no understanding of Scripture, comprehended it the very first time it was expounded to him (Acts 8:27-29).
- ❑ Certain Grecians heard men of Cyprus and Cyrene *"preaching the Lord Jesus."* It is written, *"And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned*

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unto the Lord”(Acts 11:20-21).

- When coming into Pathos, Paul and Barnabas encountered a false Jewish false prophet who sought to interfere with the deputy of the country hearing the word of the Lord. He sought to turn the deputy away from the faith, and Paul struck him blind.

- Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira believed and obeyed the Gospel when she first heard it (Acts 16:14-15).
- A Philippian jailor, upon his initial hearing of the Gospel, “believed with all of his house”(Acts 16:31-34).
- In Thessalonica, when they first heard

heard the Gospel. The name of Jesus was magnified among them, and “many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver”(Acts 18:18-19).

Those who work with the Lord must be versatile enough to make determinations, all the while remaining sensitive to adjust them to the revealed will of God when required. Those who rely wholly upon human strategies will invariably drift from the promises of God.

After hearing the good news but once, “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord”(Acts 13:12).

- In Antioch of Pisidia, after a group of Jews had forthrightly rejected the Gospel, a group of Gentiles were glad to hear the Word of the Lord, glorified it, and believed (Acts 13:48).
- In Iconium, a great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed upon hearing the Gospel for the first time (Acts 14:1).

the Gospel, a great multitude of devout Greeks, and many prominent women believed (Acts 17:4,12).

- In the philosophical citadel of Athens, “certain . . . believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them,” upon first hearing the Gospel (Acts 17:34).
- When first exposed to the Gospel, many Corinthians “hearing believed and were baptized”(Acts 18:8).
- In Ephesus, where cultist activity flourished, fear fell upon those who

Truly, the Lord is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”(Eph 3:20). Paul believed this, and applied it to his own Apostleship to the nations of the world. He was able to associate the promises of God with the work to which Jesus had called him. That is no small accomplishment! Yet, it is something that can be experienced by everyone who works together with God.

Those who work with the Lord must be versatile enough to make determinations, all the while remaining sensitive to adjust them to the revealed will of God when required. Those who rely wholly upon human strategies will invariably drift from the promises of God. But those who are willing to fasten upon some promise of God, and labor to see it fulfilled to the glory of God, will not be ashamed or disappointed. In your own measure, and according to your faith, you may participate in such a blessing. Set your heart on doing so!

CONCLUSION

In Christ Jesus, it is not only possible to do a great and extensive work, it is possible to do it well. But it all depends on one’s perception of his own calling, and reliance upon the grace and power of God. For those who labor in preaching and teaching, or “the word and the doctrine”(1 Tim 5:17), it is necessary to have some perception of the people to whom they minister. The recognition of Kingdom abilities in those whom we serve is essential to sound and profitable exhortation. Also, when God has done a work in someone, it is in order for us to

He has shared the nature of his ministry, and how he has sought to fulfill it. He was able to do this because the brethren in Rome were kindred spirits. Their faith in Christ and love for the brethren enabled Paul to speak more profitably to them.

recognize it and devote ourselves to encouraging its prominence in the people. Many a Divinely initiated work would do better if only the people were encouraged, their bruises bound up, and their

smoking flax fanned into a flame.

This is not some kind of wishful thinking or philosophical prattling. Paul

has exemplified this manner in our text. We should never be ashamed of acknowledging the work of God in others, or hesitant to affirm we see it, and give thanks for it. Even the Lord will say to His servants, “*Well done, good and faithful servant . . .*” (Matt 25:21). When the Philippians were thoughtful of Paul, ministering to his need, He said, “*ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction*” (Phil 4:14). Let us seek to culture such a spirit. It will do our brethren good, and bring glory to God.

There is something else to be seen in this text. When we perceive our role in the body of Christ, and are bold enough to speak about it, we should use that role to

bring some benefit to the people to whom we speak. Paul spoke of his Apostleship, and of the great things the Lord had done through him. But he did not leave it at that. He used his ministry to bring advantage strength, and comfort to the saints in Rome. It is good that we seek to do the same, profiting our brethren by our mutual faith. **Those with whom we company should personally benefit from our gifts and ministries.**

You see how personal Paul has been with the brethren in Rome – and with us. He has shared the nature of his ministry, and how he has sought to fulfill it. He was able to do this because the brethren in Rome were kindred spirits. Their faith

in Christ and love for the brethren enabled Paul to speak more profitably to them.

I have made mention of this before, but feel constrained to do it again. **When we put our hearts and minds into the work of the Lord, strengthening our faith, and advancing in virtue and hope, we will be able to receive much more from godly ministers.** Not only will they be inclined to give us more of the bread they themselves have tasted, our godly attitude and demeanor will prove to be a great encouragement to them. The value of harmonious and kindred spirits cannot be overstated.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 48

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----



PLANNING TO COME TO ROME

15:22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, ²⁴ whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. ²⁵ But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶ For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷ It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸ Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. ²⁹ But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. ³⁰ Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, ³¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. ³³ Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. ^{NKJV} (Romans 15:22-33)

INTRODUCTION

When one is called into the service of King Jesus, everything changes. The dominant consideration is the stewardship that has been assigned, or the ministry to which the individual has been called. The commissioning of the prophets of old was an example of this. When Moses was called of God, he was keeping a flock of sheep on "the backside of the desert" (Ex 3:1). After his Divine calling, he became

absorbed with a different work, energetically pursuing his new leadership role for the next eighty years. He never kept sheep again. When Elisha was called, he was plowing "with twelve yoke of oxen before him" (1 Kgs 19:19). After his calling, he slew the yoke of oxen, boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, never again to return to plowing. When David was called to be the ruler of the

people of God, he was taken "from the sheeppcote, even from following the sheep" (1 Chron 17:7). That ended his career as a shepherd. When Amos was called, he was "among the herdmen of Tekoa," and a "gatherer of sycamore fruit" (Amos 1:1; 7:14). God took him from those involvements, and from then on he was known as a prophet of God. Prior to entering into His earthly ministry, Jesus

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OUTLINE

- < MUCH HINDERED (15:22)
- < A GREAT DESIRE (15:23)
- < JOURNEYS, HELP, AND ENJOYMENT (15:24)
- < PLANS TO MINISTER (15:25-28)
- < THE FULNESS OF THE BLESSING (15:29)
- < STRIVING IN PRAYER FOR A PURPOSE (15:30-33)
- < THE GOD OF PEACE (15:33)

was known as *“the carpenter”* (Mark 6:3). But after His baptism, He was no longer in the carpenter shop. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen when Jesus called them (Matt 4:18-22). They were never again known as fishermen. When Matthew was called, he was *“sitting at the receipt of customs”* (Matt 9:9). When called, he left that seat to follow Jesus, and never returned there again. These things are not coincidence.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

When Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, was called by Jesus into the Apostleship, he *“lived a Pharisee”* (Acts 26:5), excelling his equals, and zealous for the traditions of his fathers (Gal 1:14). But after Jesus called him, he never again was known as a Pharisee. He did not return to that elite

group, occupying his former position with a new testimony. Now he poured his heart and soul into the *“high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 3:14). He became a *“living sacrifice”* to his God, being willing to *“very gladly spend and be spent”* for the sake of God’s people (2 Cor 12:15).

On One occasion, he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla because he was *“of the same trade”* as them, being tent makers. But Paul was not known as a tentmaker. If it was not for that solitary reference, we would never have known he made tents. That was not his primary work, with the Apostleship being on the side, so to speak. **He never wrote of making tents, or urged others to make tents. Jesus did not call him to make tents, but sent him to the Gentiles, “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me”** (Acts 26:18). He labored with his hands to confirm he did not come to be served, and out of personal necessity. That was never his preference, focus, or emphasis. **He never neglected his Apostleship to earn a living!** When he worked with his hands, it was in order to the fulfillment of his higher calling.

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

If we are to receive the real message of Scripture, it is important to know these things. The driving compulsion of Paul

was to fulfill his Apostleship – to be a faithful steward. Jesus gave him a message to deliver, making him an ambassador, and he labored to deliver it.

The relevance of this is that **Paul’s message was really a word from Jesus to the churches.** He was not delivering his own words, but the ones that were given to him. When he prayed for the churches, he did so with the heart of Jesus. When he had concern for the churches, he was reflecting the mind of Christ. He was driven by a heavenly agenda, not an earthly one, or one he himself conceived.

Paul will now share his fervent desire to be with the brethren in Rome. That desire was not driven by a fleshly association with them, for that did not exist. It was not because he had labored there, for he had not yet been to Rome. Rather, it was a keen sense of the stewardship of the things he had been given to see. **He knew those realities were designed to establish the saints, giving them a fuller grasp of the magnitude of salvation.**

Paul was a *“minister of Christ”* and a *“steward of the mysteries of God”* – things previously veiled to the sons of men (1 Cor 4:1; 2:7; Eph 3:4-5), but now revealed by the grace of God. He was diligent in allowing the river to flow out of his belly (John 7:37-39), pouring forth a message of life to the Gentile world. **He did not allow flesh to stop that flow.**

MUCH HINDERED

“ 15:22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.” Paul has already expressed his fervent desire to be with the brethren in Rome. Regularly in his prayers, he declared, he made *“request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.”* Having heard of their faith and love, he said *“I long to see you”* (1:10-11). Later he will say this desire had been with him *“for many years”* (v 23). Was all of this mere words – a mere fleshly politeness with no real substance?

Paul will now confirm this is not the case at all. **He did not merely have occasional and surface desires to be**

In this, Paul was *reflecting “the mind of Christ”* and of God. The Father and the Son do not speak casually about

He did not merely have occasional and surface desires to be with the brethren at Rome. His desires were profound, being constrained by the Holy Spirit.

with the brethren at Rome. His desires were profound, being constrained by the Holy Spirit.

their desires for us. Ponder the Father saying, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD,*

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thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jer 29:11). Consider also the words of Jesus. “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). Those are revelations of the heart of the Father and the Son.

Those who have the Spirit of God speak in the same manner. They speak from their hearts, their conscience bearing them witness in the Holy Spirit (Rom 9:1). Professional courtesy, of whatever value it may be, is not given a place of prominence in the Kingdom of God. Valid speaking is driven by the “spirit of faith” (2 Cor 4:13), not a sense of social propriety. The words, therefore, of Paul were a very real depiction of his

These represent the cause Paul will now elaborate. That “cause,” or reason, related to his commission from Christ. **While his person entered into it, the cause was driven by a Divine agenda, not a personal one.** Like Christ, his meat was to do the will of Him who sent him (John 4:34). His desires for the brethren at Rome were not the result of knowing them after the flesh, but perceiving them in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ.

MUCH HINDERED

“I have been much hindered in coming to you.” Other versions read, “I have often been hindered,”^{NASB} “I have so often been hindered,”^{NRSV} “I was frequently kept from,”^{BBE} “I have so often been prevented,”^{NAB} and “my visit to you has been delayed so long.”^{NLT} **Paul’s intentions had been frequently**

manner of seemingly effective opposition. A brief rehearsal of some of these instances will serve to confirm this to your heart.

- ☐ Abel was killed by Cain because God accepted his offering, but rejected Cain’s (Gen 4:8).
- ☐ Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen 37:28), and put into prison because of a false accusation (Gen 39:20).
- ☐ Moses was opposed by the people he was leading to the promised land (Ex 17:4).
- ☐ David was forced to flee by king Saul (1 Sam 19:11-12; 21:10), and even from his own son Absalom (2 Sam 15:14).
- ☐ God’s prophets were murdered by wicked queen Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4).
- ☐ Elijah was forced to flee for his life from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-3).
- ☐ Micaiah the prophet was imprisoned by the king of Israel (1 Kings 22:26).
- ☐ Zechariah the prophet was stoned in the king’s court by the people to whom he prophesied (2 Chron 24:21).
- ☐ Job lost all of his possessions (Job 1:13-22), was afflicted with boils (Job 2:7), and scorned by his friends (Job 16:20).
- ☐ Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon, and sank into it’s mire (Jer 38:6).
- ☐ Uriaah the priest was brought out of Egypt by king Jehoiakim and slain with the sword (Jer 26:23).
- ☐ John the Baptist was beheaded by wicked Herod (Matt 14:10-11).
- ☐ Herod also killed James, the brother of John, with the sword (Acts 12:2).
- ☐ Stephen was stoned by his own countryman (Acts 7:59).
- ☐ Timothy was imprisoned (Heb 13:23).

Paul’s Experiences

In addition to these noble saints, we know something of the hardships faced by the Apostle Paul WHILE he was engaged in his Apostolic ministry. Hindrance was no stranger to him!

- ☐ Enemies forced Paul to escape from angry Jews in Damascus by being let down over a wall in a basket (Acts 9:25).
- ☐ He was expelled from the coasts near Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:50).
- ☐ Because of hateful Jews, Paul was forced to flee from Iconium to Lystra and Derby (Acts 14:6).
- ☐ He was stoned in Lystra (Acts 14:19).

The servants of God have always met with resistance, delays, and all manner of seemingly effective opposition. A brief rehearsal of some of these instances will serve to confirm this to your heart.

heart, even though they often appeared to contradict that fact. He will now explain why he was not able to do what his heart desired, i.e., come to Rome.

FOR THIS REASON

“For this reason . . . ” Other versions read, and “For which cause,”^{KJV} “This is why.”^{NIV} The “cause” or “reason” to which he refers is what he has said about his apostleship.

- ☐ “That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.” (v 16a)
- ☐ “Ministering the Gospel of God.” (v 16b)
- ☐ “That the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (v 16c)
- ☐ “To make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed.” (v 18)
- ☐ “I have made it my aim to preach the gospel.” (v 20)

blocked, even though they were noble, and in full accord with his calling. Many different times he had intended to come to them for honorable purposes, but he was kept from fulfilling those worthy intentions.

Right here we see a vital aspect of spiritual life. Religious hucksters, particularly in America, are fond of promoting distorted views of life in Christ. Often it is represented as a triumphant life in which all of your desires are met, and authority over surrounding circumstances is continually realized. While this view of things sounds pleasant enough, it summons a dishonest spirit into the arena of life. This is simply not the way life in Christ is lived, and it is nowhere represented in that manner.

The Manner of the Kingdom

The servants of God have always met with resistance, delays, and all

- ▶ He was beaten and cast into prison in Philippi (Acts 16:23).
- ▶ Because of fierce opposition, Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica (Acts 17:10).
- ▶ He was forced to leave Berea because of the aggressive hatred of Jews from Thessalonica (Acts 17:13-15).
- ▶ In Corinth, Paul was brought before Gallio by the Jews, who accused him falsely (Acts 18:12).
- ▶ In Caesarea, he was confined to Herod's judgment hall (Acts 23:35).
- ▶ He was held bound in custody for two years (Acts 24:27).
- ▶ In his trip to Rome as a prisoner, he was delayed for three months in Melita (Acts 28:11-16).
- ▶ While in Asia, he was so opposed that he even despaired of life (2 Cor 1:8).
- ▶ Paul was shamefully treated by the unbelieving Jews at Philippi (1 Thess 2:2).
- ▶ Hew was beaten five times with 39 stripes, beaten with rods three times, three times suffered shipwreck, and spent a day and a night in the open sea (2 Cor 11:24-25).
- ▶ He was subjected to perils of waters, robbers, his own countrymen, the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren (2 Cor 11:26).
- ▶ He experienced weariness, painfulness, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, being without food, and being cold and naked (2 Cor 11:27).
- ▶ Paul was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan to buffet him – a thorn that was not removed but could only be offset with grace from Christ (2 Cor 12:7-9).
- ▶ He was troubled on every side, persecuted, and cast down (2 Cor 4:8-9).
- ▶ He fought with wild beasts in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32).
- ▶ When first attempting to preach the Word in Asia, he was forbidden by the

- Holy Spirit to do so (Acts 16:6).
- ▶ When he tried to enter into Bythunia to preach the Gospel, the Spirit of Jesus would not allow him to do so (Acts 16:7).
- ▶ When he was determined to leave Corinth because of the opposition endured there, Jesus told him to stay, because He had “*much people*” there (Acts 18:6-10).

Simplistic and fundamentally dishonest views about the triumph of the believer are not to be entertained. Although such views are vigorously promoted among Western charlatans, they are false, and conform neither to Scripture nor spiritual understanding. With care, the saints should avoid embracing views promoted by those who are dominated by the flesh. Such views bring no benefits with them.

The fact that one is doing the will of God, and that He that is in them is greater than he that is in the

objectives, he was “*hindered.*”

I Was Hindered

At the very first of this letter, Paul told the brethren in Rome of his thwarted intentions. “*And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far)*” (1:13). It is quite true that some of this hindering was due to him being redirected to other areas by the Holy Spirit, as in Acts 16:6-7. However, Satan himself also hindered Paul, even when his desires were noble. To the Thessalonians he wrote, “*Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us*” (1 Thess 2:18).

The words “*much hindered*” include the idea of frequency as well as pervasiveness. Thus the NRSV reads, “*I have so often been hindered from coming to you.*” Other versions read “*hindered many times,*”^{YLT} and “*frequently kept*

Yet, Paul did not conclude that it must not be God's will for him to come to Rome. He continued to entertain this strong desire, even though it was thwarted again and again.

world, does not mean obstacles are all instantly removed. Our text is a case in point. Keep in mind that Paul was no ordinary man. He was the premier Apostle, having “*labored more abundantly than they all*” (1 Cor 15:10). His devotion to the Lord and commitment to His cause was unparalleled (Phil 3:8-14). His objectives and motives were pure and unmingled with selfish desires. The Holy Spirit bore witness to his integrity (Rom 9:1). Yet, he confesses that, in his noble

from.”^{BBE} **Yet, Paul did not conclude that it must not be God's will for him to come to Rome.** He continued to entertain this strong desire, even though it was thwarted again and again.

It is commendable when men and women of God entertain strong desires for good. It is also good when they retain them, waiting patiently for the Lord, and not abandoning them in despair. Honorable aspirations are to be kept.

A GREAT DESIRE

“²³ But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you.”The maintenance of godly

desires assist the soul to remain alert. **The people of God must not let go of godly and honorable ambitions, even though they appear to be frustrated**

on every hand. It is God's manner to “*bear long*” with His children before granting some of their desires (Luke 18:7). We should be familiar with this manner.

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NO LONGER HAVING A PLACE

“But now no longer having a place in these parts . . .” Other versions read, *“with no further place for me in these regions,”*^{NASB} *“there is no more place for me to work in these regions,”*^{NIV} *“since I no longer have any opportunity in these regions,”*^{NAB} *“now I have finished my work in these regions,”*^{NLT} and *“there is nothing more to keep me in these parts.”*^{NJB}

The candor with which Paul speaks is quite arresting. He can speak openly with the brethren in Rome because of the excellence of their faith and love. The Apostle is not speaking of persecution, as though he was finally being driven from that region, as he was from other places. Rather, he had *“fully preached”* the Gospel through those regions, planting the Seed of the Kingdom in every major city *“from Jerusalem to Illyricum.”* New churches had sprung up, and he had revisited brethren *“in every city”* where he had preached the Word of God, confirming them in the faith (Acts 15:36). He had fulfilled his work there.

believers, whereas before he had majored on speaking where Jesus had not been named. It was the same Gospel, but would open the things of God further to those who had already been joined to the Lord.

Those who are *“workers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9) should not easily be discouraged. They should rather be strong in the Lord. Nor, indeed, should they assume that the absence of opportunity means there is nothing more for them to do. They should rather search their hearts, seeking to fulfill godly desires, and being alert for further opportunities.

DESIRING FOR MANY YEARS

“. . . and having a great desire these many years to come unto you.” One version reads, *“I have been longing for many years to see you.”* Although the desire had not been granted, yet Paul maintained it *“for many years!”*

An impatient age, such as the one in which we live, knows nothing of such tenacity of soul! Lethargic souls cannot

(Psa 37:7). Do not be surprised if something you have longed to do for the Lord has remained unsatisfied for a long season! That is not reason to conclude that you have wanted the wrong thing. Paul kept his desire to go to Rome for *“many YEARS!”* He did not abandon the desire, for it was a good one, in keeping with his calling and the grace that had been given to him. He kept alert, and now, years later, it appeared as though the desire would finally be realized. Faith and hope have their own unique rewards.

Paul was busy during the *“many years”* this desire was not granted. He continued toiling in the fields, all the while waiting for an opportunity for this desire to come to pass. **I have no confidence in a way of thinking that leads a person into inactivity while he waits for his desires to be answered.** Such a posture does not bring honor to God, and actually robs the soul, putting it to sleep.

Holy desires cannot be nurtured and kept in an inactive environment. This is precisely why many souls have dropped into the pit of despair and ultimate unbelief. Rather than waiting patiently for the Lord, they gave up when their desires were not met immediately. Such poor souls forget that Noah had to wait one hundred and twenty years to be delivered from a wicked generation. And, he had to work diligently in the preparation of the ark all that time.

Let us have done with attitudes that interpret delay as a sign of hopelessness, or a lack of Divine approval. If the path is not smooth, let no person conclude it is wrong. Also, if we cannot do things we really desire to do, let us not sit down and pine away as though there was nothing else to do. Better to do everything we can where we are at, bringing honor to the Lord, and satisfaction to the soul. **There is no point in the life of faith when idleness is consecrated.**

The candor with which Paul speaks is quite arresting. He can speak openly with the brethren in Rome because of the excellence of their faith and love.

Now, because he did not desire to build on another man’s foundation, he began to look for other places to go. Rome immediately comes to his mind, for he has long desired to go there and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul did not imagine that his ministry was concluded, but that no further opportunity existed in that region. One further note of interest can be found in this text. He now seeks to minister to

keep a godly desire for a day or two, but are easily moved away from it by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. **A person who is not willing to wait for the blessing is not apt to receive it.** Impatience moves the soul into futility and vain pursuits. If others appear to be realizing their desires, but you are not, consider your ways. If your desires are good, and for the glory of God, then there is a word for you. *“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him”*

JOURNEYS, HELP, AND ENJOYMENT

“²⁴ Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.” Faith can plan beyond the vision

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of flesh. It is not restrained by human reason, unfavorable circumstances, or great challenges. In this particular text, we will be given a glimpse of the manner in which a person of faith reasons. If it is true that God *“is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”* (Eph 3:20), then we ought to declare war on miniscule thinking. **Many a child of God never advances far in faith because they think too small. They do not allow their thinking to go beyond their own persons, family, church, or means of employment.** Unfortunately, much of the religion of our times actually fosters this kind of thinking, putting the accent of life upon personal, domestic, and social matters. There is, however, another world, another Kingdom, another realm, that is to be the subject of contemplation and purpose. This frame of mind is seen in this passage.

JOURNEY TO SPAIN

“Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.” Paul again refers to going to Spain in the 28th verse. In all of Scripture, these are the only two verses where *“Spain”* is mentioned. This was a more aggressive plan that was ever expressed by any person in Scripture. **The Apostle moved beyond the boundary of mediocrity, and purposed things that would be foolish to the flesh.**

Spain is part of Europe, to the west of Italy, just below France, and above Morocco and Algeria of Africa. It was a long trip under any circumstances. There is no record in Scripture that confirms Paul ever got to Spain. Some few human traditions affirm that he did, but offer no satisfactory evidence of it. Yet, Paul made his plans, obviously submitting them to the will of God.

Making Plans

There is a spirit to the text of Scripture as well as words, and we do well to note it. Throughout history many religious men have assumed postures in life that considered making plans a foolish activity. Such men would affirm they were waiting upon the Lord, and would make no move or determine any purpose until they were sure God had so directed them. These men quickly point out certain Divine affirmations to us. *“A man’s heart*

deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Prov 16:9). And again, *“O LORD, 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). On the surface, such thinking appears noble. However, it is nothing more than the offspring of unbelief, and betrays a lack of confidence in Divine direction.

Devising and directing, however, are not synonymous terms. These verses do not affirm it is sinful to purpose, plan, or devise. They do affirm that in the process of living, God directs the steps of a good man. **It is in the process of walking itself that the Lord directs our steps.** As it is written, *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way”* (Psa 37:23).

- ☐ After remaining three months in Greece, *“when the Jews laid wait for him, as he [Paul] was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia”* (Acts 20:3).
- ☐ After meeting with Luke and company in Assos, Paul **“determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost”** (Acts 20:16).
- ☐ Paul wrote to the Corinthians of his personal determination not to make another painful visit to them. **“But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness”** (2 Cor 1:1).
- ☐ Paul told Titus to come to him in Nicopolis, where he had **“determined**

Devising and directing, however, are not synonymous terms. These verses do not affirm it is sinful to purpose, plan, or devise. They do affirm that in the process of living, God directs the steps of a good man.

It is God’s manner to give us liberty to purpose and plan. **These purposes are to be under the supervision of faith, and with a mind to remain sensitive to the direction of the Lord, knowing that He alone can lead us properly.** Thus it is written, *“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD”* (Prov 16:33). That is, the responsibility to think, purpose, and determine, is cast into man’s lap. As he takes up that responsibility, doing so in faith and with a mind to glorify God, Divine direction will take place, and God will be glorified in it. A few examples will confirm this to be true.

- ☐ Following the great awakening in Ephesus, when followers of curious arts burned their books, Paul **“purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome”** (Acts 19:21).

- to winter”* (Tit 3:12).
- ☐ Paul and company made an attempt to go into Bythnia with the Gospel, but were forbidden to do so (Acts 16:7).

Because decisions and purposes were made unto the Lord, He directed their steps. That did not mean all of their plans were carried out. They were not. **It is in the godly purposing itself that the Lord directs the steps of a good man.**

For example, God did not tell David to build a house for Him – at least not directly. David purposed in himself to do this. Following the successful housing of the ark of God, David reasoned, *“See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains”* (2 Sam 7:5). Nathan the prophet encouraged David in his determination to make a house for God’s presence. That very night, God revealed to Nathan that David himself would not build such a house.

Instead, Solomon would build it, for he was not a man of war (2 Sam 7:6-13).

Who would dare sit in judgment upon David for having such a desire, or determining to make such a plan? His was a noble aim, and because it was, and he was a good man, the Lord more precisely directed his steps and plans.

I have taken the time to make these few comments because of the uncomely simplicity that attends many people's thinking. They choose to sit idly by, waiting for a word from God. Yet, they do not put their present spiritual understanding to use, or seek to implement godly objectives with pure hearts and minds. Such attitudes complicate life for the children of God, for they do not reflect the nature of living by faith or walking in the Spirit.

You can think in a godly

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up" (Heb 11:19). None of these things were matters of revelation. They were, however, thinking that was driven by the knowledge of God and the belief of His promises. God did not raise Isaac from the dead as Abraham thought He would. He did, however, direct Abraham's steps **while he set out to obey the Lord.**

So it was with Paul. His commission was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. God did not present him with a procedural manual on how to do it. Nor, indeed, did He supply him with the precise words he was going to say. Instead, He cast the matter into Paul's lap. **While Paul worked through it with a pure heart and a mind dominated by the hope of the Gospel, the Lord directed His steps.** That direction was not always well in advance. Blessed is the person who can see the sense of these things.

military capital of the world. Nor, indeed, did he make it his aim to see the pomp and circumstance of the Emperor's court, or the famous games that took place in that city. His desires were molded around the work of the Lord. His fervent desire was to be with the saints in Rome, and thus his journey to Spain was planned with that in mind. That kind of thinking is something you cannot legislate to a human spirit. It can only come from a heart that has been filled with the love of God.

HELPED ON MY WAY

" . . . and to be helped on my way there by." Other versions read, *"and to have you assist me on my journey there,"* ^{NIV} and *"and to be sent on by you."* ^{NRSV} At least two things are intended in this expression. First, that necessities for the journey would be provided by the brethren. Second, that some would accompany him, perhaps even in the journey to Spain itself.

While Paul worked through it with a pure heart and a mind dominated by the hope of the Gospel, the Lord directed His steps. That direction was not always well in advance.

It was the manner of brethren to provide assistance to those who were traveling for the Lord. Thus we read, *"And being brought on their way by the church . . . And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens . . . And they accompanied him unto the ship . . . and they all brought us on our way . . . that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go . . . but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me"* (Acts 15:3; 17:14,15; 20:38; 21:5; 1 Cor 16:6,11; 3 John 1:8). We also read of Paul's trip to Asia, and of several who joined him in it. *"And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus"* (Acts 20:4).

manner, yet be technically wrong.

The example of Abraham's response to the command to offer Isaac will suffice to confirm this. God said to Abraham, *"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of"* (Gen 22:2). God gave no indication that Isaac would not really be offered, or that if he was, that he would be raised from the dead. Yet, Abraham thought in a godly manner – the way faith would reason. When coming to the mountain upon which Isaac was to be offered, Abraham said to his servants, *"I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."* On the way up the mountain, when Isaac asked him about a lamb, he replied, *"My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering"* (Gen 22:5-8). The book of Hebrews tells us how Abraham reasoned,

ON MY JOURNEY

" . . . for I trust to see you in my journey." Other versions read, *"I hope to visit you while passing through,"* ^{NIV} and *"it is my hope to see you on my way."* ^{BBE} Not only did Paul determine to go to Spain (which it is doubtful he was ever allowed to do), he also purposed to visit the brethren in Rome along the way. His thoughts gravitated to Kingdom matters and the fulfillment of his stewardship. All of his plans, of course, were submitted to the purposes of God. But that did not mean he had no personal objectives. Here is how he stated his desire in the first chapter. **"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also"** (1:15).

It is of interest to me that Paul did not say he desired to stop by the "eternal city" of Rome in his journey to Spain, to behold its splendor as the political and

Such things are possible when a high value is placed upon the work of the Lord.

There is certainly room for more of this kind of response among brethren. It is my desire that our own fellowship will be noted for helping the brethren along their way. If it is thought that our provisions do not allow for such gracious assistance, let us ponder the affirmation of Scripture. *"And God is able to provide you with every blessing in*

abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work”^{NRSV} (2 Cor 9:8). In his journeys, Paul depended upon this type of response. It is the manner of the Kingdom.

ENJOYMENT FOR A WHILE

“ . . . if first I may enjoy your company for a while.” Other versions read, “after I have enjoyed your company for a while,”^{NIV} and “after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while.”^{NLT}

In his journeys, Paul depended on the refreshment and mutual edification that came from being with the people of God. On another occasion, when he was en route to Rome as a prisoner, even a heathen centurion named Julius granted Paul permission to go to his brethren and refresh himself. “*And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself*” Acts 27:3). He did not give him some money, and send him to some merchants. Rather, having become familiar with Paul’s manner, he knew there were a certain people, believers in

Christ, from whom Paul would derive needed things and refreshment.

Earlier, Paul said he anticipated being encouraged by the mutual faith of the Romans. “*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- that is, that you and I*

The very tone of this verse contradicts the highly professionalized religion that characterizes our times. It is not unusual to find traveling evangelists preferring to stay in motels, and apart from brethren, in their journeys. It all may appear quite innocent, and we certainly should not be hasty to ascribe less than

We are living in a religious culture that does not know or nourish manners that are in keeping with the Spirit of Christ.

may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith”^{NIV} (1:11-12). **He not only knew of the ministry members of the body have to one another, but relied upon that ministry.** It served to assist him in the fulfillment of his commission from Jesus. Thus he planned, on his way to Spain, to stop by Rome and be encouraged, edified, and thus assisted on his journey. **I want to stress that this is a kingdom normality.**

noble motives to our brethren. However, it is but another commentary on the spiritual impotence of our day. **We are living in a religious culture that does not know or nourish manners that are in keeping with the Spirit of Christ.** There is a lot of boasting about success, but relatively few evidences of hearts genuinely impacted by the grace of God. Of course, things do not need to be this way, and improvement can be realized.

PLANS TO MINISTER

“²⁵ But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.²⁶ For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.²⁷ It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.²⁸ Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.”

Care must be taken not to view this text from a strictly academic point of view. **There is a spirit in Apostolic expressions as well as a testimony or message.** These words reflect a certain spirit, or attitude, that characterizes life in Christ Jesus. To put it another way,

faith leads those who possess it to reason in certain ways – ways that bring glory to God and advantages to His people. Our text affords us a notable example of this way of thinking.

I AM GOING TO JERUSALEM

“*But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.*” Paul does not mean he is going to Jerusalem to preach to the saints, although he would no doubt do that. Rather, he was going “*with aid for the saints.*”^{RSV} As he will explain, there were poor among them that required assistance, and he was going to personally deliver it to them.

Note the versatility in Paul’s thoughts and ambitions. It testifies to the power and effectiveness of faith. In a single breath he speaks of going to Spain, stopping off at Rome to preach the Gospel to them and be helped on his way by

them, and to deliver some assistance to the brethren in Jerusalem. In a realm of religious specialists, that would have required at least three different ministries: (1 An evangelistic outreach ministry. (2 A ministry of edification to the people of God. (3 A relief ministry for the poor. However, here is a single individual who participates in them all. He does not speak of being overloaded with responsibility, but evinces a cheerful and expectant attitude. **Oh, how much can be learned by observing the manner in which godly people think and plan!**

Trip Mentioned Elsewhere

This trip to Jerusalem is mentioned elsewhere, and appears to have been a very important matter to Paul. Acts 19:21 informs us that Paul “*purposed in his spirit when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to*

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Jerusalem, saying, *After I have been there, I must also see Rome.*" Acts 20:16 relates that he intended to arrive in Jerusalem by the "day of Pentecost." Realizing he had enemies there, Paul, also spoke of how the Spirit was compelling him to go there. *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there"* (Acts 20:22).

Being arrested on the way to Jerusalem, Paul testified before the governor, *"Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings"* (Acts 24:17). On the way, Paul had been gathering up monies for this ministry to the poor saints,. He spoke of it to the

Luke informs us that Paul's intention to bring support to the brethren in Jerusalem was to be after *"he had passed through Macedonia and Achaian"* (Acts 19:21). In this text we find that he did not merely pass through those areas, but also constrained them to contribute to the work. They also made up a contribution for *"the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."* This was not something they were coerced into doing. Rather, it was something that *"pleased"* them, bringing satisfaction and joy to their hearts.

Testimony to the Corinthians

The collection gathered for the poor saints in Macedonia and Achaian was significant. It was a testimony to the

- ☐ It was the result of the grace of God being bestowed upon the people: *"the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches."*^{NIV}
- ☐ The collection was taken during a very difficult time, and when the people were themselves poor: *"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."*^{NIV}
- ☐ They gave beyond their power, because they were willing within themselves: *"they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."*^{NIV}
- ☐ They pled with Paul to receive the gift, fellowshiping with them in ministering to the saints: *"Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."*^{NIV}
- ☐ Before they gave of their substance, they first, by the will of God, gave themselves to the Lord and to Paul and company: *"they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."*^{NIV}

In this remarkable offering, Paul testifies they were reflecting the very spirit of Jesus Himself;. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"* (2 Cor 8:9).

Grace Enlarges Our Capacities

The brethren in Macedonia and Achaian confirm to us what possibilities there are for those who give themselves to the Lord. **The people of God must be delivered from small thinking!** For those who are willing to give themselves to the Lord and those who are doing His work, God can pour such grace into them that they will be able to give beyond their means, abounding *"in every good work"* (2 Cor 9:8). It is possible for those who have little to be so blessed they can sow *"bountifully"* (2 Cor 9:6).

Who is able to imagine what great things can be done for God by those who willingly and expectantly offer themselves for His use and service!

Under the Law, when gathering goods for the tabernacle, God told Moses to take offerings **ONLY** from *"every man that giveth it willingly with his heart"* (Ex

The people of God must be delivered from small thinking! For those who are willing to give themselves to the Lord and those who are doing His work, God can pour such grace into them that they will be able to give beyond their means, abounding "in every good work"

Corinthians. *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"* (1 Cor 16:1-2).

While Paul was expecting to come to Rome, he was also attending to some other matters, such as this ministry to the saints in Jerusalem. The brethren in Rome, therefore, should not expect him at any moment. His spiritually fertile mind allowed him to speak without being limited to the present time.

IT PLEASED THEM

"For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem." Paul speaks of this occasion in such a way as to provoke to Romans to *"love and good works"* (Heb 10:24). In the book of Acts,

power of faith and love. Paul testifies to this offering in First Corinthians, and a glowing testimony it is! *"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God"* (2 Cor 8:1-5).

He also testifies that the churches in Achaian were ready a year in advance to make their contribution (2 Cor 9:2).

What a powerful testimony Ponder carefully what was said of that collection.

25:2; 35:5). The record of that giving will bless your heart.

“And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD'S offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments. And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted, and brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold: and every man that offered offered an offering of gold unto the LORD. And every man, with whom was found blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and red skins of rams, and badgers' skins, brought them. Every one that did offer an offering of silver and brass brought the Lord's offering: and every man, with whom was found shittim wood for any work of the service, brought it. And all the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun, both of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine linen. And all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom spun goats' hair. And the rulers brought onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate; and spice, and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense. The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses. And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. And He hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work. Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded. And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it; and they received of Moses all the offering, which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it withal. And they brought yet unto him free offerings every morning. And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they made; and they spake unto

Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much” (Ex 35:21-36:7).

We must not be insensitive to the depravity of our times. Today the people of God are being taught and urged to depend upon financial experts, motivators, and fund-raising wizards to supply their congregational and other needs. The people of God are being asked to go down to Egypt for help, and trust in things other than God (Isa 31:1). They have been overrun by hucksters, who are lining their own pockets in the name of

been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.” **The Spirit will not have the poor saints in Jerusalem to be supported out of a sense of pity.** That is not sufficient ground to contribute to their needs! There is Kingdom logic, as it was, for assisting the poorer Jerusalem brethren.

Here we are introduced to a form of thinking that grates against the flesh. Unless a person is walking in the Spirit and living by faith, this will make no sense. Of course, such people are not even accepted by God, much less considered to be resources for His work. The Gentiles were actually “*debtors*” to the Jewish saints. That is, the offering they gave was a payment of something they owed: “*indeed they owe it to them.*”^{NIV} The

Today the people of God are being taught and urged to depend upon financial experts, motivators, and fund-raising wizards to supply their congregational and other needs. The people of God are being asked to go down to Egypt for help, and trust in things other than God

religion. Religious institutions have done their best to sanctify fund raising methods that are rooted in the wisdom of this world. This is a serious matter.

From the building of the tabernacle to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, God has always relied upon sensitive saints to do His will! For those who are willing to give themselves to Him, He will bless with the means to do His work, all the while having sufficiency for themselves.

The brethren in Macedonia and Achaia lived out the principle of giving that God honors: “*not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver*” (2 Cor 9:7).

THEY ARE DEBTORS

“*It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have*

point of this text is not that those of Macedonia and Achaia alone owed this debt. They were no more indebted to the Jews than were the Gentiles in Rome. Paul uses exactly the same argument to the Corinthians. “*If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?*”^{NIV} (1 Cor 9:11). He taught the Galatians the same thing. “*Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor*”^{NIV} (Gal 6:6). This is a Kingdom principle, and it is to be received and practiced in faith.

Earlier, Paul reminded the brethren in Rome that they were partakers of the benefits of the Jewish olive tree: “*you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root*”^{NIV} (11:17). The Gentiles are indebted to the whole Jewish

nation, as well as those holy Prophets and Apostles that sprang from their ranks!

The Heart of a Teacher

It might appear strange that Paul

Christ, come to give spiritual advantages to the saints. They come to assist them in having a broader vision of the Kingdom, a deeper understanding of what the Lord is doing, and a loftier view

and a work to be “finished.”^{NASB} He also calls the collection he is delivering “fruit,” or a harvest of spiritual seed. This was not, then, a mere charitable work.

However, the Apostle is not rambling, and his thoughts are not scattered. Rather, in him we see the heart of a godly teacher. He is showing us the pervasive nature of faith, and how the work of the Lord is fulfilled in us.

The words “sealed to them this fruit,” mean “safely handed over this contribution to them.”^{NAB} The idea is that **Paul was a trustworthy custodian of the money he was carrying, and would not be content until it was all safely delivered to those for whom it was gathered.** He was not like Judas, of whom it was said, “he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it”^{NIV} (John 12:6). Rather than Paul opening the “bag” and taking from it, he “sealed” it, reserving all of its contents for the appropriate recipients. There certainly is something to be said for trustworthy servants – those who refuse to take fleshly advantage of the stewardship that has been given to them. Like Paul, every servant of God is to take seriously everything that is done in the name of the Lord. No matter how servile the work, we must make no attempt to turn it to personal advantage. Paul had carried this money for some time, and would apparently carry it for an even longer time. Yet, when he finally arrived in Jerusalem, everything that was given for those poor saints would be faithfully delivered to them. **Even though he endured unspeakable hardships along the way, he did not rob the poor saints for his own good.** He faithfully guarded his stewardship. That is the standard of the Kingdom.

would elaborate on such a point. He was expressing his desire to be with the brethren in Rome, and has now developed at length a trip he was making to Jerusalem. **However, the Apostle is not rambling, and his thoughts are not scattered. Rather, in him we see the heart of a godly teacher.** He is showing us the pervasive nature of faith, and how the work of the Lord is fulfilled in us. He is unveiling the manner in which God works among His people, and how Divine purpose is woven throughout all of those workings. He is tutoring us in how to think.

of Divine intent. Such teachers assist the brethren to think in harmony with the Lord, and in concert with the Holy Spirit. Wherever such persons are found, they are to be treasured.

FRUIT THAT IS SEALED

“Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.” Other versions read, “So after I have **completed this task** and have made sure that they **have received this fruit**, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way,”^{NIV} and “So, when I have completed this, and have **delivered to them what has been collected**, I will set out by way of you to Spain.”^{NRSV}

There are different ways in which purported preachers and teachers approach the people of God. Some come as problem solvers. Others come as entertainers. Some come as experts in peripheral knowledge – knowledge that has no direct bearing on what God is doing. **Others, having the Spirit of**

Again, the manner in which a man filled with the Spirit communicates is noteworthy. Paul speaks of delivering this offering to Jerusalem as something to be “performed,” a “task” to be completed,

THE FULNESS OF THE BLESSING

“²⁹ But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” Paul continues to speak in view of his Apostleship – his stewardship of the Gospel. He does not come merely as a friend, but as one who is an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:30) and a laborer together with God (1 Cor 3:9). He regards the brethren in Rome from the highest point of view: “the called of Jesus Christ . . . beloved of God, called to be saints” (1:6-7). He now speaks of himself

as one bringing appointed benefits to such people – someone sent by Jesus.

I KNOW

“But I know that when I come to you.” Other versions read, “I am sure that, when I come unto you,”^{KJV} “I am sure that when I come to you,”^{WEB} and “I am certain that when I come.”^{BBE} **Faith genders confidence within the heart.** Here, Paul does not mean that he is sure he will get to them, for he has already been delayed for “many years.” What he

does mean is that he knows what will occur when he is in their presence. He so conducted his life, that he knew certain things would transpire when he was around those of mutual faith. He was “sure”^{KJV} and “certain,”^{BBE} of what would result from his presence with the brethren there. This knowledge was prompted by his own love for the people of God. It also resulted from his understanding of how Jesus regarded two or more being gathered together in His name (Matt 18:20).

This knowledge also posited the spirituality of the brethren in Rome, for nothing of spiritual benefit can be realized where one of the parties is recalcitrant, indifferent, or carnal.

THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING

“ . . . I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” Other versions read, “the full measure of the blessing of Christ,”^{NIV} and “the abundance of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”^{DRA} This expression is quite different from Paul’s first intentions to go to Rome. After the burning of the cultic books in Ephesus, Paul said, “I must also see Rome” (Acts 19:21). Later, when Paul was put into a castle for his own safety, Jesus told him, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). There was no word to him at that time of any fellowship that would be realized in Rome, and thus he thought only of going there and preaching as he was commissioned to do.

Now, however, Paul speaks quite differently. **It is because he has heard of a body of believers there, noted for both faith and love.** They have been so aggressive to believe God that their faith has been “spoken of throughout the whole world” (1:8). In view of this, Paul knows something most profitable will result from their meeting.

When we know men and women are filled with faith and love, we can expect good things to happen when we meet with them. When either faith or love is questionable, we will not have strong confidence that good things will result from being with such people. That is why Paul “longed” to be with the brethren in Rome. He knew of their commitment to the Lord and His people, and thus was confident profit would result from their company.

Fullness

What a marvelous word: “FULLNESS.” It is a Kingdom word, and common among those who speak in words taught by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Prior to Jesus, there was precious little said about the experience of “fullness.” One time David spoke of “fullness of joy” that is found in the presence of the Lord (Psa 16:11). Every other reference to

“fullness” in Moses and the Prophets relates to earthly provisions, and what is associated with “the earth” (Num 18:27; Deut 33:16; 1 Chron 16:32; Job 20:22; Psa 24:1; 50:12; 89:11; 96:11; 98:7; Ezek 16:49; 19:7).

Since the enthronement of Jesus, a new kind of “fullness” has been made available to men. It is realized in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him alone. What we have obtained in

(Matt 24:14), and especially to the poor (Lk 7:22). The Gospel proclaims the **grace** of God for men (Acts 20:24), expounds **God Himself** (Rom 1:1), and declares that **peace has been made** for men (Rom 10:15). It announces that **Jew and Gentile are brought together** in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:6), and that a **hope is laid up** for us in heaven (Col 1:5). When men receive this Gospel it comes with **power**, in the **Holy Spirit**, and with **much assurance** (1 Thess 1:5). The

As you can see, the Gospel of Christ is a full cup! How much it should be proclaimed to the church, expounded and confirmed! There is no message that should take the precedence over the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

salvation is said to be “of **His fullness**” (John 1:16). God has set in motion a glorious process whereby the saints can be “filled with **all the fullness of God**” (Eph 3:16-19). The whole church is growing up “unto the measure of the stature of **the fullness of Christ**” (Eph 4:13).

“Fullness” speaks of an abundance, copiousness, and richness. It is portrayed in the Psalmic expression, “my cup runneth over.” The idea is of a container that is full to the brim, and overflowing. There is no lack, diminishment, or scarcity of supply. And what is it that Paul associates with such abundance, such adequacy, such an overflow of benefit? It is nothing less than the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Blessing of the Gospel

The Gospel is associated with blessing, benefit, and advantages. It is a rich repository of Divine supplies, laden with profitable things. This marvelous Gospel is speaks of **Christ** (Mk 1:1), the power of **God** (Rom 1:16), and **truth** (Gal 2:5). It brings good news of **peace** (Eph 6:15), **faith** (Phil 1:27), and **hope** (Col 1:23). It announces a **righteousness** from God (Rom 1:17), **peace with God** (Rom 5:1), and the good news of **your salvation** (Eph 1:13). It announces a **Kingdom** that brings good things to men

Gospel is the means through which God calls us unto Himself (1 Thess 2:14). It announces a **blessed and jubilant God** (1 Tim 1:11), and brings **life and immortality to light** (2 Tim 1:10). The message brought by the Gospel is of such significance that **holy angels desire to look into it** (1 Pet 1:12).

As you can see, the Gospel of Christ is a full cup! How much it should be proclaimed to the church, expounded and confirmed! There is no message that should take the precedence over the Gospel of Christ Jesus. When rebukes and corrections are issued, it is in order to move people into a position where they can again drink from the Gospel fountain. **The administration of life disciplines is not the business of the church.** Its work is to feed the people with the nourishing words of the Gospel. When believers are turned away from the Gospel, efforts are to be expended to bring them again within its circumference. I find that the knowledge of these things is nearly extinct in our land.

Concluding Thoughts

The spiritual condition of the brethren in Rome would allow for the maximum of benefit from the Gospel. They would experience plentiful supplies of what it brought, including

righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (14:17). **It would contribute to their faith, clarify what they had received, and throw light on their future.** Therefore, Paul looked forward to being with these dear brethren, and pouring upon them the nourishing and refreshing elixir of the Gospel of Christ.

Many believers are being given small measures of the Gospel, and therefore realize few of its benefits. Others, because of the smallness of their faith and the meagerness of their commitment, are incapable of receiving much from the Gospel. Neither condition, however, diminishes the Gospel itself.

There is a fullness to the Gospel of Christ that addresses the needs and desires of the saints. Every hungry soul will find rich satisfaction in this Gospel. There are no deficiencies in it, and no areas essential to salvation that are not addressed by it. Blessed are those who know this, and avail themselves of it.

STRIVING IN PRAYER FOR A PURPOSE

“³⁰ Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in

interest of kindred spirits. Such people take great texts of Scripture like Romans 8:28, and justify their own miserable complacency. Like the changeable

fellowship of believers and the communion of the saints. Paul thought nothing of begging the people of God to pray for him. He pled with them, urged them, and besought them. Elsewhere Paul spoke of those who “helped” him through their prayers (2 Cor 1:11). Frequently he asked for brethren to pray for him and his labors for the Lord (Eph 6:19; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1; Heb 13:18). **The prayers he urged always pertained to his ministry for the Lord Jesus Christ.**

In his ministry, Paul did everything possible to ensure that God was honored and the saints profited by his labors. He prepared his own heart and mind. He made godly determinations. He spoke of his desires to kindred spirits. He also urged the saints to pray for what he was doing.

God has place means at our disposal through which He works, and blessed is the person who sees it. In this case, the means were the fervent prayers of the saints. On one occasion, when he was in prison, he called for Timothy to bring the cloak he had left in Troas with Carpus, some books, and parchments on which to write (2 Tim 4:13). He admonished Timothy concerning availing himself of means for his health also. *“No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments”*^{NASB} (1 Tim 5:23). On another occasion, he provided for his needs by making tents (Acts 18:3).

prayers to God for me,³¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,³² that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.”

chameleon, they adapt to their circumstances, declaring it must have been God’s purpose for them to be opposed, or their ministry refused by those to whom it was ministered. Thus they sit down instead of rising up.

Throughout Scripture, you will find this general perception among the saints. It may be Isaiah, saying to take a lump of figs, and apply it as a poultice on a boil (Isa 38:21). Or, it may be a good Samaritan bandaging the wounds of an attacked man, pouring oil and wine into them, taking him to an inn, and taking care of him (Luke 10:34). It may be a group of disciples lowering Paul over a wall in a basket, in order that he might escape his enemies (Acts 9:25). Or, it may be gathering a collection for poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26). It may be caring for the fatherless and widows in their

In his ministry, Paul did everything possible to ensure that God was honored and the saints profited by his labors. He prepared his own heart and mind. He made godly determinations. He spoke of his desires to kindred spirits. He also urged the saints to pray for what he was doing. **He did not take success for granted, or assume that because he was a premier Apostle, everything would automatically work for his good.** There is within the professed church a sort of fatalism that causes people to withdraw from involvement in the good work of the Lord. Many suppose that God works everything for our good without our own involvement, or the

But you do not see the slightest evidence of such corrupt thought in the Apostle Paul. **He knew the Savior does not work independently of those He has saved, and that God does not fulfill His good pleasure without the involvement of His children.**

WHEN BEGGING IS PROPER

“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit . . . ” Other versions read, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit,”*^{KJV} and *“I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit.”*^{NASB}

Here is a much neglected facet of the

affliction (James 1:27), or Onesiphorus frequently refreshing Paul when he was in prison (2 Tim 1:16).

God does not always or exclusively work by miraculous means. Sometimes Jesus uses His own people to minister to some of His saints are who hungry, thirsty, abandoned, naked, sick, and imprisoned (Matt 25:35-37). I well remember an occasion in 1960, when I was among a group of brethren who were praying for the needs of a poor soul who had been brought to our attention. While we were praying, someone left the room. I heard the front door gently close. Soon after we had concluded our prayers, the individual who had left returned. When asked why he left, he replied, "It was to put feet on your prayers." He had the means, and thus met the need.

Paul sought the assistance of the brethren. He asked for their money to help the poor, and now he asks for their prayers regarding the work to which the Savior had called him.

By Jesus Christ

Paul's urging is "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake." ^{KJV} It is for the Savior's glory, and for the success of His mission. He was Christ's servant, and it was Christ's Gospel that he was preaching. Therefore, he asks them to pray in interest of Christ's Person and work. He is asking them to pray out of a high regard for the One who saved them, and with an interest in Him being glorified.

By the Love of the Spirit

Here, the "love of the Spirit" is the love that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit (Rom 5:5). It is a love that overflows in an interest in and fellowship with the saints in their various ministries and capacities. **It is the business of saints to live close enough to the Lord to be able to recognize this love, and thus be properly motivated by it.**

STRIVE TOGETHER WITH ME

"... that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me..." Other versions read, "join me in my struggle by praying to God for me," ^{NIV} "join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf," ^{NRSV} and "in your prayers to God for me you

exert yourselves to help me." ^{NJB}

Praying is one thing. **Striving** in prayer is quite another thing. The words "striving together" are translated from a single Greek word, συναγωνίζομαι (sunagonizomai). When the word is transliterated, as in the preceding brackets, the word "agonize" becomes apparent. Literally, this word means "helping someone with great effort, join in a struggle, fight along with, help." ^{BIBLE WORKS GREEK MORPHOLOGY} This is a spiritually militant term that puts one in mind of Ephesians 6:12, where believers are said to wrestle "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The idea is that there are opposing forces seeking to frustrate the work of the

"offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" Heb 5:7). Three times He struggled with the powers of darkness before finally gaining the victory over them. Scripture says, "He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk 22:44). **He was striving in prayer!**

Paul urges the brethren to strive together with him, putting their shoulders behind the work with him. He urges fervent, aggressive, and effective prayers, for "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). I am persuaded that many godly causes are frustrated simply because they were not undergirded by fervent and earnest prayer.

DELIVERANCE FROM UNBELIEVERS

God does not always or exclusively work by miraculous means. Sometimes Jesus uses His own people to minister to some of His saints are who hungry, thirsty, abandoned, naked, sick, and imprisoned

Lord. Just as surely as Jesus sent Paul to do a work, the devil sends aggressive opponents to oppose it. One might simplistically view the whole matter as a mere technicality about which we are to have no concerns. But that is a wholly improper assessment of the case. In the Ephesians text, these opponents are the occasion of a strong admonition to put on the whole armor of God, part of which is, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph 6:18).

If a holy angel struggled against one of these principalities for twenty-one days, not even gaining the victory in that time (Dan 10:13), how can such powers be thwarted by casual and disinterested believers? Does any soul imagine they can be dismissed by a simplistic rebuke, or the shout of a novice? In combating some of these forces, the Lord Jesus Himself

"... that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe..." Other versions read, "that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea," ^{NIV} "that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea," ^{NRSV} and "that I may escape the unbelievers in Judea." ^{NJB}

Paul does not assume he is going to be delivered from ungodly men, but asks for prayer that he will be. He urged the Thessalonians to pray he would be "delivered from unreasonable and wicked men" (2 Thess 3:2). When acknowledging the Lord had delivered him from a great death in Asia, Paul added, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; **ye also helping together by prayer for us**" (2 Cor 1:10-11). Indeed, He confessed, "the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim 4:18). He also knew the Lord would work with

the prayers of His people in that deliverance, and thus urged them to pray.

The very fact that he asked for prayer that he would be delivered from those who did not believe, confirms that such people do have influence. A power greater than themselves is working through them, namely the devil. For this reason, their influence cannot be negated by human wisdom.

It has not yet registered upon many professed believers that we are engaged in a war, with very real opponents. However,

Christ." Unbelievers in Judea entertained thoughts of thwarting the preaching of Paul. **His deliverance from them involved the violent overthrow of their intentions and pretensions.**

God has presented Himself as One who *"frustrates the signs of babblers, drives diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness"* (Isa 44:25). **When, therefore, the work of the Lord is opposed, we ought to strive against such oppositions in prayer.** We have, after all, been raised up to sit *"with*

which is inherently unthankful. There might be objections that the gifts came from Gentiles, or that they were not sufficient, or that they should have come sooner. The complication here seems to be the aversion that many Jews had to the Gentiles. That antipathy could spread like a defiling plague, and thus Paul urged that prayers thwart such notions before they gained a foothold.

Also, there might be some difficulties with Paul delivering the gift. Certain men had circulated that Paul taught *"all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs"* (Acts 21:21). The accusation was not true, but could have marred the receiving of the gift. **It is good when gifts that are cheerfully given are also cheerfully received.** Sometimes it takes fervent prayer for that to happen.

COMING WITH JOY AND BEING REFRESHED

"... that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you." Other versions read, *"so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company,"*^{NASB} and *"Then, by the will of God, I will be able to come to you with a happy heart, and we will be an encouragement to each other,"*^{NLT} The *"spirit of faith"* that animated Paul (2 Cor 4:13), moved him to seek prayers for matters scarcely, if ever, considered by others. Some might think to pray for deliverance. Some rare souls might even think to pray for the gracious reception of the gifts that were delivered to needy people. But what of this final request?

Coming in Joy

Paul wanted to arrive *"in joy,"* being filled, as it were, *"with all joy and peace in believing"* (Rom 15:13). **His desire was to be with them in a cheerful state of mind, liberated from all grief and fear. This is a noble aspiration, and is to be sought by believers.**

Although the saints are to *"count it all joy"* when they fall *"into divers temptations,"* (James 1:2), trials and oppositions can have an adverse impact upon the human spirit. It is possible to be

It has not yet registered upon many professed believers that we are engaged in a war, with very real opponents. However, those who do know, are not ashamed to urge godly people to pray for their deliverance. When God's work is opposed, and His servants maligned and resisted, prayer is to be made.

those who **do** know, are not ashamed to urge godly people to pray for their deliverance. When God's work is opposed, and His servants maligned and resisted, prayer is to be made. That prayer is a fellowship of kindred spirits who have a genuine interest in the work of the Lord.

Spiritual Weaponry

The saints of God have been provided with spiritual weaponry, and it is effective. *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Cor 10:4-5). The thoughts and imaginations are not always within ourselves. Sometimes they are in other souls, and casting them down frees those souls from bondage to those thoughts. Thus the NIV reads, *"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to*

Christ" in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). In that position, God *"is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us"* (Eph 3:20). Let us therefore enter into the fellowship of aggressive prayer, maintaining an active interest in the activities of those who are laboring in the face of opposition and threats.

ACCEPTABLE GIFTS

"... and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints ..." Other versions read, *"that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints,"*^{NASB} *"that the Christians there will be willing to accept the donation I am bringing them,"*^{NLT} and *"that the help which I am taking for Jerusalem may be pleasing to the saints."*^{BBE}

Here is a most insightful request. Paul does not take for granted that the poor saints will receive the gifts that were graciously gathered for them. **He knew all too well the tendency of the flesh,**

“cast down” (2 Cor 4:9), “despair of life” (2 Cor 1:8), and have “sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil 2:27). Like Jesus, one can be “exceedingly sorrowful unto the death” (Matt 26:38), and be “acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). The human spirit can be so fatigued that death is even sought (1 Kgs 19:4). The servant of God can be provoked within by the sight of idolatry (Acts 17:16), or “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” (2 Pet 2:7). **It is possible to be in the midst of a great trial like Job, or Joseph, and thus not be at the pinnacle of joy.**

However, Paul wanted to come to Rome “with joy,” at the peak of spiritual life, and abounding in the grace of God. Such souls bring the greatest advantage, and are able to receive more fully. The marvel here is not merely that Paul wanted to come with a joyful spirit, but that he asked the brethren to pray that would happen. It seems to me that this opens a lot of possibilities for believers. We will all be the better if we come “with joy.” It is certainly in order to ask the God of heaven to cause that to happen. **Better to have the contagion of joy among us than the root of bitterness, or the gall of sorrow.**

Coming by the Will of God

The will of God drives the Kingdom. What God does, He does “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph 1:5,9; Phil 2:13; 2 Thess 1:11). Therefore, one might reason there is no need to pray about the will of God, for it will be done anyway. But that is not how the Lord governs His Kingdom. Jesus Himself prayed, “Thy will be done” (Matt 26:42), and taught us to do the same (Matt 6:11).

Paul has resigned himself to the will of God. He has longed for “many years” to come to those in Rome, but wants to do so in God’s own time. Such prayers will serve to make him more alert, so the Lord can guide him with His eye. It is quite possible to run swiftly to give the king a message, like Ahimaaz. But when asked concerning the message say, “I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was” (2 Sam 18:29). He had not run by the will of God! It is possible to have good desires, yet seek to execute them at the wrong time.

Coming by the will of God means coming at the most appropriate time, and in keeping with the Divine agenda. It involves coming in the blessing of the Lord, while in fellowship with Him.

After Paul had desired for “many years” to see the saints in Rome, and after

refreshed, and was well” (1 Sam 16:23). He was restored to his right mind.

“Refreshed” also carries the idea of rest, becoming calm, and relieved of all agitation. Here, the key is “refreshed **WITH YOU;**” i.e., the presence of the brethren in Rome themselves would contribute to the rest, recuperation, and

Coming by the will of God means coming at the most appropriate time, and in keeping with the Divine agenda. It involves coming in the blessing of the Lord, while in fellowship with Him.

he had been “hindered” in the fulfillment of that good and holy desire, he was willing to submit wholly to the will of God. Here is a perfect example of living out this truth: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov 3:5-6). **This is HOW you submit to the will of God!** It involves your will, but it involves more than that. You need more direction than your will can muster. Therefore, Paul begged the brethren to pray he would come to them “by the will of God.” It is quite true this does not fit into some theological molds. However, it is not our aim to make the Scriptures conform to human thinking, but to conform thinking to the Scriptures.

Coming to be Refreshed Together

The blessing of spiritual refreshment is to be coveted. Paul sought to be delivered from unbelievers. He desired for those receiving the gift he brought to do so graciously and thankfully. He wanted to come to the Romans clothed with joy, and by the will of God. All of this would contribute to his visit being a refreshing one.

The word “refreshed” is one of great significance. It includes the idea of **recovery**. When king Saul was troubled with an evil spirit from the Lord, young David came and played expertly upon the harp before him. As a result, the evil spirit left Saul. It is also written, “so Saul was

encouragement of the Apostle.

There are brethren in whose presence certain refreshment comes. While with them, the difficulties and oppositions encountered in the world are quickly forgotten. There is a greater liberty to speak of the things of God, and gain the refreshment that comes from such speaking (Job 32:20). It is good to have a reputation of refreshing the saints (Phile 1:7). For example, the only thing we know about the activities of Onesiphorus is that he “oft refreshed” the Apostle Paul (2 Tim 1:16).

An Exhortation

May Paul’s summons to fervent prayer enlarge your own understanding of this holy work. There is striving to be done in prayer. There is unity in prayer, where we strive together. **Through prayer, we can cause the ministry of our brethren to be more effective.** The Lord will deliver his messengers from unbelieving men through our prayers. When gifts or a word are delivered to brethren, our prayers can assist them to joyfully receive what they are given. We can pray brethren will come to us while dominated by the joy of the Lord, and that they will arrive in the heart of God’s will. We can seek for our gatherings to be refreshing ones.

What noble purposes are served by the prayers of the saints of the most high God! Let us give ourselves to prayer!

THE GOD OF PEACE

“³³ Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” The “*God of peace*” is the One who gives peace. **The peace He gives is the environment in which spiritual profitability is**

The Lord raised up Solomon, among other things, to show the utter vanity of having your affection anchored to this world. Even though he had everything his heart desired, possessing it in abundance, he

mentioned five times in Scripture. **In each case, it has to do with Divine accomplishment – with making something occur in the people of God.** In our text, it is related to striving together with Paul in prayer. In Romans 16:20, it relates to the subduing of Satan to us. “*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.*” Philippians 4:9 connects it with doing what has been learned and received. First Thessalonians 5:23 associates it with the complete sanctification of the individual, spirit, soul, and body. Hebrews 13:20 speaks of “*the God of peace*” making us “*perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight.*” **There are things to be done within the saints of God, and it is “the God of peace” who does them!**

Ponder if you have ever grown spiritually when in a state of inner turmoil. Consider what type of advancement in the Spirit you have realized when you had no inner peace. Reflect if you have ever moved a millimeter closer to the Lord while you were agitated within.

realized. Souls who do not have peace do not have power in prayer. They cannot profit from the presence of God’s servants, nor can they enter into their work with them. Put that to the test, and see if it is not true!

When describing the wicked, the remarkable power of God’s peace can be seen. “*But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked*” (Isa 57:20-21). **From this perspective, the summation of wickedness is the lack of peace – the absence of spiritual tranquility.** That condition is what propels the soul into vanity – into a futile quest for satisfaction that can never be realized apart from God.

confessed, “*I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun*” (Eccl 2:10-11).

There is no reason for any soul to pursue a path that has already been proven vain! Yet, those who lack peace in their soul consistently pursue it, oblivious to its vanity and heart-wrenching disappointments. Oh, how men need the presence and effectual ministry of “*the God of peace!*”

The phrase “*the God of peace*” is

Ponder if you have ever grown spiritually when in a state of inner turmoil. Consider what type of advancement in the Spirit you have realized when you had no inner peace. Reflect if you have ever moved a millimeter closer to the Lord while you were agitated within. It will take but a moment of reflection to confirm to your heart the importance of “*the God of peace*” being “**with you.**”

I take the sense of the verse to be this. **May the God of peace keep you united together in the noble work of prayer and participation in His work.** The exhortation of the Apostle is thus helped along by a prayer that God would cause it all to come to pass by being with them as “*the God of peace.*”

CONCLUSION

I have sought to share with you the manner in which the godly think. **Their faith is uncomplicated, but their thinking is not simplistic.** Faith broadens the perceptions and intentions of both heart and mind, bringing the ability to see further and more precisely. Faith constrains noble purposes, moving the believer to honorable intentions. It does not move the individual to take the

work of God for granted, or to treat His commissions with casualness. Whether it is Abel offering a sacrifice, Noah building an ark, or Moses leading the people out of Egypt, faith move individuals into action. It constrains men to God-honoring purposes and determinations. Faith will not let those possessing it be idle.

Faith can make plans – extensive

plans, and is willing to keep them for long seasons, even though they are not fulfilled in a manner suitable for the flesh. It moves the believer to willingly subject everything to the will of God, all the while beseeching the saints to strive together in prayer for deliverance, reception, and a joyful spirit. Human wisdom cannot put things together like this. It is too easily discouraged, and too anxious to plot its

own course, and devise its own ways. Flesh is too impatient to wait on the Lord.

May the Lord give us the mind set that is revealed in this text. May we not

balk at large ambitions, or draw back from making extensive plans that blend with our calling and the revealed will of the Lord. And may we be willing to wait for their timely fulfillment, unashamed to

confess them, and ask for the assistance and fellowship of the people through their prayers. May the Lord direct us to have such noble aspirations, that they are worthy of striving together in prayer.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 49



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

A TRIBUTE TO UNCOMMON SAINTS

^{16:1} I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. ³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. ⁶ Greet Mary, who labored much for us. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. ¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

(Romans 16:1-16) ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Those who become related to Jesus obtain a certain distinction and profitability that is worthy of recognition. They are no longer “common,” and are, in a very real sense, separated from the masses of unregenerate peoples. For this reason, they are referred to “a **chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people**” (1 Pet 2:9). Although such people may have been

relatively unknown prior to their connection with Jesus, now their names are “*written in heaven*” (Heb 12:23). They are duly recognized by God, intercession is made for them by Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells them, and they are ministered to by the holy angels. It is difficult to conceive of obtaining a more impressive status. Some illustrations of this observation will serve to prepare us for a

considering the sixteenth chapter of Romans and our approach to believers.

IN PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING

- ▣ Abraham (Gal 3:16).
- ▣ The Holy Prophets (1 Pet 1:11).
- ▣ Zacharias and Elizabeth (Lk 1:5-13).
- ▣ John the Baptist (Matt 3:10-3).
- ▣ Mary, the mother of Jesus (Lk 1:26-39).

People obtain Distinction and Profitability in Christ Jesus, and it is worthy of due Recognition--by Given O. Blakely

OUTLINE

- < PHOEBE OUR SISTER (16:1-2)
- < PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, FELLOW WORKERS (16:3-5)
- < EPAENETUS, THE FIRST FRUITS (16:5b)
- < MARY, WHO LABORED MUCH (16:6)
- < ANDRONICUS AND JUNIA, OF NOTE AMONG THE APOSTLES (16:7)
- < AMPLIAS, MY BELOVED (16:8)
- < URBANUS AND STACHYS (16:9)
- < APELLES, ARISTOBULUS, HERODION, AND NARCISSUS (16:10-11)
- < TRYPHENA, TYPHOSA, PERSIS, AND REFUS (16:12-13)
- < ASYNCRITUS, PHLEGON, HERMAS, PATROBAS, HERMES, PHILOGOGUS, JULIA, NEREUS AND OLYMPAS (16:14-15)
- < ONE ANOTHER AND THE CHURCHES (16:16)

ASSOCIATED WITH JESUS' BIRTH

- ▶ The shepherds (Lk 2:6-20).
- ▶ The wise men from the East (Matt 2:1-20).
- ▶ Simeon (Lk 2:25-34).
- ▶ Anna (Lk 2:36-38).
- ▶ Those looking for redemption in Jerusalem (Lk 2:38).

DURING CHRIST'S MINISTRY

- ▶ The Apostles (Matt 10:1-2).
- ▶ Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52).
- ▶ Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:25-30).
- ▶ Gentile centurion (Matt 8:5-10).
- ▶ Mary and Martha (John 11:1-11).
- ▶ Lazarus (John 11:1-43)
- ▶ Mary Magdalene (Lk 8:2).
- ▶ Mary the mother of Zebedee's children, James and John (Matt 20:20).
- ▶ Nicodemus (John 3:1-9; 7:50-53).
- ▶ Former Gadarene demoniac (Mk 5:1-19).
- ▶ Woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11).
- ▶ Woman with the alabaster box (Matt 26:7-13).

THE DEATH OF CHRIST

- ▶ Joseph of Arimathea (Mk 15:43-46).
- ▶ Nicodemus (John 19:39).
- ▶ Mary the mother of James and Joseph,

- or Joseph (Mk 13:55).
- ▶ Mary the mother of Zebedee's children, James and John (Matt 27:56).
- ▶ Salome (Mk 15:40; 16:1).
- ▶ Mary Magdalene (Mat 27:56; 28:1).

The above listing is by no means complete, and is intended only to illustrate the point. Where would we ever have heard of these men and women if they were not favorably related to the Lord Jesus Christ? Our total recollection of them is because of Him! **And, if those related to Him when He was upon the earth obtained significance, how much more will this be true of those joined to Him now that He is enthroned in glory.**

THE TEXT BEFORE US

The text before us will mention twenty-eight saints. Most of them are only mentioned in this passage. In the last part of the sixteenth chapter, Paul will also make mention of eight more believers: Timotheous, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertium, Gaius, Erasmus, and Quartus. All of this serves to emphasize the respect Paul afforded those who distinguished themselves by laboring for Christ Jesus. His manner teaches us how to speak of one another.

Those Mentioned

An extremely pertinent point can be made about WHO Paul mentions. Both men and women are included. **Eighteen men are mentioned:** Aquila, Epäenetus, Andronicus, Implies, Urbane, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodian, Narcissus, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Philologue, Nereus, and Olympus. **Ten key women are also mentioned:** Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, "his mother" (Rufus), "his sister" (Nereus), and Julia. The distinctions given to these saints will further reveal the nature of the heavenly Kingdom. It will conflict sharply with certain views of sisters in Christ that have been promoted in His holy name.

Additionally, we will see the practice of certain believers to have a church in their house (16:5). Some people will be noted for "much labor" (16:6). There will even be reference to certain "kinsmen," or relatives (16:7). Some will be distinguished for being held in high regard by the

Apostles (16:7). Others will be acknowledged as special helpers, who have assisted many (16:2). Particular mentioning is made of some who risked their lives for Paul himself (16:4). A person who was the first convert in his area will be acknowledged (16:5). Some will be noted for being especially beloved (16:8,9,12). One will be distinguished as "approved in Christ" (16:10a), and an entire household will be saluted (16:10b). Husbands and wives are mentioned (16:3,7,15), as well as two sisters who labored in the Lord (16:12). Of one, Paul says he was "chosen in the Lord" (16:13). He even mentions a woman who ministered as a mother to himself (16:13).

A Precise Manner

You see the precise manner in which the Apostle speaks of the saints of God. There is a total absence of favoritism, sectarianism, or the respect of persons. No one is known "after the flesh," but everyone is seen after the Spirit. The average church could improve in the manner in which they speak of one another, and of other saints. Too often, there is a spirit of fleshly camaraderie in the churches, with people gravitating to those with similar fleshly interests. Many believers have been wounded by this tendency, which is altogether out of order. The saints of God are to be recognized after the heavenly manner. **Whatever distinguishes them to the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and holy angels, should distinguish them to us.**

There simply is no place in the body of Christ for a party spirit, or for attitudes that allow members to look at the people of God through the lense of flesh. Indeed, it is no small accomplishment when believers can consider one another in the spirit of this text. Notwithstanding the difficulty of achieving this attitude, it is the only one that will be honored by God. Jesus died "for all," in order that "those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view"^{NIV} (2 Cor 5:16).

Living unto the Lord, therefore, involves having a proper view of His people, zealously avoiding carnal views of them, and seeking to advantage them.

PHOEBE, OUR SISTER

“^{16:1} I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.”

Paul spoke of certain individuals to believers, either recommending them and their ministry, or warning the saints of them. Thus he warned Timothy of “Alexander the coppersmith,” “Hymenaeus,” “Philetus,” and “Phygellus and Hermogenes” (2 Tim 1:20; 2:17; 4:14). He also warned the church about teachers who served their own interests, caused divisions, and “by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:18). He also was careful to recommend certain saints who had distinguished themselves among believers by their faithfulness, genuine concern, and spiritual abilities. Among them were Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19-20), Titus (2 Cor 8:16,23), Tychicus (Col 4:7-8), Onesimus (Col 4:9), and others.

In this manner, we see the depth and sincerity of Paul’s concern for the welfare of the saints. He carefully sought good things for those whom the church received, and for the church of God itself. This was a consistent pattern in his life, and further confirms the genuineness of his calling. **It is highly unlikely that anyone lacking this concern is called of God to minister among His people.** Throughout Scripture, those who were called by God generally became absorbed with His will. Judas, who “by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25), is an exception. Jonah is also an exception, who initially ran away from the work to which he was called (Jonah 1:3). However, those cases, as well as any similar ones, are not the Kingdom standard, or norm.

I COMMEND TO YOU

“I commend unto you Phebe . . .”

Here is an Apostolic recommendation. Every major version reads the same way. One exception is the Basic Bible English (BBE) version which reads, “It is my desire to say a good word for Phoebe.”

In commending Phebe (or Phoebe), Paul is approving of her and her work. More precisely, he is articulating his approval, standing together with her in the good work she was doing. He does not leave it to the saints to examine Phebe and finally perceive her worthiness. Rather, he sets her before them to remove all doubt from their mind. She has proved herself before him, and there is therefore no need for her to again do it before the brethren in Rome. How quick saints ought to be in speaking well of those who have clearly shown their identity with, and allegiance to, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know nothing more of Phebe than what is made known in this text. This is why Paul recommends her to the brethren. There was no need for those who were well known to have letters or words of recommendation. As Paul said to the Corinthians, “Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 3:1). Phebe was one those “others” who required such a word.

She stands a notable example of someone whom was “unknown, and yet well known” (2 Cor 6:9). The name “Phebe,” (or “Phoebe”) means “bright or radiant.” After what is said of her, it becomes apparent she was appropriately named. **It is generally understood that Phebe is the one to whom Paul gave this Epistle, to be delivered to the brethren in Rome.** She is the only one Paul especially recommends, mentioning that she might very well require some insistence in matters of business. This lends itself to the conclusion she actually delivered the letter to the church in Rome. Some conclude her business carried her there, and Paul took advantage of the trip to send along this Epistle. There is nothing abrasive or contradictory about this view, although it is not essential that all

embrace it.

OUR SISTER

“ . . . our sister . . . ” Paul recognizes Phebe in the Lord, for he knew no person “after the flesh.” She was a sister in Christ, and was so recognized. There are people who either object to using this term, or simply are not inclined to do so. In giving directions to the married who had divided homes, the Spirit referred to believers as “a brother or sister” (1 Cor 7:15). James also referred to destitute believers as “a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food” (James 2:15). Young Timothy was reminded to consider younger believing women as “sisters,” and older believing women as “mothers” (1 Tim 5:2). Thus we see that spiritual relationships supercede fleshly ones.

A SERVANT OF THE CHURCH IN CENCHREA

“ . . . which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.” Other versions read, “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae,”^{NRSV/NRS} “a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae,”^{RSV/NJB} “who is in the ministry of the church, that is in Cenchrae,”^{DRA} “who is minister of the assembly which is in Cenchrea,”^{DBY}

Two Kinds of Servants

The word “servant” comes from the Greek word δούκων (diakonon), which refers to one who carries out the commands of another. This is one who is a helper, ministering to the needs of others. This is the word Jesus used when He said, “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your **minister**” (Matt 20:26). Other versions say “servant.” Jesus Himself is referred to as a “minister (or servant) of the circumcision” (Rom 15:8). The Spirit also refers to Paul and Apollos as “ministers,” or “servants” (1 Cor 3:5). Paul acknowledged he was “made a minister,” or “servant” (Eph

There simply is no place in the body of Christ for a party spirit, or for attitudes that allow members to look at the people of God through the lense of flesh.

3:7). Other individuals designated as “ministers,” or “servants” include Tychicus (Eph 6:21), Epaphras (Col 1:7), and Timothy (1 Thess 3:2).

There is another word that is translated “servant.” It is δούλος (doolos), and denotes a slave who does the will of another. It is used of social slaves (1 Cor 7:21; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:5-6), as well as those who are bond-servants to Jesus through redemption (Rom 6:16-17,19-20; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 1:1). Jesus is also said to have humbled Himself to become such a Servant (Phil 2:7).

The Difference in the Words

The difference in the two words is this. A bond-servant, slave, or servant (δούλος) speaks of the MANNER in which

are to remain in the background, with no official capacity, the presence of Phebe will prove quite challenging. There are religious systems in which a woman like Phebe simply could not arise. Such systems are unworthy of any dignity, and are to be rejected. It was within the real body of Christ that Phebe surfaced, was commended, and had a ministry.

The Church at Cenchrea

This was the city where Paul took a temple vow with certain Jews, shaving his head (Acts 18:18). It was located in Greece, and was the port of Corinth, on the east side of the isthmus (a narrow strip of land connecting two areas), and about nine miles from the city itself. Some suppose Phebe was a rich and generous woman who was disposed to give to the

“give her, in the Lord, a welcome worthy of God’s holy people.”^{NJB}

There are two possible meanings of this text. The first is that the brethren in Rome should receive Phebe as is befitting for THEM to do. The second is that they should receive Phebe in a manner that matched her good work for the Lord, or as SHE should be received. There is a sense in which both of these are right. The idea is that it would not be fitting, or appropriate, for the brethren to fail to show Phebe dignity and kindness.

Our reception of one another, particularly those who have distinguished themselves by their Kingdom labors, is to be “in the Lord.” That means a reception that is because of Christ, and out of a recognition of the individual’s participation in the work of God.

The brethren in Rome were not to receive Phebe as a woman, a member of the business community, or some other form of fleshly differentiation. She was to be received “in the Lord,” as a member of His body, one who was participating in the Divine nature, and one who was a worker together with God.

However, this was more than a mere formality. Phebe was a servant of the church at Cenchrea. She was engaged in a noble work, and she was to be so received. This sister had obtained a certain distinction in Christ, and it was fitting that she be so recognized by the saints.

ASSIST HER

“ . . . and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you . . . ” Other versions read, “help her in whatever matter she may have need of you,”^{NASB} “give her any help she may need from you,”^{NIV} “help her in whatever she may require from you,”^{NRSV} and “assist her in whatever business she hath need of you.”^{WEB}

First, there are many congregations and systems of theology that could not receive a sister in this manner. Their view of the Kingdom does not even allow for the existence of such a woman. They do not see ladies as having any role whatsoever that requires assistance of the rest of the body – particularly in “business”

Our reception of one another, particularly those who have distinguished themselves by their Kingdom labors, is to be “in the Lord.” That means a reception that is because of Christ, and out of a recognition of the individual’s participation in the work of God.

we live for the Lord, doing His bidding and fulfilling His will. This word is never translated “minister.” In the second use of the word (as in our text, “minister,” or “servant” denoted an **official capacity**, or one assigned to fulfill a particular work – like the seven who were appointed over the daily distribution to widows in the early church (Acts 6:1-7). This is the same word used by Peter when speaking of certain spiritual gifts. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man **minister**, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:11).

Phebe was a “servant,” or “minister,” by special assignment. That is precisely why the brethren will be told to assist her in any way required. For those who feel all women in the body of Christ

needy, and thus represented the church in that capacity. At any rate, she was especially commended because of her effective ministry.

Other prominent and capable women are also mentioned in Scripture (2 Kgs 4:8; Psa 45:9; Luke 8:3; Acts 9:36-37; 13:50; 16:14-16; 17:12). It is good when those with such capabilities make themselves available for the service of the King of kings.

RECEIVE HER IN THE LORD

“That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints . . . ” Other versions read, “that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints,”^{NKJV/NASB/NIV} “so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints,”^{NRSV} “That you will take her in kindly, after the way of the saints,”^{BBE} “Receive her in the Lord, as one who is worthy of high honor,”^{NLT}

matters relating to the work of the Lord. But Phebe's record has been placed in Scripture through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it will no doubt be a factor when the saints stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

“Assist.” This word means to be at the disposal of someone, to come to the aid of, and be ready and prepared to help them. It includes the idea of yielding to an individual, aggressively standing by them in their labors.

“Business.” Here is a word that speaks something specific that is being accomplished – something like a mission, or “whatever matter.” It refers to a specific undertaking or task. We assume this undertaking was being done in the name or behalf of the church in Cenchrea, for she was a servant of that congregation. The particulars of the “business,” however, are not stated. Therefore, I conclude that it was not the nature of the business Phebe was conducting that was to move the Roman brethren to assist her. Rather, it was the nature of the woman herself, and her role in Christ's body.

SHE HAS BEEN A HELPER

“... for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also.” Other versions read, “she has been a helper,” ^{NKJV} “she has been a great help,” ^{NIV} “she has been a benefactor,” ^{NRSV} and “she has also

assisted.” ^{DRA}

Among other things, Paul recommends Phebe because of her consistency. The mission she was currently fulfilling was not her initial involvement with the work of the Lord. Like Gaius (3 John 1:5-6), she had helped sojourning brethren on their way, being hospitable like Lydia was to Paul and company (Acts 16:15), and Mary and Martha were to Jesus (Lk 10:38-39).

As a passing note, it is interesting to observe that a married woman is here (1 Tim 5) depicted as lodging saints, washing their feet, relieving the afflicted, and diligently following every good work. Those who imagine the wife can do nothing without the express permission of her husband should ponder this circumstance. The woman who prepared a lodging place for the prophet Elisha initiated the suggestion to her husband that a place be prepared for the prophet because he was a holy man. Obviously, her husband acquiesced, for the place was prepared (2 Kings 4:8-11). While this does not suggest carnal independence on the part of the wife, it does show that a virtuous woman is on the initiative to do good works. Phebe was this kind of woman.

Whether she was a widow or not, we do not know. She did, however, do the works that would qualify a widow to be supported by the church: “if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work” (1 Tim 5:10). It is comely that such be found among us.

“Succorer.” This is a most interesting word. It comes from the Greek word *προστάτις* (*prostatis*), which means “a woman set over others, a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources.” ^{STRONGS} Young's Literal; Translation follows this meaning by reading, “for she also became a leader of many, and of myself.” This does not suggest Phebe lead out in Paul's Apostleship. Rather, it was in her ministry TO him that she led as a provider and servant, supplying his needs. As is true of all stewardship and gifts, the individual possessing them is a custodian of a particular ministry, being responsible for its fulfillment. This is submitting to one another, which is enjoined upon the church (1 Pet 5:5). In this way, we become the recipient of grace that has been given to another.

Like Dorcas, Phebe was “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). The brethren are now admonished to come to her assistance, that she might reap bountifully, for she had sown bountifully (Cor 9:6). We should take care to avoid any view of our sisters that would not allow us to receive a woman like Phebe into our fellowship. There are theological views held by some believers that would not permit such a woman to rise from among them, or allow them to receive such a notable, much less come to her assistance.

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, FELLOW WORKERS

“³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house.”

Care must be taken not to regard this passage as inconsequential – words that simply take up space. The Spirit never speaks aimlessly or without profit. Expressions like these reveal the manner of the Kingdom – the way faith and a love for the brethren move a person to speak.

Nearly every perceptive soul will

acknowledge words like these do not blend with common church manners. Rarely do we hear people speaking of one another in this way. All of this confirms the serious decline that exists in the modern church. There are reasons why professed Christians do not think and speak as this text. It is enough to mention this, and urge sober reflection upon that circumstance.

Nearly every perceptive soul will acknowledge words like these do not blend with common church manners. Rarely do we hear people speaking of one another in this way.

Now, Paul makes mention of Priscilla and Aquila, a wife and husband of note in Scripture. What is said of them distinguishes them among the saints.

First Mentioning

The first mentioning of this couple is in the eighteenth chapter of Acts. We learn there that Aquila was a Jew “born

in Pontus,” which was in the Northeastern part of Asia Minor. On the day of Pentecost, “Pontus” was one of the places represented when the people heard the wonderful works of God in their native tongue (Acts 2:9). It was also included among the dispersed believers to whom Peter wrote (1 Pet 1:1).

When Paul first met this couple in Corinth, they had “recently come from Italy,” “because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome” (Acts 18:2). Claudius was a Caesar. It was during his reign that a severe famine took place that was prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:28). Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, working with them, “because he was a tentmaker as they were”^{NIV} (Acts 18:3).

man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.” He was “instructed in the way of the Lord,” and “was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John.”^{NASB} It was at this point that Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos. Seeing that he only knew about the baptism of John, “they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”^{NKJV} As a result, he was inclined to go through Acahai. The brethren wrote, recommending him, and exhorting the disciples to receive him. When Apollos arrived among them, he “helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by

“diminutive or small.”

In the seven references to this couple, “Aquila” is mentioned first only two times (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor 16:19). “Priscilla” is mentioned first five times (Acts 18:18,19,26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). I only mention this to confirm that a rigid and legalistic approach of husbands and wives cannot be supported by either the words or spirit of Scripture.

MY FELLOW WORKERS

“My fellow workers in Christ Jesus.”

Other versions read, “my helpers,”^{KJV} “who work with me,”^{NRSV} and “co-workers in my ministry.”^{NLT} Aquila and Priscilla were companions in labor, working along side of Paul and assisting him in his work. **Whatever work a person has been given from God, there is always room for helpers, or co-laborers.** Both Aquila and Priscilla are included in this most gracious description. Rather than one being in the background, and one in the foreground, as it common in our day, they both were distinguished as Paul’s helpers.

Not only, therefore, were Aquila and Priscilla helpful to Paul, they proved to be a turning point in the remarkable ministry of Apollos, whom Paul referred to as one who “watered” his work

Second Mentioning

Because Jesus revealed to Paul that He had “much people” in the city of Corinth, he remained there for “a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” Finally, the Jews in that area made an insurrection against Paul, bringing him into court. The outcome of the whole affair was that Paul “remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, **and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.**” Before he sailed, he “had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow” (Acts 18:18). Thus Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him from a place of trouble to Ephesus, where he entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Third Mentioning

From Ephesus, Paul “departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” Aquila and Priscilla did not go with him, but remained in Ephesus.

While there, “a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent

the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:26-28).

Not only, therefore, were Aquila and Priscilla helpful to Paul, they proved to be a turning point in the remarkable ministry of Apollos, whom Paul referred to as one who “watered” his work (1 Cor 3:6).

The Fourth Mention

Excluding our text, the next mention of this godly couple is found in First Corinthians. There Paul sent greetings from them and the church in their house to the saints in Corinth (1 Cor 16:19).

The Fifth Mention

In addition to our text, the final mention of Aquila and Priscilla is in the book of Second Timothy. There Priscilla is referred to as “Prisca,” which is a variant of the name Priscilla (much like “Pete” is of “Peter”). Timothy is told to salute, or greet, this holy couple (2 Tim 4:19). How thankful I am for their mentioning.

Their Names

As a point of interest, “Aquila” means “an eagle,” and “Priscilla” means

“Fellow workers” are people engaged in productive Kingdom labors. It means more than simply belonging to the same church, or embracing the same creed. I fear that within the institutional mind-set, there is little, if any, room for expressions like this. Too many professed believers are rarely associated with doing anything for the Lord, or participating in any Kingdom enterprise.

THEY RISKED THEIR LIVES

“. . . who risked their own necks for my life.” Other versions read, “Who have for my life laid down their own necks,”^{KJV} “They risked their lives for me,”^{NIV} and “Who for my life put their necks in danger”^{BBE}

Aquila and Priscilla had exposed themselves to great danger for the sake of Paul, or to save his life. We are not given the particulars in this matter, in order that our minds not be distracted by carnal curiosity. Nor, indeed, are we apprised when this thoughtful deed took place. Aquila and Priscilla were with Paul in both Corinth and Ephesus. In both of those places, a great uproar broke out. In Corinth and insurrection broke out

against Paul, and Sosthenes, ruler of the synagogue, was dragged into court and beaten (Acts 18:12-17). In Ephesus, Demetrius and the silversmiths caused a great and dangerous tumult (Acts 19:24-30). Perhaps Aquila and Priscilla risked their lives during one of those times. However, whenever they did, their action confirmed their commitment to Paul and the Gospel he preached. It must have been refreshing for Paul to recall such a rare display of godly commitment.

THE CHURCHES THANK THEM

“. . . unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” Paul personally gave thanks to God for their unselfish devotion to the work of the Lord. Like God Himself, He was “not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love,” which they “showed toward *“is name,”* in that they “ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10).

We do well to also recall those who have inconvenienced themselves for the work of the Lord, and particularly when we have been the objects of their attention. Those who have thought enough of the Lord, His work, and His people, to risk their reputations and lives for the same, are worthy of our remembrance and thanksgiving.

Note, “*all the churches of the Gentiles*” also extended their thanks to Aquila and Priscilla. The “*churches of the Gentiles*” owed this couple thanks because their selfless spirit had enabled the Gospel to come to them. Those who assisted Paul also assisted the spreading of the Gospel of Christ. The fruit of his labors was also credited to the account, for example, of Aquila and Priscilla. They had received a prophet in the name of a prophet, and were thus afforded a prophet’s reward (Matt 10:41). This opens the door to remarkable opportunities for all saints.

THE CHURCH IN THEIR HOUSE

“*Likewise greet the church that is in their house.*” Other versions read, “*Greet*

also the church that meets at their house,”^{NIV} and “*the assembly at their house.*”^{DBY}

Not only did Aquila and Priscilla have a fellowship meeting in their house in or near Rome, they had done the same

in other places as well (1 Cor 16:19). It seems that wherever they lived, they gathered kindred spirits about them for spiritual profitability.

In this special greeting, we catch a glimpse of the spirit of Paul, as well as the manner of the Kingdom. He writes to “*all*” who were beloved of God “*in Rome*” (1:7). We do not know if this was a particularly large assembly, several individual ones, or some other form of brethren joined together. The point is that Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, recognized this family who had a gathering of believers in their home. Whatever one chooses to believe about such fellowships, keep in mind that the

Those who assisted Paul also assisted the spreading of the Gospel of Christ. The fruit of his labors was also credited to the account, for example, of Aquila and Priscilla.

Apostle Paul sent a special greeting to this one, acknowledging their prominence before the Lord.

Candidly, institutionalism has robbed many people of just such a perspective. It is a good one to, as some say, “restore.”

EPAENETUS, THE FIRST FRUITS

“Greet my beloved Epäenetüs, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” This is the only mention of this brother in Scripture. Very little is said of him, but what is said is very significant. He was “*the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.*” Achaia was a Roman province in Western Asia Minor. This was the area in which the Holy Spirit once forbade Paul to preach the Gospel (Acts 16:6). It is obvious, however, that this was not intended to be a permanent prohibition, for here we read of fruit “*to Christ*” there. Believers must learn that Divine guidance is not by broad mandate, but by the ordering of our steps. **The very areas that are blocked on one occasion, can be opened on another.**

Most of the later versions read “*Asia,*” instead of Achaia. Some prefer this reading because otherwise they imagine there is a conflict with First Corinthians, which declares that “*the house of Stephanas*” was the “*firstfruits of Achaia*” (1 Cor 16:15). However, there is no need for conflict. *Epäenetüs* could very well have been a member of the household of Stephanas, and been the very first one of that house to turn to the Lord. A distinct privilege, indeed!

As an additional consideration, the people of God should have an approach to the Word of God that discourages skepticism and doubt, giving precedence to faith. This may not meet with the

approval of supposed scholars, but God has rejected their wisdom (1 Cor 1:20).

FIRST FRUITS, OR FIRST CONVERT?

Other versions read, “*the first convert.*”^{NASB/NIV} I prefer the word “*first fruits,*” which is the literal rendering of the word ἀπαρχή. That word in no way can be translated “*convert.*” The word “*convert*” is an interpretation, not a translation.

The word “*first fruits*” has its roots in the First Covenant and its ordinances, not in etymology. In Israel, God instituted the “*Feast of Harvest,*” in which the first fruits sown in the field were offered to the Lord (Ex 23:16). All of the first fruits of

the land belonged to the Lord (Ex 23:19), and were given to Him in order to sanctify what remained. Through this term, God taught the people of beginnings – of something good followed by more of the same.

This precise word is used seven times in the Apostolic writings, and always in the above manner. It represents a spiritual manner of expression.

- ▣ Romans 11:16 uses the word as an example of a whole “*lump*” being dedicated by its “*firstfruit*,” applying the principle to Israel being sanctified by Abraham.
- ▣ 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 29 use the word to describe Jesus Christ as the

first to rise from the dead, thereby guaranteeing the resurrection of those who sleep in Jesus.

- ▣ In 1 Corinthians 16:19, “*first fruits*” is used in the same sense as our text, denoting the first of a larger harvest of souls from a particular area.
- ▣ In James 1:18, the word employed to describe those in Christ, who are the first to be redeemed from the impersonal creation, which will also be redeemed at the resurrection (Rom 8:21).
- ▣ Revelation 14:4 uses the word to describe the pledge of a great harvest of souls described as “*redeemed from among men*.” In these instances, it portrays the working of the Lord.

In all of these cases, “*firstfruits*”

denotes the first of more to come – the beginning of a great Divine work. It denotes a pledge or more, and a sanctification of the rest. There is something about the word that is fresh and unique. As “*the first fruits of Achaia*,” *Epaenetus* was the proof that many more people of God would surface in that area. As the “*firstfruits*,” he stood out as the pledge of a greater harvest that would be reaped when the fields were white. No doubt, for his sake, that area was spared.

Achaia was an area dominated by idolatry and spiritual ignorance. Yet, the Gospel had penetrated this citadel of darkness. It was therefore especially precious that *Epaenetus* was the first – a sort of guarantee to Paul of more to come.

MARY, WHO LABORED MUCH

“⁶ **Greet Mary, who labored much for us.**” Other versions read, “*who bestowed much labor on us*,”^{KJV} “*who has worked hard for you*,”^{NASB} and “*who has worked very hard among you*.”^{NRSV} The differing translations seem to suggest three different meanings. First, that Mary had bestowed much labor upon Paul personally, ministering to him of her substance. Second, that she had expended

laborer and helper among the Roman brethren themselves. Adhering to the practice of humbly receiving the Word of God as the truth, and not approaching it with skepticism, there is no violation of the text in seeing all three things as true. In such a case, because she was faithful in her labors for Christ among them, she also did the same for Paul while he was in some other area. When she did minister to

personally devoted to the Lord.

It is noteworthy that Paul speaks of this sister in such a commendable manner. Not only did she “*labor*,” she “*labored much*,” far exceeding the norm. Perhaps, like those of Macedonia and Achaia, she even labored beyond her natural capacity, extending herself according to the abundance of grace she had received (2 Cor 9:8).

Those who live for Christ should consider the possibility of laboring “*much*,” and giving of themselves to the work of the Lord in an unusual manner.

Those who live for Christ should consider the possibility of laboring “*much*,” and giving of themselves to the work of the Lord in an unusual manner. While men often boast of the average and normal, the man of God boasts of those who extend themselves beyond the boundaries of average and normal. As believers, we are admonished to “*seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church*” (1 Cor 14:12). Here, in Mary, we have an example of one who did.

this labor in the behalf of the brethren in Rome. Third, that she was a prodigious

Paul, she did so as a representative of the brethren in Rome, as well as one who was

ANDONICUS AND JUNIA, OF NOTE AMONG THE APOSTLES

“⁷ **Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.**” I am grateful for these

salutations, for they reveal aspects of the Kingdom of God that should be known. In order to avoid the rise of curiosity and the undue reverence of men, the Spirit does not fill every text of Scripture with the

names of brothers and sisters who rose to greater heights than others. Such a practice would have dulled the edge of truth, for **wherever those who are redeemed are the emphasis, the**

People obtain Distinction and Profitability in Christ Jesus, and it is worthy of due Recognition--by Given O. Blakely

Redeemer Himself becomes less known. However, lest men come to the erroneous conclusion that great blessings are withheld from the masses, an occasional word is said that will dispel such imaginations.

The Divine warehouse of God's grace is filled with much for all saints. God is able to *"do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us"* (Eph 3:20). No child of God is excluded from that provision. By siting a few saints here and there, the Spirit is lighting the candle of hope, enabling the saints to seek to be involved in *"exploits,"* as Daniel prophesied. As it is written, *"but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits"* (Dan 11:32) – and that is said to take place during a time when corruption was spreading.

Now we are introduced to a spiritual duo who had obtained extraordinary Kingdom distinction. While the name *"Junia"* can be either masculine or feminine, it is generally agreed this was a woman, probably the wife of Andronicus. This is the only place in Scripture where these distinguished saints are mentioned, but what a testimony is given of them!

MY COUNTRYMEN

" . . . my countrymen." By *"countrymen,"* Paul means they were Jews, of the same fleshly stock as himself. While he placed no confidence in the flesh, and did not regard the saints after the flesh, yet he was careful to give honor to those whose lineage went back to Abraham. Another version refers to them as *"kinsmen."* ^{KJV/NASB} Still another version refers to them as *"relatives."* ^{NIV/NRSV}

The word used here is also translated *"cousins"* (Lk 1:36,58) *"kin"* (Mk 6:4), *"kinsfolk"* (Lk 2:44), and *"kinsman"* (Lk 14:12). In its widest sense, it refers to the Jewish nation as a whole. In its most narrow sense, it refers to those of the same household, distinguishing them from *"brothers"* or *"sisters,"* which is an even closer family association (Lk 14:12). They fell into the category of people for whom Paul had a special affection: *"my kinsmen according to the flesh"* (Rom 9:3). This couple had further distinguished themselves by embracing

the Savior who sprang from the Jewish nation.

FELLOW PRISONERS

" . . . and my fellow prisoners." This was an even loftier distinction – being imprisoned for the name of Jesus. Andronicus and Junia had been imprisoned with Paul. This same term was applied to Arisarchus (Col 4:10) and Epaphras (Philemon 1:23). Whether they were in the same prison at the same time is not confirmed, but that appears to be the case. There were also other saints that were imprisoned together, i.e., the Apostles (Acts 5:18) and Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25-26).

If their imprisonment was in one place, they no doubt sharpened one another's countenance, and strengthened each other's faith during their time

apostles." ^{NLT} This could mean they were themselves *"apostles"* in the general sense, as were Barnabas, James the brother of Jesus, and others (Acts 14:14; Gal 1:19). It seems more likely, however, that these saints were highly regarded by the Apostles for their *"work's sake."*

We know such people did exist -- people who were held in high regard by the Apostles. John wrote to *"the elect lady"* and *"Gaius,"* both of whom he held in high regard (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1). Just as God does not regard all of His children alike, so the Apostles did not look at every child of God as having equal value. **All were received. All were loved. But there were some who excelled, and they were duly honored.** There are still people who *"labor more abundantly than they all"* (1 Cor 15:10). There is no reason why you

Paul means they were Jews, of the same fleshly stock as himself. While he placed no confidence in the flesh, and did not regard the saints after the flesh, yet he was careful to give honor to those whose lineage went back to Abraham

together. The Lord Jesus said, *"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"* (Matt 5:11-12). How fitting it would be to remind one another of that reality when experiencing that very persecution!

If it is a treasure to enjoy the *"fellowship"* of Christ's *"sufferings"* (Phil 3:10), it should not surprise us if great benefits are realized when brethren suffer for the name of Jesus together. Such fellowship is of great value.

OF NOTE AMONG THE APOSTLES

" . . . who are of note among the apostles." Other versions read, *"who are outstanding among the apostles,"* ^{NASB/NIV} *"they are prominent among the apostles,"* ^{NRSV} and *"They are respected among the*

cannot aspire to be such an one.

Some are of the opinion these were among *"the seventy"* that Jesus sent out *"two by two,"* into every city and place where He would go (Lk 10:1).

I am careful to once again point out that we are being taught **how** to regard, and **how** to speak of, those who are in Christ Jesus. We should avoid stereotyped ways of looking at the people of God.

IN CHRIST BEFORE ME

" . . . who also were in Christ before me." Here is a most considerate view of fellow believers. In ranking, Paul was among the Apostles, who were "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28). However, here is a sense in which Andronicus and Junia had the advantage over him: they were *"in Christ before"* him. They had been exposed to the grace of God longer than himself, seeing the truth concerning

Christ Jesus before he did.

It is one thing for that to be the case. It is quite another for it to be thankfully acknowledged by the premier Apostle! That acknowledgment indicates they had advanced in the faith, and were bringing

benefit to the saints.

One has reminded us that it is a great privilege to come to Christ early, thereby delivering us from many sins and transgressions. ^{JOHN GILL} It will serve to promote humility among the saints to

acknowledge those who have been sitting at the table longer, and feasting on the riches of God's grace for a more lengthy period. Such are worthy of due recognition, and it will strengthen and encourage them to hear it acknowledged. Of course, it is assumed such souls have been active.

AMPLIAS, MY BELOVED

"⁸ Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord." Again, this is our only reference to this believer. Because his name is Roman, we assume he was a citizen of Rome. His name means "enlarged," and appears to accurately

describe his spiritual condition. Paul is particularly endeared to this good brother, calling him "*my beloved*," "*most loved to me*," ^{DRA} or "*who is dear to me in the Lord*." ^{BBE} His closeness to Paul implies it was not upon the basis of fleshly

relationship, or any other natural cause. It was because of his identity with the Lord Jesus. That is what gives people their true worth. While it is desirable that every believer be so noted, the truth of the matter is that some excel in this area.

URBANUS AND STACHYS

"⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved."

URBANUS

It is understood that this was a common name among slaves within certain households. The name means

had joined in the actual doing of the work of the Lord. Urbanus had assisted Paul, joining in his labors, and thus bringing relief and encouragement to him.

Just as there were specialized "*workers*" in the building of the Temple, so there are in the work of Christ. In preparing for the work of building the

This circumstance is even more true with the work of Christ, where a building is being erected to be "*the habitation of God through the Spirit*" (Eph 2:22). Those who put their hand to the work are "*fellow workers*," and will be duly recognized.

STACHYS

This is a Greek name, meaning a head, or ear of grain – something that is growing and has great potential. Church tradition says he also was one of the seventy, and was the bishop of Byzantium. Whatever his role in the body of Christ, he was very dear and close to the Apostle, and thus he sent special salutations to him.

Fearing that I may be redundant in saying this, I again call attention to the manner in which Paul refers to brethren in Christ Jesus. He does not cite their earthly credentials, if they possessed any. He recognizes no political entities, or those who have attained to a great name. His sole source of reference is the Lord Jesus and His work. **Also, note the total absence of religious and academic titles, which our contemporaries are so fond of using.** It is obvious Paul had a different set of values.

Were professed Christians to follow

He recognizes no political entities, or those who have attained to a great name. His sole source of reference is the Lord Jesus and His work. Also, note the total absence of religious and academic titles, which our contemporaries are so fond of using.

"polite" and "of the city." Whatever his social background, he is appropriately called "*our fellow worker*" or "*helper*" ^{KJV} in Christ." Other believers so designated include Timothy (Rom 16:21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Aquila and Priscilla (Rom 16:3), and Clement (Phil 4:3). These, like Urbanus, or "*Urbane*," ^{KJV} were noted for having their hand on the plow (Lk 9:62). They

Temple, David selected "*workers*" in abundance. He told Solomon there were "*hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work. Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number*" (1 Chron 22:15-16). The work was large and important, and thus many hands were necessary to accomplish it.

this example, there would be a dramatic reduction in the number of popular Christian leaders and personalities. Some professed Christians are noted for their

expertise in earthly matters, some for entertainment, and others for athletics. You will note a total absence of such references in this passage.

Men should be recognized in strict and consistence accordance with the great work of redemption. That is how heaven views them, and we do well to to the same.

APELLES, ARISTOBULUS, HERODION, AND NARCISSUS

“¹⁰ Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.” With great care, Paul continues to mention godly clusters of people. They may have been despised in the world, but they were honored in heaven, and thus were duly recognized by Paul, who himself trafficked in heavenly places.

APELLES

“Greet Apelles, approved in Christ.” Apelles is a Latin name, and means “called.” How will the Apostle refer to this precious soul? He does not disappoint us, but reaches into his bag to bring something out that is new in this listing. He declares Apelles to be “*approved in Christ.*” I gather that this word is not used in a general redemptive sense, as being “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6). This word is rather one of distinction, reflecting that Apelles had proved himself in the work of the Lord, and thus met with the special commendation of the Lord. It is used in the sense of 2 Corinthians 10:18: “*For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth*” (2 Cor 10:18).

This kind of approval is also applied to Timothy. “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth*”^{NASB} (2 Tim 2:15). It is also used of those who were prospective deacons, who *must* “*first be proved,*” then use the office of the deacon (1

Tim 3:10).

Apelles had apparently proved his worth in the crucible of Kingdom labors, where he was steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Such souls should be recognized, for they have brought great glory to the Lord, and encouragement to His people.

ARISTOBULUS

“Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.” The name “*Aristobulus*” means “best counsellor.” We know nothing of this man, except that his household was worthy of a special Apostolic salutation. For whatever it is worth, Josephus maintains this man was the grandson of Herod. Even if this was true, it apparently was not significant to Paul, for he regarded no man after the flesh.

Some households were greeted in their entirety, such as those of Stephanas (1 Cor

Perhaps he was not. Yet, even if this was the case, the Apostle acknowledged those within that household who knew the Lord.

HERODION

“Greet Herodion, my countryman.” This was a kinsman according to the flesh. I gather the relationship was more that of a Jew than of a particular family. Perhaps Herodion was from the same tribe of Benjamin. At any rate, this good brother had embraced the Savior that was born of the Jews, claiming the promises made to that nation. He was thus advantaged by all of the good things God had done for the Jews.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF NARCISSUS

“Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.” Here again, a household is mentioned with no immediate indication that its head was in the Lord. Yet, those who were “*in the Lord*”

This word is rather one of distinction, reflecting that Apelles had proved himself in the work of the Lord, and thus met with the special commendation of the Lord.

1:16) and Onesiphorus (2 Tim 4:19). But here, only believers within that household were greeted. We should not take this to be a reproach to Aristobulus. Rather, it is a tribute to those who stood for Christ even though some within their household did not. Paul does not say this man was in Christ.

were especially greeted, without fear of offending any that were not. It was necessary that those who occupied the same household with unbelievers be encouraged in the Lord. Their earthly circumstance was not ideal, and therefore especially required they be encouraged in the Lord.

TRYPHENA, TYPHOSA, PERSIS, AND REFUS

“¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who

labored much in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” The Apostle

continues in an impressive recognition of Kingdom laborers. All of this attests to the uniqueness of the brethren in Rome.

Their faith had been broadcast throughout the world, and this listing confirms why. There are a number of prodigious laborers in Rome who were spending and being spent for Christ.

TRYPHENA AND TYPHOSA

“Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord.” Other versions read, *“who labor in the Lord,”* ^{KJV} *“workers in the Lord,”* ^{NASB} and *“those women who work hard in the Lord.”* ^{NIV}

How comely that there should be two women, working together for the honor of the Lord and the benefit of His people. It seems to me that it is honorable to seek for the surfacing of such ladies in our day.

PERSIS

“Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.” This was also a woman, like Tryphena and Typhosa, noted for her work in the Lord. However, this woman excelled in her efforts,

in Mark 15:21, whose father, Simon of Cyrene, was compelled to carry the cross of Christ. If this is the case, it is an unusual testimony of the power that attended the presence of the Lord – even when He was on the way to be crucified.

By saying Rufus was *“chosen in the Lord,”* the Apostle accented the excellent spiritual quality that attended this man. Paul had personal acquaintance with him, and considered him to be a choice believer, rising above the ordinary. I understand that Paul’s perception of this man was not the result of a special revelation from God, but through observing his godly demeanor and involvement in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Such recognition is similar to that of Paul for the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:4-5).

HIS MOTHER AND MINE

“... and his mother and mine.” The NIV gives the sense of the text: “and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.” She had been a literal mother to Rufus, and a figurative one to Paul. Rufus was a Gentile, Paul was a Jew. Also, Paul from another part of the world, which forbids us to conclude he and Rufus were fleshly brothers, having the same mother.

When her ministry to Paul took place, we do not know. She did, however, conduct herself with great care toward him, as a mother would for her own offspring. The tenderness of Paul is seen in this language. He did not forget those who had ministered to him, particularly those who did so in a matronly way. In this matter, Paul emulated the spirit of the Savior, who said, *“Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”* (Matt 12:49-50). Spiritual relationships are superior ones.

This might very well be the “Rufus” mentioned in Mark 15:21, whose father, Simon of Cyrene, was compelled to carry the cross of Christ. If this is the case, it is an unusual testimony of the power that attended the presence of the Lord – even when He was on the way to be crucified.

Here were two women, noted for their hard work for the Lord Jesus! Again, there are many assemblies in which such women would not be welcomed. The name *“Tryphena”* means “luxurious,” and the name *“Tryphosa”* means “luxuriating.” Both names come from the same root, and mean living in luxury. These were probably sisters, perhaps even twins. Early church writers say they were noble women of Iconium. Their presence in the Apostolic salutations will stretch the thinking of some. Perhaps they ministered to the sick and needy, or played a role similar to that of Phebe. We do not know. It may be surmised that they were single, especially devoting their attention to *“the things of the Lord,”* how they might *“please the Lord,”* as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:32.

laboring *“much in the Lord.”* She abounded in the work of the Lord, and was full of good works. Thus, a special greeting is given to her. As with the Tryphena and Typhosa, this is the only place she is mentioned. **In all three cases, the only thing we know about them is good. There is nothing questionable said about them. Oh, that such could be said of us!**

RUFUS

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord.” Other versions read, *“a choice man in the Lord,”* ^{NASB} *“eminent in the Lord,”* ^{RSV} *“the choice one in the Lord,”* ^{NLT} and *“whom the Lord picked out to be His very own.”* ^{NLT} *“Rufus”* is understood to have been a rather common name among slaves. This might very well be the *“Rufus”* mentioned

ASYNCRITUS, PHLEGON, HERMAS, PATROBAS, HERMES, PHILOLOGUS, JULIA, NEREUS AND OLYMPAS

“¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his

sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” Here are two clusters of brethren, together with those associated with them. It is to be

assumed their relationship centered in some form of mutual activity in the Lord. When the people of God are **not** known after the flesh, it is because they are

People obtain Distinction and Profitability in Christ Jesus, and it is worthy of due Recognition--by Given O. Blakely

viewed from a high vantage point, and in regard to a higher calling. The greeting that is extended to them is not social, but spiritual – i.e., in the Lord.

THE FIRST GROUP

“Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.” We know nothing more of these men through Scripture. **Church historians say the following.**

As to their former lives, church historians suggest the following.

- ▣ Asyncritus may have been a freed slave from the house of Augustus.
- ▣ Hermas is thought to have been a Roman slave.
- ▣ Patromas is considered to have been a freed slave from Nero’s house.
- ▣ Hermes was also considered to have been a Roman slave.

As to their lives in Christ, church historians suggest the following.

- ▣ Asyncritus may have been one of *“the seventy,”* sent out by Jesus, and is said to have been the bishop of Hycrania.
- ▣ Hermas may also have been one of *“the seventy,”* and is said to have been the bishop of Marathon.
- ▣ Patrobas may also have been one of *“the seventy,”* and is said to have been the bishop of Puteoli.
- ▣ Hermes may also have been one of *“the seventy,”* and is said to have been the bishop of Dalmatia.

THE SECOND GROUP

“Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” Again, nothing more is known of these saints in the Scriptures.

As to their former lives, church historians suggest the following.

- ▣ Philologus and Julia may have been husband and wife slaves in the household of Julius Ceasar.
- ▣ Nereus and his sister are also considered to have been slaves in the Imperial household.

As to their lives in Christ, church historians suggest the following.

We must learn from such passages to carefully consider the people of God, avoiding beholding them through the lense of the flesh.

- ▣ Philologus and Julia were husband and wife, with Philologus being reckoned among *“the seventy,”* and also said to be the bishop of Sinope.
- ▣ Olympas is said to have been numbered with *“the seventy,”* and was also a Roman martyr.

THE PAULINE RECOGNITION

After a cursory recognition of the opinions of church historians, Paul’s recognition of these saints is of particular interest to me. First, they apparently represent two clusters of believers, called *“the brethren who are with them.”* This means three separate groups are recognized in Rome. (1. The church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. (2. The brethren with Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and (3. The brethren with Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas. We have no idea of the size of these groups, but they are all recognized and greeted with dignity and affection. They were not ranked by size or prominence, or considered splinter groups of a “mother church.”

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF

MENTIONING THEM

The fact that these precious souls are mentioned in the Scriptures has provoked many to earnestly seek to identify them. Whether or not they have uncovered genuine facts concerning their identity is not of any momentous value. However, the fact that they engaged in such an effort is worthy of notation.

Anyone recognized by heaven, and, by inspiration, incuded in the Scriptures, is, by virtue of that inclusion, significant. What they have done is recognized by God, but only because they themselves have been received into His fellowship. There is a certain spiritual dignity associated with being received by God. Such souls are worthy of saluation and commendation. They are worthy of encouragement and prayers. Whether or not they are recognized by the world, or have attained to any degree of earthly status is entirely without significance. Their total worth is based upon their participation in the *“great salvation”* of God.

This is precisely why men highly lauded by the world are not mentioned in Scripture, and men lauded in Scripture are not included in worldly history and commentary.

We must learn from such passages to carefully and thoughtfully consider the people of God, avoiding beholding them through the lense of the flesh.

ONE ANOTHER AND THE CHURCHES

“¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.” The emphasis in this text is on *“holy,”* **not** *“kiss.”* Those with an

inclination to law and precise procedures read this text as though it was a procedural directive. As with all of our relationships with the people of God, this

is addressed to the heart, which is to drive our external manners.

THE KISS

Among the Jews, it was customary to kiss one another as a token of deep family ties. Thus Isaac entreated Jacob to come close and kiss him (Gen 27:26). Laban mentioned kissing his sons and daughters (Gen 31:28). When Elisha left all to follow the prophet Elijah, he first requested permission to go home and kiss his father and mother farewell (1 Kgs 19:20). When Esau was reunited with Jacob, he ran forward and kissed him (Gen 33:5). When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he kissed them all (Gen 45:15). When Joseph saw his aged father Jacob again, he fell before him, wept over him, and kissed him (Gen 50:1). When the prodigal son was depicted as returning to his father, his father fell on his neck and kissed him (Lk 15:20). When Aaron went to the mount of God at the direction of the Lord, he kissed his brother Moses (Ex 4:27). **The kiss was, therefore, a recognized token of close family ties.**

It was also a token of abiding friendship. Jonathan and David are said to have kissed each other (1 Sam 20:41). This is the kind of kiss Judas pretended to give to Jesus when he betrayed him – the kiss of a friend (Matt 26:49-50).

This was not a romantic kiss, placed upon the mouth, as in Song of Solomon 1:2). Rather, it was placed in the region of the neck and cheek. Thus Esau fell on Jacob's neck and kissed him (Gen 33:4). The prodigal's father also fell on his neck and kissed him (Lk 15:20). When Paul left the elders from Ephesus, they also fell on his neck and kissed him (Acts 20:37).

REETING ONE ANOTHER

First, it is important to *"greet one another"* – to recognize the members of the household of faith, to which we have been joined by the grace of God. To *"greet"* is to *"salute,"* welcome, embrace, or enfold with the arms as one that is precious. It means to bid welcome, receive joyfully, and wish well.

However, our greetings are not to be mere religious formalities. In this text, the Spirit is not ordaining a lifeless ceremony. Rather, He is awakening brotherly love, and the public display of it. If God is not ashamed to be called our God (Heb 11:16), and Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren (Heb 2:11), we certainly ought

not to be ashamed of one another. **Whatever form of greeting we use, it should be "holy," distinct from the manner in which we greet, or salute, those who are of the world.**

Confirming the *"holy kiss"* is more than a mere custom or empty formality, Peter refers to *"a kiss of charity"* (1 Pet 5:14). In three other places, Paul mentions *"an holy kiss"* (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26).

A *"holy kiss"* is not only one that conveys the idea of the individual being especially close to the our heart, but which also carries a desire for the blessing of the individual. In it, the one who is kissed is recognized as a member of the body of Christ, justified from sin, and possessing an inheritance in heaven. This distinguishes it from a kiss of lust and unchasteness.

By the end of the first century, historians tell us the church practiced the *"holy kiss"* before participating in the Lord's Supper. ^{JUSTIN MARYR} While this does not justify the forming of a law to be bound upon the followers of Jesus, it does reveal something of how our text was understood. The *"holy kiss"* was not considered to be a mere casual greeting, but one related with our identity with Jesus Christ. It was a means of confessing the superior relationship we have with one another in Christ Jesus.

Contemporary Practices

I have been in congregations where a greeting time had been established during the formal gathering. During this time, brethren would mingle with the others, greeting one another, welcoming strangers, etc. As a rule, I have noted that very little spiritual conversation occurred during such times. Recognition of one another tended to be more on a neighborly or friendly basis. There is certainly nothing wrong with displays of civility and neighborliness among the saints. However, that is not the point of this text. Whatever place may be assigned to such greetings, it cannot take the place of a hearty recognition of those who are in Christ Jesus.

Another form of recognizing those who have tasted of the grace of God, is the

right hand of fellowship. Paul mentioned such a kingdom formality in Galatians 2:9. *"And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship."* This was a sort of pledge to solidly stand behind one another, recognizing the work to which they had been called. Job would call it striking hands together (Job 17:3). Solomon would refer to it as being surety, or security, for your friend (Prov 6:1). Ezekiel referred to the procedure as confirming a covenant (Ezek 17:13).

The point is that even in greeting one another, we should zealously avoid casualness and viewing the saints of God after the flesh. Spiritually insightful greetings have often been a great source of consolation to weary warriors.

As to actually kissing one another in our salutations, there is certainly nothing wrong with it, and everything right about it. But the kiss had better be *"holy,"* and never a means of inciting lust. It is to be driven by a recognition of the saints of God, and not by the binding of a social custom.

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

"The churches of Christ salute you." In their quest to call their assemblies by Bible names, some have viewed this admonition as revealing a valid, and even preferable, name for a local congregation. Nothing could be further from the truth. In this text, the Spirit has no regard whatsoever for the name by which an assembly is known.

In this expression, Paul is saying, *"All of the other assemblies who are in Christ Jesus recognize and greet you in the Lord."* This is the recognition of the *"whole family in heaven and earth"* (Eph 3:15) on a congregational level. They all have common interests, and acknowledge all other believers. If it was a larger assembly in Rome, or the church meeting in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, *"All the churches of Christ send greetings."*^{NIV} They acknowledge you, and desire the best in Christ for you all!

Bound Together

In this admonition and salutation,

the Spirit is moving Paul to promote “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph 4:3). That kind of unity (which is the

only kind God recognizes), begins with a recognition of the saints, and the acceptance of them in Christ Jesus. It is a

sin of great magnitude to use these words to promote sectarian interests, or place limitations on the people of God.

CONCLUSION

As with all of Scripture, the passage we have reviewed has a spirit. There is a particular direction in which it is pointed, and a specific purpose that it serves. The due recognition and honoring of the people of God is a tributary of a greater river. The “*great salvation*” of God includes our relationship to the people of God as well as God Himself. Thus it is written, “*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and **everyone who loves Him who***

begot also loves him who is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1).

There is something refreshing about recognizing and honoring those who are in Christ Jesus – all of them. It is as though the Lord blesses those who acquiesce to His marvelous work. When we receive His people, we receive Him. When we minister to His people, we minister to Him. It is good to have a holy

resolve to be give honor to all of God’s people. If it is a sister in Christ, doing a good work like Phoebe, assist her. If it is a holy couple who have inconvenienced their lives for the sake of Christ and His people, give them greeting and honor. If it is a congregation meeting in a home, receive them and pray for them. If you know anyone who was the first to come to Christ from their family, a region, or a town, give them due honor.

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The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 50



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

HOW TO HANDLE DIVISION AND HERESY

16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. ¹⁸ For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹ For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. ²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet. ^{NKJV} (Romans 16:17-20)

INTRODUCTION

The book of Romans is like a vast mountain range, populated with several valleys. The mountain peaks rise high, extending into the heavenly realms. While standing upon them we are given to see Divine purposes, accomplishments, and promises. While beholding these things, a certain clarity is imparted to us, so that we are able to see life as it really is. **Faith and hope flourish in these high altitudes, and the grace of God becomes most prominent.** In setting the stage for the text before us, it will be good to rehearse some of these lofty mountain peaks, for they form a context for the proper understanding of our text.

MOUNTAIN PEAKS

- ▣ Peak #1 – The powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:16-17).

- ▣ Peak #2 – The revelation of being made righteous by God (3:21-27).
- ▣ Peak #3 – The glory of justification by faith (4:1 - 5:11).
- ▣ Peak #4 – The effectiveness of Christ's obedience for all (5:12-21).
- ▣ Peak #5 – Our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ (6:1-23).
- ▣ Peak #6 – Our uncondemned state in Christ Jesus (8:1-4).
- ▣ Peak #7 – The ministry of hope under the administration of the Holy Spirit (8:13-27).
- ▣ Peak #8 – The security of those who live by faith (8:18-39).
- ▣ Peak #9 – The hope of Israel's restoration (11:11-34).

LOW VALLEYS

But there are also valleys, profound

teaching regarding the impact of transgression and the malignity of sin. It is essential that we perceive these also.

- ▣ Valley #1 – The depravity of the Gentile world (1:19-32).
- ▣ Valley #2 – The "fallen" state of the Jewish world (2:1-29).
- ▣ Valley #3 – The universality of the fall of humanity (3:1-20).
- ▣ Valley #4 – The war induced by the entrance of faith (7:1-24).
- ▣ Valley #5 – The fall of Israel, even though they had remarkable advantages (9:1-10:21).

IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS

From a human point of view, this book has also faced us with some impossible situations. By that, I mean

Division and Heresy are Vile, and Cannot be Dignified, Nor are They to be Tolerated--by Given O. Blakely

OUTLINE

- < THERE ARE EVIL PEOPLE TO BE NOTED (16:17)
- < HERE IS WHAT THEY REALLY ARE (16:18)
- < SATAN'S FUTURE REGARDING US (16:20)

circumstances that are greater than the abilities of men. They are too challenging for human wisdom, and too strong for human strength.

- ▣ A Gentile world given over to its own base lusts (Rom 1:24-26). This was a Divine judgment, resulting from the Gentile world refusing to retain God in their knowledge (1:28-29), ascribing Divine attributes to the creation itself (1:23-24), being unthankful (1:21), and giving themselves over to unnatural desires (1:27-28). Their condition is vividly described as (1) being vain in their imaginations, (2) their foolish heart was darkened, (3) they became fools, (4) God gave them over to a reprobate mind, (5) they were filled with all unrighteousness, (6) they knew the judgment of God, yet sinned against him, and loved those who did the same.

Is it possible for such a condition to be rectified through human wisdom or power? Is not the Gentile world depicted as being in an utterly hopeless condition? **Only God can address such a dreadful dilemma!**

- ▣ The Jewish people degenerated into a state similar to that of the Gentiles. They did *"the same things"* for which the Gentiles were condemned, even though they had been Divinely tutored. The following benefits applied exclusively to them. (The adoption, (2) the glory, (3) the covenants, (4) the giving of the Law, (5) the service, or worship, of God, (6) the promises of God, (7) the fathers, to whom the promises were made (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), (8) the Lord Jesus Christ, who came from their nation, being

given first to them (9:4-5). Yet, in spite of these remarkable advantages, here is what is said of them. (1) They attained not to the Law of righteousness (9:31). (2) They stumbled at the stumbling stone (9:32). (3) All day long God held out His hand to them as a disobedience and gainsaying people (10:21). (4) God gave them a spirit of slumber (11:8). (5) Their eyes were darkened, and their back bowed down always (11:10). (6) They fell and were diminished (11:12). (7) They were cast off (11:15).

What element of human wisdom can recover a people from such a condition? Where is the wise man who can raise this people from the horrible pit into which they have fallen? **Only the Living God can resolve this quandary!**

- ▣ In order to show us the extensive impact of sin upon the offspring of Adam, the Spirit gathers Jew and Gentile together. Here is what He says of them all, with no one being excluded. (1) There is none righteous, not even one (3:10). (2) No one understands or seeks after God (3:11). (3) Everyone has gone out of the way and become unprofitable (3:12a). (4) No one does good, not even one (3:12b). (5) Their verbal expressions are like eruptions from a defiled tomb, and deceit and poison are in their words (3:13). (6) They are swift to take life (3:14). (7) Destruction and misery are in their ways (3:15). (8) They do not know the way of peace (3:16). (9) There is no fear of God before their eyes (3:17).

Now, who is the person who will resolve that situation? What wise man will step forward with an answer that will

please God and reclaim man for His glory. To ask the question is to answer it!

When professed believers are not reminded of these things regularly, they become more vulnerable to the purveyors of spiritual corruption. Such overstate man's ability, and understate the working of the Lord. But you will find no such defilement in this Epistle!

STRONG REASONS

Throughout this Epistle, strong reasons are presented for embracing Jesus and fighting the good fight of faith. **Sin is always presented as unreasonable, and righteousness as reasonable.** All of this is done against the backdrop of these mountain peaks, valleys, and impossible situations. If these extreme highs and lows can be seen, sin will lose its attractiveness, and righteousness will be viewed as precious.

When corrupt doctrine is introduced to believers, it is nothing less than a Satanic lure to bring us back to the very state from which we had to be delivered in the first place. It was our humanity that necessitated our salvation, together with its wisdom and power. To move into that arena again is the epitome of ignorance, and fraught with unspeakable danger.

This is why the Spirit will briefly admonish us concerning how to react to those who divide, offend, and confuse the people of God. The very sight of those words should alarm us. This is no light matter, and you will sense that in the words the Spirit uses. He will summon us to proper action, and His summons is not to be ignored. In this text a most serious danger is addressed.

When corrupt doctrine is introduced to believers, it is nothing less than a Satanic lure to bring us back to the very state from which we had to be delivered in the first place. It was our humanity that necessitated our salvation, together with its wisdom and power. To move into that arena again is the epitome of ignorance, and fraught with unspeakable danger.

THERE ARE EVIL PEOPLE TO BE NOTED

“16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”

It should not surprise us that we contend with evil people. Cain and Abel were in the same house, with the same parents. Lot's wife was not in harmony with Lot in her attitude toward Sodom. Isaac and Ishmael were in the same house, with the same father. Jacob and Esau were in the same womb, and were raised up together. Moses had to contend with Korah and his rebels. Absalom was the son of David, the man after God's own heart. Judas was among the twelve. Certain men went out from John the Beloved and his company, yet were not of them, being imposters.

make a suggestion, or present some optional alternative. Ultimately, when seen properly, an area requiring urging is one in which great spiritual jeopardy exists. It is an area where our adversary the devil is at work, and where an assault is being made upon the faith of God's elect. It is imperative that men NOT rely upon human wisdom in such a matter.

A Divinely inspired appeal is not a summons to muster our natural energies, or rely upon natural wisdom. Urging awakens the new creation, calling it into dominating activity. It is a summons to put off the old man and put on the new man in a specific area. In order to confirm this, ponder the

(1 Thess 4:1).

- ☐ That we suffer, or allow, the word of exhortation among us (Heb 13:22).
- ☐ That we abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 Pet 2:11).

Without being distracted by these various admonitions, it is important to note that none of them are insignificant, or allow for us to ignore them. There is a certain mind set that has penetrated the church that is to be put down in the power of the Spirit. It is one in which the safety of believers is assumed, and diligence is viewed as a trait of unusual brethren, or those who are leaders among them. Some may rely upon their initial faith, as though that secured them for eternity. Others rely on their baptism, as though once they were baptized, they were suddenly removed from the arena of activity and responsibility. **Whatever the reason, any persuasion that leads an individual to assume they can ignore the beseechments and urgings of Scripture is an open door to the devil.**

It is never in order to be tolerant of things that detract from Christ and distort the Gospel. Whatever and whoever moves the saints away from God and the truth of God are their enemies.

The knowledge of these things should move us away from naivety concerning dangerous preachers and teachers within the church. It is never in order to be tolerant of things that detract from Christ and distort the Gospel. Whatever and whoever moves the saints away from God and the truth of God are their enemies. They are not to be countenanced. All of this is strong language in a society that has grown indifferent about both truth and the lie, about the Gospel and perversions of the Gospel. However, the Spirit will not allow lethargy to exist without challenging it.

WHEN URGING IS IN ORDER

“Now I urge you, brethren . . .”
Other versions read, *“I beseech you,”* ^{KJV}
“I appeal to you,” ^{RSV} *“And I call upon you,”* ^{YLT} and *“And now I make one more appeal.”* ^{NLT}

As I have noted before, there is nothing casual about beseeching or urging. The Spirit is not moving Paul to

various times the saints are urged or besought.

- ☐ Present our bodies as living sacrifices to God (12:1).
- ☐ Strive together in prayer for Kingdom laborers (15:30).
- ☐ That believers speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among them, and that they be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment (1 Cor 1:10).
- ☐ Be followers of those with great faith (1 Cor 4:16).
- ☐ That we submit ourselves to those who have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints (1 Cor 16:15-16).
- ☐ That we receive not the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6:1).
- ☐ That believers confirm their love to those who have repented and been restored (2 Cor 2:6).
- ☐ To cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:1-5).
- ☐ That we ought to walk and please God

One of the great weaknesses in the average church is the absence of strong exhortations and admonitions. I do not speak of barking orders, or issuing a list of “do's and don'ts.” Rather, sound exhortations are those *“contained in the Scripture”* (1 Pet 2:6). Of course, a congregation that has made the conversion of sinners its priority sees little need for such urging. However, their view is so obviously wrong that it requires an unusual level of ignorance to even embrace it. In God's Word, there is not a solitary exhortation to any church or individual concerning “reaching the lost.” It is not that such a work is bad, for we are all the result of some effort in that matter. However, the winning of souls is **a product of the proper emphasis,** and not the emphasis itself.

This may appear to be an unnecessary diversion. However, I have made it because the condition of the average Western church is nothing more than the result of its emphasis. A misplaced accentuation simply does not require the urgings of Scripture. That is

precisely why they are neglected.

THE SACRED WORK OF NOTING

“ . . . note those . . . ” Other versions read, “*mark them,*”^{KJV} “*keep your eye on those,*”^{NASB} “*watch out for those,*”^{NIV} “*consider those,*”^{DBY} and “*be on guard against the people.*”^{NJB}

There are people and things that are to be noted, or carefully observed and accurately identified. For example, we are to take special **note** of those who are dominated by a quest to know Christ, and be found in Him with the righteousness that comes from God through faith. Such individuals are an example to be followed (Phil 3:10-17). Failing to take note of such people within the perimeter of our lives brings certain disadvantage. If this was not the case, we would not be urged to note such people.

In the text before us, we will be asked to “*mark,*” or make a note of, those causing disruption to the body of Christ. The admonition is to be considered within the context of issues mentioned in our introduction. **The salvation of men is wholly dependent upon the working of God. If He does not work, there can be no salvation, reconciliation, or hope of glory.** All of that may appear quite simple, but it is not. There are some environments in which the Lord cannot and will not work. This fact has been amply demonstrated, so there should be no doubt about it. A few examples will suffice to confirm this to be the truth.

- ▣ **The flood.** In this case, the entire world was dominated by wicked violent men. It finally came to a point where God’s Spirit no longer strove with men. God was moved to destroy “*all flesh*” with a flood. Had there been any hope of reclamation, the world would have been spared (Gen 6-8).
- ▣ **The tower of Babel.** Here is a situation that differed from the time of the flood. It was not a matter of violence, or the presence of profound immortality. In the land of Shinar, men were quite productive. They joined together in solid unity to make a name for themselves by building a city and a tower. The project was most displeasing to the Lord, for He had been totally left out. Although united

and enterprising, an environment was formed in which God could not work or be glorified. Hence, He brought the project to a grinding halt by confusing the language of the people (Gen 11:1-9).

- ▣ **Sodom and Gomorrah.** From these cities a cry rose into the heavens that greatly displeased the Lord. Their cry was “*great,*” and their sin “*grievous*” to the Lord. He could not work in such a setting, and thus overthrew those cities with a fiery holocaust (Gen 18:20; 19:28-29).

- ▣ **The country in which Jesus was raised.** When Jesus came into the very area where He was raised, it was dominated by a spirit of indifference and a lack of perception. Although they were astonished by His poignant speech, they were “*offended*” by Him

No person should think themselves strong enough to survive in such an environment, for where the working of God is absent, survival is not possible. Salvation is the work of God. In fact, He IS our salvation (Ex 15:2; Deut 32:15; 1 Chron 16:35; Phil 1:28; Tit 2:11; 1 Pet 1:5; Rev 7:10; 19:1). If men insist upon remaining in an environment where God does not work, they simply cannot be saved. It is no wonder that the Spirit fairly shouts to us, “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*” (2 Cor 6:17). And again, “*Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath*

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because of their familiarity with Jesus in the flesh. It is written, “*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him.*” The environment was so hostile and dominated by unbelief, that Jesus could not work there. Thus it is written, “*He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them*”^{NIV} (Mark 6:1-5). **There are settings in which the Lord Jesus can do nothing extraordinary.** At the very best, only a few token workings can be found in such places.

The individuals we are exhorted to “*note,*” or “*mark,*” create an environment in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, do not work. They introduce manners that are repugnant to God and summon forth His wrath and indignation.

remembered her iniquities” (Rev 18:4-5).

Therefore, let us view with intense interest and keen sensitivity those the Spirit admonishes us to note, or mark.

CAUSING DIVISIONS

“ . . . who cause divisions . . . ” Other versions read, “*cause dissensions,*”^{NASB} and “*who stir up disagreements.*”^{NJB} With great zeal, the devil promotes unity among sinners, as in Shinar, and division among believers.

Behind this admonition is the truth that “*the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*”^{NKJV} (James 3:18). Spiritual fruit does not grow in disturbed and disquieted hearts or congregations. The unsettling of the soul moves one further from the working of the Lord. The further peace is removed from us, the least apt God is to work among us. **The division under**

consideration separates the children of God from one another.

Not the Division Jesus Caused

There is a division that comes from being exposed to Jesus. Thus it is written, "So there was a division among the people because of Him" . . . "Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This Man is not of God, because He keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them" . . . "There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings" (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). This is a division of flesh from Spirit, and sin from righteousness. In this case, Jesus came to bring such division. He said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Lk 12:51). This is not sinful division, but division caused by sin.

city" (Gen 11:7-8). A house divided against itself cannot stand.

Division Between Brethren

It is a Divine principle that "every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt 12:25), and "a house divided against a house falleth" (Lk 11:17). Divided houses are destined to fall. They "CANNOT" stand! Even if they are churches, they "cannot stand!" Even if they are great religious movements, they "cannot stand!" When division intrudes among those who bear the name of Jesus, the process of deterioration begins, and the fabric of unity begins to shred.

Division has to do with **the way** people think, with their perceptions and persuasions. Therefore the Spirit admonishes believers "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the

seditions, heresies" (Gal 5:20). Other versions read, "contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies," ^{NKJV} and "selfishness, dissension, party spirit." ^{RSV}

Division is the injection of poison in the mainstream of spiritual life. Whereas the Holy Spirit promotes unity (i.e., "the unity of the Spirit" – Eph 4:3), the devil, working through the flesh, promotes division. The Spirit promotes unity through the love of the brethren and the declaration of the truth. The devil promotes division by hatred and false doctrine.

The seriousness of division among the people of God cannot be overstated. We are living in a period of time the Scriptures call "a falling away" (2 Thess 2:3). It is a time when the love of many has "waxed cold" because of abounding and popular iniquity (Matt 24:12). The "Christian" world is dominated by a "form of godliness," while the very power of God is being denied and rejected (2 Tim 3:5). In such a climate, religious people have grown accustomed to division. Some even imagine that it is an advantage for the people, offering valid alternatives that more precisely meet their needs. However, this text will expose the foolishness of such an imagination.

The divisions in Corinth were caused by heresies, or factional teachings – teachings that divided the people. The condition had neutralized their influence, and set the stage for their demise.

The Division at Babel

We have the people involved in the tower of Babel for an example. They were perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. The work they undertook, however, was not a good one. They conspired to make a name for themselves by themselves, without any involvement with the Living God. Of them God said, "And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now **nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do**" (Gen 11:6). The Lord therefore came down and divided them, for "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

The action of the Lord is described in these words: "Go to, let us go down, and there **confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the**

same thing, **and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**" (1 Cor 1:10).

Evidence of Carnality

Division among the people of God is evidence of carnality and worldly-mindedness. Thus it is written, "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, **and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?**" (1 Cor 3:3). The divisions in Corinth were caused by heresies, or factional teachings – teachings that divided the people. The condition had neutralized their influence, and set the stage for their demise.

The Work of the Flesh

Division is evidence of the "works of the flesh," for which men will be condemned. In a remarkable catalog of the works of the flesh, the Spirit paints different views of division. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest . . . variance, emulations, wrath, strife,

Them that Cause Divisions!

Here is a word to all believers. It is not addressed to the leaders, or the more advanced, but to all of the saints. "Mark them which **cause divisions.**" There are people whose presence and teaching put brethren against each other. These are purveyors of poison and hawkers of heresy. They "CAUSE divisions."

Solomon referred to such people as those who "sow discord among brethren." He added that God "hates" such people (Prov 6:16-19). Often this is done by attempting to mingle human opinion with the truth of God, or declaring a purely human thought as though God was the author of it. Others take things God has said, perhaps in a former dispensation or circumstance, and bind it upon the people of God today. An example is the Jews who taught, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Others sought to bind upon

believers Old Covenant distinctions of meat and drink, holy days, new moons, and sabbath days (Col 2:16). Still others influenced believers to worship angels. Such men major on visions they claim to have seen, and thus depart from the Lord Jesus (Col 2:17). Still others press human disciplines upon believers which *“have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence”*^{NIV} (Col 2:23).

All such things *“cause divisions,”* and those who teach them are to be marked, or noted. From the gossip and talebearer to the false teacher, we are to keep our eye upon those who set brethren against one another. Such are enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, who seek their own betterment, and not that of the saints.

Why Is Division So Serious

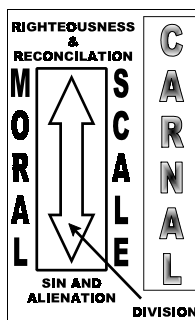
The seriousness of division is seen in this: **it reproduces the circumstances from which we had to be delivered in the first place.**

On the moral scale, sin and alienation are at the low extreme, and righteousness and reconciliation are at the high extreme. Division pushes men toward sin and alienation, thereby enabling Satan to work more freely. Division causes men to quench and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. It moves them to elevate the teachings of men above the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It promotes a disregard for the work of God in His people. Division makes the flesh so bold that it asserts itself against those to whom the Holy Spirit and holy angels minister, and for whom Jesus died and now intercedes. Do not begin to imagine that division is not a serious matter!

CAUSING OFFENSES

“ . . . who cause . . . offenses . . . ”

Offenses are stumbling blocks, when people *“put obstacles in your way.”*^{NIV} These are things that make it more difficult to run the race, perfect holiness, and prepare for the coming of the Lord.



While it is a grievous thing to have to acknowledge, there are some people from whom we must recover. Like the Canaanite, they are pricks in our eyes and thorns in our side

They are *“hindrances”*^{NASB} in the race, obstructions in the way, and barriers that inhibit spiritual growth.

Earlier, the Spirit mentioned those who ate *“with offense,”* causing a weaker brother act contrary to his conscience. Such conduct was said to *“destroy the work of God”* (14:20). Jesus declared that it was inevitable that offenses would come, *“but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh”* (Matt 15:7). There are professing Christians who make it more difficult for us to be faithful. In the presence of such people, we tend to ignore our conscience, placing a higher value on the influence of the offender than on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. **While it is a grievous thing to have to acknowledge, there are some people from whom we must recover.** Like the Canaanite, they are pricks in our eyes and thorns in our side (Num 33:55).

THINGS THAT ARE CONTRARY

“ . . . contrary to the doctrine which you learned . . . ” How are we to measure such people? What is the means by which we know who they are? This is not a carnal evaluation. The test is not whether or not we are attracted to, or turned away from, them in the flesh. We must rise above mere emotion in this judgment.

The division and offenses in question are *“contrary to the teaching you have learned.”*^{NIV} The divisions caused by these people are not the divisions Jesus caused. They do not reflect the teaching of the Gospel of Christ. Those whom God unites, these people divide. Those, of course, who have no regard for *“doctrine”* will be hard pressed to fulfill this admonition. Some treat *“sound doctrine”* as though it divided people. Because of their simplicity, they even compare doctrine with Jesus, saying they hold no doctrine, but stand for Jesus alone. That

position itself is divisive, for Jesus was noted for *“His doctrine”* (Matt 7:28; 22:33; Mk 1:22; 4:2; 11:18; 12:38). He referred to *“My doctrine”* (John 7:16).

Doctrinal Direction

There was a certain direction to the teaching of our Lord, as well as that of His Apostles. He made people more aware of His Father and His coming. He had a high regard for pleasing God at all cost, and seeking first His Kingdom and righteousness. When you listened to Jesus, He did not leave your head pinned to the earth. He left you thinking about God, heaven, hell, and the day of judgment. You sensed there was another world, and a point in time when you would be ushered into the presence of the Lord.

Paul wrote of *“the doctrine that is according to godliness,”* or that *“conforms to godliness”*^{NASB} (1 Tim 6:3). John wrote of *“the doctrine of Christ,”* in which **He** was preeminent (2 John 1:98). Such doctrine is *“adorned,”* or made attractive, by godly living and *“good fidelity”* (Tit 2:10).

Divisions and offenses that are *“contrary to the doctrine which you have learned”* do not promote godliness. Christ is not at the heart of such things. Both division and offenses move you closer to the earth, and further from heaven.

Dividing Over Private Persuasions

The people of God are not to divide over their private persuasions. These are matters in which there is a strong conviction, yet which is not Divinely sanctioned as an area in which to withdraw from a brother. In such matters the word is, *“So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God”* (Rom 14:22). These are views that intrude into the thinking of fellow believers, causing disruption and offense. It is assumed they have been formed out of a consciousness for God, yet they

cannot be imposed upon other brethren.

The Spirit can be specific about who we are to avoid, or people from whom we are to separate.

- ▶ We are to avoid those who **cause** divisions and offenses. *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them”* (Rom 16:17).
- ▶ We are to *“turn away”* from those having a *“form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”* (2 Tim 3:5).
- ▶ After a first and second admonition, we

man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess 3:11-14).

These are areas in which our association with believers can be impacted. Those who *“cause . . . offenses,”* in such cases, are the offenders that are mentioned.

Concerning other matters, any teaching that tends to be disruptive among those who have demonstrated a love for the truth, faith in Christ, and a love for the brethren, is to be treated like a coal of fire. It should

Zealously he pursued the things for which Christ had “apprehended” him. He forgot the things that were behind him, stretching forward to the things that were before him. He pressed toward the mark with unrelenting fervor.

The Example of Paul

Paul shared with us the spiritual motivation that compelled how he lived. He had counted everything *“loss,”* turning his back on a dedicated religious career. He not only suffered the loss of those things, but considered them but *“dung”* to be left behind. Zealously he pursued the things for which Christ had *“apprehended”* him. He forgot the things that were behind him, stretching forward to the things that were before him. He pressed toward the mark with unrelenting fervor. According to his own testimony, he did this in order to *“win Christ,”* being *“found in Him”* with an acceptable righteousness, in order that He might *“know Him,”* realize the *“power of His resurrection,”* and the *“fellowship of His sufferings.”* His aim was to *“attain to the resurrection of the dead,”* and obtain the *“prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* Noble ambitions, indeed!

After sharing these profound things, the Spirit moved Paul to call others into the same kind of life. Note, however, the manner in which he did this. *“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained”* NIV (Phil 3:7-16). Each person was to live according to the understanding they had, or had *“already attained.”* Because the approach Paul took to life was valid, those who could not see it because of his testimony, would be shown it by God Himself. Paul was willing to rely on this Kingdom procedure, if I may refer to it in this manner. If, on such a critical matter, Paul did not make such an issue, so as to divide the saints of God, what person is willing to disrupt the congregation of God over even lesser matters? This is an area where a great deficiency exists in not a few believers.

AVOID THEM!

“. . . and avoid them.” What is our response to be to those who *“cause divisions and offences?”* Are we to tolerate them, explain them, attempt to dissuade them from spreading their venom? Should our hearts be moved with great sympathy for them? Here is the mandate of the Spirit, and we are to take it seriously. **“AVOID THEM!”** Other

are to *“reject”* a man who is a heretic, insisting on doting about inconsequential matters. *“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject”* (Tit 3:9-10).

- ▶ Fellowship is to be withdrawn from professing believers who are caught up in immoral practices. *“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat”* (1 Cor 5:11).
- ▶ Those who refuse to work, becoming disorderly are busybodies, are to be duly noted, and fellowship withdrawn from them. *“For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that*

not be handled long, for it will have a damaging effect upon the saints of God. It may involve a very strong personal persuasion, but it cannot be used to disrupt the unity of believers.

Apart from the malicious doctrines that crafty men seek to perpetrate, I have found that divisive teaching almost always has to do with procedures and human relationships. Those who hold to certain views in such matters are not to be despised, and they are certainly free to hold their views. But they must keep them to themselves, not seeking to bind them on those who, even though they are trusting in the Lord, do not see things with the same perspective.

I say these things fully aware that it will appear on the surface to leave a door open for the wicked one. However, nothing could be further from the truth. A single example will suffice to confirm this to be the case.

versions read, “turn away from them,”^{NASB} “Keep away from them,”^{NIV} and “stay away from them.”^{NLT} We are told to do the same when confronting those “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5).

The word “avoid” is especially strong. It means to shun and stay aloof from. This is more than a mere physical reaction, although that is involved. To

“avoid” those causing divisions and offenses is to refuse to hear them or follow them. It is to decline to give them our ears or our attention. We are not to grant such people access to our hearts and minds, allowing them to impact our thinking.

When speaking of the path of the wicked, Solomon said, “Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Prov 4:15). The people of God are to “avoid

fornication” (1 Cor 7:2). “Foolish and unlearned questions” are to be “avoided,” for they “gender strifes” (2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9). Does anyone imagine that this is only a casual word, to be treated as though no danger was imminent when we are near those who “cause divisions and offenses?” Forever thrust such folly from your mind. The Spirit does not admonish us so strongly when there are no dangers, no jeopardies, or no liabilities!

HERE IS WHAT THEY REALLY ARE

“¹⁸ For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” It is the manner of the Spirit to speak of adversaries according to their character, not their appearance. Thus, our chief adversary, Satan, is referred to as “the old serpent” (Rev 12:9), “the dragon” (Rev 20:2), the “tempter” (1 Thess 3:5), “the Devil” (slanderer, Jude 1:9), “Satan” (accuser, Rev 2:13) “Abaddon” and “Apollyn” (destroyer, Rev 9:11). It should not surprise us that his “ministers” (2 Cor 11:15) are also referred to according to their character. The Spirit refers to them in a variety of ways, the magnitude of which is staggering.

The Spirit Refers to False Teachers

- ▶ Called “blind guides” (Matt 23:24).
- ▶ They are called “dogs” (Phil 3:2).
- ▶ They are called “ravening wolves” (Matt 7:15).
- ▶ They are “wolves” (Matt 10:16).
- ▶ They are “grievous wolves” (Acts 20:29).
- ▶ Jesus referred to them as “fools and blind” (Matt 23:19).
- ▶ Like their father, they are “serpents” (Matt 23:33).
- ▶ They are a “generation of vipers” (Matt 23:33).
- ▶ They are “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13).
- ▶ They are “deceitful workers” (2 Cor 11:13).
- ▶ The Spirit refers to them as those who “corrupt the Word of God” (2 Cor 2:17).
- ▶ They are “false brethren” (Gal 2:4).

- ▶ They are referred as those who “desire to make a fair show in the flesh” (Gal 6:12).
- ▶ They “lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14).
- ▶ They are those who “beguile you with enticing words” (Col 2:4).
- ▶ They have “turned aside unto vain jangling” (1 Tim 1:6).

- ▶ *truth*” (2 Tim 3:7).
- ▶ Such are “false prophets” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ They are “false teachers” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ They “bring in damnable heresies” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ They have “pernicious ways” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ Described as those who “with feigned words make merchandise of you” (2

Do not imagine that the presence of false teachers is without consequence. Their presence is not to be viewed casually. Nor, indeed, are the saints to suppose such individuals can be confronted with the wisdom of this world, or with natural resources. As lofty as some consider academics and the speculative approaches of men, they are insufficient to confront such despots.

- ▶ They are described as “understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).
- ▶ Those who are “proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising” (1 Tim 6:4).
- ▶ They are “men of corrupt minds” (1 Tim 6:5).
- ▶ Men who are “destitute of the truth” (1 Tim 6:5).
- ▶ Those who “creep into houses” (2 Tim 3:5).
- ▶ They are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the

- ▶ Pet 2:3).
- ▶ They are “antichrists” (1 John 2:18).
- ▶ They are “deceivers” (2 John 1:7).
- ▶ They are “ungodly men” (Jude 1:4).
- ▶ Think of them as “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers” (Tit 1:10).
- ▶ They “speak evil of those things which they know not” (Jude 1:10).
- ▶ They are like “brute beasts” (Jude 1:10).
- ▶ They are “as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed” (2 Pet 2:12).
- ▶ Those who “speak evil of the things that they understand not” (2 Pet 2:12).

This is not an exhaustive list. It

does provide us with a Divine perspective of such individuals – those who impose themselves upon the flock of God as though they were proper representatives of the Lord, and faithful proclaimers of His Word.

Do not imagine that the presence of false teachers is without consequence. Their presence is not to be viewed casually. Nor, indeed, are the saints to suppose such individuals can be confronted with the wisdom of this world, or with natural resources. As lofty as some consider academics and the speculative approaches of men, they are insufficient to confront such despots.

With great care, therefore, the Holy Spirit more precisely identifies these intruders. He will not move us to think kindly of them, or treat them as naive and

Whatever may be said of those who “*cause divisions and offenses*,” they are NOT serving Christ. His purposes are not being advanced by them. They do not bring advantages to the saints. They are not guided by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is neither directing or blessing them. Their ministry is outside the circumference of Divine commission and blessing. They do not make Jesus more plain, or His will more clear.

Does anyone imagine this is not a serious matter? Are there not only two masters? If Jesus is not being served, there is only one other personality that can be served, for “*no man can serve two masters*” (Matt 6:24). Jesus said, “*If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will my Father honor*” (John 12:26). If, then,

It is the inmost part of the natural man. A similar statement is made of false prophets in Philippians 3:19. “*Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*” Such are serving purely earthly, or fleshly, interests. They are wrapped up in the temporal, and neither live nor teach with eternity in mind. Their ministry is wholly unrelated to that of the Lord Jesus Christ. At no point does their earthly agenda intersect with the purpose of God Almighty.

The message delivered by such intruders, who cause divisions and offenses, is completely related to life in this world. Their false gospel concerns the flesh, and life in the flesh. They offer no remedy for sin, and do not hold before men the eternal inheritance reserved in heaven for those who are in Christ Jesus.

To reaffirm the truth here declared, those who cause “divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine” are not serving Christ. Consequently, they are of no value to the people of God. They are obstacles to spiritual progress.

Isaiah spoke of such imposters as “*greedy dogs which can never have enough*” (Isa 56:11). Their appetites are larger than what they have received, and thus they even preach and teach to fatten their coffers and satisfy their flesh. Of such, Solomon said, “*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase*” (Eccl 5:10). To them, their possessions, recognition by their peers, and stability in this world are everything.

sincere. It is imperative that we give heed to the spirit of this text, as well as to the information it conveys. You simply cannot consider these words soberly, and come away with a casual attitude about those who cause division, and offenses.

THEY DO NOT SERVE CHRIST

“*For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*” Other versions read, “*For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites,*”^{NASB} “*For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites,*”^{NIV} “*Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests,*”^{NLT} and “*people of that sort are servants not of our Lord Christ, but of their own greed.*”^{NJB}

They Are Not Serving Christ

these men are not serving Christ, it is because they are not following Him. They are **not** on the narrow road that leads to life, and thus the Father will not honor their labors. Unless they are changed, Jesus will repudiate them in the day of judgment as “*workers of iniquity*” (Lk 13:27). What we are dealing with here, is that serious!

To reaffirm the truth here declared, those who cause “*divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine*” are **not** serving Christ. Consequently, they are of no value to the people of God. They are obstacles to spiritual progress.

THEY SERVE THEIR OWN BELLY

“*. . . but their own belly . . .*” The word “*belly*” denotes the earthly, or temporal, appetites of a person.

They bear remarkable resemblance to the ancient Cretians, of whom it is said, “*The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies*” (Tit 1:12). Other versions read “*lazy gluttons*” instead of “*slow bellies.*” The idea is of people with no initiative, who live only to gratify their fleshly appetites. That is precisely what serving ones own “*belly*” means. Such do not intend to please God, but to gratify self. They are slaves to the flesh, and the appetites that gratify it. That proclivity is reflected in what they preach and teach. It shapes their presentation of the Gospel, and determines their doctrinal emphasis.

THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY DECEIVE

“*. . . and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive . . .*” Other versions read, “*smooth and flattering speech,*”^{NASB} “*pleasing speeches and good words,*”^{DRA} “*smooth and well-said words,*”

^{BBE} “smooth talk and glowing words,”^{NLT} and “talk that sounds smooth and reasonable.”^{NJB}

Those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine are unabrasive **to the flesh** in their speech. Using flattery, they leave men comfortable in, at the very best, a state of spiritual infancy. At the worse, they make men comfortable in vice and deliberate transgression.

Speaking of this kind of approach, Paul is more detailed in Second Corinthians. There he declares true ministers have “renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Cor 4:2). Those using “smooth words and flattering speech” distort the Word of God to serve their own purposes. Because they give great emphasis to the flesh, they cause divisions and offenses, for both are products of the flesh, having no place in God’s Kingdom.

THE HEARTS OF THE SIMPLE

“ . . . the hearts of the simple.” Other versions read, “the hearts of the unsuspecting,”^{NASB} “the minds of naive people,”^{NIV} “the hearts of the innocent,”^{DRA} and “the hearts of those who have no knowledge of evil.”^{BBE} The word “simple” does not refer to a state of intellectual inferiority, or to those lacking normal mental capacities. This condition refers to those who are not yet acquainted with the aggressiveness of the devil. Hence, they cannot imagine someone coming in the name of the Lord bringing a message that is not true.

Those who “cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine” direct their teaching to such souls. They have no ministry for the mature, and thus can never say with Paul, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37). Nor, indeed, will they ever be heard to say, “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect” (1 Cor 2:6). The teacher sent from God appeals to the spiritually mature to confirm the truth of what he speaks. **Those who “cause divisions and offenses” appeal to the immature,**

who are closer to the flesh than to the Spirit, and have not yet had their “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

The Danger of Spiritual Simplicity

There is a very real danger associated with being “simple,” or spiritually immature. In order to ensure that this state is only brief, and associated with the beginning of our life in Christ, the Lord has ordered His Kingdom in a certain manner. That manner is described, among other places, in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. There, “Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” are declared to have been given to the church “for the perfecting of the saints.” The aim of the perfection, or maturing, of the saints is this: “That we henceforth **be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about**

peace” are multiplied to us “*through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Pet 1:2). The “spirit of wisdom and revelation,” or the ability to handle the truth, comes “*in the knowledge of Him*” (Eph 1:17). Even the appropriation of “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*” comes “*through the knowledge of Him*” (2 Pet 1:3). **When our knowledge of God is limited, we receive limited measures of grace and peace – because that very knowledge is the conduit through which grace and peace are received.** When our knowledge and understanding of God and His ways is restricted, our appropriation of all things pertaining to life and godliness is also restricted.

The Point of the Text

The point of the text is that those causing “divisions and offenses” focus

Those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine are unabrasive to the flesh in their speech. Using flattery, they leave men comfortable in, at the very best, a state of spiritual infancy.

with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:8-14).

It is certainly right to minister to the spiritually undeveloped and novices, in order that they might “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15). In fact, it is imperative that this be done. However, this is neither the core nor the thrust of the ministry of the truth of God. All such teaching and guidance is intended to bring the saints to a place where they can ponder and profit from “the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10).

The Role of the Knowledge of God

The reason for this arrangement should be apparent to us. It is by “**increasing in the knowledge of God,**” or acquaintance with Him and His ways, that we are more precisely conformed to the image of Christ (Col 1:10). “Grace and

their attention upon those who are unacquainted with the ways of the Lord. They have nothing for those who are “rooted and grounded,” have the “full assurance of faith,” or are “walking in the Spirit” (Eph 3:17; Heb 10:22; Gal 5:25). What is even more, they do not focus on the immature in order to bring advantages to them, or assist them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, they are actually seeking to satisfy themselves and fulfill their own agenda.

Their subtle message arouses the remnants of the flesh, thus causing “divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine.” It is clothed in smooth and flattering words, but brings no advantage to the “new man.” It pulls men down into the arena of flesh and blood rather than up into the heavenly places.

Those who are truly from God

declare a message that edifies both the mature and the novice. It feeds the sheep and carries the lambs, so to speak. That is precisely why the truth of Christ produces unity among those who embrace it. When the truth is ministered in the power of the Spirit, the elder and the novice can sit at the same table and receive nourishment. It is the nature of truth as it is in Jesus, to provide food for every level of discipleship, with none being neglected.

One Final Word

The seriousness of the text before us cannot be overemphasized. An approach to preaching and teaching that is limited to spiritually elementary things, actually opens the door for imposters and

intruders. **Unless teaching lifts men upward, the seeds of division and offense will eventually be sown.** The closer we are to the earth, the more imminent sinful divisions and offenses become. Such *"divisions and offenses"* can only grow in certain kinds of soil. That soil is directly related to the teachings of men who *"have not the Spirit"* (Jude 1:19).

It is to be understood that a proper doctrinal emphasis will also produce division – a division of the flesh from the Spirit. Those with no appetite for the truth will soon turn away, like certain who heard the Lord Jesus (John 6:66). However, for those who have received *"the love of the truth,"* such growth can

be realized as will constrain the individual to hate sin, make war against it within their own members, and consistently resist the devil. Those who teach unto edification will produce these results among those who receive their word. They will never cause divisions and offenses.

If *"It is an honor for a man to cease from strife"* (Prov 20:3), then it is most dishonorable to be the cause of strife, contention, division, and offenses. If the blessing of the Lord is pronounced upon *"peacemakers"* (Matt 5:9), and *the "fruit of righteousness"* is sown by those who *"make peace"* (James 3:18), what must be said of those who disrupt that peace? Zealously avoid such people!

GOING ON FROM OBEDIENCE

"¹⁹ For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil." Here Paul expresses his confidence in the brethren responding favorably to his exhortation. His warning concerning those who caused *"divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine"* was not given because of a hesitating spirit among the brethren at

mentioned that the faith of the brethren in Rome was *"spoken of throughout the whole world"* (Rom 1:8). Now he speaks of their obedience, because it was constrained by their faith (Rom 1:5).

OBEDIENCE THAT IS KNOWN

"For your obedience has become known to all . . ." Other versions read, *"For the report of your obedience has reached to all,"*^{NASB} *"Everyone has heard*

see in this text. He does not commend the brethren for responding to the personal promptings of the Lord, although that is, indeed a commendable quality. However, the perception of such prompting is highly subjective, depending upon the condition and understanding of the one so moved. There are persuasions that are *"not from the Lord,"* yet can be treated as though they were (Gal 5:8). It is also possible for a challenging occasion to arise from the Lord, and the individual be totally unaware this is the case (Judges 14:4).

I know of no place in the Apostolic doctrine where people are asked to interpret their personal inclinations independently of the Word of God.

Rome. Rather, he was at liberty to speak in this manner because of their forwardness to obey. **When the saints respond favorably to the truth that is given to them, they will be given more.** Thus Jesus said, *"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance"* (Matt 13:12). Again our Lord said, *"Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given"* (Mark 4:24).

Early in this Epistle, Paul

about your obedience,"^{NIV} *"For your obedience is published in every place,"*^{DRA} *"For all have knowledge of how you do what you are ordered,"*^{BBE} and *"But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord."*^{NLT} How marvelous to be noted for obedience! This trait was also found among the Philippians, of whom Paul said, *"ye have always obeyed"* (Phil 2:12). Such people are noted for taking hold of the truth and conforming their lives to it.

AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

There is an important distinction to

While the Lord does direct His people in very personal ways, under the New Covenant, the accent of obedience is always a response to the Gospel of Christ, and truth that is common to all saints (Rom 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 16:26; Gal 3:1; 5:7; 2 Thess 1:8; 2 Thess 3:14; 1 Pet 3:1; 1 Pet 4:17). **I know of no place in the Apostolic doctrine where people are asked to interpret their personal inclinations independently of the Word of God.** This is not to be construed as meaning the Lord does not move His people to do "this or that." It does mean, however, that so far as the revelation is concerned, that moving is always in strict concert with the Gospel of Christ and the revealed purpose of God. For God to otherwise deal with His children would require personal interests to be elevated too highly, placing the revealed purpose of

God into the background.

So far as I know, no one in Scripture is commended for being obedient in buying a piece of land, building a house, marrying a wife, or some other matter relating to social and domestic circumstances. The obedience commended in Scripture always relates to the “common salvation” (Jude 1:3) and the “common faith” (Tit 1:4). Wherever obedience, or a failure to obey, is sited, there was always an articulated word from God. **If it was a personal word, such as the one directed to Abraham, it eventually became public, and became a basis for sound spiritual reasoning. It also had to do with benefits that extended beyond the individual to whom God spoke.** This reasoning may also be applied to the dreams of young Joseph (Gen 37:5-10), Gideon (Judges 7:13), Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5), and Joseph the husband of Mary (Matt 2:12-13).

True Excellence

True excellence must be traced back to men’s response to the word of the Gospel. It should be evident why this is true. **Other areas of moral excellence, making right choices, etc., do not require immediate involvement with God, faith in His Son, or the belief of the Gospel.**

The “obedience,” therefore, for which the brethren in Rome were noted, specifically related to how they responded to the Gospel. What others had rejected, they had received. While some thrust the Word of God from themselves (Acts 13:46), they took it to themselves, obeying it. They had become noted for their obedience. What a marvelous reputation, and it is to be greatly desired among us.

Now Paul appeals to that obedience in regard to their response to those causing divisions and offenses. While this may appear to be a rather technical point, it is critical that we understand how God regards obedience. As with all of life, obedience is never the result of leaning to our own understanding (Prov 3:5-6).

GLAD ON YOUR BEHALF

“Therefore I am glad on your behalf . . .” Other versions read, “therefore I am

rejoicing over you,”^{NASB} “so I am full of joy over you,”^{NIV} and “I am very pleased with you for it.”^{NJB}

The idea is that Paul rejoiced that an obedient spirit was evident in the brethren. In this, they were like the Lord Jesus who “learned obedience by the things that He suffered” (Heb 5:8). Amidst the difficulties brought on by his own faithfulness to the Lord, the recollection of the obedient spirit of the brethren brought joy to Paul’s heart. That, of course, was but a faint reflection of the joy it brought to the Lord of hosts.

The effect of obedience upon the Lord of glory is found throughout the

Prior to Christ’s entrance into the world, He is never said to have been “obedient” to the Father. His “obedience” relates exclusively to His entrance into the world, His holy life of preparation, and His death and resurrection (Matt 3:15; Matt 26:39-42; John 4:34; 5:30,36; 6:38; 15:10; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8; 10:7-9).

The Holy Angels

The holy angels are said to “do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His Word” (Psa 103:20), but are never said to be “obedient.” They carry out the Word of the Lord swiftly, apparently without confronting any tendency to resist, or without having to extend themselves to respond to the honor and

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Word of God. Great men and women of faith have been placed in the Scriptures because of their obedience (Gen 22:18; Josh 22:2; 2 Chron 11:4; Hag 1:12; Rom 6:17; Phil 2:12; Heb 11:8). Those whom the Lord does not commend are noted as those who “obeyed not” (Josh 5:6; 2 Kgs 18:12; Jer 11:8; Dan 9:14; Zeph 3:2; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17).

Why It Is This Way

There is a reason why such a high value is placed upon “obedience.” This is a word and an activity that applies to men in this world. “Obedience” assumes the presence of opposing influences. It involves an assertion of the will and the putting down of contrary thoughts.

Perfected Spirits

Those who are “with the Lord” in glory are never said to be obedient. They “follow the Lamb whosoever He goeth,” but once out of the body, they are never said to “obey” Him.

The Lord Jesus

glory of God.

An Area Where Men Can Excel

While the word “obedience” etymologically involves compliance and submission, and might technically appear to apply to angels, the Holy Spirit uses the word exclusively in regard to mankind. Even the Lord Himself is never said to have obeyed God until He took upon Himself the form of a man. **Obedience is an area of response to God in which men can excel and bring honor and glory to the Lord.** Thus, obedient men and obedience itself are always commended in Scripture.

Traits of Obedience

Obedience reveals a tender heart. It confirms the presence of faith, and relates to the works that faith produces. Where obedience to God takes place, there has been “reverence and godly fear” before Him (Heb 12:28). **It is not so much the obedience itself that causes rejoicing, but what is confirmed by that obedience.** Those who fail to obey

confirm they have thrust the Word of God away, judging themselves “unworthy of everlasting life” (Acts 13:46). Just that surely, those who obey substantiate they have taken the Word of God into their hearts, desiring the eternal life that He freely offers to them. That circumstance brings joy to those who are working together with God.

Thus John the beloved confessed, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). Paul also “rejoiced” when the Corinthians “sorrowed to repentance” over a matter that had caused him great concern (2 Cor 7:9). **The measure of a true teacher**

10:16). That is, while confronting those who would hurt and devour them, or cause divisions and offenses, His disciples were to so conduct themselves as always be beneficial. They were never to be carried away with the contentious and harmful doctrines of those who spoke out of the reservoir of human wisdom. Wherever such people exist, there is danger.

The point is that “good” is to be done, not merely recognize. **Jesus has not called us to be mere spiritual analysts, but to be able to recognize, and involve ourselves in, “good.”** That takes wisdom, and wisdom comes

LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” All of this, he was apprised, would come after he had died. However, Hezekiah was wise concerning that was good. This message did not cause him to despair. Thus he answered, “*Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?*” (2 Kings 20:17-20). **Being wise concerning what is good is exceedingly practical, yielding great benefits.**

SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL

“... and simple concerning evil.” Other versions read, “innocent in what is evil,”^{NASB} “guileless in what is evil,”^{NRSV} “and without knowledge of evil,”^{BBE} “harmless as to the evil,”^{YLT} and “unsophisticated about all that is evil.”^{NJB}

The idea here is not that Paul wanted the brethren to be simply-minded about evil, unable to perceive it, and ignorant concerning its effects. There is no advantage in such a frame of mind. Nor, indeed, is he referring to the mere detection of evil, such as being able to “discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

The Manner of False Teachers

Here the Spirit leads us to consider the manner in which those who cause divisions and offenses operate. **The field of their expertise is found in deception and guile.** Of them it is said, “*by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*” (Eph 4:14). **Like their father the devil, they are expert in making evil appear as though it was good.** They are better at making the wrong appear right than in shining the jewel of redemption, and throwing the light upon the Lord Jesus. They know how to take what brings hurt to the body of Christ, and move men to embrace it, thinking they are gaining an advantage. The saints cannot afford to be ignorant of such devices!

Legion is the name of those perpetrating doctrines that have been foisted upon the church as though they were true, yet which caused divisions and offenses. The only way this can happen is for the proponents of such dogmas to be

The measure of a true teacher or preacher can be seen in his ability to rejoice in the obedience of the people to the truth of God.

or preacher can be seen in his ability to rejoice in the obedience of the people to the truth of God.

WISE IN WHAT IS GOOD

“... *but I want you to be wise in what is good* . . .” Other versions read, “*but I want you to be wise about what is good,*”^{NIV} “*but yet I would have you wise to that which is good,*”^{WEB} and “*I want you to see clearly what is right.*”^{NLT}

The words “*but yet,*”^{KJV} or “*but I want,*” indicate that **obedience must lead us to the point where we are discerning.** Obedience is greatly limited if we cannot detect what is right, or are not wise enough to decipher what is good and without corruption. Things that are “good” promote God-honoring results, bringing everlasting benefits to the children of God.

Concerning wisdom and good, Jesus said, “*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*” (Matt

with spiritual maturity.

More Specifically

There is an even more specific reason for this word. The brethren in Rome had a reputation for being obedient. Of itself, that is a good thing. It must not be forgotten, however, that “*the wicked one*” will attempt to exploit such a tendency. His “*ministers*” (2 Cor 11:15) are also looking for people who will quickly obey what they say. The people of God are to develop a wisdom that is able to instantly recognize the good, to which they are to give themselves fully. Thus, even when a message is delivered that sounds bad on the surface, yet if it is good, they will be quickly able to detect and conform to it.

An Example of Wisdom in Good

King Hezekiah is a sterling example of this. Isaiah brought him a word that did not sound good. “*Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the*

cunning concerning evil – to be able to so thoroughly misrepresent the lie, that men think it to be truth. **Just as surely as Satan used wit to deceive Eve into doing what was evil, so His ministers use cunning craftiness to put pressure on the saints to accept what causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ.**

It is comely when the people of God gain wisdom to recognize and do what is good, possessing no adeptness at presenting or doing evil. They know what evil is, but they are unlearned in executing it. They cannot put God into the background of their thinking in order to do evil. For this reason, evil becomes especially offensive to them. It is abrasive

to their spirits and loathsome to their hearts. When a purveyor of spiritually damaging doctrines confronts them, they become expert in avoiding that person, unable and unwilling to carry out his bidding, or embrace his teaching. There is certainly room for a great deal of this wisdom in our day. Knowing how and when to do good is found in such wisdom.

SATAN'S FUTURE REGARDING US

“²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” Here is one of the grand promises of Scripture. For centuries it has ministered great hope to the saints while they were under attack from the powers of darkness. We do well to frequently recall this word, for it is a Divine commitment. **It teaches us not to assess our situation according to appearance, nor to imagine that our current circumstances will never change.** Faith can look beyond today and this time. Unlike our fleshly senses, it is not limited to time and space. Those who *“live by faith”* are noted for their vision – for being able to peer into the future, beyond *“this present evil world.”* The secret to their overcoming lives is that they live in view of what is coming. This is of particular relevance when it comes to our adversary, the devil.

THE DIVINE MANNER

As is the Divine manner, a wonderful promise is placed before the saints. The promises are the appointed means through which we *“participate in the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). The promises of God have a strong drawing power to those who believe. **They assist us in gaining a proper spiritual focus, and reduce the weight of suffering.** It is no wonder they are called *“exceeding great and precious promises.”*

This promise is designed to encourage them in the good fight of faith. It is quite true that they will have *“tribulation”* in the world (John 16:33). Their adversary, the devil, does walk about as a roaring lion, *“seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8). They will surely confront subtle teachers who will *“cause*

divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine.” However, those difficulties and confrontations are not all there is to life. There are also Divine commitments that are given to us along the way, and they are good and effective. The Spirit places

to the poor saints in Jerusalem will be received, and that God would bring him to them in joy. The *“God of peace”* will superintend these things.

☐ **Philippians 4:9.** The saints of God are urged to *“do”* what they have

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just such a promise before us now. It is of sufficient weight to engage our whole heart and mind, and will serve the mitigate the hardships we must face en route to glory.

THE GOD OF PEACE

“And the God of peace . . .” This is the second time this phrase has been used in Romans, the other being in the thirty-third verse of chapter fifteen. It is also used in Philippians 4:9 and Hebrews 13:20. The Lord is also referred to as *“the God of love and peace”* (2 Cor 13:11), and *“the very God of peace”* (1 Thess 5:23). In each of these cases, a significant work is set before the saints.

☐ **Romans 15:33.** Here the brethren are urged to pray that Paul might be delivered from those who do not believe, that the offering he is bringing

learned, received, heard, and seen in Paul. In this effort, *“the God of peace”* will be with them.

☐ **2 Corinthians 13:11.** Believers are admonished to be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, and to live in peace. *“The God of love and peace”* will be with them in this work.

☐ **1 Thessalonians 5:23.** It is *“the very God of peace”* who will sanctify believers in their *“whole spirit, soul, and body.”*

☐ **Hebrews 13:20-21.** Here the perfection of the people of God is mentioned, in which God works to do His own will, working in them *“that which is well pleasing in His sight.”* This staggering work is depicted as being accomplished by *“the God of peace.”*

In each of these texts, peace provides the environment in which

the work and will of the Lord is accomplished. This is a vital aspect of Kingdom life, and must be seen more clearly by each believer. Many of God's children are unable to make significant progress in the faith because they are continually in hostile and adversarial circumstances. Their hearts are disquieted, and turmoil and agitation plague them. **No child of God is capable of controlling such environments.** For many, this proves to be a source of frustration and despair. It is good when the concept of "*the God of peace*" breaks upon us. He, and He alone, can quiet our troubled seas, and bring calmness to the soul.

In this particular text, the Spirit mentions the ultimate

Through Christ's vicarious death Satan was "destroyed" in the heavenly places, and rendered powerless in the domain of faith. He remains invincible in the earth. He cannot be resisted or overcome apart from faith.

adversarial circumstance, and the consummate enemy. If those matters are to be resolved by our Lord, we have no reason to be overcome by lesser circumstances and inferior foes!

THE CRUSHING OF SATAN

"... will crush Satan..." Other versions read, "will **bruise** Satan," ^{KJV} and "will be **crushing** Satan." ^{BBE} This promise clarifies the nature of our present battle, and dispels the confusion caused by spiritual simplicity. It provides a very needful perspective, and will assist us in formulating proper views of the life of faith. In order to set the stage for the exposition of this promise, it is essential that we consider some of the proclamations concerning the overthrow of Satan and his hosts. In the consideration of these proclamations, we want to cast down spiritual simplicity.

Satan Has Been Destroyed

In His death, the Lord Jesus fulfilled the statement God made to Satan in the garden: "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall **bruise thy head**, and thou shalt bruise his heel*" (Gen 3:15). Other versions read, "*He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.*" ^{NIV} The picture is that of Jesus stomping on Satan's head with His heel, and Satan lashing back by striking Christ's heel. Satan's strike was administered in Christ's suffering and death, and was to Christ's "*heel*," or His humanity. Jesus made Himself vulnerable in no other area, confessing that Satan had "*nothing*" in Him (John 14:30).

In the Apostolic elaboration of the promise in Genesis, the Spirit said,

"*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that **through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil***" (Heb 2:14). The word "*destroy*" does not mean annihilate, or rid the world once and for all of the devil. He is still walking about "*seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pet 5:8). Neither, indeed, does it mean that Satan is rendered impotent or powerless, for he must be "*resisted*" by steadfastness in the faith (1 Pet 5:9). Such resistance is not required unless there is some kind of power resident in the foe. In fact, there is no such thing as a powerless foe.

Through Christ's vicarious death Satan was "destroyed" in the heavenly places, and rendered powerless in the domain of faith. He remains invincible in the earth. He cannot be resisted or overcome apart from faith.

From another perspective, in His death Jesus delivered a death blow to Satan – one from which he will eventually expire. The "*old serpent*" is presently in the death throes, but like a wounded beast, he remains vicious and dangerous.

Spoiled Principalities and Powers

Through the cross, Jesus also "*spoiled*," or plundered, principalities and powers that had dominated the world. Part of the Gospel includes this announcement: "... *His cross; and having **spoiled principalities and powers**, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it* [His cross]" (Col 2:15). Now these powers can hold no person or group of persons who believe on Christ, thereby receiving the salvation of God. Their only power is in the domain of unbelief. While they have, in a sense, been stripped of their power, they still retain a measure of it where faith is not present. They can only be overthrown when men wrestle against them in faith (Eph 6:12). The fact that we must "*wrestle*" against them confirms that when Jesus "*spoiled*" them, they were not rendered totally without influence or power.

Simplistic Views

There are simplistic views of Satan's bruising and the spoiling of principalities and powers that lead men to imagine they can be casually overcome. This view has come from the devil Himself. Using craftiness and subtlety, Satan has ensnared many a naive soul, taking them "*captive at his will*" (2 Tim 2:26). Such persons must "*recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.*" This is such a difficult task that God must grant repentance to the one who has been snared in order that recovery can be realized (2 Tim 2:25).

A Warning to the Church

In the apocalyptic Gospel, the book of the Revelation, the Gospel is presented in a picture, or animated, form. The twelfth chapter makes this presentation. The birth of Christ through the Jewish nation is depicted as a woman traveling in birth, with the devil, as a dragon, positioning himself to devour the Child as soon as He was born. He also marshaled a great host of fallen spirits to join him in his intent (12:1-4). However, with one grand statement, the birth, life, death,

resurrection, and ascension of Christ is declared. *“And she brought forth a Man Child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her Child was caught up unto God, and to His throne”* (12:5). Thus, Satan’s intent was thoroughly and decisively frustrated.

As soon as this happened, the people of God fled to a place where spiritual sustenance could be ministered to them, even though they were seemingly vulnerable to the wicked one (12:6). At this point, Satan is pictured as being thrust out of the heavenly realms. Because Jesus had taken away the sins of the world, and there was no further basis for accusation before God, a place for him and his cohorts no longer existed in heaven (12:6-8).

Salvation Has Come

Satan, however, was not cast then into the lake of fire, which is his appointed destiny (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10). Instead, he was cast out *“into the earth.”* The casting of Satan and his angels out of heaven is equated with the coming of salvation, for a *“loud voice”* from heaven responded, ***“Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them”*** (12:10-12a).

Cast Into the Earth

However, this was not the end of the matter. Those dwelling *“in the heavens”* were rid of the *“old serpent,”* but those remaining upon the earth were not! A shout from heaven comes to the domain of earth. *“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”* (12:12b). This is a great voice from heaven, and is not to be taken lightly. **While we are not to overestimate the power and influence of the devil, care must be taken not to underestimate it!**

Filled with Wrath, with a Short Time

The devil, our adversary, is acutely aware that his time is running out: *“knowing that he has only a short time.”*

^{NASB} God Almighty tells us that circumstance puts us into jeopardy. It makes living in this world a liability. In order that we may realize the extent of Satan’s opposition, the Spirit continues to paint a picture of his present activity. Realizing he has lost the battle with Jesus, being soundly and publicly defeated, he turns his attention to those who follow Jesus and keep His commandments. First, he seeks to wash away *“the woman,”* or the people of God, with a quick and devastating flood of persecution. But *“the earth helped the woman,”* absorbing the shock of Satan’s vicious attack (12:14-16). A remnant was preserved, the Gospel continued to be preached, and the saints were *“nourished from the face of the serpent.”*

armor of God” that they will be *“able to stand against the wiles of the devil”* (Eph 6:11).

- ☐ It is possible for believers, should they be lifted up with pride, to *“fall into the condemnation of the devil”* (1 Tim 3:6), and into the *“reproach and the snare of the devil”* (3:7).
- ☐ Our foe is so formidable that before we can effectively *“resist”* him, we must first *“submit”* ourselves to God (James 4:7).
- ☐ Married believers are reminded that Satan can *“tempt”* them because of their incontinency (1 Cor 7:5).
- ☐ All believers are warned that Satan can *“get an advantage”* of us, if we are *“ignorant of his devices”* (2 Cor 2:11).
- ☐ Transforming himself into an *“angel of light,”* he leads unwary souls into the night of sin and error (2 Cor 11:14).
- ☐ Time and again, Satan hindered the

As frustrating as this must have been for the devil, he did not throw down his weapons. Instead, he “went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”

Satan Initiates a War

As frustrating as this must have been for the devil, he did not throw down his weapons. Instead, he *“went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (12:17). He continues in this *“war”* unto this very day, targeting all who refuse to let go of God’s commandments, and keep the *“testimony of Jesus”* in their possession.

In view of this war, the saints are frequently admonished concerning their view of and response to Satan’s advances. The Holy Spirit never paints a naive picture of the devil, or leads us to believe there is no danger or jeopardy when he works. Ponder some of these warnings.

- ☐ *“Do not give the devil an opportunity”* ^{NASB} (Eph 4:27).
- ☐ It is only as we *“put on the whole*

Apostle Paul (1 Thess 2:18).

- ☐ We are even warned of a spiritual despot *“whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved”* (2 Thess 2:9).
- ☐ Early in the history of the church, there were those who *“turned aside after Satan”* (1 Tim 5:15).

The Context of Our Text

All of this is the context of our text – the jewel-setting in which this precious promise is placed. If Satan is powerless, and can be dismissed with but a casual word, the promise will have no power at all. If the saints experience no setbacks, no seemingly effective opposition, and no hindering influences, this word will have no effect upon them!

This promise presumes the saints of God are experiencing trouble, perplexity, persecution, and being cast down (2 Cor 4:8-9). Behind the promise is the fact that in this world we experience dishonor, evil reports, being unknown, dying, chastening, sorrow, poverty, and sometimes possessing nothing (2 Cor 6:8-9). It speaks to those who have been subjected to perils, weariness, painfulness, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, and cold and nakedness (2 Cor 11:26). It holds forth promise to those who are pressed above their strength, being put to such a test they even “*despair of life*” (2 Cor 1:8).

Those who boast of total control in their life and only happiness and prosperity do not leap for joy when they hear this promise. The devil himself has deceived them, causing them to have no regard for the promise of God and the

where the devil is excluded. Then, and only then, will all of these experiences cease to exist (Rev 21:1-4).

Jesus has delivered the death blow to Satan! He Himself will never again be subjected to Satan’s devices. **He has passed into the domain where the devil cannot enter, and where adversity and sorrow cannot be experienced.** Now the Spirit assures us that we will experience the same thing!

UNDER YOUR FEET

“... will crush Satan under your feet . . .” Every version reads precisely the same – “*under your feet.*”

Here the Spirit makes a faint illusion to the fact that, as Jesus was, we also are “*seed.*” While we are not “*the seed of the woman,*” as Jesus exclusively

Behind the promise is the fact that in this world we experience dishonor, evil reports, being unknown, dying, chastening, sorrow, poverty, and sometimes possessing nothing (2 Cor 6:8-9). It speaks to those who have been subjected to perils, weariness, painfulness, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, and cold and nakedness

warnings of the Spirit. But for those who have their hand on the plow, this promise is a sweet and comforting elixir. Sometimes they are required to plow in the wind and rain. Other times they must plow in the midst of a noisome pestilence, or with the shout of the enemy all around them. God does not make this promise to those who are at “*ease in Zion*” (Amos 6:1).

No! This promise is for those who are in the thick of the battle. They know full well that as long as Satan is in our domain there is a tumultuous sea, tears, death, sorrow, crying, and pain. They refuse to pretend these things are not present, or that they are not sometimes very prominent and extended. It is for this reason that they look forward to being

was, yet, by virtue of our union with Him, we will also experience the promise of Genesis 3:15. In principle, this truth is confirmed in the third chapter of Galatians. “*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ . . . And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*” (3:16,29). Thus, what Jesus is said to have already done, will also be done through us!

The Experience of Joshua

This language also reminds us of a certain occurrence in Israel’s history. Early in Israel’s occupation of Canaan, they encountered “*the five kings of the Amorites.*” These are identified as “*the*

king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Egon.” These kings “*joined forces*” ^{NIV} and moved up with troops against Gibeon, finally attacking the city. Gibeon was one of the royal cities of the Hitites, yet had formed an alliance with Joshua and the Israelites, agreeing to be their servants. As soon as they were attacked by the armies of “*the five kings of the Amorites,*” they sent a message to Joshua, pleading that he come and help them.

Gathering the people of war, and the mighty men of valor, Joshua went up from Gilgal to face these formidable foes. Along the way, the Lord said to him, “*Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.*” Emboldened by this good word, Joshua and his troops marched all night, finally taking the foe by surprise. In the heat of the battle, “*the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Bethhoron, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah.*” As the enemy fled from the Israelites, “*the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.*” ^{NASB} It was during this battle that Joshua shouted out to the sun, “*Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies.*” Of that occasion it is written, “*And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.*”

Joshua and his army then returned to the camp. However, he was not aware that the five kings who had conspired against Gibeon had “*hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah.*” In the finalization of the battle, some Israelites found the five kings and reported it to Joshua. He charged that large stones be rolled over the mouth of the cave, and watchmen be established to ensure the kings remained there. He then charged the army, “*but do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies and attack them in the rear. Do*

not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has delivered them into your hand.”

Following the **total** triumph over the foe, Joshua revisited the matter of those five kings of the Amorites. “Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave. And they did so, and brought forth those five kings unto him out of the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Egon.” When these kings were brought out, Joshua summoned “all the men of Israel” to come to him. He then called the “captains of the men of war which went with him.” In a most solemn act of faith, he then charged those captains with words paralleling our text. “Come near, **put your feet upon the necks of these kings.** And they came near, and **put their feet upon the necks of them.** And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight.” Afterward “Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening. And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones” (Josh 10:5-26).

The Application

The bruising of Satan under our feet is much like the slaying of the kings of the Amorites while the feet of the army captains were on their necks. Those who have experienced the opposition of the devil will have a part in his final demise! Perhaps this is involved in the saints judging angels (1 Cor 6:3). At the time promised in our text, we will not need to “resist the devil.” Like the defeated kings of the

Amorites, his forces will no longer be with him, and he will be stripped of his power. The “Captain of our salvation” will call for our adversary to be brought before the redeemed. We will then be summoned to step forward, as it were, and place our feet upon the neck of the defeated foe. Those whom Satan has harassed, tempted, and hindered, will display before an assembled universe his inferiority, and the greatness of the Captain they chose to follow.

This is also involved in the promise spoken through Isaiah. “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 325:8). When Satan is bruised under our feet, it will spell an end to all death. Tears will be wiped off of the faces of all the elect, and the rebuke of

shall serve and obey him”^{NRSV} (Dan 7:27).

SHORTLY

“... will crush Satan under your feet **shortly.**” Other versions read “soon,”^{NASB} “speedily,”^{DRA} “before long,”^{BBE} and “quickly.”^{YLT} Once again, this word can only be grasped by faith. It is the language of faith, and is not intended to denote time. The people of God are to look forward to the bruising of Satan under their feet. But they are to do so in faith, for that is the only way it can be seen as occurring shortly. It is only as we “live by faith” that we can take delight in our lives being “even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). Only then will consolation be found in the consideration of life being like a “weaver’s shuttle” that moves quickly into the fabric of life in this world, then exits with the same swiftness (Job 7:6). “Shortly” is faith’s perspective of life

The bruising of Satan under our feet is much like the slaying of the kings of the Amorites while the feet of the army captains were on their necks. Those who have experienced the opposition of the devil will have a part in his final demise!

God’s people will be taken away. There will be no more chastening, no more correction, and no more exhortations and warnings! With joy we will shout in the words of Isaiah, “the year of my redeemed is come” (Isa 63:4). Then “the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions

in this world. It makes life tolerable, trials bearable, and opposition brief.

The closer you are to the Lord, and the stronger your faith becomes, the more clear and desirable this wonderful promise appears to you. It helps to fire your devotion and stabilize your ministry. It is the truth, and you do well to ponder it often, and with great joy. It will surely come to pass!

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” This is a common blessing pronounced upon the children of God – a strong desire that

insightful souls have for the body of Christ. Paul will say these same words in verse twenty-four: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” He

writes them to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:23), the Galatians (Gal 6:18), the Philippians (Phil 4:28), and the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess

3:18). He also wrote them to Philemon (Phile 1:25). In fact, these very words are the final words of the Scriptures – the last verse of the Bible. *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”* (Rev 22:21). These words are the conclusion of what God has to say to us!

Nothing that has been provided for the saints can be possessed apart from the grace of God. Salvation in its entirety is *“by grace through faith”* (Eph 2:8). The righteousness of God conferred upon men, which is salvation in its essence, is nothing less than *“the gift by grace”* (Rom 5:15). Those who labor effectively for the Lord do so because of *“the grace of God”* (1 Cor:10). Whatever achievements for the

Lord Jesus Christ” is with us, everything we are exhorted to do becomes doable. We are thus equipped to fulfill our role in the body of Christ, and to minister effectively to the Lord’s own household. We will be able to successfully resist the devil, avoiding his devices, rejecting his ministers, and recognizing his presence.

Oh, the people of God must make much of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! A theology that does not make much of the grace of God is very close to devil’s camp, if not in the very heart of it. If grace is the means through which salvation is brought to us (Tit 2:11), then the experience of salvation is minimized when grace is minimized, and maximized

for every man (Heb 2:9).

- ☑ We continue our spiritual life in the grace of God (Acts 13:43).
- ☑ The Gospel is the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).
- ☑ The grace of God can be known in truth (Col 1:6).
- ☑ The grace of God brings salvation (Tit 2:11).
- ☑ The grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit 2:12).
- ☑ The grace of God teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit 2:12b).
- ☑ We stand in the grace of God (1 Pet 5:12).
- ☑ We are justified freely by His grace (Rom 3:24).
- ☑ By faith we have access into this grace, wherein we stand (Rom 5:2).
- ☑ Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Rom 5:20).
- ☑ Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life (Rom 5:21).
- ☑ We are not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14).
- ☑ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is made known in Him becoming poor, though He was rich, that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor 8:9).
- ☑ Christ’s grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12:9).
- ☑ We have been called into the grace of Christ (Gal 1:6).
- ☑ We have the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace (Eph 1:7).
- ☑ The grace of our Lord is exceeding abundant with faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 1:14).
- ☑ God saved us and called us according to His own purpose and grace (2 Tim 1:9). We can be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 2:1).
- ☑ We can obtain grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).

When the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is neglected, or even opposed, men will gravitate to the Law and systems of legalism. Their religion will become lifeless, and spiritual impotence will descend upon and dominate them.

Lord may be realized, the laborer will confess, *“by the grace of God I am what I am”* (1 Cor 15:10).

When we are able to avoid sin and be godly, it is only because *“the grace of God”* has taught us to do so (Tit 2:11-12). The various ministries and capacities that we have been given are nothing less than a stewardship *“of the grace of God”* (1 Pet 4:10). Nothing that is required from the saints can be done apart from the grace of God. This grace is called *“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”* because He alone has qualified us to receive it. It is because of what He has done that it can be conferred upon us, and He Himself participates in that conferment.

When, therefore, *“the grace of our*

when grace is maximized.

When the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is neglected, or even opposed, men will gravitate to the Law and systems of legalism. Their religion will become lifeless, and spiritual impotence will descend upon and dominate them. It is refreshing to consider what God has said about His grace.

- ☑ We believe through grace (Acts 18:27).
- ☑ God has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace (2 Thess 2:16).
- ☑ We are and shall be saved through grace (Acts 15:11).
- ☑ We are what we are by the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10).
- ☑ We effectively live our lives in this world by the grace of God (1 Cor 1:12).
- ☑ By the grace of God, Jesus tasted death

What cause can possibly be adduced for despising the grace of God, neglecting to proclaim it, or being doubtful of its necessity?

CONCLUSION

The text we have just considered has brought us to think within a spiritual room with two great pillars. The first is a

solemn exhortation, and the second a wonderful promise. The first reminds us of where we are presently, the second

where we will be. The first tells us of the present attacks of the enemy, the second of our ultimate triumph over him. If we

take heed to the first word, the Lord will cause us to participate in the second one. If we refuse to yield to the encroachments of the devil, he will at last, openly and to the glory of Jesus, yield to us.

Our text began with a solemn word concerning noting those who “*cause divisions and offenses contrary to the*

doctrine” we have learned. Those causing such things do not serve Christ, but their own fleshly interests. Thus, they are aligned with the devil, who opposes the people of God, and has thus declared war upon them. The bruising of Satan under our feet demands that, until that time, we firmly resist his adversarial advances, insightfully noting all who do his work.

That is the reason for this text.

Those who take this word seriously will be among those who will put their feet upon the neck of the devil. Jesus will bring his work to an abrupt and eternal halt while we stand triumphantly over him. Let me assure you, that is a blessing that is worth fighting for!

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Division and Heresy are Vile, and Cannot be Dignified, Nor are They to be Tolerated--by Given O. Blakely



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 51



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

FINAL LESSON

A GRAND BENEDECTION

16:21 Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. ²² I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. ²³ Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. ²⁴ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. ²⁵ Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began ²⁶ but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith; ²⁷ to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. ^{NKJV}

(Romans 16:21-27)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this review of the book of Romans, we have been exposed to the power of the Gospel of Christ. That Gospel is central to all "sound doctrine," and pivotal in all Apostolic teaching. Apart from it, there can be no effective edification or enlightenment. It is, in the words

of this Epistle, "the power of God unto salvation" (1:16). All of this has little significance to those who have institutional agendas, or who are enslaved to profitless forms of theological thought. The Gospel of Christ lights up the universe of Divine communication. It illuminates

the creation itself, the origination of a favored people in the Israelites, the giving of the Law, and the proclamations of the Prophets. Take away the Gospel, and a spiritual fog descends upon the entirety of Scripture. It becomes a book men think themselves capable of

A Fitting Conclusion to a Remarkable Exposition of the Salvation of God--by Given O. Blakely

OUTLINE

- ▶ TIMOTHY, LUCIUS, JASON, AND SOSIPATER (16:21)
- ▶ TERTIUS (16:22)
- ▶ GAIUS, ERASMUS, AND QUARTUS (16:23)
- ▶ GRACE, GRACE, AND GRACE (16:24)
- ▶ TO HIM WHO IS ABLE (16:25)
- ▶ THE MANIFESTATION (16:26)
- ▶ TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST (16:27)

manipulating for their own purposes.

I am going to wax bold and say that a failure to comprehend the Gospel of Christ is the cause of all doctrinal error in the Christian community. It is the reason for distorted understanding, erroneous emphases, and corrupted vision.

There is no purpose for delineating the fall of man if there is no Gospel. There is no reason for the Law itself and the definition of sin if there is no Gospel of Christ. The record of Divine workings, and the prophecies of old time lose their significance if the Gospel is removed from our thinking. This is involved in Jesus declaring the Scriptures testified of Himself (John 5:39). It is why Peter said the Prophets testified of the *"sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow"* (1 Pet 1:11). It is why *"the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy"* (Rev 19:10).

THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL

Throughout the reasoning of Romans, the Gospel remains in the forefront.

- ▶ The *"righteousness of God,"* so sorely needed by man, and required by God, is revealed in the Gospel (1:17).
- ▶ The Gospel announced a Divine resolution to the otherwise hopeless, universal human

dilemma (3:21-31).

- ▶ Justification by faith, apart from the Law, is proclaimed in the Gospel (4:1-5:11).
- ▶ A new federal head of humanity is announced in the Gospel, declaring Jesus to be the One upon whom the total recovery from Adam's fall is realized (5:12-21).
- ▶ The inward conflict between good and evil is explained and neutralized by the good news of the Gospel (7:14-25).
- ▶ The status of *"no condemnation"* can only be accounted for through the Gospel 8:1-10).
- ▶ The provision of a Divine Helper, the Holy Spirit, is declared through the Gospel (8:11-27).
- ▶ A beneficent purpose is announced in the Gospel that cannot fail of fulfillment to all who believe its report (8:28-39).
- ▶ The Gospel, being God's power to salvation *"to the Jew first,"* enables us to anticipate the recovery of the Jews, with whom God has made a covenant (9:1-11:36).
- ▶ Once perceived, the Gospel makes total submission to the Lord perfectly reasonable (12:1-2).
- ▶ Being reconciled to God, the Gospel confirms we have also been endued with a measure of faith that will benefit the members of Christ's body (12:3-21).
- ▶ If the Gospel is true, and the Lord is for us, we can submit to the governmental powers without fear (13:1-7).
- ▶ The impact of the Gospel upon our hearts will constrain us to do good to our neighbors, thereby fulfilling the Law (13:8-14).
- ▶ The perception and embrace of the Gospel will move us to be considerate of one another (14:1-15:33).
- ▶ Belief of the Gospel moves us to perceive the brethren with greater clarity, giving them honor where honor is due (16:1-27).

In this closing chapter, Paul especially commends one sister, and

sends special greetings to a number of brothers and sisters – twenty-seven in all (vs 1-16). His descriptions and greetings all have the glow of the Gospel upon them.

- ▶ *"Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea . . . she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also."*
- ▶ *"Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus . . . the church that is in their house."*
- ▶ *"Salute my well beloved Epænetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ."*
- ▶ *"Mary, who bestowed much labor on us."*
- ▶ *"Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."*
- ▶ *"Amplias my beloved in the Lord."*
- ▶ *"Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved."*
- ▶ *"Apelles approved in Christ."*
- ▶ *"Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord."*
- ▶ *"Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord."*
- ▶ *"The beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord."*
- ▶ *"Rufus chosen in the Lord."*
- ▶ *" . . . the brethren which are with them."*
- ▶ *" . . . all the saints which are with them."*



At some point, our perception of the people of God must intersect with the Gospel of Christ. That is the single factor that causes eternal benefit to flow from our association with them. If the Gospel is not central in our vision, we will not be able to see the saints correctly or assist them in their race to glory. The Gospel is the Divine pigment that gives proper color to our dealings with both God and man. It is the appointed clarifier that puts the truth of God within our grasp and causes understanding and wisdom to flourish.

REASONING UPON THE GOSPEL

Ponder the direct references to elements of the Gospel that are made in this book, and behold how central they are. These are only a sampling

offenses and raised for our justification (4:25).

- ▣ When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (5:6).
- ▣ God commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (5:8).
- ▣ We are now justified by Christ's blood, and are being saved by His life (5:9).
- ▣ When we were enemies, we were reconciled through the death of God's Son (5:10).
- ▣ The grace of God, and the gift by grace, is through one man, Jesus Christ (5:15).
- ▣ By the obedience of Jesus Christ, many are made righteous (5:19).
- ▣ Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (5:20).
- ▣ In our baptism we are identified

is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, and also makes intercession for us (8:34).

- ▣ Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believes (10:4).
- ▣ If we confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved (10:10).
- ▣ Faith comes through the hearing of the Gospel (10:14-17).
- ▣ For this purpose Christ both died and arose, that He might be the Lord of the dead and the living (14:9).
- ▣ Just as Christ pleased not Himself in dying for us, so we are not to seek to please ourselves (15:3).
- ▣ We are to receive one another as Christ has received us to the glory of God (15:7).
- ▣ One can come to us *"in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ"*(15:29).

The Gospel is the Divine pigment that gives proper color to our dealings with both God and man. It is the appointed clarifier that puts the truth of God within our grasp and causes understanding and wisdom to flourish.

All of these statements, and more, put the Gospel at the foundational level. The validity and power of every word relating to salvation depends upon the reality and integrity of the Gospel of Christ.

of the many statements that depend upon Christ's atoning death, resurrection, and enthronement in glory. The Gospel is the Divinely appointed base of reasoning.

- ▣ The power of God unto salvation (1:16).
- ▣ Reveals the righteousness of God (1:17).
- ▣ Justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24).
- ▣ God set Jesus forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood (3:25).
- ▣ God's righteousness is declared for the remission of sins that are past (3:25-26).
- ▣ Righteousness is imputed to those who believe God raised Jesus from the dead (4:24)
- ▣ Jesus was delivered for our

with the key elements of the Gospel, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (6:1-10).

- ▣ We are alive to God through our Lord Jesus Christ (6:11).
- ▣ There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).
- ▣ The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death (8:2).
- ▣ What the Law was incapable of doing, God did in sending His Son and condemning sin in His flesh (8:3).
- ▣ If the Spirit that raised up Jesus dwells in us, He will quicken our mortal bodies (8:11).
- ▣ He that spared not His own Son will also freely give us all things (8:32).
- ▣ It is Christ that died, yea rather

Not a single statement in Romans is made from an institutional perspective. There is not a single word declared from the standpoint of "our church," "our movement," or some other form of sectarianism. We have no idea where the church of Rome met, how many were numbered among them, how they were perceived by the community, or what roles they may have played in political and social activities. No person is commended for earthly credentials, academic achievements, or anything but service to God and His people.

If the crimson thread of the Gospel of Christ is not the most prominent yarn in the fabric of theology, it cannot be true! When men are tempted to make some other thing their emphasis, they immediately begin to wander. If

other issues begin to dominate their minds, they will lose their bearings in the treacherous sea of life, becoming an offense to both God and man. This certainly does not insinuate that there can be no correction, or that there are never matters of practical life that are to be addressed. It **does** mean that the priority of those matters is to be weighed on the scale of the Gospel, and the manner in which they are addressed is to be dictated by the direction of the Gospel.

The Gospel of Christ not only

announces the righteousness of God for men, it also sheds satisfying light on all human obligations, bringing power to fulfill them. It makes duty pleasant, and labor gratifying. It is the Christ of the Gospel who offers us a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, then urges us to take it, thereby receiving a blessing and rest for our souls.

ALL OF THIS IS GERMANE

It may appear on the surface as though I have rambled a bit in this introduction – but I have not. Every

word of this Epistle, including his closing remarks in this text, drip with honey of the Gospel. The greetings Paul sends have the scent of grace upon them. The blessings he bestows depend upon the Gospel. The announcements he makes are confirmations of the truth of the Gospel. The glory that he ascribes to God is the result of his own persuasion of, and commitment to, that glorious Gospel of the blessed God (1 Tim 1:11)! The sweetness and profitability of his words are due to the Gospel of Christ. Glory be to God!

TIMOTHY, LUCIUS, JASON, AND SOSIPATER

^{16:21} **Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you.** Having sent personal greetings to many of the saints in Rome, Paul now speaks in the behalf of those who labor with him. They are all of *“one mind,”* and with *“one mouth”* join in glorifying the Father (15:6). **Part of glorifying the Father is giving due recognition to His people.** It is not possible to glorify God and disdain His people at the same time. As soon as those upon whom He has placed His grace are held in disregard, the Father Himself begins to be dishonored.

This little known principle is declared throughout the Scriptures. When Israel contended with Moses, they were really contending with God (Num 16:3-32). When Israel rejected the Judges, put in place by God, and preferred a king like other nations, they were rejecting God (1 Sam 8:7). When Israel did not hear the Prophets, they at once became guilty of not hearing God (2 Chron 36:13).

You will find this repeated pattern in Scripture. When those sent by God are recognized and received, the people are blessed. When they are not recognized and received, the people are cursed. The ultimate example of this is the Lord

Jesus. The ultimate Man, and the One sent by God in a unique and unparallel sense. Thus Jesus said, *“he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me”* (Matt 10:40; John 13:20).

The text before us is nothing less than Paul recognizing the

recognition, honor, and respect. With these things in mind, behold how Paul speaks of these men.

TIMOTHY, MY FELLOW WORKER

“ . . . Timothy, my fellow worker.” Other versions read *“my co-worker,”*^{NRSV} and *“who is working*

Oh, for a revival of viewing those in Christ Jesus as they are viewed in heaven! Whatever is involved in their acceptance by God, reception by Jesus, and direction by the Spirit, ought to be prominent in our thinking when we consider them!

servants of the Lord. He has a Divine perspective of them. I do not doubt that these brethren were not perceived by the world as having the value related in this passage. Oh, for a revival of viewing those in Christ Jesus as they are viewed in heaven! **Whatever is involved in their acceptance by God, reception by Jesus, and direction by the Spirit, ought to be prominent in our thinking when we consider them!** If the holy angels are ministering to them, they ought to be assessed as worthy of our

with me.”^{NJB} He does not refer to Timothy as one who is simply accompanying him, but as one who is engaged in the work with him. What noble things are said of this young man, who from the very first was *“well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium”* (Acts 16:2). The very first time Paul met him, he recognized Timothy’s spiritual caliber, choosing him to *“go with him”* (Acts 16:3). At one point, Paul rejected John Mark because of his immaturity (Acts 15:37-39), but

A Fitting Conclusion to a Remarkable Exposition of the Salvation of God--by Given O. Blakely

he never had such a reaction to Timothy

Paul discreetly chose those who worked with him. Being with Paul was more than being in a spiritual training camp. **Those with him joined in the work of the Lord, which was of preeminent importance.** When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said it came from himself and Timothy: *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church*

him with several others: “And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas” (Acts 20:4-5). Truly, Timothy was a fellow worker.

When sending Timothy to Corinth, Paul described him in a most commendable manner: *“For this cause have I sent unto you*

Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother” (Col 1:1). First Thessalonians was sent by Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy: *“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians”* (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to establish them in the faith and comfort them: *“And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith”* (1 Thess 3:2).

When, therefore, Paul refers to Timothy as “my workfellow,” or “co-worker,” NRSV it was not a mere formality. He did not say they belonged to the same congregation, or that Timothy had done well working among a special sub-group of believers.

When, therefore, Paul refers to Timothy as *“my workfellow,”* or *“co-worker,”*^{NRSV} it was not a mere formality. He did not say they belonged to the same congregation, or that Timothy had done well working among a special sub-group of believers. He had joined together with the most prodigious Kingdom laborer the world has ever seen, apart from the Lord Jesus Himself. His youth was no hindrance to him. The fact that he came from a divided home brought him no deficiency. He was not from Jerusalem, or some other city in the promised land. Instead, he was from Lycaonia in Asia Minor. Yet, he became a premier laborer for the Lord, and has been known throughout history as faithful and true.

of God which is at Corinth” (2 Cor 1:1). It appears as though Timothy was with Paul in prison when he wrote to Philemon: *“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother”* (Phile 1:1). The book of Hebrews declares that Timothy was released from prison: *“Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you”* (Heb 13:23).

Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ” (1 Cor 4:17). He instructed the brethren at Corinth to conduct Timothy on his way in peace, ministering his needs to him: *“for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren”* (1 Cor 16:10-11). Timothy joined with Paul in writing the letter to the Philippians: *“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”* (Phil 1:1). Paul described him as unique among all who labored with him: *“For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel”* (Phil 2:20-22). Timothy also joined Paul in writing the letter to the Colossians: *“Paul, an apostle of*

There is no sin recorded against Timothy, no reluctance, and no hesitancy to serve the Lord. He was imprisoned for Christ, and was trusted to travel with other spiritual notables like Silas. He stands as an example of what can be done in a young man who is willing to forsake all to follow the Lord Jesus!

LUCIUS, JASON, AND SOSPATER

LUCIUS was a noted prophet and/or teacher from the church in Antioch, which was an extraordinary assembly. *“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene”* (Acts 13:1). He distinguished himself as a man of faith

Timothy was also a companion of Silas, who came to Paul in Corinth from Macedonia: *“And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia”* (Acts 18:5). He preached the Gospel with Paul and Silas (Silvanus) in Corinth: *“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus”* (2 Cor 1:19). Paul also sent Timothy with Erasmus to Macedonia after they had ministered to him: *“So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erasmus”* (Acts 19:22). Later, when Paul returned to Macedonia on his way to Syria, Timothy accompanied

early in the history of the church. He was among those who, as they “ministered to the Lord, and fasted,” heard the Holy Spirit say, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” He also was among those who “laid their hands on them, (and) they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3). Now, approximately twelve years later, he himself is working together with Paul, having proved himself to be a faithful servant. He has been brought higher, so to speak.

Cyrene was a city in Lybia, which is in North Africa. This was the city from which Simon came, who was compelled to carry the cross of Christ (Matt 27:32). There were also “devout Jews” from this city in Jerusalem, when the day of Pentecost was fully come. They heard the Gospel that day (Acts 2:10). Some of the converts from Pentecost, who were scattered abroad in the first persecution preached the Gospel as far as in Phenice and Cyprus. Some of these men were also from Cyrene (Acts 11:20). Lucius is an example of the Word of God falling upon good soil, and bringing forth fruit to the glory of God.

JASON is probably the one who received Paul and Silas into his house in Thessalonica. At that time, Paul reasoned for three Sabbath days out of the Scriptures. Some of the Thessalonians believed and joined Paul and Silas. A multitude of devout Greeks did the same things, as well as a number of prominent women (Acts 17:1-4).

Unbelieving Jews were moved to envy, and caused a great

uproar in the city because of the powerful preaching of Paul. The city being in an uproar, the people gathered in a mob and “assaulted the house of Jason.” They told the rulers

synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily,

Thus Paul sends greetings from four fellow workers: Timothy from Lystra, Lucius from Cyrene, Jason from Thessalonica, and Sosipater from Berea. How marvelous are the uniting effects of the Gospel! Though they were from different cultures, yet they were one in Christ.

of the city that Jason had “received” Paul and Silas, whom, they charged, did “contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.” They then made Jason post bond for Paul and Silas, then letting them go (Acts 17:9). Now, Jason also is laboring together with Paul. His hospitality was the doorway to becoming a copartner with Paul in the Gospel. **Holy alliances will surely yield good fruit!**

SOSIPATER is probably another name for “Sopater.”^{Robertson} If this is the case, and many are of the opinion that it is, he is referred to in Acts 20:4, where he is said to be among those accompanying Paul into Asia. There we are told that he was from Berea, a place where believers were distinguished for their diligent searching of the Scriptures. Of them it is written, “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto **Berea**: who coming thither went into the

whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed: also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:10-12). Perhaps Sosipater was among the first Bereans who received the Word with “all readiness of mind.”

He is also distinguished as Paul’s “kinsman,” a term Paul uses for “fellow countrymen,” rather than immediate family relationships (Rom 9:3; 16:7). They were fellow Jews, of the stock of Abraham and in Christ Jesus also – twice blessed.

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TERTIUS

“²² **I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.**” It was Paul’s manner to dictate his letters to a amanuensis. We would call such a person a stenographer – one who precisely records the thoughts and

words of another person. Paul would, then, add his own signature to certify the validity of the Epistle. Thus he wrote to the Galatians, “Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand” (Gal 6:11). To

the Colossians he wrote, “The salutation by the hand of me Paul” (Col 4:18). He wrote to the Thessalonians, “The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write”

(2 Thess 3:17). For whatever it is worth, church tradition says Tertius was one of the seventy disciples, and was the bishop of Iconium. ^{John Gill} His name is Latin, indicating he as a Roman citizen.

Now Tertius, confirming he is more than a professional stenographer, adds his salutations, mingling them with others. He also is a brother *"in the Lord,"* and thus greets the saints in Rome. Among other things, this reveals that those outside of Christ were not normally chosen to participate in the work of the Lord. Phoebe, a servant of the church, brought the letter, and Tertius, a brother in the Lord, wrote it. **Only the saints were greeted, and only the saints sent greetings.**

This single fact is the only thing we know about Tertius. We do not know where he was from, what other brotherly relationships he had, or if he traveled elsewhere with Paul. All we know is that he was used to write the book of Romans. I suppose that if the only thing you knew about a man was that he wrote the book of Romans, you would have to acknowledge such a one had achieved more fame than many men and women throughout Christian history.

When the hand of a person is put upon the Gospel plow, he at once obtains a certain spiritual dignity. He is worthy to salute the saints of God, and his name is worthy of mention. **Should I have set before me the opportunity to obtain impeccable**

academic credentials, and rise on the ladder of religious fame, and were I asked to compare it with the standing of Tertius, I would without hesitation choose to follow him. His role in the work of the Lord is closer to heaven.

He had the opportunity of mingling his brief greeting with the greetings of the most prodigious Apostle that ever lived, who *"labored more abundantly than they all"* (1 Cor 15:10). What refreshment it must have brought to this dear scribe to mingle his salutation with that of Paul the Apostle! It is a revelation of his fellowship. Surely Tertius can be of worth in assisting us to adjust our values and priorities to be more in agreement with godly activities.

GAIUS, ERASTUS, AND QUARTUS

Let there be no question about this in your mind: these greetings reflect the mind and purpose of the Head of the church. They confirm a certain awareness held by those who live by faith: it is that those whom Christ has received are worthy of formal recognition.

"²³ Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother."

In these salutations and greetings, you will notice a peculiar absence of carnal ranking. While mention is made of one holding a political position, the greeting is in the Lord. Every person's value is directly related to the salvation that is *"in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"* (2 Tim 2:10). That is of particular significance when you consider the religious trends that dominate in our day. We have no idea of the size of

the assembly with which these saints were related, their academic achievements, or other things that are held in high regard by men. Every time I read this passage, I am brought to recall the words of our blessed Lord: *"for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God"* (Luke 16:15).

Let there be no question about this in your mind: these greetings reflect the mind and purpose of the Head of the church. They confirm a certain awareness held by those who

live by faith: it is that those whom Christ has received are worthy of formal recognition. That is not because of what they have achieved in the flesh, but because their names are *"written in heaven"* (Lk 10:20; Heb 12:23). Should this approach to the people of God be heartily embraced, denominationalism would instantly collapse, and great would be the fall of it!

GAIUS

"Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you." There was a *"Gaius"* from Macedonia who traveled with Paul (Acts 19:29). There was also a *"Gaius"* from Derby who accompanied Paul to Asia (Acts 20:4). The Apostle John wrote to *"the well beloved Gaius,"* who was noted for his hospitality (3 John 1:1-5). It is not likely the Gaius of our text is one of the first two that are mentioned. Even though the hospitable character of the Gaius of Third John matches those of our text, it is not certain it is the same person Paul mentioned here.

It is likely that the *"Gaius"* mentioned in First Corinthians is the

one of reference. *"I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius"*(1:14). Because this letter was written from Corinth, this is no doubt the Gaius to which Paul refers.

The testimony to Gaius' hospitality is remarkable. It certainly was not confined to Paul. Notice how the Apostle describes him: *"my host and the host of the whole church,"* ^{NKJV} *"host to me and to the whole church,"* ^{NASB} and *"whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy."* ^{NIV} We do not know how large the church was at Corinth, but the tone of First Corinthians, together with the reference to an unusually wide variety of spiritual endowments (1 Cor 14:26), suggest it to be of considerable size. The city itself, historians affirm, had approximately 600,000 citizens. They were comprised of "a seething mass of Jews, merchants, philosophers, ex-soldiers, retailers, and agents of vice." ^{PULPIT COMMENTARY} In that kind of setting, being a host to *"the whole church"* takes on a special significance.

Gaius must have been a man of means, yet he had devoted them to hospitality toward, and the care of, the people of God. What grand fellowship and advantages he must have reaped while he hosted the Apostle Paul. The book of Acts tells us that Paul remained in Corinth for one year and six months (Acts 18:1-11). During that time he was also hosted by Aquila and Priscilla, while reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 18:3).

He also was entertained by a man named Justus, whose house was next door to the synagogue. It was at that time that a great number of the Corinthians believed and were baptized (18:7-8). At that time the Lord spoke to Paul in a night vision, saying, *"Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city."* After that incident, Paul *"continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God*

among them"(18:9-11). I understand this to be the period during which Gaius' *"hosted"* Paul.

During this time, the church at Corinth was probably formed, growing rapidly. Gaius, therefore, proved to be a key person, hosting *"the whole church"* in Corinth during its formation. It is one thing to be noted as such a *"host"* in a well known and popular church. It is quite another thing to do so when a congregation is being formed in the midst of tumult and agitation (Acts

Gaius, therefore, proved to be a key person, hosting *"the whole church"* in Corinth during its formation. It is one thing to be noted as such a *"host"* in a well known and popular church. It is quite another thing to do so when a congregation is being formed in the midst of tumult and agitation.

18:12-17). I pay tribute to Gaius, a Kingdom notable, who dared to side with, and support, the people of God in a critical time. He cared for the saints of God at his own expense.

ERASTUS

"... Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you." Other versions refer to Erastus as *"the chamberlain of the city,"* ^{KJV} *"the city's director of public works,"* ^{NIV} *"the steward of the city,"* ^{DBY} and *"the manager of the accounts of the town"* ^{BBE}

There is mention of an Erastus in the book of Acts, who was sent with Timothy into Macedonia (Acts 19:22). It is assumed that is the same Erastus who remained in Corinth as Paul moved forward in his journeys (2 Tim 4:20). The nature of the office held by this good brother does not seem to allow for extensive journeys, as is suggested by the Erastus of Acts and Second Timothy.

Theoretically, I suppose it is possible that the Erastus who *"remained in Corinth"* eventually became the treasurer of the city. However, Second Timothy was written approximately 6-8 years after Romans, and does not seem allow the Erastus who traveled with Timothy to be the one of reference here.

Considering the size of Corinth, Erastus held a significant office: treasurer of the city. He was apparently in charge of the dispersement of monies. The mention

of him, particularly in this capacity, is worthy of a few observations. First, Corinth was a heathen city ruled by a heathen government. Yet, here was a faithful brother holding a public office. It had not corrupted him, which is a tribute to his faith.

One might conjecture that some of the city monies may have been distributed to causes that were not approved by Christ, thus forbidding the involvement of any of His people. All such thought, of course, is mere speculation. **We should not be surprised that Erastus maintained his faith in a place of authority in Corinth like Joseph did in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, or Nehemiah in a Persian palace in Shushan.**

The presence of Erastus in these greetings also confirms the universality of the Gospel. Here was a *"treasurer"* like the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), yet he was also

one of many brethren who sent their greetings to the church in Rome. Whether Onesimus the slave (Phile 10-12), young Timothy (Acts 16:1-2), tent makers like Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:3), "aged" men and women (Tit 2:2-3), or Erastus the treasurer, we are "all one in Christ" Gal 3:28). Thus Erastus sends his greeting, not as a city official, but as a member of the household of faith.

QUARTUS

"... and Quartus, a brother."

This is the only mentioning of this saint in the Bible. All we know of him is that he was "a brother." Other versions read "THE brother,"^{NASB} and "our brother."^{NIV} I do not know how those who are averse to the use of the

term "brother" would have referred to such an individual. To them, I suppose, Quartus would have been altogether insignificant. That, of course, highlights the utter foolishness of opposing the use of this term. We are to consider individual believers as our "brother" (Rom 14:10,15). Saints referred to as "brother" include Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1), Apollos (1 Cor 16:12), Timothy (2 Cor 1:1), Titus (2 Cor 2:13), Tychicus (Eph 6:21), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Onesimus (Col 4:9), Philemon (Phile 1:7), Silvanus (1 Pet 5:12), and Paul himself (2 Pet 3:5). **Think of Quartus in association with such men, and it will elevate your estimation of him.** Jesus was not ashamed to call Quartus "brother"

(Heb 2:11), and neither was Paul.

By calling *Quartus* "a brother," we know he was reconciled to God, in fellowship with Jesus, and in the body of Christ. We know he was a son of God, an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. His name was written in heaven, an inheritance was reserved for him there, and he was being kept by the power of God. He had been given the Holy Spirit, was being tutored by Jesus, and taught by God. The Holy Spirit interceded for and strengthened him, and the holy angels ministered to him. He was also living by faith. Oh, it is no small thing to be called "a brother."

If it is true that salvation, in its entirety, is "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8), then this is a prayer for the fulness of that salvation to be experienced by the brethren in Rome. It is a petition for them to walk in a greater awareness of "the love of Christ," and a broader experience "the fulness of God"

" 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." Within this very chapter, this is the second time these exact words have been written (Rom 16:20,24). The expression asks for the smile and favor of Jesus to be upon the people. It is a petition for the Lord Jesus to be kindly disposed toward them, and to heap the benefits of salvation upon them. If it is true that salvation, in its entirety, is "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8), then this is a prayer for the fulness of that salvation to be experienced by the brethren in Rome. It is a petition for them to walk in a greater awareness of "the love of Christ," and a broader experience "the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19).

Paul refers to "grace" twenty-four times in this book. The references unveil something of the magnitude of this Divine quality, and many benefits that flow from it. Allow me to briefly enumerate these Romans mentionings.

- ☐ Related to Paul's Apostleship (1:5).
- ☐ Coupled with peace, and conferred upon the saints (1:7).
- ☐ The cause of our justification (3:24).
- ☐ Contrasted with salvation by works (4:4).
- ☐ Righteousness is conferred by faith that it might be by grace (4:16).
- ☐ Saints have access into this grace

GRACE, GRACE, AND GRACE

(Rom 5:2a).

- ☐ Saints stand in this grace (5:2b).
- ☐ The "gift of righteousness" is "by grace" (5:15, twice).
- ☐ Because of Christ we receive an "abundance of grace" (5:17).
- ☐ Grace abounded "much more" than sin (5:20).
- ☐ Grace reigns "through" God's righteousness (5:21).
- ☐ We do not sin that grace may abound (6:1-2).
- ☐ Sin does not have dominion over us because we are "under grace" (6:14).
- ☐ Grace does not promote sin (6:15).
- ☐ There is still a Jewish remnant "according to the election of grace" (11:5).
- ☐ If salvation is by grace, it cannot be by works (11:6, four times).
- ☐ Paul spoke through the grace given unto him (12:3).
- ☐ Saints have differing gifts according to the grace given to them (12:6).
- ☐ Paul wrote boldly because of the grace given to him (15:15).
- ☐ The grace of Christ can continually be with us (16:20,24).

From First Corinthians

through the Revelation “grace” is mentioned ninety-two more times. It is related to God, and comes from God (1 Cor 1:1-2). It is associated with Jesus, and comes from Him (1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 1:2). It is also connected to the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:29). It makes us what we are (1 Cor 15:10), can be caused to abound toward us in all of its fulness (2 Cor 9:8), and is sufficient during great trials (2 Cor 12:9). We have been called into this grace (Gal 1:6), and it is replete with “riches” (Eph 1:7). Grace is the means through which we are saved (Eph 2:5,8), and it is given to every child of God (Eph 4:7). God’s grace can be personally known “in truth” (Col 1:6), and dwelling in our hearts can prompt us to sing for God’s glory (Col 3:16). It effects the way we talk (Col 4:6), and brings us “everlasting consolation and good hope” (2 Thess 2:16). Grace is

“*exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 1:14), and is the reason God has called and saved us (2 Tim 1:9). We can be “*strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim 2:1). The “*grace of God*” not only brings salvation to us, it teaches us “*that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*” (Tit 2:11-13). Grace is the cause for our justification (Tit 3:7), is the reason Jesus tasted death for every man (Heb 2:9), and is dispensed to us from a Sovereign throne that is devoted to grace (Heb 4:16). Grace can establish our hearts (Heb 13:9), and is dispensed in increasing measures (James 4:6).

The Prophets prophesied of it, and its fulness will be brought to us at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:13). God’s grace is “*manifold*,” taking various forms (1 Pet 4:10), and is given to the humble (1 Pet 5:5). The Word of God refers to “*all grace*” (1 Pet 5:10), “*true grace*” (1 Pet 5:12), and growing in grace (2 Pet 3:18).

We dare not view this grace from a mere academic viewpoint. When the prayer for grace to be “*with*” us is uttered, there is a certain perspective that is encouraged. **This is nothing less than a prayer for all of the benefits and gifts of grace to be experienced by the believer.** The magnitude and sufficiency of grace is thus being sought for the people of God.

TO HIM WHO IS ABLE

“²⁵ *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began . . .*” One of the traits of revelation is that a lot is said in a few words. It is a characteristic of fallen man that little is said with a lot of words. Current religious fads seem to go out of their way to emphasize miniscule thoughts with a surplus of verbiage. But such speech is hollow, lacking substance for the soul. It is flowery, but its glory quickly fades.

On the other hand, it is the nature of the truth of God to be able to be condensed and summarized. You will note, however, that **summarization and condensation cannot be done with simplicity.** It is particularly true of spiritual simplicity that it comes in a large container of meaningless babble. You can only summarize something having much detail and complexity. You can only condense something that is significant in size. Perhaps

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this accounts for the extreme brevity that characterizes much preaching.

There are some who perceive the great truths of God as basically simplistic – things a little child can understand. It is not unusual to find believers accepting this nonsense. **Let those who speak so foolishly take up the books of Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, and the Revelation, and point out the intellectual simplicity in them!** Let them show us the childlike simplicity of the proclamations of Jesus’ humility (Phil 2:5-8) and Paul’s motivation (Phil 3:5-10). What such

people mistake for simpleness is really Divine summary. **It is truth in a seed form, which, when it blossoms, is vast in both scope and depth.** We have just such a verse before us. It is something like a large umbrella that is compacted into something very small. Or, more precisely, like a small mustard seed that contains the makings of a mighty tree.

Here Paul beings his benediction. He has not only written to the brethren in Rome, he has done so with an acute awareness of the Lord God Almighty. He is going to

ascribe to God the glory for what he has declared with great effectiveness. He will also leave the saints trusting in God, not relying upon his intellectual superiority. Whatever marvels he has unfolded have been given to him by the Lord. Now he will tell believers that the Lord also has an immediate association with them.

HIM WHO IS ABLE

"Now to Him who is able."

Other versions read, *"Now to him that is of power,"* ^{KJV} *"Now to Him who can."* ^{NAB} The ability of God is a constant accent in Scripture. There are certain things that simply cannot accomplish the will of the Lord. The

- 25:9).
- ☐ To those who are threatened with the opposition of dark forces, God *"is able"* to deliver them (Dan 3:17).
- ☐ When mighty men of the earth arise, seemingly dominating over everyone, God *"is able to abase"* them (Dan 4:37).
- ☐ To those who imagine they are invincible, He *"is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt 10:28).
- ☐ When you elevate your mind to its most lofty capabilities, soaring upon the mountain peaks of grace and truth, you must remember *"Him that is able to do exceeding*

- ☐ In every possible sense of the word, *"He is able to save"* (James 4:12).
- ☐ When life becomes treacherous and fraught with difficulties, *"He is able to keep you from falling"* (Jude 1:24).

Carnal men speak of the abilities of men. Spiritual men speak of the ability of God Almighty. No person will be built up in the most holy faith by being pointed to their natural abilities. **If people are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, gaining the victory, they will have to be directed to the consideration of God.** A lot of preaching is godless. It has little or no Divinity in it. The accent of such preaching is humanity. However, the truth of the matter is that there is no Gospel, no good news, concerning human capabilities, or power that is resident in the natural man. We do not preach the good news of man, but the good news of God and of Christ Jesus. This verse provides an aspect of that glorious Gospel.

No such inability exists with our God. He is fully capable of doing anything and everything that is required for the salvation of men.

ESTABLISHMENT

"... who is able to establish you." Other versions read, *"able to strengthen you,"* ^{NRSV} and *"able to make you strong."* ^{BBE} The words *"strengthen"* and *"make strong"* can be misleading, as though they referred to enabling you to DO something great. The word used here means to **make stable, place firmly, set fast, and render constant.** ^{STRONG} More literally, it means to **set something up so that it remains unmoveable.** ^{BARCLAY} Thayer says, "to make stable, place firmly, set fast, fix."

Law itself *"could not do"* what God had determined for men (Rom 8:3). NO man *"by any means"* can redeem his brother or give a ransom to God for him (Psa 49:7). When it came to the salvation of men, among the entire empire of created personalities, *"there was none to help"* (Isa 63:5).

No such inability exists with our God. He is fully capable of doing anything and everything that is required for the salvation of men.

- ☐ He is *"able"* to raise up children to Abraham from *"stones"* (Matt 3:9).
- ☐ He is *"able"* to graft the Jews into their tree again (Rom 11:23).
- ☐ He can make a believer stand (Rom 14:4), and cause all grace to abound to YOU (2 Cor 9:8).
- ☐ To those who think they lose a lot by coming to the Lord He says, *"The LORD is able to give thee much more than this"* (2 Chron

abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph 3:20).

- ☐ If you ponder the forces that are aligned against you, *"He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself"* (Phil 3:21).
- ☐ When you have committed your life and gifts to the Lord, remember *"He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that dy"* (2 Tim 1:12).
- ☐ When your soul seems famished, and spiritual nourishment is not as evident as you desire, remember *"He is able to succor them that are tempted"* (Heb 2:18).
- ☐ At such time as the race seems long, and the task seems too great, remember, *"He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them"* (Heb 7:25).

I suppose if there is one trait that identifies the modern Western church, it is the LACK of this quality. There is hardly a congregation in this part of the world that does not lose as many, if not more, people than it gains. The religious landscape is cluttered with the carcasses of souls who began, but *"were not able to finish."* (Lk 14:29). Jesus referred to such souls as those who *"for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away"* (Lk 8:13), and those whose

love “*waxes cold*” (Matt 24:12). Paul spoke of those who “*depart from the faith*” (1 Tim 4:1), “*cast off their first faith*” (1 Tim 5:12), and “*fall away*” (Heb 6:6). He also spoke of those who were “*tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine*” (Eph 4:14). Peter mentioned those who are “*again entangled*” and “*overcome*,” after being delivered (2 Pet 2:22). Both James and Peter wrote of those who were “*unstable*” (James 1:8; 2 Pet 2:14; 3:16).

Who is not able to see the dominance of this condition all around us? Such souls are vulnerable to the devices of the devil, and are sure to fall if their condition remains unchanged. What is the answer to this dilemma? This text has the answer!

God is able to establish believers! He is able to make them firm, grounded, and immovable. **It is a cardinal rule in Scripture that whatever is required of men, God is able to work in them.** Along these lines, immovability and stability ARE Divine requirements. There can be no question about this in our minds.

- ▣ “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye **steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord***” (1 Cor 15:58).
- ▣ “. . . to present you *holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith **grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel***” (Col 1:22-23).
- ▣ “*For we are made partakers of Christ, if we **hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end***” (Heb 3:14).

I know of no word of Scripture that offers hope to unstable souls. They are described as “*double minded*” (James 1:8), those who will be beguiled (2 Pet 2:14), and those who wrest, or twist, the Word of God (2 Pet 3:16). Jesus said those who did not “*abide*” in Him would be violently removed and cast into the fire (John

15:6). Paul said those who did not remain in Christ, but chose to leave, could only expect God’s “*of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*” (Heb 10:27).

God’s people must settle it in their minds that He will not tolerate static discipleship and lifeless profession. Either they become established, or they will be discarded. When this is perceived, and heartily embraced, the text before us becomes a joyful sound of jubilee!

God is able to establish us, and will do so through our faith. He will cause our spiritual roots to go downward, and our fruit to grow

3:3). The Holy Spirit has moved holy men to declare that God will, after you have suffered a while, “*make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you*” (1 Pet 5:10).

This is an aspect of the Gospel that must not be neglected. Those in Christ must be reminded of this again and again. This speaks of a salvation that fulfills the word of Isaiah: “*We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks*” (Isa 26:1). In Nehemiah’s days, the walls of the holy city were broken down, and its gates remained burned with fire (Neh 1:3). But there is no God-honoring cause for that condition existing in

His absolute faithfulness is held before you as a basis for establishing you and keeping you from evil (2 Thess 3:3). The Holy Spirit has moved holy men to declare that God will, after you have suffered a while, “make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you”

upward (2 Kgs 19:30; Isa 37:31). He is “*ABLE*” to do this. In connection with establishing you, He is “*able to keep you from falling*,” and will do so as you give yourself to spiritual diligence. As it is written, “*But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (Jude 1:20-21). **Our God will see to it that such people do not fall!**

Take hold of this truth, for it will assist in sustaining your soul. God has power to establish your heart, so that you are blameless and holy in His sight (1 Thess 3:13). He is able to establish you “*in every good word and work*” (2 Thess 2:17). His absolute faithfulness is held before you as a basis for establishing you and keeping you from evil (2 Thess

this “*day of salvation.*” Everything has been set in place that is required for the stability and firmness of the saints. Their past has been blotted out, their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, and a reconciliation with God effected. They have been given the Holy Spirit, exceeding great and precious promises, and everlasting consolation and good hope. They have a better covenant that is established upon better promises, and their adversary has been destroyed. They have an ever-living Intercessor in heaven, and One within their own hearts. They have been given a message that is conducive to joy, peace, and spiritual stability. What possible reason can be adduced for weak and vacillating disciples. Who is the wise man that can step forward and give an acceptable reason for the massive weakness and instability that exists in the contemporary church

Those in Christ must be told, God *"is of power to stablish you."*^{KJV} From the mouth and from the pen, let the words be made known, God *"is able to establish you."*^{NKJV} Let no child of God be left imagining their stability and steadfastness depends upon their own strength! Let none of them remain ignorant of this foundational and indispensable truth!

ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL

"... according to my gospel."

The Lord uses appointed means to

message of the Gospel itself. Third, when the Gospel is received, it produces a spiritual environment in which God brings stability to the believer. These three things – God's power to establish, the Good News of the Gospel, and the environment produced by the belief of the Gospel – are *"a threefold cord,"* and cannot be *"quickly broken"* (Eccl 4:12). A purported Gospel that does not carry this message is no Gospel at all. It is spurious, having no sustaining power.

Preaching is not lecturing. It is not a logical presentation, as men think of things. It is proclamation, announcement, and reporting. It is the declaration of something that has occurred, is presently occurring, or has been determined to occur.

accomplish His will. He used Moses to bring Israel out of Egyptian bondage. He used Solomon to build His temple. He used Nebuchadnezzar to chasten His people. He used John the Baptist to prepare the people for His Son and their Savior. He uses His Word to begat us, and His Spirit to strength us. What does He use to establish His people? What is the means through which He makes His people solid, dependable, stable, and immovable?

Our text says God will use the message Paul preached – *"according to my Gospel."* Other versions read, *"BY my Gospel,"*^{NIV} *"in agreement with the good news which I gave you,"*^{BBE} and *"just as the Good News says."*^{NLT} The word translated *"according to"* or *"by"* literally means *"toward,"* or *"denoting a relationship to something."* The idea here is threefold. First, the Gospel points to this fact, that God is able to establish you. Second, the ability of God to establish you is confirmed by the

If you are a preacher or a teacher, you must ask yourself this question: "What can God do with my Gospel?" Can saints be established by the message you declare? The contemplation of this interrogation will lend itself to more acceptable and profitable preaching.

THE PREACHING OF JESUS CHRIST

"... and the preaching of Jesus Christ." Other versions read, *"and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,"*^{NIV} and *"the message about Jesus Christ."*^{NLT} The expressions *"my Gospel"* and *"the preaching of Jesus Christ"* are two sides of the same coin. *"My Gospel"* accents the container, and *"Jesus Christ"* emphasizes the contents. **To put it another way, Jesus Christ is declared through the Gospel alone, and the Gospel deals with Christ alone.** God has nothing to say about Jesus that is not contained in the Gospel, which is *"the record"* He has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11).

Preaching is not lecturing. It is not a logical presentation, as men think of things. It is proclamation, announcement, and reporting. It is the declaration of something that has occurred, is presently occurring, or has been determined to occur. Thus what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection is in the Gospel. What He is presently doing at the right hand of the Father is in the Gospel. What He will yet do in gathering us to Himself and bruising Satan under our feet, is in the Gospel!

God works through the declaration of His Son, not the declaration of morality. He establishes His people in strict accordance with the Gospel of Christ, not the Gospel of the Spirit. Believers are made solid by what God has said about Christ, now what He says about domestic and social relationships. If you want the people to be immovable, you are going to have to declare Christ Jesus. **Academic lectures and learned disquisitions on the nuances of humanly conceived theology will not yield a strong and stable church.** Such things may, indeed, be impressive to men, but they will not prepare men and women for eternity!

A weak and emaciated church is the result of the preaching to which it has been subjected. This may appear to be an unfair statement, but it is, in my judgment, even understated. The religious message to which people are subjected, and which they receive, shapes their thinking. It sets the limits for their lives, both toward the earth and toward heaven. A flawed message allows for more liberty in the earth. A strong Gospel message allows for more movement in the heavenlies. The reason for this circumstance is that God uses *"the Gospel,"* or *"the preaching of Jesus Christ"* as the means through which He establishes the people. You must settle it in your mind that if God does not establish the people, they will not be established. Conversely, if He does establish them, they will be

established.

THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY

“ . . . according to the revelation of the mystery.” The Gospel, or the preaching of Jesus Christ, is not a synopsis of human opinion. It is not the result of human analysis and study. **This is something that has been revealed by the God who purposed salvation!** Apart from this revelation, the Good News would have forever remained “the mystery.” Man, who is wrapped in mortality, cannot discern on his own what is wrapped in immortality. A message that is conceived and saturated with Deity cannot be uncovered by the fallen men for whom it is intended. This ought to be so apparent it would require no iteration. But that is not the case. The landscape of theology has been so muddled with the wisdom of men they hardly think of revelation. If, indeed, the very concept of “revelation” is entertained, it is immediately relegated to the past. Therefore, it is treated much as a theological museum piece.

Our text does not say “*what WAS revealed*,” but “*according to the revelation*.” **Revelation is something like the lingering glory of God on Mount Sinai, and in the face of Moses. It continues to illuminate after it is initially given.** Only things that are temporal fade. That which is eternal continues to glow with the glory of the Lord, illuminating both heart and mind. Furthermore, faith comes when that unfading glory is seen in the Gospel. You can never promote faith with historicity and the supposed confirmations of science, human logic, or archeology. Whatever value may be assigned to those things, God will never use them to establish His people, for they do not immediately relate to Jesus. Science, the wisdom of men, and other such matters, can stand without Jesus. They do not need Him to exist, and thus they will all ultimately perish. The Gospel, on the other hand, requires Jesus, and consequently necessitates revelation. This is

because there is not an artifact in all this world that God uses to expound Jesus. **His Presence cannot be confirmed by any human sense or ability. He cannot be heard with the hearing of the ear, nor seen with the seeing of the eye.** If God does not reveal Him through the Gospel, He will not be known at all!

In Scripture, the word “mystery” does not denote something that is mysterious by nature, and unable to be comprehended. Rather, it is something intelligent and apprehensible, but hidden and kept secret. In this case, “the mystery” is what God had determined to do

proclamation is in strict accord with the unveiling of a mystery that had been concealed since the world began.

This “mystery” was hidden in the types and shadows of the tabernacle service. It was announced by the Prophets, yet remained a mystery even to them because the time had not yet come for it to be made known more fully. However, now that sin has been “put away” (Heb 9:26), the devil “destroyed” (Heb 2:14), principalities and powers “spoiled” (Col 1:15), and the law ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), the “mystery” has been revealed.

Remember, we are speaking of the establishment of the people of God – of being immovable and grounded and settled. God will do this through the Gospel, which is the proclamation of God Son.

through Jesus Christ, *His “only begotten Son.”* This “mystery” is only “revealed,” or made known, to those whom God approves. **It is of such a nature that it cannot be discovered independently of God Himself.**

The Good News is that God is disposed to reveal this glorious message. There is a twofold sense in which it is revealed. First, it is revealed so that it may be proclaimed, or declared. That declaration becomes the means through which He will accomplish what he has purposed. Second, it is revealed to those who receive it. They are enabled to see the implications of that revealed mystery in order to conform their thinking and living to it.

Remember, we are speaking of the establishment of the people of God – of being immovable and grounded and settled. God will do this through the Gospel, which is the proclamation of God Son. That

Frequently the message of the world’s reconciliation is referred to as a “mystery.” Elsewhere Paul reminds us the message remains a mystery to those wed to the world. Thus he says he spoke “*the wisdom of God in a mystery*” (1 Cor 2:7). Later in that very passage, he confirms there are no human capacities capable of uncovering this mystery. It had to be revealed (1 Cor 2:9-10). He also referred to it as “*the mystery of His will*” (Eph 1:9), and “*the mystery of Christ*” (Eph 3:4). He also confirms it was “*hidden in God*,” that is, God alone was capable of opening it up, for it pertained to His own immutable purpose (Eph 3:9). He also calls it “*the mystery of the Gospel*” (Eph 6:19).

This mystery, the Spirit affirms, “*now is made manifest to His saints*” (Col 1:26), and contains “*the riches of the glory*” of God (Col 1:27). Emphasizing the thorough involvement of Deity in this message,

it is called *“the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ”* (Col 2:2). Also, showing that Christ Jesus Himself is the core of this message, the Spirit elsewhere speaks of it in this manner. *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory”* (1 Tim 3:16).

KEPT SECRET SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN

“ . . . which was kept secret since the world began.” Other versions read, *“hidden for long ages past,”*^{NIV} *“kept in silence from times eternal.”*^{ASV} If God had not revealed this secret, there is not an angel in

heaven or a man upon earth that would ever have known it. We know this is the case, because it remained concealed *“in God”* for 4,000 years. **Until the Object of God’s affection was sent into the world, the purpose that depended upon that Object, His Son, remained concealed and inaccessible, hidden in His own Person.**

Many godly and wise men lived from Adam until Christ, but none of them comprehended the mystery. They wanted to understand it, but God told them it was not for them to know while they remained in the world (1 Pet 1:10-12a). The time for understanding had not yet come. Even holy angels, stronger and wiser than men, desired to look into these things, but had to wait until they

were revealed to men (1 Pet 1:12b). Jesus told His disciples, *“that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them”* (Lk 10:24). They did not understand at that time – we should in our time!

In order to affirm the willingness of God to make His will known, the fact and means of that revelation will now be briefly expounded. This message is the one God uses to make His people stable, grounded, and settled. Spiritual stability depends upon this message being proclaimed and believed. It is not possible apart from that.

THE MANIFESTATION

“²⁶ . . . but now has been

NOW MANIFESTED

That mystery is not a message of the closing period of history in which a tyrant will rule the world. It is not a message concerning a world government, or a highly successful organized church. Rather, it is “the word of this salvation”

made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith.” The shroud of Divine silence has now been lifted, so that the mystery can be unveiled. That mystery is not a message of the closing period of history in which a tyrant will rule the world. It is not a message concerning a world government, or a highly successful organized church. Rather, it is *“the word of this salvation”* (Acts 13:26). It is a message that is supported by the Prophets, and made known for all peoples.

“ . . . but now has been made manifest.” Other versions read, *“But now is made manifest,”*^{KJV} *“but now revealed and made known,”*^{NIV} and *“but is now disclosed.”*^{NRSV} **The point is that the mystery is being revealed during the reign of Jesus from the right hand of the Father.** By saying *“But,”* the Spirit contrasts the *“day of salvation”* with all time prior to it.

This being the case, there is no acceptable reason for being ignorant of what God is doing in Jesus Christ. It is being opened up in Christ Jesus, who is both the sum and core of the Gospel. If a person

wants understanding of the will of the Lord, the ears must be attune to the Gospel, and the eyes pointed toward those who proclaim it. God does not open His mystery apart from the Gospel of His Son. It is not comprehended by studying Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. You can wade through Leviticus and Deuteronomy and never see this message. **All of those sections of Scripture must be illuminated. They are not themselves the illumination itself.** Light must be shed on them, they are not the light.

BY THE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES

“ . . . and by the prophetic Scriptures. . .” Other versions read, *“by the scriptures of the prophets,”*^{KJV} and *“made known through the prophetic writings.”*^{NIV}

Here the Spirit uses Peter to open this more clearly to us. On the surface, it may appear confusing that what was previous hidden is now made known through the writings of the Prophets, who ministered during the time when the mystery was hidden. Peter affirms, *“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who*

spoke of **the grace that was to come to you**, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that **they were not serving themselves but you**, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things^{NIV} (1 Pet 1:10-12).

Here, then, was a message written centuries before, and intended for us "upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor 10:11). It was delivered by holy men to whom it did not immediately pertain! Now, through the Spirit, those very writings become a means for opening up the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, Peter opened the Gospel through the writings of the prophets. He appealed to Joel (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32), David (Acts 2:25-28; Psa 16:8-11; 49:15), and a prophesy delivered to David (2 Sam 7:11-16). He did exactly what our text affirms.

Peter later announced to Cornelius that "all the Prophets" bore witness to Christ and the remission of sin that comes through belief in Him (Acts 10:43). Paul said he preached "none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22; 29:23). The extensiveness of these prophecies is staggering. Ponder a few of them, which are a very small representation.

- ▣ He would utterly frustrate the Devil (Gen 3:15).
- ▣ Through Him the world would be blessed (Gen 12:3).
- ▣ The people would gather to Him (Gen 49:10).
- ▣ He would be a Prophet, and the people would hearken to Him (Deut. 18:15)
- ▣ He would stand on the earth in

the latter day (Job 19:25).

- ▣ The details of His death are provided (Psa 22).
- ▣ He would humble Himself willingly, coming into the world to do what sacrifices and burnt offerings could not do (Psa 40:6-10; Heb 10:4-8).
- ▣ He would lead captivity captive in His ascent to glory (Psa 68:18; Eph 4:8).
- ▣ The Stone which the builders refused would become the Head of the corner (Psa 118:22-24).
- ▣ He would be born of a virgin (Isa

(Isa 40:1).

- ▣ A bruised reed He would not break, and a smoking flax He would not quench (Isa 42:3).
- ▣ He would not fail nor be discouraged (Isa 42:4).
- ▣ He would be God's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6).
- ▣ In His day God would hear the people and accept them (Isa 49:8).
- ▣ His death would be vicarious, and He would suffer as a Substitute (Isa 53:4-6).
- ▣ He would justify man and bear their iniquities, bringing

Much contemporary preaching leaves much to be desired. However, one of the most tragic characteristics of it is a near-total misrepresentation of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

7:14).

- ▣ He would be a Son given to Israel, the government would be upon His shoulder, and of its increase there would be no end (Isa 9:6-7).
- ▣ He would come from Jesse, growing out of his roots (Isa 11:1).
- ▣ He would be impeccably wise and discreet (Isa 11:2-4).
- ▣ The Gentiles would seek unto Him, and His rest would be glorious (Isa 11:10).
- ▣ He would have authority to open and close (Isa 22:22).
- ▣ All the glory of God's house would depend upon Him (Isa 22:24).
- ▣ The burden would be cut off in Him (Isa 22:25).
- ▣ He would be a Foundation Stone, a Tried Stone, and a Precious Cornerstone. Whoever believed on Him would not be ashamed (Isa 28:16).
- ▣ A Man would for protection and sustenance in a desolate domain (Isa 32:2).
- ▣ A voice from the wilderness would prepare the way for Him

satisfaction to God (Isa 53:11).

- ▣ He would make intercession for the transgressors (Isa 53:12).
- ▣ He would be a Leader and a Commander for the people (Isa 55:4).
- ▣ He would bring salvation, and His righteousness would sustain Him (Isa 16-17).
- ▣ He will come out of Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Isa 59:10).
- ▣ The Spirit of the Lord would be upon Him, and the Lord would anoint Him (Isa 61:1).
- ▣ He would preach good tidings to the meek, bind up the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who were bound, and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Isa 61:2-3).
- ▣ He would comfort those who mourned, give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa 61:3-4).
- ▣ He would bring His reward with Him (Isa 62:11).
- ▣ His days would be marked by

salvation and safety, and His name would be *"The Lord Our Righteousness"* (Jer 23:5-6).

- ▣ All people, nations, and languages would serve Him (Dan 7:14). He would make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24).
- ▣ He would be the Desire of all nations (Hag 2:7).
- ▣ He would open a fountain for sin and uncleanness (Zech 13:1).
- ▣ He would be the Messenger of the covenant, in whom God would delight (Mal 3:1).
- ▣ He would be the Sun of

did not speak a message that was for them or their generation. They delivered a word that is for us. How is it, therefore, that their delineations of the Savior are so rarely heard?

Endeavoring to maintain some form of civility and godly restraint, I make the following observation. The reason preachers and teachers do not open the Prophets to the people can be traced to only two possibilities – and both of them are inexcusable. Either they have no knowledge of the Prophets, or they do not feel their Messianic prophecies are relevant to the people

What Does This Mean?

This whole arrangement means that Jesus cannot be properly presented apart from the Prophets. **If what God has promised concerning the Savior is not declared, then who the Savior is and what He does will remain unknown!** It is no wonder that Paul confessed before Festus, *"And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles"* (Acts 26:22-23).

If men do not know the kind of Savior the Lord has provided, then they can learn from the Prophets. The Prophets, after all, did not speak a message that was for them or their generation. They delivered a word that is for us. How is it, therefore, that their delineations of the Savior are so rarely heard?

Who is there among us that can recall when they first saw Jesus in the Prophets? Did not your heart leap for joy when you read what they said the Savior would do? What of when you became acquainted with the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, or the 22nd Psalm, or some of the remarkable affirmations of the 32nd chapter of Isaiah Did not your heart leap for joy? And why so? Because that is the appointed means through which God has chosen to make His Son known. Your own experience in the faith will attest to the truth of what I have said.

righteousness, with healing in His wings (Mal 4:2).

The Bane of Much Preaching

Much contemporary preaching leaves much to be desired. However, one of the most tragic characteristics of it is a near-total misrepresentation of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Thinking to make the Lord more relevant, He is largely presented to the people as an answer to their problems. He is submitted to men within the context of present day circumstances, and in the language of the street. All of this may sound as though it is wise, but it is not.

God used the holy Prophets to define the real dilemma of humanity. He described a coming Savior that had a fundamental appeal to fallen humanity. These descriptions are very pointed, and are universal in their application. If men do not know the kind of Savior the Lord has provided, then they can learn from the Prophets. The Prophets, after all,

to whom they speak.

But allow me to carry this matter one step further. I am going to say their very perception of salvation is distorted – that it has been molded by misapprehensions of God, Christ, redemption, and the glory to come.

ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF AN EVERLASTING GOD

" . . . according to the commandment of the everlasting God." The disclosure of the great salvation of God *"through the prophetic writings"* is not a contrivance of the sons of men. Nor, indeed, is it one of several options available to men. **This means of revelation has been commanded by the eternal God.** Not only was the message of the Prophets itself given by God's command, the opening up of that message by those sent out by Jesus has also been commanded. One version reads, *"by the order of the eternal God, the knowledge of it has been given to all the nations."*^{BBE}

FOR THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

" . . . for obedience to the faith." Other versions read, *"for the obedience of faith,"*^{KJV} *"leading to obedience of faith,"*^{NASB} *"so that all nations might believe and obey Him,"*^{NIV} *"to bring about the obedience of faith,"*^{NRSV} *"so that they may come under the rule of the faith,"*^{BBE} and *"so that they obey in faith."*^{NJB}

This is the purpose for which God is revealing the formerly hidden mystery through the message of the prophets. It is **not** in order to meet humanly perceived needs. It is **not** for the purpose stabilizing the home or buttressing the government. It is **not** to gratify man's quest for attention or for possessions. Nor, indeed, are we left to speculate about why God is

unveiling His secret. It is in order to “*obedience to the faith.*”

This is a significant phrase, and does not fit into the fanciful theological molds men have created. A literal translation would read, “*unto obedience of faith.*” At this point, Paul is tying together the first part of Romans with the last part. He has already declared that the Gospel announces a righteousness for men – a righteousness that comes from God and is appropriated by faith (1:17). **The meaning of the verse under consideration is that the Gospel properly preached is designed to constrain men to receive the righteousness God offers through their faith.** The Gospel is designed to produce this result. Faith itself is the fundamental obedience, and procures the fundamental benefit, which is the righteousness of God.

In its essence, to obey the Gospel is to believe it. If sin is, at its very core, unbelief (John 16:9), then obedience at its very core is believing. **I know of no word from God that suggests a person can believe without obeying.** The lack of obedience is tied to unbelief, not faith! When Abraham, for example, “*believed in the Lord,*” it was “*counted unto him for righteousness*” (Gen 15:6). And how was Abraham brought to believe in the Lord. What motivated him to yield the obedience of faith? God delivered a glorious promise to him – good news. Here is the very word that moved Abraham to believe. “*And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be*” (Gen 15:5).

When Daniel was threatened

with the contrived edict of the king, he continued to pray to his God. After being delivered from the lion’s, Darius “*was exceeding glad for him,*” and commanded that he be removed from the den. In assessing why

A BRIEF WORD ABOUT SILENCE

I am constrained to say a word about Divine silence. Among the people with whom I have journeyed, there exists a notion that Divine silence is a medium of

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Daniel was delivered, even this “*Darius the Mede*” knew what was at the root of Daniel’s deliverance: “*because he believed in his God*” (Dan 6:23).

The commanding need of “*all nations,*” and the church as well, is that of “*the work of faith*” (1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11). Unless that is accomplished, everything else is for nought. If all who believe not are to be “*damned*” (Mark 16:16), there should be no question about where our stress is to be placed. If any one thinks faith is a mere step in a procedure, and that it allows for a failure to obey God, they have simply thought wrong.

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instruction. It is not unusual to find some poor soul trying to prove a point by saying God did not say anything on that subject. Some believe Divine silence shuts the door, and others believe it opens it. Whatever you may think about the matter, no person of understanding has ever been comforted by Divine silence. Holy men have even implored the Lord, “*keep not silence, Oh Lord*” (Psa 35:22).

Regarding our text, “*silence*” is equated with “*mystery,*” and speaking with revelation. As long as God did not speak extensively about salvation, even though He granted a few tokens, the matter was garbed in mystery. Even those who wrote of it did not understand it, to say nothing of the holy angels, who themselves did not have the faintest notion of the extent of the Savior and His salvation. The church must become occupied with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the appointed means of Divine enlightenment.

TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

“*27 . . . to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*” The phrase “*the only wise God*” is not uncommon in Scripture.

It is also found in 1 Timothy 1:17 and Jude 25. “*Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God . . . To the only wise God our*

Savior.” This verse (16:27) is the continuation of a thought started in verse twenty-five. “*Now Him who is able . . . to God, alone wise . . .*” The

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latter part of verse twenty-five, together with verse twenty-six, is parenthetical – an elaboration of God Himself. **It attributes to Him what our salvation requires.**

The wisdom of God is a subject the Spirit often develops. All of His works have been made *“in wisdom”* (Psa 104:24). *“His understanding,”* we are told, *“is infinite”* (Psa 147:5). It is characterized by both depth and richness (Rom 11:33). Salvation is, in fact, God abounding toward us *“in all*

15:15. Twice in the Revelation both wisdom and power are ascribed to the Lord (Rev 5:12; 7:12).

While it is true that Divine power is made known in the effective rescue of lost humanity, salvation involves more than God’s power. In Christ power and wisdom are united for the purpose of extricating man from the clutches of the wicked one, and bringing him to glory. Thus it is said of the Savior, *“But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ **the power of God,** and*

God.” Because of His wisdom, none can condemn those whom God justifies (Rom 8:34), or lay anything to the charge of His elect (Rom 8:33). Both the Father and the Son have maintained their righteousness in saving us. God will not only be justified in all that He has said, He will also be justified in the manner in which He has saved His people from their sins.

Our great God has overcome the devil without rendering him helpless during the battle. He has given him leave to exercise all of his craftiness and power, then in wisdom used those very efforts to work salvation in the midst of the earth! In bringing many sons to glory, none of them are being brought unwillingly. They are, according to His own word, *“willing”* in the day of His power (Psa 110:3). They have not always been so. God’s wisdom was employed to so direct them that they became willing without having to be forced to do so. This was also done without God compromising His character, will, or promises. That requires inexplicable wisdom. Only God possesses wisdom, and thus only God can save. Thus it is written, *“Salvation is of the Lord”* (Jonah 2:9). God alone is *“able to save”* (James 4:12).

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wisdom” (Eph 1:8). This is the very quality God is displaying to heavenly hosts through His dealings with *“the church”* (Eph 3:10).

Yet, this text is not simply affirming that God is *“wise.”* Nor, indeed is it only saying He is all wise. It is not the quality of His infinite wisdom that is the subject here, but its absolute uniqueness. He is the *“ONLY wise God.”* There is no wisdom outside of His own. All other forms of valid wisdom come from Him. Everything else is obsequious and pretentious. **No other God is wise, or, to put it another way, no other wisdom is valid.**

SALVATION IS AN EXHIBITION OF DIVINE WISDOM

The Lord is known for His wisdom as well as His power. It is written, *“He hath made the earth by His **power,** He hath established the world by His **wisdom,** and hath stretched out the heavens by His **discretion”*** (Jer 10:12). The same statement is made again in Jeremiah

the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). In fact, Jesus is, by God, *“made unto us wisdom . . . ”* (1 Cor 1:30).

The marvelous dealings of God with the Jews and Gentiles is encapsulated in the words, *“O the depth of the riches both of the **wisdom** and knowledge of God!”* (Rom 11:33). The appointed role of preaching in the economy of salvation is declared to have been due to God’s *“wisdom”* (1 Cor 1:21). When the Gospel is declared in truth, it is said to be the declaration of *“the **wisdom** of God in a mystery”* (1 Cor 2:6-7). The immensity and diverseness of salvation is referred to as God abounding *“toward us in all **wisdom** and prudence”* (Eph 1:8). Now, through the church, the *“**manifold wisdom** of God”* is being displayed to eager and inquiring heavenly hosts (Eph 3:10).

The fact that God can be *“just and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”* (Rom 3:26), confirms that He is *“the only wise*

GLORY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . be glory through Jesus Christ for ever.” It is essential that God be glorified, for *“all things are of God”* (2 Cor 5:18). This is particularly evident in salvation, which is the most extensive display of Divine power and wisdom. For *“the only wise God”* to receive glory involves the recognition of what He has done. This will not be prompted by a consideration of nature, although that does cause one to give glory to God in a measured way. **However, nature is not the object of Divine attention.** It is man that has moved God to consideration.

Thus, when David studied the vast universe, together with its complexities, he burst forth in praise. *“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and*

the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" (Psa 8:3-4). The "sweet Psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam 23:4) knew something of the intricacies of nature. The heavens belong to God – they were His. The moon and the stars were ordained by Him, and fulfill their destiny in strict accordance with His appointments. Yet, God's attention is not focused on the heavens, or the various bodies that occupy them. He has not visited nature, but man. There – upon man – is where He has placed His attention and love. He is mindful of man – mindful enough to provide a Savior for him, an inheritance, and a place of dominion in the world to come.

It is THAT work that produces the glory of reference. That is why it is said to come "through Jesus Christ." That is a description of His redemptive capacity. Regarding His humanity, He is "Jesus." Regarding His commission, He is "Christ." God is so exalted, and His wisdom so infinite, that glory can only be given to Him "through Jesus Christ." Thus, in our redemption, we are being suited to render Him the sort of glory that is properly due to

CONCLUSION

AMEN!

"Amen!" What a fitting word for this marvelous Epistle! It is also the last word in the Bible: "AMEN!" (Rev 22:21). This word is used seven times in the book of Romans.

- ▶ 1:25: "... the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."
- ▶ 9:5: "Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."
- ▶ 11:36: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."
- ▶ 15:33: "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."
- ▶ 16:20: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

Him. In giving that glory to Him, we ourselves will reap eternal benefits.

This glory is "forever." That is, the effects of it will ripple throughout eternity. As the ceaseless cycles of eternity roll on, the glory that is given to God because of His great salvation will never wane or diminish. I can only imagine the swells of glory increasing, and being magnified in the "ages to come." In fact, the Spirit makes a point of this very thing. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: **that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus**" (Eph 2:4-7). The grace that brought salvation, taught us how to live, and made us what we are, will be the subject of inquiry and

marvelous exposition throughout the ages to come.

That is the grand purpose of God! He has, in salvation, unveiled an aspect of His Person that never before has been seen so extensively – His grace. In the display and working of that grace, He has employed His "manifold wisdom," and it has delighted and instructed the heavenly hosts. How fitting, therefore, that those who are being saved also be earnest students of this grace, inquiring into it, and receiving the rich bounty that flows from it. The church is to be noted for its embrace and proclamation of the grace of God. Here, in this day of salvation, among the people of God, His grace can be both experienced and comprehended, enjoyed and perceived. Let it not be strange to any one of us.

Having said all of that, the word "Amen" is the response of faith. It is the result of comprehending to some degree what has been said, agreeing with it, and letting the agreement be made known. There is no shame in "Amen," no doubt, and no unbelief.

- ▶ 16:24: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."
- ▶ 16:27: "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."

This is a Scriptural word of assent, agreement, and faith. Literally it means "verily," "let it be so," or "truly." At the conclusion of an affirmation, such as those I have mentioned, it means "this is indeed true." ROBERTSON If expressed in the spirit of thanksgiving it means, "that is the way it should be." ROBERTSON

Etymologically it means "verily, of a truth, so be it, or certainty." LIDDELL-SCOTT It is also used in the sense of a strong affirmation and assent to what has been said. FRIEBERG

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When the twelve curses of the

Law were read, the children of Israel were required to say "Amen" after the reading of each one (Deut 27:15-26). Faith, however, does not need to be commanded to say "Amen" when the working of the Lord is declared. It is a spontaneous response of joy, confirming the desire of the godly to participate in the blessing of the Lord.

Thus we come to end of this marvelous Epistle. We have glided over its surface rather swiftly, but there are unspeakable depths in this letter. It gets down to the core of our salvation, declaring its greatest benefits and the cause of them. The words that have been expounded are all pivotal. They include the Gospel,

sin, righteousness, faith, justification, grace, and hope. The matter of our baptism into Christ was opened in an unprecedented way. The inner warfare produced by our faith has been delineated, together with the state of no condemnation. The role of suffering and the assistance of the Holy Spirit has been expounded. Spiritual gifts have been declared, together with brotherly love and consideration. Our relationship to the government, as well as to one another was expounded extensively. The role of Israel in the Divine economy was explained, together with the role of the conscience.

All of these things, and more,

have been placed within the grasp of our faith, and with no respect of persons. You may have imagined yourself unequal to the task of understanding the book of Romans. However, if it is true that Paul belongs to you (1 Cor 3:21-23), then this book also belongs to you. It has been provided to clarify your salvation, enable you to have a strong faith, and cause your hope to abound. Let your faith reach out and receive it. Divine assistance will be given to you. Truly, we have been blessed to sit down beside still waters, and in green pastures. May your heart ponder these things often, and with profit. Now, may the Lord direct your heart.



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