

# **Right with God Right Now:**

**Commentary on the  
Book of Romans**

**by Desmond Ford**





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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to Roy Gee, my good friend and fellow servant in the gospel, who edited the talks on which this book is based.





## Preface

To understand Romans is to understand those things we most need to know. It means finding the truth about our own hearts, God's heart, and the solution to the problems most troubling to most humans over the ages.

- Why is there sorrow and pain?
- What can I do about my guilt?
- How should I live?
- How can temptation be overcome?
- What follows death?
- What is Christianity all about?
- Is there a key to the Bible and is this book that key?
- How shall I distinguish between religions and avoid being cheated or duped?
- What principles can guide me in my relationship to God, my neighbor, the church, the state?
- Just what is the gospel?

This book begins with articles which were abridged from my lectures on Romans, edited by Roy Gee, and then published in the Good News Unlimited magazine. More complex exegetical problems have been dealt with in the appendices.

In some instances, we have repeated key points, remembering that people do not read a whole book at once and may merely consult it on certain issues.

This book is best read with a Bible by your side so that the pertinent chapters of Romans can be consulted before the commentary on them. We recommend that the paraphrase found in *The Living Bible* be used, but that most attention should be paid to the *New International Version* (NIV), and the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) translations.

Remember the warning of F. F. Bruce: “Be prepared—to conscientiously study Romans is to invite cataclysmic change ... but a change that is marvelously for the better.” Romans is the gateway to Paradise.

There is here no attempt to deal with every nuance of meaning in Paul’s masterpiece. That would take a book of thousands of pages, and I have found that most people will not read large books. What is attempted here is to set forth the exquisite gems of Romans in a practical way for every sinner who is seeking or has found the gospel.

It was Luther who said that “prayer is the better half of study.” Therefore, let each of us who studies Romans do it, so to speak, on his or her knees. Thomas Aquinas said that if a donkey looks into a book, you can’t expect an angel to look out. We are donkeys if we forget how much we need the help of the great teacher, the Holy Spirit. He is the true Vicar of Christ who makes plain to us the truth and will of God; and we are to acknowledge our need of him constantly and especially as we read the sacred Word.

Romans is the first of the Epistles, and in the appendix we speak of the significance of this fact. It was written by the New Testament leader who, in some respects, was most like us. Paul never knew the living, personal Christ of the days before the resurrection. Paul is a pattern for us, according to the New Testament itself. (See 1 Timothy 1:16.)

Romans is his greatest book because, here, he systematically deals with the chief issues of the Christian faith. It is the only systematic presentation of the plan of salvation in the Bible.

Many writers such as Scroggie have set forth the nature of the organization of this inspired volume, as follows:

Romans 1–8 constitute the chief doctrinal portion of the book, encompassing condemnation, justification, sanctification, and glorification consecutively.

Viewed as a whole, the book has three sections:

Chapters 1–8: Doctrinal;  
Chapters 9–11: National;  
Chapters 12–16: Practical.

Or,  
Chapters 1–8: Exposition;  
Chapters 9–11: Explanation;  
Chapters 12–16: Application.

Or,  
Chapters 1–8: Racial;  
Chapters 9–11: Israel;  
Chapters 12–16: Individual.

Or,  
Chapters 1–8: The sin problem;  
Chapters 9–11: The Jew problem;  
Chapters 12–16: The life problem.

Or,  
Chapters 1–8: Philosophy of Salvation;  
Chapters 9–11: Philosophy of History;  
Chapters 12–16: Behavior.

Or,  
Chapters 1–8: The righteousness of God in  
relation to sin and sins;  
Chapters 9–11: The righteousness of God in  
relation to the cutting off of Israel;  
Chapters 12–16: The righteousness of God in  
relation to everyday life.

Or,  
Chapters 1–8: Doctrinal;  
Chapters 9–11: Dispensational;  
Chapters 12–16: Dutiful.

(See G. Scroggie's great book, *Know Your Bible*.)

It is the author's prayer that the study of these pages may result in the reader experiencing the joy and peace that comes through believing the gospel (see Romans 15:13). No one is as rich as the Christian believer. The saints of God have found the secret of life.

Only when we know that God accepts us can we accept ourselves, and only as we accept ourselves can we accept others. The power of sin can never be broken until the guilt of sin is taken away by our acceptance of the gospel.

We are free, indeed, when, as a result of the glad tidings and the moving of the Spirit upon our hearts, we now want to do what we ought to do. No one can ever love God until he or she believes that God loves them.

It is at the cross that this supreme revelation was made, and as we see the hand of the Crucified extended to east and west, we realize that all heaven is inviting us to come to him and claim him as our Substitute, Representative, Redeemer, and Friend.

Henceforth may you not only see God but yourself in a new way. May you see that you were crucified with Jesus, buried with him, that you rose with him and ascended with him. (See Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:2-4; Colossians 3:1; Ephesians 2:6.)

2 Corinthians 5:14 tells us that the day of our death was the Calvary Good Friday. "If one died for all, then all died." Not only did Christ die for us as our Substitute, but we died with him who was our representative. At Calvary, legally all of us paid for our sins of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Therefore, it is our great privilege to know, as surely as the penitent thief came to know, that paradise is ours this very day because we believe in that love manifested for us at Golgotha!

Gratefully I acknowledge my special indebtedness to Marion Fritz, the best proofreader I have ever met; and Gill, who helped with the final publication. The title is also hers. Thanks also to my friend Doug Ledding for the original idea and financial support.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction to Romans— Part One**

The glory of the book of Romans is that it speaks  
to the four core issues of human existence:

- 1) Right and wrong; 2) Acceptance with God;
- 3) Self-acceptance; 4) Death.

These issues are addressed  
and satisfied in Christ.

If the people of our world knew just how valuable the book of Romans really is, and if it were a book that was hard to find, they would fight to get it. And having found it, they would study it as though their lives depended on it (which they do.) They would treasure it more than a rich gold mine, more than a diamond mine.

The book of Romans contains the remedies for our human ills and possesses the answers to our human problems. Its balsam goes deep, deep into our souls. We can only stand what we see there, because Romans also goes deep, deep into the heart of God.

#### **Bad news can be good**

Even the bad news in Romans becomes good news, because that bad news throws us upon Christ. (Even God can't help us unless we have a sense of need.)

The bad news in the book of Romans is that every thought we have is defiled. Every emotion of our heart, every tendency of our mind, and every inclination of the flesh is tainted, in every one of us, until the second coming of Jesus and glorification.

That's the bad news. But even the bad news in the book of Romans is good news because it leads us to Jesus, who alone is our

righteousness, our strength and our wisdom.

### **Errors from ignorance**

Jesus once said to people at a religious gathering: “You are in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God” (Matt 22:29 and Mark 12:24, NIV). We make mistakes because we do not know the Bible.

The word Jesus used when he said “in error” is a word that’s used to symbolize a straying sheep, a planet out of its course, or a falling star. Jesus is saying that we are all a flock of lost sheep because we do not know the Scriptures well enough.

Jesus implies that if we knew the Scriptures better, we would not have so much to undo. The problem in life is not so much the doing, as it is the undoing. Undoing our actions is a problem that’s too big for us.

Paul says something similar to the words of Jesus: “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” (1 Cor 15:34).

Paul is telling me that if I knew God better, as found in the Bible, I would not miss the mark so often.

### **First issue: right and wrong**

Romans has the wisdom to address the four core issues of life. Life may be a multi-colored kaleidoscope, but life’s central issue is right versus wrong. These are what elicit praise from us, or blame, or joy, or hatred.

Everything swings and depends on right and wrong. What philosophers call “the horrible choice,”—the choice between right and wrong—is our burden from the moment consciousness dawns to the moment it leaves us at night.

How we make those decisions depends on what we think about right and wrong. If we do not know this book, the Bible, we will

go wrong. There is a lot of religion that is bad religion because it is not Bible-based religion.

You've heard of the man in the church choir who insisted on singing, "Rejoice! Give thanks, and sin,"—instead of "Rejoice! Give thanks, and sing." He was ignorant of what was in the hymnal. On a small scale that's what people do on a big scale.

There are even some religious men who think they're being very faithful to their wife if they are loyal to her six nights out of the seven. There are young people who think they can obey their parents as often as they wish—when they feel inclined to.

### **Religious oddities**

Religion has all sorts of peculiarities, sacred cows, and shibboleths. Have you heard of the Left-leg Brethren and the Right-leg Brethren? They used to exist in a part of the United States. They believed in foot-washing, but were divided over which leg should be washed.

When we come to the book of Romans, we will find what religion is meant to be. True religion, according to Romans, is about faith, hope, love; about the cross of Christ, and the love of God. It is about the reality of forgiveness—daily and hourly forgiveness.

As Romans speaks about bearing and forbearing, giving and forgiving, we learn what true religion is. True religion is the union of the heart with God that brings an overflow to our relationship with other people. It is not a matter of shibboleths and sacred cows. It is not a matter of creeds.

This is the main thing that Romans deals with: the issue of right and wrong. By focussing on it, we can avoid the mistakes that fall to us so naturally.

### **Second issue: acceptance**

Here's a second issue: The basic drive of our lives is for acceptance. Relationships are the real essence of our lives. Not

wealth, reputation, or strength, but relationships. Even washing dishes is fun if you do it with the right person.

We all have a great passion to be accepted. But there is a problem, an obstacle. We do many things that rupture relationships. Some of them are done unconsciously, others consciously. Some of them we do with premeditation, others carelessly.

All great literature of the ages, throughout the world, has made human responsibility and guilt their central issue, because it is the central issue of life.

We want to be accepted, but look how we behave. You find this theme whether you go back to the Greeks with Aeschylus, or to the Latins with Virgil. You find it in England's Shakespeare, Germany's Goethe, and in the best American novelists.

### **Acceptance with God**

Most of all, we want to be accepted with God. Walt Whitman said that animals don't lie awake at night and weep for their sins, but human beings do. Here, then, is the second thing: not only do we have the knowledge of right and wrong so we can avoid making mistakes, but, "How do I find acceptance?"

If I find acceptance with God, then I can accept myself and not until then. Conscious guilt always leads to increasing guilt. Conscious guilt leads not only to increasing guilt but to illness, accidents, self-hatred, and self-punishment.

We know that if sin is not forgiven, it must be punished. And sometimes we punish ourselves in our guilt. That's why the second issue that Romans deals with—acceptance—is dealt with in terms of forgiveness. Romans is a book about forgiveness.

### **Forgiveness and justification**

The forgiveness in Romans is much better than we could ever have imagined, because in Romans we discover the word "justification." Justification is a key word in Romans. It's used



about fifty times. **Justification means forgiveness plus.** It means forgiveness, but it means going beyond forgiveness. It means God treating us as though we never had any need to be forgiven. What a wonderful concept!

### **Romans so far**

Let's go over this important ground again. The basic issues in Romans, so far, are: 1) Right and Wrong; 2) Acceptance. If evil becomes a trifle, virtue becomes a toy. We have to understand the basic things of life—what is good and what is evil—and Romans tells us.

However, we won't be motivated to choose the good and shun the evil unless we have acceptance with God; unless we know today, this hour, this moment, that God accepts us just as we are, warts and all, flaws and all, mistakes and all, fumbblings and stumblings and all; unless we know that acceptance, we will never be motivated to do what is right.

The worst person in the world knows more about duty than the best person achieves. At the heart of every one of us is a selfish core. It taints everything we do. Nothing we do is untainted. We never pray a prayer, preach a sermon, sing a hymn, or do anything, that is not tainted. I'm talking about Christians. We desperately need forgiveness.

We haven't started to live until we believe that all our sins are like a grain of sand beside the mountain of God's forgiveness. We haven't started to live until we are aware that all our guilt is but a spark falling before the ocean of God's mercy. We haven't started to live until we believe that God is more willing to forgive than a mother is to save her child from a burning house.

We haven't started to live until we know it's more difficult to take love out of the heart of God than it is to take the salt out of the ocean or the blaze out of the sun. We haven't started to live until we know these things.

### **Third issue: self-acceptance**

There's a third issue Romans deals with: Self-acceptance.

"You are in error because you do not know the scriptures," said Jesus. But Romans shows us right and wrong so we can make decisions and avoid mistakes. Romans tells us about acceptance with God in Christ when we miss the mark and don't know God.

But only when I know God accepts me can I accept myself. And no one can accept his brother and his sister until they accept themselves. Romans explains that God accepts me and that leads to self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance begins with knowing God accepts me. What right do I have to complain about someone else's warts when God has accepted me warts and all? God accepts me in Christ despite my failures, my blotches, my follies and stupidities.

The thing I find most humbling is not when I sin, but when I do something stupid. Of course, that's just another form of sin, because we ought to be wiser.

But we have a great and a good God who knows all these things, who knows all about our weaknesses.

### **Fourth issue: death**

The fourth issue addressed by Romans, dear friends, is death. We humans are the only living things that fear death. Animals don't fear death. They relax and pass away.

Walt Whitman was right when he said that animals don't lie awake and weep about their sins. Animals don't fear death, either. But we do.

The Bible says the sting of death is sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:56). Romans deals with the basic issues—and what a book Romans is. It is the greatest masterpiece the human mind has ever conceived. As we shall see, this masterpiece not only addresses the four great issues of life. What is more important, it brilliantly reveals how these issues are met and satisfied only in Christ and the gospel.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Introduction to Romans— Part Two**

Frederick Godet, the French theologian, called Romans, “The cathedral of the Christian faith.” It is, indeed. It’s the most important document ever written.

Romans is the only book in the Bible that systematically tells us of the plan of salvation. The only book. If you don’t understand Romans, you really don’t understand the Bible.

Romans was written by the chief theologian of Scripture, the apostle Paul. Jesus made the atonement, but Paul explained it. The atonement couldn’t be explained until after it was made.

Romans is Paul’s last will and testament, summing up the essence of what he knew by experience. When you read Paul, you’re not just reading doctrinal material, you’re reading Paul’s lifeblood. You’re reading his life experience. Romans is testamentary. It’s Paul’s last will and testament.

#### **Romans prevents bad religion**

Romans is prophylactic. We use the word “prophylactic” to talk about preventive things, about preventing problems in medicine. We use it here to mean preventing problems in religion.

I repeat, most religion is bad religion. But if we understand Romans, we’ll get religion straight.

Tyndale called Romans “The light and way into the whole of Scripture.” Luther said Romans is “The chief part of the New Testament and the purest gospel.” Calvin said, “Every Christian should feed upon it every day as the daily bread for his soul.” Coleridge said Romans is “The most profound piece of literature in existence,” thereby agreeing with Frederick Godet.

F. F. Bruce said, “Beware when you begin to study Romans. Anything can happen.”

### **Augustine’s conversion**

Monica was a great Christian lady who lived in Carthage, North Africa. She had a tempestuous son, Augustine.

Augustine lived a very loose, licentious life, and Monica was worried about him. He announced he was taking off for the big city of Rome. (He could live it up and sin better there.) Monica worried.

But in Rome, Augustine’s experience paved the way for his conversion. One day he was in a garden in Milan when he heard a child chanting and calling. The only phrase that registered with Augustine was the Latin expression, *tolle lege*, “Take and read.”

He had with him a manuscript of the New Testament. His interest was aroused. He took it and read. The first words he saw were: “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14 NIV).

Our world is different because of Augustine. And Augustine became different because of Romans.

### **Romans and revivals**

Since the days of Christ, these men we have mentioned have changed the world. Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley—these have been great men who have transformed our world.

F. F. Bruce was right when he said, “Beware when you read Romans. Anything can happen.” All the great revivals in the Christian world have been triggered by this book.

Romans was responsible for the revival in America under Jonathan Edwards; the revival under Wesley in England; and that of George Whitefield in USA and England. And Luther in Germany. All

great and true Christian revivals are begun by this book. Tread carefully when you study it because anything can happen.

### **Law and motivation**

Romans tells us the truth about God. It tells us the truth about religion. It tells us the truth about how to live. These things we must know.

But Romans will also motivate us.

You see, we're all conscious of law. You don't have to have someone read the Ten Commandments. Everybody has convictions of right and wrong, whether in church or out of church.

However, law cannot muzzle desire. Law is helpless and hopeless to restrain us from evil. The only motive in the world that will keep me from sin is the knowledge that God is mine and I am his.

No commandment will keep me from sin. No law will keep me from sin. No creed can do it. Not even fear of my brethren can do it—and that's a very potent fear, because we want to be accepted.

The only motive that can keep me straight is the knowledge that God is mine and I am his. That's the essence.

### **Faith not sectarianism**

Romans is a book about faith, hope, love, and the cross. It says nothing about sectarian shibboleths.

You won't find any fierce debate here about the nature of the Lord's Supper. Romans takes baptism by immersion for granted, but it doesn't try to polemicize on the matter. When it talks about the keeping of days, it makes it quite clear that the question of days is not nearly as important as faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Faith—the key word of Romans**

That's the key word of Romans—faith. You find it sixty-four times throughout the book. You find it in the very first chapter, verse five,

“The obedience of faith.” And it’s the last word of the book before the doxology, the same phrase—“the obedience of faith.”

Life would be very different if Paul had written it the other way—“the faith of obedience.” That would be dreadful. But he wrote, at the beginning and the end, “the obedience of faith.”

It’s as if he were saying, “Only that which is done because of your faith in Jesus Christ is acceptable to God. Nothing else. Everything else done before faith in Christ is simply a sin. It falls short because it doesn’t have that which stamps it as authentic—faith in Christ.”

The only obedience God will accept is that which grows out of faith in Jesus Christ. It’s wonderful that Romans should finish with that word—“faith.” Faith is the very last word in the very last chapter just before the closing doxology (Romans 16:26 RSV, NRSV).

### **A circular letter**

Many ancient manuscripts of Romans don’t have chapter 16, because it’s a list of names. Probably what happened early on was that an edition of Romans without chapter 16 was circulated among the churches. The chapter that had the names of the Christians in Rome who Paul knew was left off, because it was only of local interest.

Still it’s a chapter with many beautiful little statements. Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila, who risked their lives for him (Romans 15:3–4). Paul speaks tenderly of Rufus and his mother, “who has been a mother to me,” says Paul (15:13).

A circular letter among the churches would be the only Bible some early Christians had. They recognized that Romans contained the sum and substance of Christianity. They had oral traditions about Jesus, and these were circulated widely. But Romans was the only written Bible some people had.

That's why so many manuscripts of Romans bring it to a conclusion without chapter 16, because it went to all the churches.

### **Only two religions**

Romans is a book about true religion, majoring in the majors. It's a book that tells the truth in such a way as to warn us against its opposite.

There are only two religions in the world. The Bible refers to them symbolically as the religion of Jerusalem and the religion of Babylon. These are mentioned in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and they're mentioned in the last book, Revelation. They're mentioned in a middle book, Daniel, as well.

One religion is the religion of good views. That's not the Christian religion, though many Christians practice it. The other is the religion of good news.

There's a big difference between good views and good news.

### **Good news, good views**

The false religion of good views centers on humanity. The true religion of good news centers on God. The false religion looks at human activities, human achievements; but true religion looks at the cross.

False religion makes Christ first of all our Example. That's a miserable teaching. It would depress any of us who are honest. You cannot compare yourself with Christ without feeling very distant from God.

True religion looks upon him as a Substitute. "Jesus was my substitute on Calvary, and he's my substitute in the last great day." None of us can get through the judgment without that Substitute.

Bobby Burns said, "My life isn't what it should be." He said, "It's not even what it could be." He spoke for all of us. Our lives aren't

what they should be. Our lives aren't what they could be, or what we would have them be.

But we have a Substitute in the judgment. That's Christ.



## CHAPTER THREE

### **Introduction to Romans— Part Three**

The whole book of Romans unfolds from its key verses, Romans 1:16 and 17. These verses teach that the gospel is about a righteousness from God. This righteousness from God is a gift to everyone who has faith in Christ.

When you open your Bible to Romans chapter one, you find the key to the book right there, in verses 16 and 17:

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.”  
(Romans 1:16–17 RSV)

#### **Outline of Romans**

Romans falls into three major divisions:

1. The first eight chapters dealing with the way out of sin.
2. Then the next three chapters ask, “Well, why didn’t the most religious people in the world find that way?” That’s chapters 9, 10, and 11.
3. Then, Romans says, “Here’s how to live.” That’s chapter 12 onwards.

After each of these three divisions, there’s a doxology (which is an expression of praise to God).

Again, the outline is: eight chapters about “How to deal with the sin problem.” Then a doxology.

Then three chapters, “Why did the Jews miss it if it’s so good?” Then another doxology.

Then five chapters, “Here’s how to live.” Then yet another doxology.

### **Outline of first section**

The first section, chapters 1–8, consists of these four divisions:

#### **A division on condemnation**

It’s good to take the whole rainbow of truth. The rainbow has dark colors, as well as bright colors. You don’t appreciate the bright colors without the dark colors. Did you ever see a good painting without shadows? I doubt it. But all shadows testify there’s a light somewhere. Romans starts with the dark: condemnation.

#### **A division on justification**

This is the legal and verbal opposite of condemnation. It’s a bright color in contrast to the shadow.

#### **A division on sanctification**

This also is a bright color. Sanctification is the fruit of justification. So you could call sanctification a reflected brightness or color.

#### **Sanctification is a derivative of justification.**

God gives his gifts with both hands. He doesn’t justify anyone he doesn’t sanctify. You can’t accept the death of Christ without accepting his risen life. The first look at the cross is, “He died for me.” The second look is, “I died with him.” “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20 NIV).

#### **A division on glorification**

This is a very important doctrine, but few think much about it. There’s going to be a time when I will lose these sinful drives

that haunt and torment me every day of my life. It will only be when Jesus returns and we are transformed. Our sinful nature is destroyed then, and not until then.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51–53; see Romans 8:23).

Sin remains in the Christian until glorification, although it should not reign. It's there, but it should not dominate.

But it is there.

### **Key to Romans**

If we can understand the key verses of Romans 1:16–17, we'll be saved from doubts, despair, defeats, and disappointments.

These dark and terrible things are the result of not understanding the Book, the Bible. “You make mistakes because you do not know the Scriptures,” says Christ. “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?” (Matt 22:29 and Mark 12:24 NIV).

“You sin, you miss the mark,” says Paul, “because you don't know God who's revealed in the Scriptures.” “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” (1 Corinthians 15:34).

Notice the introduction, verses 16 and 17, the keynote of the book:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from

first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:16–17 NIV)

### **Luther’s experience**

Luther said, “I pondered this passage night and day. What is the connection between the gospel, the ‘righteousness from God’ and ‘the just shall live by faith’?”

He said, “I hated the passage. How could God be just and yet demand of me, a sinner from conception, that I should love him? I hated God.”

Luther would confess his sins to other monks as much as six hours a day. Finally, his abbot confessed to Luther, “Martin, Martin, it is you who is angry with God. God is not angry with you.” The wise old priest was right.

Martin saw in this passage in Romans that a righteous God demands that we should love him with all our hearts, minds, and souls. In other words, God demands an impossibility, because we’re not righteous. Luther hated that inconsistency.

One day the light burst through. Martin said:

The gates of paradise were thrown open. I was born anew.  
I found the key to the whole Bible.

I saw that this ‘righteousness of God’ was a gift from God.  
It was given into the hand of faith of all who felt their  
need of Jesus. This is the gospel—the good news.

Then he said, ‘I was a new man. The Bible was a new  
book. I had found paradise.’

### **A gift for faith**

Now, dear friends, that is the essence of the Christian faith: What you and I don’t have by nature, what we can’t develop, what we can’t earn, is God’s gift for the beggar’s hand of faith.

A child's hand doesn't earn the apple placed in it. The child's hand doesn't make the apple, or deserve the apple. It just takes the apple. That's what faith is.

Faith is not something you have to work up. Faith is not something achieved by psychological striving, or by logical reasoning. Faith is God's gift to those who hear that God loved them enough to die for them. If you don't oppose that, if you don't resist the gospel, faith is born and reigns.

Faith takes, faith receives. All good things are given into the hands of faith.

Luther read Romans 1:16–17 respectfully and studied it night and day. What he ultimately discovered was that it said, "I'm not ashamed of the good news!"

"Ah!" thought Luther, "now, I understand it. It's good news, because it says God is for sinners."

Romans 1:16–17 is an echo of Luke 15:2: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus goes to be guest with him who is a sinner.

### **God justifies the ungodly**

Ours is a God who justifies the ungodly. (See Romans 4:5.) The Old Testament forbids such a practice. (Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15.) It says, "Judges must not justify the wicked." God breaks his own law when he justifies the ungodly!

Yet, in a higher sense, he keeps it.

God does justify the wicked. We're all wicked. We've all gone out of the way. We've all been unprofitable. We've all been selfish. We still are selfish. Selfishness tempts us every hour, every conscious minute.

But Luther saw the glory, “I’m not ashamed of the good news, for it’s the power of God.” That’s what we need—power! We’re a weak lot.

The gospel is far-reaching—it’s unto salvation. The gospel is so universal—it’s for everyone. There’s no Calvinistic idea of predestination here, as if salvation is just for an elect few. It says, “Everyone who believes.”

It doesn’t say the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who achieves. That’s false religion.

It’s for everyone who believes, not to everyone who achieves. For everyone who believes—therein is a righteousness from God revealed.

### **The righteous by faith shall live**

The next line is translated more correctly in many modern translations than in the King James Version. The one in the KJV is all right, “The just shall live by faith.”

But the Revised Standard Version is to be preferred: “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” (See the New Revised Standard Version, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”)

More accurately, it should be translated, “He who is righteous by faith shall live.”

Why do I say that? Because this phrase is in the introduction to Romans, and in the chapters that follow there are clear divisions. Chapters 1–5 of Romans stress the words “faith” and “righteousness,” but you rarely find the word “live.”

Once you move into chapter 6, however, the chapter that introduces the topic of sanctification, you find the word “live” again and again—about 15 times. But you don’t find “faith” and “righteousness” linked in this section.

The first five chapters then, where justification is explained, teach: “He who is righteous by faith.” The following chapters on sanctification teach, “shall live.”

### **God’s great gift**

Here is the key idea of the book of Romans: “That which you and I cannot earn, and cannot deserve, is God’s gift for the taking.”

It’s not even open to us to turn believing into a work, or we would be back to salvation by works. Believing is simply receiving.

Saving faith is God’s gift to those who hear the good news that “God is for us,” whatever our past, whatever our difficulties, whatever our weaknesses.

Ten thousand times ten thousand sins do not approach the mountain of the forgiveness of God.





## CHAPTER FOUR

### Introduction to Romans— Part Four

Romans explains how  
God can justify the ungodly.  
“Justification” is a declaration by God  
that we are righteous only in Christ.  
We need justification all through life,  
however sanctified we might become!

Do we understand that God is prepared to justify the ungodly?  
This word “justify.” It never means to make righteous inside. It  
means, strictly, to count righteous. It’s very important to know that.  
The whole of true religion revolves around this issue.

#### **Justify means “declare righteous”**

Does “justify” mean “To make me righteous inside?” If it does,  
then I’ve never been truly justified, never truly converted, because  
I’m not altogether righteous inside. I know the fact of my inner  
unrighteousness through and through. I know it daily.

However, in both Old and New Testaments, the word “justify”  
always means the opposite of “condemn.” If you condemn  
someone, you don’t make them bad, you declare them bad. In  
the same way, when you justify someone, you don’t make them  
righteous inside, you declare them righteous.

That’s why the judges in ancient Israel were rightly told,  
“They shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked”  
(Deuteronomy 25:1 KJV). To justify means to declare righteous.

The judge, or lawyer who does the opposite is condemned  
in Proverbs 17:15: “He who justifies the wicked and he who

condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord” (ESR).

How then can God justify the ungodly?

### **Justification always**

When you read about justification in the New Testament, it’s saying that God treats us believers as though we are his Son, the righteous Jesus.

This is a marvel and yet no marvel. After all, he treated his Son as though he were a sinner.

This is well expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin [or a sin offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Read this text carefully. It explains how God can justify the sinner.

You might call it the divine exchange. Jesus bears our sins; and we receive his righteousness. He offers us his atoning death and his perfect life. The Reformers called this Christ’s passive and active righteousness. God offers us both as a free gift.

So, in justification God treats the sinner as though he is the Son. The believer accepts this righteousness of Christ by faith.

Read again the texts that transformed Martin Luther’s life:

<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. <sup>17</sup>For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’

### **The Cross turned around**

You only have to turn the cross around to understand justification.

Why is that good Man being treated as a bad man? So that I, an evil sinner, can be treated as a righteous person.

Why is the innocent Man treated as guilty? So that I, the guilty, can be treated as innocent.

Never think of justification as something that happens solely at the beginning of the Christian life. As though, once you are justified, you then roll up your sleeves and say, “We’d better get on with this business of sanctification or we’ll lose our justification.” No! No! Justification is over you all the time, like the sun. Like the pillar of cloud in the desert that sheltered Israel from the heat.

Justification and sanctification are like two railroad lines that run side by side all the way, all the days of your life. They may look as though they merge and join on the horizon. The fact is they run parallel, side by side, all the way.

In other words, every minute of your stand before God does not depend on how you are doing, but how Christ has done. That’s the good news of the gospel.

### **Justification by faith**

The New Testament talks about being justified by faith. It’s a constant thing, being justified. The moment I believe, the next day, and the next, and the next, and the next. Even when I fail as a Christian, I’m justified by faith.

You see, we’re all born legalists. When we do something wrong, we feel condemned. Then we are prone to put our sin up on a pedestal and be miserable for three days. When we think we’ve punished ourselves enough with remorse, then we say, “God, now I’ll accept forgiveness. Thank you.”

That’s not how justification works. It’s justification by faith.

**“Being justified by faith.”**

**“Being justified by faith.”**

If you are looking to Jesus, justification is never repeated in the sense of a new justification. Justification is over you all the time.

Jesus said to the apostles, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet” (John 13:10 NIV). We were washed when we accepted the Savior. We were washed even before we were baptized. It happens only once.

As we travel along through life’s pilgrimage, our feet become soiled by our failures and mistakes. We don’t need to go and be baptized again. We bring those feet to Christ, and he cleanses them.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us, and goes on cleansing us. Just as the lachrymal gland washes the eye and goes on washing it, so the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

Justification, dear friends, arches over you and covers you, all the time. Your standing before God is always dependent on justification by faith.

### **Justification and sanctification**

Justification has to do with your position. Sanctification with your condition.

Justification has to do with your status. Sanctification with your state.

It’s very important to understand the difference, or you can have no peace.

Your state is influenced by the Internal Revenue Service, the weather, your arthritis, a cold, your relatives, your in-laws, your out-laws—any or all of them. Your state is influenced by all those things and more.

Your status is not so influenced. Your status is always the same in Christ—perfect. Your state is up and down, in and out, a mess.

Anyone honestly looking within themselves cannot but be discouraged. But looking unto Jesus, you cannot but be encouraged!

So, it's very important to distinguish, but not separate these two things: justification and sanctification. One adheres on the outside, the other inheres on the inside. One is based on what Christ did for me. The other is based on what Christ does in me. The first is perfect, complete and 100 percent. The second isn't, because God is doing it in me, and that's miserable terrain in which to work..

### **Look away from self**

The gospel is about what God did for me. That brings justification. The gospel is about Christ's finished work on the cross. His was a perfect righteousness worked out in a holy life and an atoning death. All that is put to my account.

Mine is Christ's living and dying, speaking and acting. Through faith, I have lived his life and died his death. "On a life I didn't live, on a death I didn't die, I stake my whole eternity."

The essence of true religion is looking away from the self to Christ. If you try to balance a broom on your finger and look at your finger, you'll never manage to balance the broom. You have to look away to the top of the broom. True religion is like that—it's objective, not subjective.

### **Don't trust your feelings**

Don't start with your feelings. Feelings come from within, and they are too unreliable. They must never be made the root of your assurance. Our feelings are like a lot of noisy children in a nursery—so don't rely on them for your standing or status with God.

Instead, look away from your feelings to Christ. Says Paul:

I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance—

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.  
(1 Corinthians 15:1–4 NIV)

If a ship is in a storm, the crew doesn't throw the anchor into the ship's hold. The crew throws the anchor overboard, outside the ship. You and I are in storms all the time. That's what life is: we travel from one storm to another, with an occasional calm. Throw your anchor outside yourself, to Christ.

The Christian message is Christ for me. It's about what Christ has already done. The Christian life is Christ in me—what happens after conversion.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Overview of Romans: Chapters 1 to 3:20**

After his key verses on the gospel, Paul inserts almost three chapters showing why everyone needs the gospel.

Paul insists that all groups of humanity need the gospel because all groups—irreligious and religious—fall short of God’s holiness.

Notice how, in the opening chapters of the Book of Romans, Paul works as with a lawyer’s brief. (A lawyer’s brief is an outline statement of a client’s case.) The first three chapters of Romans file a lawyer’s brief.

After introducing his letter in chapter one, and giving us the key to his letter in 1:16–17, Paul says, “Now, let’s see the need of that key, the gospel.”

#### **Powerful parenthesis**

After 1:16 and 17, Romans continues, thematically and logically, only at 3:21. All the verses after 1:17, until we get to 3:21, are a parenthesis. (A parenthesis is an explanation that is inserted into a discourse. It’s like a digression or aside.)

Paul shows in his parenthesis, our need for this righteousness from God (mentioned in 1:17) that gives us a righteous status with God.

Paul inserts a parenthesis here, in which he says, “Look, let me show you why the gospel is so important. It’s because all people are lost without it!”

## **The irreligious are lost**

First, Paul says, “You see those irreligious people? They’re lost. God gave them up. ... God gave them up. ... God gave them up.” Three times he says it. “God gave them up” (verses 24, 26, and 28).

Paul shows us how all irreligious people are lost. In verse 18 we read, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness” (Romans 1:18 NIV).

Please note the order. Paul doesn’t say, “wickedness and ungodliness.” All wickedness grows out of ungodliness. It’s because of a wrong relationship to God that everything else goes wrong. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, it was only a brief time before their children were killing each other.

The spokes in a bicycle wheel get nearer to each other the nearer they get to the hub. The farther they get from the hub, the farther they get from each other.

So it is with humanity. Having sinned against God (Genesis 3), they sin against their brothers and sisters (Genesis 4). The farther we get from our divine hub, the farther we get from each other.

Wickedness and unrighteousness grow out of ungodliness. Conversely, when we get right with God in Christ, we’ll get right with our neighbor.

## **Sins of the irreligious**

Paul then lists the sins of the irreligious and the gentiles (non-Jews). He gives a horrible list of the sins of the gentiles. Notice, for example, this portion:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless,



faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:29–32)

### **The religious are lost**

Paul knew that many in the congregation at Rome were Jews who had been righteous according to the law. In chapter two he says (to paraphrase), “And you religious, you are also lost. You are also done for, just like the irreligious and gentiles.”

Look how he begins chapter two:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. (Romans 2:1)

Later, Paul says:

If you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?

You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Romans 2:19–24)

First, Paul dealt with the pagans, the irreligious, the Gentiles. “They’re lost,” he said.

Now, second, he comes to the religious, and he says, “They’re lost as well.”

Third, in chapter 3, Paul says, “Let’s look at the whole world.” And he says, “All of them are lost.”

### **All are lost**

Look at chapter 3. Beginning with verse 9, Paul quotes fourteen statements from the Old Testament:

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written:

‘There is no one righteous, not even one;  
there is no one who understands,  
no one who seeks God.’  
‘All have turned away,  
they have together become worthless’;  
‘there is no one who does good,  
not even one.’  
‘Their throats are open graves;  
their tongues practice deceit.’  
‘The poison of vipers is on their lips.’  
‘Their mouths are full of cursing  
and bitterness.’  
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
ruin and misery mark their ways,  
and the way of peace they do not know.’  
‘There is no fear of God before their  
eyes.’

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (Romans 3:9–20)

I appreciate the way *The Living Bible* paraphrases verse 20:

Now do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; his laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners. (Romans 3:20 LB)

Do you see it? God's holy laws only show us that we are sinners. They cannot save us.

### **Demands of perfection**

Dear friends, think what the Lord demands of us! He is a holy God! Even the heavens aren't pure in his sight (Job 15:15).

God demands flawless obedience. Not just in acts and words, but even in thoughts—in our very nature.

He demands fervent obedience. Obedience without fervency is like a sacrifice without fire.

He demands willing obedience. If your obedience is not willing, God won't accept it.

He demands perfect obedience. "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Galatians 3:10 NIV; Deuteronomy 27:26).

"Cursed is everyone." That's very personal. "Who does not continue." That's perpetual. "To do everything written in the Book of the Law." That's practical.

God shoots down our ideas of human perfection. God's law demands that I be right inside and out. God's law demands that I had a perfect conception, a perfect infancy, a perfect childhood, a perfect maturity, and a perfect death.

God's law demands that I be able to say, "Which of you convinces

me of sin? I do always those things that please him.” (See John 8:46 and 29.) My, we’re done for.

The Bible says, “His [God’s] angels he charged with folly” (Job 4:18 KJV). The Bible talks about what a creature man is who “drinks up evil like water” (Job 15:16 NIV). “Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Psalm 39:5 KJV).

### **No difference**

I appreciate the verse that says, “There is no difference, for all have sinned” (Romans 3:22–23 NIV).

There’s no difference between any of us: irreligious, pagan, gentile, Jew, or religious. There are differences in the degree of sin. There’s no difference in the fact of sin.

In most countries, it makes no difference whether you murder one person or 30. The penalty’s the same—death!

Paul has completed his lawyer’s brief. The whole human race is guilty! All are worthy of death—eternal death!

## CHAPTER SIX

### **The Acropolis of the Christian Faith**

Romans 3:21–26 are the most important verses in the Bible.

They reveal that God has provided for our salvation in the cross of Christ. At the cross God has dealt with our guilt and given us heaven.

*The Living Bible* has a beautiful summary of what happens next (both in Romans and salvation):

But now God has shown us a different way to heaven—not by ‘being good enough’ and trying to keep his laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the Scriptures told about it long ago). Now God says he will accept and acquit us—declare us ‘not guilty’ if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins.

And we all can be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like. (Romans 3:21–22 LB)

Beautiful!

#### **An Advocate appears**

Now, after we have been devastated by the lawyer’s brief of Romans 1:18–3:20, it’s as though an Advocate appears. This Advocate is an attorney for the defense. He represents the human race before the great Judge.

As our Advocate stands up, he suddenly collapses and dies! The universe is hushed and still. There is a period, a beat of three. Then, the Advocate comes back to life, and he begins to speak.

## **Most important verses**

“But now” is how Romans 3:21 begins. Whenever you find a “but” in the Bible, it usually introduces good news. However bad things appear to be for you, the words come: “but now.”

Look at it. Here’s the message. Here’s the acropolis of the Christian faith. Here are the most important verses in the Bible about salvation:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21–26 NIV)

## **The Cross means two things**

Here, the apostle Paul talks about “the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Paul talks about Christ “as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”

When you look at the cross of Christ, and think about it and contemplate it, it can mean only one of two things. It is either a demonstration of the futile, accidental, nature of life—which means that however good life is down here, it has no meaning.

Either the cross is futile, or it reflects the righteousness, the love, and the mercy of God. These qualities are so superior they can be nailed down and still win!

Take your choice between these two. Is the cross a futile, accidental

event proving that life is useless? Or is it rather an event that proves that God's righteousness, love, and mercy are so wonderful that even when nailed down, they still win?

### **We were at the Cross**

Think about the cross. We were there. The old Negro spiritual asked the right question: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

The cross event is a microcosm. The whole world is present in its representatives. The learned are there, represented by the educated Sadducees and the Pharisees. The unlearned are there in the unschooled soldiers. Both men and women are there. It was women who stayed last at the cross.

There are young and old, bond and free, Greeks and barbarians there. There are Jews there. There are the righteous and the unrighteous.

There is a whole world there. And we are there.

We forged the nails and swung the hammers that drove them deep into Christ's flesh. We did that. We put our God to sleep on a tree. We tucked in his hands and his feet with nails, and then we laid his holy head, not on a pillow, but on a crown of thorns. We did it. We were there.

### **A wounded God**

We need to understand the meaning of the cross. There's nothing like the cross. It's so distinctive. Here is the only wounded God of all religion, history, and time.

Only the wounded can properly minister to the wounded. Here in these verses is a picture of a Christ who takes our sin upon himself and hangs on that cross for you and for me.

For many people, the cross is an ornament to put around their necks. For an architect, it's a symbol you can use to adorn a

church. For the skeptic, it's a superstition. For the ancient Romans, it was a mode of execution. For the motley mob, the day of crucifixion was a day of carnival.

For Mary, it was a memory of agony and piercing of soul. For Paul, it was a glory that pointed the way to heaven.

For the thief crucified on Christ's left, it was a door to hell and eternal damnation. For the other thief, on Christ's right, it was a gateway to paradise, beautiful beyond all human thought.

For Christ, the cross was a coffin and a throne. And for millions of storm-tossed souls, it's an anchor that leads to a haven of rest.\*

What is the cross for you? What is Christ to you?

### **Guilt and forgiveness**

Paul told us about guilt in his lawyer's brief, beginning in chapter 1 and leading up to these verses.

"We are all guilty before God," he said. "Guilt is piled upon us—mountain upon mountain to cover and smother and stifle us all.

The consciousness of guilt only increases our misery, bringing accidents, illness, and death."

Then, Paul says, Christ, our Advocate appears. He has died for us, and offers his cross and his lifeblood to quench our guilt.

### **Curiosity killed the Cat**

You've heard about the girl being told not to ask so many questions. "Curiosity killed the cat," she was warned.

"What did the cat want to know?" she asked.

What do you most want to know? Do you want details about how

\* paraphrased from Herschel Hobbs.



the world began? The Bible doesn't give detail. It simply tells you the great religious truth that God is the Creator.

Do you want to understand the miracles of Christ? When Christ came to the end of his days on earth, he never asked his disciples to remember his miracles.

He never asked them to remember his wonderful words. He never asked them to remember his beautiful life.

Rather, he said, "Remember my death."

This do in remembrance of me. This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for many for forgiveness of sins.  
(See 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.)

Here is the heart of religion—the forgiveness of sins. We've all got plenty of sins to keep us busy seeking forgiveness. And God has done it, has forgiven us in Christ! That's the heart of religion. Only this can break the power of sin in our lives and hearts.

### **Contemplating the Cross**

When a person really becomes aware of what he is, he must either stifle that awareness, commit suicide, or Christianize.

The only people in the world who have assurance that their sins are forgiven are people who know Jesus Christ. Nobody else.

They look at his hands nailed to the tree, and they say, "I think of what my hands have done. My selfish, impure and greedy hands."

They look at his spiked feet, and think of the places their feet have led them, places they don't want other people to know about. They see his brow crowned with thorns and regret their foul, hateful and doubting thoughts.

They see his side ripped open, and they think how their heart has been given over to idolatry and has loved many false gods.

They see Christ's back raw from the Roman flagellation, and remember how eagerly they have borne their idols upon their backs.

Many people don't like this kind of contemplation. They check out of life altogether. Other people would do the same if they had the courage.

### **Heaven is yours**

Jesus chose to come into this world, and he chose to die. He turned the Roman cross into an altar.

As soon as his blood spurted from his wounds, he was interceding as High Priest. "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

He turned his cross into a throne, and gave away heaven! He told the penitent thief he could be sure that heaven was his that day.

"Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise'" (Luke 23:43, punctuation added).

You should know that heaven is yours because Christ died for you.

### **A divided world**

Christ's cross divides the world. You're either siding with the thief who took paradise as a gift from Christ, or you're with the other one who thought he had no need. The latter thief went down to hell without salvation.

You can know you're in one group or the other. You can know, whatever your past that Paradise is yours today! The thief on Christ's right was penitent, but he still made a big steal. Not Fort Knox or the Bank of England, but heaven. He stole heaven! And Christ rejoiced to have him do it. Christ rejoices for you to have heaven, too.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Review of Romans Chapters 1–3

These three chapters are the most important in all literature and life.

They address humanity's greatest problem—and give the solution in the cross of Christ!

We all want spiritual power in our lives. We will find it only in the gospel. The gospel is the good news, the good story, about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on our behalf. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16 NIV).

To be human is to have problems. We have all sorts of problems. We have information problems. Jesus once said to people at a religious gathering, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29 and Mark 12:24 NIV).

We make mistakes because we don't know the Bible. We sin, we miss the mark, because we don't have a knowledge of God.

#### **We have a guilt problem**

Relationships matter to us tremendously. If we feel at home with God and ourselves and our neighbors, we live in a heaven on earth. If we don't feel at home with God in our own hearts and with our neighbors, we live in a hell on earth. The choice is ours.

Whether we admit it or not, we have a problem with death. We're all afraid of death. We're not like animals that are perfectly composed about death. It doesn't mean a thing to them. But the sting of death is sin.

## **The Bible answers our problems**

God has given us the answer to these problems in Holy Writ. He has told us the way we should live. The main issue in life is making choices, because everything we do matters and everything we don't do matters.

The things we don't do and the things we don't know can destroy us. So God has given us a book to tell us how to live and how to die.

And most of all, it solves the problem of acceptance.

I hear the words of love,  
I gaze upon the blood,  
I see the mighty sacrifice,  
And I have peace with God.

There is no other way. Atonement (at-one-ment) between God and humanity has always, in all religions, involved sacrifice. The difference with the Christian religion is that God provides the sacrifice:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ...

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:14, 18–21)

## **In Him**

That little expression, "in him" (or "in Christ"), is found 165 times in the New Testament. By faith, we are "in him." As soon as we lay

our hands on the head of the Lamb of God, all that he did, all that he was, is put to our account.

God no longer sees in you and me the vileness of the sinner, but the likeness of his Son in whom we believe. That's what it is to be in Christ, "in him." The New Testament says:

"I [we] have been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20).

"You [we] have been raised with Christ" (Colossians 3:1).

"Ye [we] are complete in him" (Colossians 2:10 KJV).

"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in heavenly realms with Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2: 6 NIV).

All of this in the merciful reckoning of God.

Five times the New Testament talks about Christ "in us." This is also an important phrase, but it is different from "in him."

The difference between the two is the difference between our faith-completeness "in him," and our personal incompleteness despite Christ "in us." The difference is between the finished work of God "in him," and the work only begun "in us," in the forgiven sinner.

It's the difference between perfection and imperfection, between justification and sanctification.

### **Righteousness by faith**

Paul says, "The just by faith shall live." (That's the way Romans 1:17 probably is best translated and is so in the RSV.) Remember, "just" is the same word as "righteous."

In some denominations, "righteousness by faith" has traditionally been understood to include two things: 1) being declared righteous (justification) and 2) being made righteous (sanctification—our status or standing with God by faith in Christ and our condition

before God. By condition we mean the Holy Spirit in the life, the doing of good works, and the developing of character.)

That, of course, is not the “righteousness by faith” of the New Testament. Never, never, never.

In Paul’s discussion on acceptance and in his discussion on justification, “righteousness” and “faith,” “just” and “faith,” are linked together 13 times in 13 verses. They are never so linked in his discussion on sanctification. It is so important to understand that sanctification, or being made righteous, is the fruit of the gospel. It’s not the gospel. It’s the result of the gospel.

The gospel is the good news about the death and resurrection of Christ. Through faith in Christ, his perfect righteousness is imputed to us, and God accepts us—now. Sanctification—or working in cooperation with the Holy Spirit—is the fruit of the gospel.

### **Distinct but not separate**

At Calvary, when from our Lord’s side there came blood and water, it’s significant that the streams were distinct though not separate. You’re a skilled theologian if you know how to keep certain things distinct that must never be separate.

The Members of the Trinity are distinct; they are not separate. Most Christians are not Trinitarian; they are tri-theists. They have three separate gods. That’s not the doctrine of the Trinity. The biblical doctrine of the Trinity is that where one Member of the Godhead is, the Others are always present, though One is in the vanguard. The Father didn’t suffer physically on the cross, but he was in the Son. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19 KJV). Through the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself. The whole Trinity was there.

Distinguish but don’t separate. Otherwise, you won’t be able to see the glory of Christ in his finished work on the cross. This work was for us, and gives us a perfect standing with God in a moment. That’s justification. The fruit of justification, of being declared

righteous in Christ, is the coming of the Holy Spirit into your life. This is sanctification, which always follows justification.

### **A great beginning**

Sanctification only begins our being made like our Lord Jesus Christ. It's never complete in this life. There's no perfect Christian, even if he or she has been a Christian for a hundred years and is trying to be just like the Master. The nearer we come to Christ, the more we confess our unlikeness to Christ. Inherent perfection is fully accomplished only by the change of glorification when Christ returns.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). The very best people on earth can only offer litanies of guilt continuously. At the same time, because of the gospel, they can shout, “There's no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (see Romans 8:1).

### **The gospel answers our questions**

The book of Romans answers our great questions: “How are we reconciled to God?”; “How are we to live?”; “How are we to live with ourselves?”; “How are we to live with our neighbors?” When we look at the key to this book (Romans 1:16–17), we notice that when it speaks about the gospel, it says:

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.’ (Romans 1:16–17 RSV)

The expression “righteousness by faith” is a rubric covering the first five chapters of Romans. These chapters talk about what Christ did for us. That is what gives us complete acceptance with God at the moment of faith.

### **Faith and the Cross**

Faith is not something you've got to self-generate. Faith is not

something you develop. Faith is God's gift as you learn that Christ loved you enough to die for you. If Calvary doesn't melt and break the heart, there's nothing else God can do.

The cross is the sun in the sky for the Christian. To take the cross from the Christian would be like blotting out the sun. Kneeling at the foot of the cross, Christians have reached the highest place they can attain.

The cross is the Sermon on the Mount enacted. It's the Ten Commandments demonstrated. It's 1 Corinthians 13 exemplified. The cross is the fruit of the Spirit in full blossom.

At Calvary we see the almighty, pure, spotless, infinite One being made the off-scouring of the universe for our sakes. When Jesus was on the cross, we were all there. You can know the day of your death. It was two thousand years ago.

"One died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV). The verse doesn't say, "If one died for all, all need not die." It says, "All died." We died in him. Therefore, you and I have paid the penalty for all our sins, past, present, and future.

### **Justification—not just forgiveness**

Justification—the great idea of Romans—is not just forgiveness for the past. In fact, it's not even just forgiveness. Justification goes one better. Justification says, "I count you as though you never sinned."

To be justified means to be declared righteous. It doesn't mean only to be declared forgiven. It certainly involves the reality of forgiveness, but God, to assure us of how much he loves us, says, "I'm going to treat you as though you'd never done anything wrong."

Now we see the meaning of the blood and the water that came—distinct but not separate—from Christ's side.

### **Blood and water**

Jesus said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me"



(John 13:8 KJV). That represents the blood of Christ.

As soon as you believe on Christ, your life is washed clean by the blood. That cleansing flood continues to operate every day of your life. Every moment, every hour, every day that you trust in Christ, God sees you only in him. Even if you've bungled things a hundred times that morning.

What a wonderful teaching! Because wherever there's conscious guilt, guilt develops into conscious hate, into self-hatred, illness, and accidents.

We must keep the water and the blood distinct. It is Christ's blood that justified us. The water is the symbol of the Holy Spirit who comes into us as a result of that cleansing. The Holy Spirit changes our heart, our mind, our habits—the life! The blood and water are not separate, yet they are distinct. You only put your confidence in what the blood has done for you because the work of the water is not yet finished.

Anytime you look within, you'll be discouraged. Who has faith enough? Who has love enough? Who's a perfect husband, father, son, wife, mother, daughter? No one.

Sanctification is always the fruit of the gospel. It's not part of righteousness by faith. It's the result of it. The "righteousness of faith" (which, according to Martin Luther, is the article of a standing or falling church) is justification by faith.

### **Righteousness by faith is the gospel**

"Justification" and "righteousness" are the same word in the original Greek of the New Testament. When people read Bibles in other languages, they find that out. When you read a variety of English Bibles, you often find them translated variously. What one translation translates as "justification" another translation in English will translate as "righteousness."

"Righteousness by faith" is "justification by faith."

“Righteousness” and “justification” in Romans are not two different things. Justification is the sweetest melody ever heard from human lips. This is the one interest that should swallow up every other.

Humans have problems. Those problems include knowing right from wrong, how we ought to behave, understanding acceptance, and about death.

But when we see the cross, those problems are refocused and we begin to understand. We are encouraged. We can rejoice in Christ Jesus despite our blemishes and despite our failures.

Because of the cross God forgives us every sin. The perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. God accepts us now, in his Son. We are ushered and welcomed into God’s presence and into his heavenly family.

Life with Christ is good.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Why the Cross?

Some Christians downplay the cross of Christ.  
But this only ignores the terrible tension  
between the holiness of God and the  
problem of sin. For example, the Moral Influence  
Theory severely limits the cross. What Jesus did  
at Calvary is for all people, for all time.

We need to ask, “Why the cross?” Why didn’t God just forgive sin without the cross? Why didn’t God just say, “We’ll let bygones be bygones?”

#### **The problem of sin**

A thousand years ago, an ancient theologian said, “You have not sufficiently considered the seriousness of sin.”

If God had just condemned us all, well, that’s it. It’s finished. The world is gone, the universe is wiped out. If God had simply forgiven us all, the universe would have been in jeopardy because of lawlessness.

Here is a very important verse about the cross:

He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:26 NIV)

Remember what we said about “justify” and “righteous” being the same word in the original Greek? So, we have another translation saying:

To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he

might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:26 KJV)

### **God is holy**

God himself is righteous. We don't tell the whole truth about God when we say that God is love. The love of God is the truth that breaks our hearts. That's the truth that motivates us. God is love. That's a preeminent truth in holy Scripture, but it's not the whole truth.

The Bible refers to the holiness of God over 600 times! God is so holy that, inevitably, he is opposed to anything that's unlike himself, or unholy. God's opposition to sin is revealed in his wrath toward sin.

The wrath of God is spoken of 550 times in the Bible. With God, wrath is not a passion as it is for humans. It's not an emotion with God. It's an attitude that is opposed to anything that is destructive of what God has made.

Therefore, God's wrath is opposed to sin, because there is nothing as devastating as sin.

The greatest cheat, the slickest confidence trick in the world, is sin. We always think sin will benefit us. But it never does. Sin is the greatest cheat in the world.

All the fruit of sin is either unripe or rotten. Anything taken without the blessing of God, whether it's a man or a woman or money or reputation, whatever it is, is like the manna that was hoarded. It breeds maggots (see Exodus 16:20).

God is opposed to sin. That's the wrath of God. He's a holy God. He cannot tolerate evil, because he knows it destroys us.

### **The Cross and sin**

If we want to understand the cross, we need to understand that it is not just about forgiveness—it is about the holiness of God.

Yes, it is a wonderful revelation of the love of God. All of our sins are but a grain of sand compared to the mountain of his forgiveness. All of our sins are just a dewdrop falling into the ocean of his mercy.

But, friends, the cross reveals, first of all, the holiness of God.

God himself could not forgive sin until its penalty was paid. The cross was necessary so that God might be just and the justifier of all who believe. The cross was necessary so that God might be right and righteous, as well as the right-wiser—the one who makes us right—of all of us who believe.

Through Calvary, the moral law (which reflects the character of God) is vindicated and established.

God is light as well as love. That explains some of the hard things in the New Testament. You can read things in the New Testament about God that make the selfish and ungrateful thankful.

Your Father in heaven. ... causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:45 NIV)

Then you can read some things that make the believer and the upright fearful:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell. ... And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. (Mark 9:43, 45)

It's better to go into death without an eye or a hand than to cling to sin. God says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28 KJV).

The same God says a few verses later: “But anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:32 NIV).

### **Hot and cold**

How come God blows hot and cold? How is it that God’s so gentle, so soft? He invites us to believe. “Whosoever will may come” (Mark 8:34 KJV).

And the Spirit and the bride say, 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. (Revelation 22:17)

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)

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. (Matthew 12:31)

But if we refuse to believe, it is the worm for us (Mark 9:44, 46, 48); torment (Matthew 8:29); anguish (Romans 2:9); weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42; Luke 13:28).

The reason for the gentleness and harshness is because sin is so sinful. Sin is so terrible. Sin is so devastating.

God hates sin. God will not tolerate sin. The cross of Christ testifies to that, “Sin always bring death.” Our sin brought the death of Christ.

We must never forget that the Bible is talking about the holiness of God, as well as the love of God. The cross is doing both.

### **Two universities**

Let me give you an illustration. There’s a denomination that has a couple of universities in this country. At one university they

teach the Protestant view of the meaning of the cross. That is, the cross was an atonement. Christ was our Substitute and our Representative.

The same denomination has another university on the opposite side of the country. There are many fine Christians there also. However, they teach a different theory. They teach what is known as the Moral Influence Theory.

In that theory, the cross of Christ wasn't really necessary. God did it as a gesture, to show he loves us. But God could have forgiven sin without the cross. The motive behind the theory is, "We don't want a butcher shop religion, a slaughterhouse religion. Don't talk too much about the blood."

That is the Moral Influence Theory. It is taught by men and women whom I respect greatly and love dearly. They're good men and women. But this teaching has never been acceptable to either Catholic or Protestant theologians because it's non-biblical.

### **The moral influence theory**

The Moral Influence Theory divides up the Trinity. The theory creates a straw man so it can knock him down. "God wouldn't take an innocent man and put guilt upon an innocent man," the theory says. Dear friends, that's just plain ignorance of the New Testament.

At the cross, the One sinned against pays the penalty. You can't divide up the Trinity and talk about the Father doing this to the Son. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Don't divide up the Trinity.

The theory also says, "God is not dictated to by a law outside of himself. God doesn't have to pay a penalty to that law." True, God is not dictated to by a law outside himself. But God is dictated to by what God is. God's law is the outward expression of what God is.

Because God is purity, there's a law about purity (Exodus 20:14).

Because God is truthful, there's a law about truthfulness (Exodus 20:16). Because God is generous and reliable, there's a warning against stealing (Exodus 20:15). The law is simply the outward expression of what God is. It expresses what God's character is.

God therefore cannot dispose of his law. Remember what Romans says about God's law:

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:31 NIV)

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. (Romans 7:12)

### **The importance of the Cross**

Those who hold the Moral Influence Theory, in this and other countries, are saying, "We want to avoid the traditional view of the cross somehow. We want to leave it out." With the cross of Christ left behind the door, that's how they march.

They ignore the plain statement of Scripture that says:

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:22)

For example, the Moral Influence Theory makes the cross of no use to the patriarchs. If the only value in the cross of Christ was to show us the love of God, that means a lot of people lived without that demonstration. Yet we know that Abraham will be saved; Melchizedek will be saved; Job will be saved. They all lived before the cross.

You see, the Bible teaches that the cross of Christ atones for the past, as well as all the future. It covers all of time.

The cross is a microcosm of the universe that unfolds the heart of God. God is against sin, but God is for sinners.



The cross unfolds the heart of man. Man is so sinful that he would plan to destroy his God.

The cross tells the reality about heaven and about earth, about past, present, and future. To understand the mystery of the cross is to have insight into all the mysteries of existence.

### **The triumph of the Cross**

Think of the mystery of pain.

There are times when every soul feels forsaken. There are people with diseases that cannot be helped by the doctors.

Jesus cried upon the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). The cross of Christ is saying, “The fact that you’ve been forsaken doesn’t really mean you are.”

I’m so glad for the testimony of the cross that you can feel forsaken—yet not be forsaken.

Christ felt he was forsaken at Calvary. Three days later he was standing on resurrection ground! I’m so glad for the testimony that pain doesn’t have the last word, that suffering isn’t the omega.

“There’s more to come!” proclaims the cross of Christ. “Life is not just pain and death. There’s resurrection and glory!”

That, too, is part of the meaning of the cross.



## CHAPTER NINE

### Calvary's Day of Atonement

We are saved by grace. To illustrate, Paul uses three metaphors: One from the law court, one from the slave market, and one from the temple. Jesus is our true High Priest, and he made his complete atonement for us at Calvary.

You'll remember from our previous study that the book of Romans is very systematically constructed. The first three chapters are like a lawyer's brief.

#### **Three condemning chapters**

The first chapter says, "See those irreligious people? They're all lost. God gave them up, because look how they live. They're hateful, impure, and liars. The irreligious are lost."

The second chapter focuses on the religious who don't know the gospel. They're going to church; they're singing hymns; they're paying tithe. They're very religious outwardly, but they don't know the gospel. Paul says to them, "You're lost, too, because in your own heart you still love sin. You are religious, but because you don't rejoice in the gospel, you're lost."

God looks at the heart. God wants an obedience that isn't just outward. God wants an obedience that's inward. He wants an obedience that's willing and complete and perfect and flawless and fervent.

Whenever you have a religion that says, "If I don't do this and I do this, I'll get to heaven," you have an abominable religion. That's a religion that's drudgery, a religion of duty instead of

privilege; of weight instead of wings. That's not the religion of the New Testament.

The religion of the New Testament is such that you are so captivated by the love of God that the joy thereof fills you with contentment. That's the religion of the New Testament.

The third chapter lists 14 statements from the Old Testament that declare, "There's none righteous, not one."

Then Paul says, "There you are. God, by the use of his moral law, has shut everybody up to condemnation. He's put them all in the dock."

We're all in the same place. There's no difference between us, for all have sinned.

It's as though we were in the French Revolution when aristocrats were mixed in with street women and dukes with dustmen. God has locked us all up and thrown away the key.

### **An Advocate appears!**

Suddenly, an Advocate appears—a glorious advocate! But to our amazement, he collapses. He's about to intercede and he dies.

We wait and wait. Day after day we wait, and then the third day our Advocate rises from the dead. He says, "Father, I claim them. They are mine. I bought them. They are mine."

Those are the first three chapters that lead up to the Acropolis of the New Testament. This Acropolis of salvation is so important! It's the glorious temple of the New Testament. Here it is:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21–25 NIV)

### **Saved by grace**

The source of justification is the grace of God. The means of justification is the blood of Christ. The instrumental appropriation of justification is faith. The fruitage of justification is works.

You are saved by faith alone. However, the faith that saves is never alone. You're not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works. But the basis is grace, manifested in the blood of Christ.

Karl Barth said, “Religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude.” That’s a great summary. Religion is grace. Every letter of Paul begins and ends with grace. The last word of the New Testament is grace: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (Revelation 22:21 KJV).

Grace is simply a name for the outpouring love of God for the unlovely. “We’re saved by God’s grace,” says this passage, “through the shed blood of Christ, to be received by faith.”

### **Three metaphors**

Paul uses three metaphors here in this famous passage. He uses a metaphor from the law court (Romans 4:24). That’s where we get “justification,” a legal term. When a person’s accused of a crime, if that person is justified (declared innocent), that person is acquitted, and goes free. That’s one metaphor.

Then Paul uses a metaphor from slavery—redemption (Romans 4:24). The man or woman who was a slave could be redeemed by the payment of money. We were redeemed from slavery by the payment of the shed blood of our Lord.

Then Paul uses a third metaphor, a metaphor from the Jerusalem temple—a sacrifice of atonement (Romans 4:25).

### **Sacrifice of atonement**

There were sacrifices offered every day at the temple. Once a year a special sacrifice was slain, and the blood was taken into the Most Holy Place. This only happened once a year, and it pointed forward to Calvary.

Once a year, the high priest went through the temple veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. He carried with him the still-warm blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the mercy seat over the law. (The mercy seat was the golden lid of the ark that contained the Ten Commandments.)

That law has been violated and broken by all of us.

God looked at the broken Decalogue under the ark's lid. But God looked at it through the blood of the sacrifice sprinkled on the mercy seat.

The mercy seat is a symbol of Christ and his sacrificial death. God looks at the law that we've broken. But God looks at our situation through the shed blood of Christ.

### **Passion Week**

When the New Testament was written, the whole story of Christ's Passion—the last week of his life on earth—was included. Because it's so important.

If the New Testament contained all of Christ's life on the same scale as Passion Week, it would be 1,000 times the size it is now! From a third to a half of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are

about the last week of our Lord's life. That's because it's so important. As we said before, Jesus didn't say, "Remember my beautiful words." Jesus didn't say, "Remember my wonderful miracles." Jesus didn't say, "Remember my outstanding life." Jesus said, "Remember my death."

That's because I'm not saved by Jesus' miracles. (There have been plenty of miracle-workers.) I'm not saved by Jesus as a teacher. (There have been plenty of good teachers.) I'm saved by the death of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. (There has only been one death of atonement.)

When the New Testament presents that death, it draws from the annual ritual of the Day of Atonement.

### **The Day of Atonement**

Every Day of Atonement, the sacrifice was secured some days beforehand. Then the high priest, who was involved in offering the sacrifice, was kept up all night before the sacrifice was offered.

He was repeatedly interviewed by the Sanhedrin. His clothes were changed several times to make sure he was in no way defiled. When the cock crowed, when they burned the first of the sacrifices of the day, then they brought in the atonement sacrifice.

The high priest, alone, did the work on that Day of Atonement. Only he. He had no helpers.

This man—who's been up all night, who's been interrogated by the leaders of the land, whose clothes have been changed repeatedly—he alone conducts the sacrifice.

When the cock crows and the fires are lit, he takes the sacrifice and offers it, and slays it raw. Then he takes the warm blood in a golden bowl through the veil into the Most Holy Place. No one else went through there all year.

He takes the warm blood and sprinkles it on the mercy seat where the Shekinah glory—the Presence of God—shines above.

### **Jesus Our High Priest**

The New Testament was written to show that Jesus is our true High Priest. The Passion Week narrative reveals Jesus as High Priest making the atonement for the human race. He is kept up all night. He's in Gethsemane, then brought before Annas, then before Annas and Caiaphas, then before the Sanhedrin.

Every year, for hundreds of years, the high priest was kept up all night on the Day of Atonement. He was interrogated throughout the night by the leaders of Israel. So, too, during his day of atonement, Jesus was kept up all night just as the high priest always was. Jesus was interrogated repeatedly, at a total of seven trials, by the religious and secular leaders of Israel. (All these “trials” were illegal. It was quite illegal to have trials at night.)

Just as the high priest, every year for hundreds of years, had his clothes repeatedly changed, so Jesus had his clothes repeatedly changed. They are removed so he can be flogged. They are removed so he can be nailed naked to the cross. Repeatedly, his clothes are changed, just as were the high priest's.

Then Jesus offered the sacrifice. And when his flesh was torn, the veil was torn (Hebrews 10:20).

### **The veil torn away**

Jesus entered within the veil—entered into the presence of God—by his own sacrifice. At Calvary, a soldier put a lance in Jesus' side, and ripped it open. As Jesus died, “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51 NIV).

This tells us that the way to the heart of God is now open. There are no barriers between us and God now in Christ. All can come to God through Christ.

Israel's religion, you'll remember, was a religion of restriction. The



gentiles who wanted to worship Israel's God were only allowed in one of the temple courts. That's the gentile men. Gentile women were restricted to another court. Jewish women were restricted to another court, and Jewish men another.

Ordinary priests could go into the first (or outer) apartment of the temple to minister. But only the high priest was allowed into the Most Holy Place where the Shekinah glory of God shone. He only was allowed in once a year, and he only if he had the blood of sacrifice. And only for a few moments.

But when our Lord died on the cross, the veil in the temple was rent. The veil between us and God was torn away. And the barriers between human beings, such as racism and class distinctions, were also torn away.

### **Christ's Atonement complete**

That's why we read that on the third day after the crucifixion, Peter and John ran to Jesus' tomb. They "saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen" (John 20:6-7).

In Leviticus 16 we read, "Then Aaron [the high priest] is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he put on before he entered the Most Holy Place [and made atonement], and he is to leave them there" (Leviticus 16:23). The high priest then put on his glorious, ceremonial robes to show that the work of atonement was finished.

Our Lord Jesus left his priestly linen clothes in the tomb. When Peter and John looked in and saw the clothes lying there, they saw a symbol that Christ's atonement was complete.

You don't have to be afraid of the tomb anymore. The robes of Christ are there. You don't have to be afraid of the tomb anymore. It's a place of angels (John 20:12). You don't have to be afraid of the tomb anymore, the sweet fragrance of Christ's ointment is

there (John 19:40–41). You needn't be afraid of death anymore. Because of Christ, it's now fragrant. It's no longer a grim enemy. Christ has abolished death.

We may fall asleep in Christ, but we can never die. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36 KJV).

Never forget, the Old Testament Day of Atonement pointed to the Christ event, to the cross of Calvary. It is wrong to indulge in calendrical shuffling, trying to bring the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement down to the nineteenth century.

The ancient Day of Atonement is not talking about the nineteenth century. It points to the cross of Christ. That's where the final, full atonement was made. Calvary was the only place of complete atonement. We look only to Calvary, not to an event or date invented by man.

That's a vital and basic point.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Romans Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of Romans shows us that our part in salvation is the same as for Abraham. Faith in Christ is credited to us as righteousness. This begins a life of good works. Salvation is by faith because all the best things in life are free.

Come with me now, please, to chapter 4 of Romans. This chapter is an expansion of how we are restored to God. Christ has done the necessary work, but we must believe.

You see, there's "Christ for us" and there's "Christ in us." We appropriate Christ for us by faith alone. When we do that, the Holy Spirit comes into our heart.

Then sanctification begins.

The moment you believe, the Spirit comes in. That's because you are declared righteous enough—in Christ—to receive the Holy Spirit. (There is no other way sinners can be holy enough.) Now God is for you, not against you. Now you can say, "I'm never left alone. I need never feel inadequate."

Jesus said, "I will come to you" (John 14:18 NIV). The coming of the Holy Spirit is the coming of Christ.

Any religion that elevates the Spirit above the Son is not a Christian religion. It has Christians in it, but it's not a Christian religion. That's because the Spirit doesn't speak of himself (John 16:13). It's a mistake to have a religion speak all the time about the Spirit over and above the Son.

The Spirit's very important, but Jesus said, "He will not speak of himself. He will witness to me. I send him to you." The coming of the Spirit into our life is the coming of Christ, and that's the beginning of sanctification.

### **Sanctification—A beginning**

Chapter 4 tells us how sanctification begins to work.

Sanctification begins when we receive the Holy Spirit. But we cannot receive the Holy Spirit until we are holy.

The only way we sinners are counted sufficiently holy to receive the Holy Spirit is through having Christ's perfect righteousness imputed and reckoned to us.

We can say then that sanctification begins with justification. In fact, it cannot begin until we are first justified.\*

Please do not confuse what I'm saying with the idea that justification merely begins the Christian life or that we don't need justification once we are sanctified enough.

This would imply that we sinners could somehow become so skillful at holy living in this world that God would accept us for what we are—not what we are counted in Christ!

We need justification all the time, every step of the way, like a rainbow arching over our whole lifespan.

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\* Here, we are using the popular view of sanctification, meaning Christian growth. There is a biblical use of sanctification, which is a parallel term to justification. Justification—meaning declared righteous—is the language of the law court; sanctification—meaning set apart for God—is the language of the sanctuary. This biblical way of using sanctification describes our perfect standing with God when we believe. Like the rainbow of justification, sanctification also is over us all our days.

However, justification does begin sanctification. There is no other way to receive the Holy Spirit, the agent of sanctification, except by being declared as holy as Jesus through faith in the Savior.

### **The meaning of law**

Chapter 4 enlarges on the phrase found in chapter 3, “To which the Law and the Prophets testify” (verse 21).

People often think that this word “law” is the same thing as the Ten Commandments. That’s not accurate. “Law” is a term with several meanings.

- One of the meanings of “law” is a synonym for “the whole Old Testament.”
- Another meaning of law is “the Pentateuch.” (The Pentateuch comprises the first five books of the Old Testament. These five books, which constitute the basis of Judaism, are traditionally understood to be written by Moses.) In Romans the word law is used this way.
- However, the word law is also used to refer to the moral elements of the Pentateuch as comprehended in the Decalogue. So “law” has a variety of meanings.
- In Galatians, Paul’s eye is on the ceremonial elements in Israel’s economy when he uses “law.”
- In Romans, Paul’s eye is on the moral elements of the law.

### **The Law and the Prophets**

Notice Paul wrote, “The Law and the Prophets.” That means the whole Old Testament. “Law” means the first five books of Moses, and “Prophets” means the rest of the Old Testament.

Jesus gives us an example of this usage. Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus was not saying, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Ten Commandments and the Prophets.” He was rather saying, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the writings of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament.”

### **Law and prophets and gospel**

Chapter 4 enlarges on the statement that, “The Law and the Prophets” of the Old Testament bear witness to Christ’s way of salvation.

The key word here is a Greek word “*logizomai*,” which is sometimes translated as “account,” “reckon,” or “impute.” Chapter 4 explains how we are counted righteous—and that’s another translation of the Greek word “*logizomai*,” meaning counted.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:1–3).

### **Abraham and faith**

The last phrase, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” is a quotation from the first book of the Bible, Genesis. That’s fascinating because Paul is quoting the very first time in the Bible that the word “righteousness” is used!

This same verse that uses the word “righteousness” for the first time is also the first verse to use the word “believed!”

Genesis 15:6 says that, “Abram believed the Lord.” That means Abraham trusted God. He laid hold of God. “And he [the Lord] credited it to him as righteousness.”

Abraham’s belief, trust, laying hold of God was credited, reckoned, imputed, accounted, and attributed to him for righteousness. Now, this is the same man who had sworn to the Egyptian pharaoh that

his wife, Sarah, was only his sister. This is Abraham, the great man of faith—whose faith occasionally balked and faltered.

Do you see? God counts him righteous by faith alone, not by Abraham's performance. That's because faith knits us to God.

True religion is not hymn-singing. It's not even reading the Bible and praying. These things are good. They are an essential part of the fruitage of true religion. But true religion is the union of our heart with God.

That's what faith does. You take hold of God. You bond with him.

### **Faith is receiving**

Faith is an empty hand. A child's hand that takes a delicious apple doesn't make the apple. It doesn't deserve the apple. The child's hand just takes the apple. That's how faith is.

Similarly, faith "takes" salvation. Salvation is something received, not something achieved.

Paul is saying to the Romans (enlarging on the statement about "The Law and the Prophets") that "The Law bears witness to this means of obtaining righteousness. I'm explaining it. Look how it worked for Abraham."

By quoting from Genesis, Paul is using that section of the Scripture—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—known as "the Law of Moses," or the Pentateuch. Paul asks, "The very first time in the Law that righteousness is used, how did Abraham get it?"

The answer is: by trusting and believing! By faith alone!"

### **Naaman and works**

Dear friends, our trouble is we would rather not receive righteousness that way, by faith alone. We would rather earn it by our works.

Do you remember the story of Naaman in Second Kings? Naaman was the commander of the army of the king of Aram (5:1). But the great Naaman was a leper.

He humbled himself and went to Elisha the prophet. (Elisha was a prophet in the small and despised nation of Israel.) Elisha said to Naaman, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan” (5:10).

Naaman was horrified and enraged. “I thought you were going to do something sensational and impressive. What, you want me, the noble Naaman, to wash in that muddy river? I’m a nobleman! We have better rivers back home in Damascus. Tell me to wash in those. You want me to dip myself in that water? Jewish water?” (see 5:11–12).

Naaman wanted Elisha to think of him as a nobleman—who incidentally had leprosy. But Elisha, the prophet, turned Naaman’s thinking on its head. Elisha thought of Naaman as a leper—who incidentally was a nobleman.

You and I come to God somewhat like Naaman. Naaman said, “I thought he’d do some great thing, such as place his hand over my leprosy and say, “abracadabra.” I thought fire would go forth, and steam and smoke, and then I’d be healed.”

But, Elisha says to Naaman, “Look, if I’d asked you to do some great thing, wouldn’t you have done it to be rid of leprosy? Why not do this easy thing when I ask you?” (See 5:13).

### **The best things are gifts**

By nature we would rather earn our salvation. But how can we earn something infinite? How can we ever pay for infinite, everlasting life with a little fragment of existence?

We cannot earn something infinite. Something infinite has to be a gift to us who are finite.



This really shouldn't surprise us, should it? After all, the best things are gifts, aren't they?

First of all, this life is a gift. We didn't arrange it. We didn't choose our grandpas and grandmas and mother and father and the place and time of our birth.

We didn't choose our color, sex, or race. We had nothing to do with these things.

Second, we've been sustained by gifts ever since. We've been on the receiving end all the time.

I would often say to my children at home, "As long as you're receiving, you have some duties to perform as a contribution to the home." And we are all receiving all the time.

How much do you pay for sunshine? In Los Angeles you have to endure the overcrowding and traffic to have the sunshine, but we pay nothing for it.

How much do you pay for air? I was going to say "fresh air," but we all have to endure smog. It's fresh enough in the morning after rain. How much do we pay for life-giving air?

All the best things in life are free, including love. Parental love. Filial love. Married love. They are all free.

If love is bought, it's not love. That's prostitution. Love has to be a free gift to be real love.

### **Lowly faith finds heavenly places**

The mental picture here is of an empty hand receiving the gift. Even a trembling hand can take a golden cup.

You ask, "What if I don't have very good faith?" Listen, no one has an excuse, because the Bible says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). If you

think your faith is faulty, at least you can call. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

### **The chosen vehicle**

Faith is the gospel’s chosen vehicle because faith has no virtue in itself. Faith gives all the credit to God. You must go through a lowly entranceway into the Christian life. You are also going to be kept low one way or another ever after.

The old joke is: “I used to pray for humility. I don’t do that now. I don’t have to ask anymore. I’m a married man, with children.” Life has many things to humble us. Once you enter by lowly faith into the Christian life, God’s going to keep you walking lowly, one way or another.

That’s because the moment we forget that we are paupers, on a pension from heaven, we’re in danger. The only way to walk high is to walk low. It’s the only way.

God has chosen lowly faith that we might walk in heavenly places.

### **The channel of blessing**

It is important to understand that this faith whereof we speak must never be considered as the cause of our being reckoned right with God but only the channel through which the blessing comes.

Otherwise, we have made of faith a work; whereas, in truth, it is nothing but the empty hand that takes the gift. God could only have all the glory for his gracious work of redemption if man’s part remained that of the beggar accepting the divine gifts. Faith itself is a gift bestowed on all who hear the gospel unless they oppose and reject the good news.

See the glory of the description of God that is found in the fifth verse of this chapter. He is called the One “who justifies the ungodly.” What a title! What wonderful encouragement for every sinner! In the Old Testament law, judges were forbidden to justify the ungodly (see Deuteronomy 25:1.) But God breaks all human

customs and traditions by his infinite mercy and declares the penitent sinner to be righteous because he or she has embraced the Savior and thus becomes covered with his mantle of merit.

### **The man after God's own heart**

Having built with this example of Abraham from that portion of Scripture known as the Law (the Pentateuch), Paul proceeds now to draw an example from the Prophets. What we call the historical books—Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles—were known as “the former prophets.” And there is to be found a wonderful story of David, “the man after God's own heart.”

Surely one of the most encouraging verses of the Bible is 1 Kings 14:8. Here is a message to the apostatizing king Jeroboam, and he is admonished to be like David, who is now dead. God says to him, “You have not been like my servant, David, who kept my commandments, and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes” (RSV).

Does the Almighty suffer from amnesia? Has he forgotten David's murder and adultery? Here is a wonderful example of justification which declares the sinner not only forgiven but treated as though he or she had never sinned. Marvel of marvels! Rejoice and sing! God will not remember your sins, however heinous, if you have found and accepted the gospel!

### **Justification, past and present**

Observe that when Paul quotes David's own words in verses 7 and 8, he makes it plain that the blessing of justification is not only for the past but for the present as well. “Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin” (4:8 RSV). Forget the fairy story that angels industriously record in the heavenly books our slightest deviations or our falls to incriminate us on Judgment Day! The sins of the believer are not reckoned or recorded against him or her.

Will this encourage us to sin lightly? No, it should break our hearts

and deliver us from the curse of disobedience. Remember, the power of sin is never broken until the guilt of sin has been taken away. Only those persons are truly free who want to do what they ought to do.

The real cause of unhappiness is not from without but from within. It is our unsatisfied desires that make us miserable, and the law can no more restrain these desires than a person attacked can ward off the wolf by trying to hold its muzzle. Only when something infinitely better has come within our grasp are we delivered from chasing after baubles.

### **Blessed are those who fail**

In the rest of the chapter, Paul elaborates his theme by showing that justification is heaven's bestowal upon those who have failed:

- 1) by violating the divine law about outward religious ceremonies.
- 2) in fulfilling the moral law of the Decalogue pronounced at Sinai.
- 3) by lacking inner strength and confessing only weakness.

Paul asks in verse 9 whether the blessing of being right with God is pronounced only upon the circumcised and answers that Abraham received the blessing while he was uncircumcised.

Circumcision here stands for all outward religious observances—baptism, the Lord's Supper, Sabbath-keeping, churchgoing, Bible-reading, prayer, etc. Each and all of these are God's intention for the believer, but not one of them is a channel of merit.

We must distinguish between the many blessings that come to us as we follow the things that “accompany salvation” and “salvation” itself.

It is true that “without form, Spirit dies; and without Spirit, form is already dead.” The Christian church cannot be cavalier and dispense with all outward forms as though we were ethereal spirits. Certainly,

while we are in the body we need outward forms, and God has appointed them. But righteousness is not to be found therein.

In verses 13 on, we are further told that the promises made to Abraham came before the law was given at Mount Sinai. It is true that all the principles of that law had existed from the beginning, and each can be found in the book of Genesis alone. But the official proclamation of the Decalogue as a covenant came at Mount Sinai centuries after Abraham was pronounced righteous. Thus, Paul can now write:

The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents to the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there's no law there's no transgression.

That is why it depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants—not only to the adherents to the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all ... . (Romans 4:13–16)

### **More than ancient Israel**

Notice, incidentally, that it is affirmed that God's promise was about the world and not just about Canaan. This is typical of the way in which the New Testament transposes all the things that belong to Israel in the Old Testament.

Israel is now the church, and the promises apply to believers of all nations and will ultimately be fulfilled in the new earth to come. Let us not make the mistake of taking those Old Testament passages that foretold the restoration from the Babylonian captivity and apply them to the restoration of modern Israel.

It is possible to believe that God was in the latter event, for God is just and the Jews have a right to their own country, without seeing

in it a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Most modern Jews are not believers even in the Old Testament, let alone constituting a blessed penitent remnant on whom the favor of God especially rests.

Every Jew is as precious to God as every Gentile, and has been redeemed by the blood of Christ but, concerning the nation, it is written: “God’s wrath has come upon them.” And, “May no fruit ever come from you again!”

“It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of promise are reckoned as descendants.”

(1 Thessalonians 2:16; Matthew 21:19; Romans 9:8. See also Matthew 21:43.)

### **The miraculous birth of the believer**

Finally, in Chapter 4 Paul takes us back to Abraham and points out that though his own body was almost dead and likewise Sarah’s, yet God gave them a child miraculously. In verse 18 Paul describes God as One “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

And his point is that those who are dead in sins can come to life by God’s gracious gift of faith through the Holy Spirit. We can know the blessing of justification regardless of how bad we have been or how bad we feel or truly are. The gift is for everyone who hungers and thirsts to receive it.

The last words of the chapter are these: “Jesus our Lord ... was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (4:25). Observe that Christ’s death followed the fact of human trespass, and similarly his resurrection followed our justification.

In other words, the resurrection of Christ was the divine seal, that because of the cross, the whole world now stood legally justified. This is further taught in the next chapter, particularly in verses 18 and 19. All men and women are legally free, legally justified, all that remains is for each individual to accept the gift.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Introduction to Romans Chapter Five

Romans 5:1–2 tells us we need justification by faith continually because we fall short of God’s glory all the time. The cross of Christ has ended our war with God. Peace is ours through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Near, so very near to God,  
Nearer I cannot be;  
For in the person of his Son,  
I am as near as he.

That’s worth thinking about, because it’s the meaning and result of the gospel. “Near, so very near to God, Nearer I cannot be; For in the person of his Son, I am as near as he”—by faith.

#### **Three Romans “therefores”**

Please turn to Romans 5:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1–2 NIV)

Notice it begins with, “Therefore.” Someone has said that whenever you see a “therefore,” you should ask what the “therefore” is there for.

There are three of them in this book of Romans.

There’s one that has to do with the therefore of justification,

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith” (Romans 5:1).

There’s one that has to do with sanctification, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Despite all the problems that the previous verses of the seventh chapter have talked about, there is still no condemnation.

Even though “what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15), “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

The last time “therefore” occurs in Romans is, “Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

This is the “therefore” of service. Therefore, in Romans, you have three “therefores”—a “therefore” of justification, a “therefore” of sanctification, and a “therefore” of service.

### **Present continuous justification**

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I prefer the Revised Standard Version’s, “Therefore, since we are justified . . . .” The Greek tense is present continuous. You see, in the third chapter, we read, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 NIV). “All have sinned”—that’s past tense in the Greek. “And fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)—that’s present continuous.

It’s very important that we see the present tense, “We are justified.” That’s because I continue to fall short. If I do anything for less than perfect love, less than perfect unselfishness, I fall short of the glory of God.



Selfishness dogs our every thought, word, and deed while we're in the body. There's not a single inclination of the heart, a disposition of the flesh, that isn't tainted by our selfishness, even after conversion.

Therefore: Number 1, if it is true that all have sinned, and Number 2, if it is true that not only have I sinned in the past but that even as a believer I still fall short (and we all do). Then, Number 3, I need present continuous justification through faith right now all the time.

We are all falling short. Which of us is as generous as we should be with our love, sympathies, finances, and physical efforts? Which of us is as unstinting as we should be? Which of us is as trusting, prayerful, or praiseful as we should be? Prayer and praise are often a foreign language to professed Christians.

“Therefore, since we are justified.”

Despite what I am, it's still true that God “justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:5 KJV). I'm still ungodly, but justified.

### **Peace with God**

Romans 5:1 continues: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.” Peace with God is not simply an emotion.

Please don't misunderstand. The Bible's not against emotions. God invented human emotions. They're wonderful. But like everything else wonderful, they can be extremely dangerous.

You can't think of anything that's a great blessing that can't also be a great curse. All the best gifts of God can be two-edged swords. The gift of speech is wonderful. How many people can be helped by a kind, sympathetic expression? But how many people can be hurt by the opposite?

Every good thing can be abused—and is. Even as Christians we so often take the gifts of God and abuse them.

However, we are justified by faith, not by feeling. The peace Paul speaks of is the end of the war between us and God. It's not an emotional overabundance.

God is never more pleased than when a believer looks around on a universe from which every vestige of God seems to have departed and still chooses to obey him—regardless of feelings.

Feelings, dear friends, on their own are deceptive and unreliable. And when the Bible talks about peace with God, it's not talking simply about a feeling.

The Bible does talk about peace as an emotion. “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Romans 15:13 KJV).

At this stage joy and peace are emotions—and we'll come across this again later. Only notice it's after you believe. It's joy and peace in believing.

### **The peace of reconciliation**

The peace in, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God” is a reconciliation with God, not simply an emotion. The war between us and God is over.

Something had to happen before God could be reconciled to us. Not to God's nature, not to God's heart, but to the way God could proceed. The cross makes all the difference. Only because of the cross is it lawful and legal for God to forgive and accept sinners. That's because the price of their sins—past, present, and future—has been paid.

That won't make them careless about sin. Such grace should melt and break the human heart.

## **Through our Lord**

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). It would benefit you sometimes to take your concordance and look up the various passages in Romans that use that expression “through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

You’ll find that the first five chapters of Romans talk about freedom from God’s wrath “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the sixth chapter, it’s freedom from sin “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then, in the seventh chapter, freedom from law (as a method of salvation) “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then, in the eighth chapter, freedom from death “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It’s all through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Near, so very near to God, Nearer I cannot be; For in the person of his Son, I am as near as he.” It’s through our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s not through a preacher that we are near to God. It’s not through a church, or a creed. It’s not through anything we do. We are near to God through what Christ has done.

The nineteenth-century preachers used to say, “The gospel is done, done, done, not do, do, do, cock-a-doodle-do. Done!” That’s right. The gospel’s done.

And when you see that and you’ve received it, you’ve received a finished work, a perfect work. God finds no fault with the work of Jesus, and when I’m hidden in Jesus by simple faith, God finds no fault with me. I find a thousand faults with me, but God doesn’t find any. Now that’s generous!

## **The treasure house of grace**

Then, Paul writes, “Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:2).

“Gained access.” It’s as though we’ve come into a great treasure room. “In which we now stand.” You don’t sit down; you stand there. You stand because from now on it’s going to be a walk with God.

A walk is a continually interrupted falling. You are living by faith. You can't breathe once and that's it forever. Every small boy's glad you don't have just one birthday party where you eat—and that's it. You get to do it repeatedly. You have to breathe repeatedly. You have to trust repeatedly. One step after another, every step, a step of faith.

We walk, we stand, because we have already gained access to God's grace in Christ. We're in a great treasure room.

Clive, the eighteenth-century British general, was taken into an Indian rajah's treasure room. The rajah said to Clive, "You see all these rubies, diamonds, and sapphires? Help yourself." Well, Clive didn't want to seem ungrateful, so he took a few.

When he got back to England, he was summoned before a law court. "You stole some of the property of His Majesty King George III when you were in India on government service." Clive explained the situation, and told how he was invited to take what he wanted. "I am amazed at my own moderation," he exclaimed.

### **Amazing moderation**

The angels are amazed at our moderation.

You see, we all have 100 percent of the merits of Christ put to our account. That's our access to God.

But with the access come accessories.

The rule in the treasure house of grace is, "According to your faith will it be done to you" (Matthew 9:29 NIV). That's the rule in the treasure house of grace. With our access to God comes accessories, such as joy and fruitfulness. We should be amazed at our own moderation.

We could all do so much more than we are doing. God accepts us in Christ as though we are doing it all. But here we are in

this treasure house, and God would have us remember the rule: “According to your faith will it be done to you.”

### **In glory now**

“We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2). Paul jumps from justification—being justified by faith—to the hope of glorification. When we are transformed and we receive a new, spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44), we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

He doesn’t even mention sanctification. Sanctification is an inevitable and essential part of Christian experience, and a necessary part.

But Paul says (paraphrase): “If you’ve begun and you are looking unto Jesus, well, that’s it! All I can see is you in Christ now and you in Christ then. Already I see you at the end and completion of your journey with Christ, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.”

For Paul, everything is so certain in Christ, that when we are justified by faith, why, that’s the same as already being in heaven!



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Romans 5:3–5

Romans 5:3–5 tells us that while we have peace with God, we still suffer in this life. What’s surprising is that all of life is not suffering—as sinners, we deserve such a life. But pain is our best teacher. And through the gospel the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to genuine hope.

Here’s the hardest line in the book of Romans: “We also rejoice in our sufferings” (Romans 5:3 NIV).

I can tell you, I don’t.

Here’s a commandment of Scripture I have never been able to obey. It is an ideal with me. It has never been an achievement. The commandment says, “Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy” (James 1:2 NRSV).

I don’t.

Only by faith can we even venture out on that line. “We also rejoice in our sufferings,” Paul says. Then he gives the reasons. By faith we may do it, but that’s the only way it can be done.

#### **Christians and suffering**

Paul writes, “But we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3–4 NIV).

I want to think with you on this verse. It’s very important.

Life is very largely suffering. There’s a great deal of suffering in

every life. A person who doesn't face this reality is not prepared to handle life. Dr. James Dobson has written a splendid book called *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. I recommend it to all of you. He comments:

In every Christian's life, there is a time of the betrayal barrier, when it seems as though God has let us down and he's not answering our prayers. We're in pain and God doesn't seem to care.

Dr. Dobson continues, "At that point, 90 percent of Christians balk. They are not prepared for this."

Many Christians have been raised on the 'Health and Wealth' gospel that, once you become a Christian, you have no more troubles.

Dear friends, being a Christian is not a stroll on a spring day through a rose garden. Paul said, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22 NIV).

### **But why isn't all life suffering?**

Let me refer you to an interesting verse:

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:1–5)

Apparently, back in the time of Jesus, there had recently been a couple of unfortunate incidents. Some pilgrims had been slaughtered in the Temple during the act of offering sacrifice.



Some builders had been killed when the tower they were constructing had collapsed on them. And so the disciples said, “Jesus, look! In a world run by a good God, these things shouldn’t happen.”

### **The wrong question**

I want you to notice what Jesus does. He says, “You are asking the wrong question. You should ask, “Why hasn’t God destroyed me since I got out of bed this morning?” That’s what you should ask.

Don’t ask, “Why did this happen to the eighteen?” Don’t ask, “Why did this happen to the pilgrims?” Ask, “How come God tolerates me when he’s not always first and best and altogether in my thoughts and plans and spendings and gatherings and doings and hopings?

“When I too often give God last instead of first, how come he has allowed me to live this day? Why hasn’t God destroyed me since I got out of bed?” That’s the right question.

### **Pain is our best teacher**

God’s amazing grace has ceased to be amazing to us. That’s our trouble. Every moment of life is a gift, and we don’t deserve it. But the fact about life is that because we are yet a statue in the rough marble, God keeps chipping away at us. God loves us so much he wants us to be beautiful in character.

My, what a job God has!

Pain is the best teacher. It’s the most expensive teacher, but it is the best. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6 KJV). If there’s no chastening, or disciplining, you’re not a child of God.

You know that old, old story about the man who sold the mule, guaranteeing it was a very good mule. The buyer brought it back. He complained, “You said this was a good mule. I can’t make it do anything.”

The seller replied, “Look, it’s easy.” He picked up a two-by-four and hit the mule over the head. “First,” he said, “you must get his attention.”

That’s how God has to work with us. There’s nothing like pain to get our attention.

### **Pain calls attention to God**

We all are under the illusion that we are doing fine. We think that we are sufficient for our own needs, that we can run our own lives, that we are doing wonderfully, thank you. But, my, a little bit of pain fixes that. A little bit of pain humbles us like nothing else under the sun.

We’re doing great, living it up. Suddenly—a pain in our abdomen. “Uh oh! Must see the doctor tomorrow.” The doctor looks at us very sternly. Our house of cards collapses.

Pain has a place. It brings God to our attention.

We must realize that this is a school, not a playground. We’re in a school, and God is determined that we will learn our lessons. Otherwise, through all eternity we’ll say, “How much I missed.”

Christians need to make up their minds that it’s not going to be easy down here. Paul said, “Through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God.”

### **Pain a hard lesson**

The story Dr Dobson tells is a good one. A truck driver is high up on a mountain road. He’s turning a corner, and suddenly the truck goes over the edge. It bounces down and down and down and down, and explodes in flames. But the driver is thrown out at the top of the cliff. He grabs hold of a bush. He hangs on. He tries to pull himself up, but gets nowhere.

He calls out, “Is there anybody there?” Time passes.

Then he hears a voice. A regal, strong voice, “Yes, I’m here. This is God speaking. What can I do for you?”

“Save me!” screams the driver.

Another long delay. “All right. Let go of the bush, and I’ll catch you.”

The truck driver calls out, “Is there anyone else there?”

That truck driver represents all of us, dear friends. It’s a hard lesson to learn that trials mean benefit. When an eagle is buffeted by storms, it rises high. Now it has a much better view and perspective of everything. Now it’s out of range of the harassment of hawks and other lower flying birds. Now it can fly with energy because those great updrafts of warm wind are carrying it. It goes faster than ever now, 80 to 100 miles an hour instead of 60 to 70.

Trials mean benefit.

### **Pain produces faith**

Oh, it’s so easy to preach on it—and so hard to practice it. I can say this easily because at the time of writing it I was not in chronic or acute physical pain as some of you are all the time.

Trials demand faith. Faith is when you hold onto what you cannot see. Faith is being absolutely certain with passionate conviction about uncertainties. There’s nothing like trials to teach us to trust. And ultimately, in the mercy of God, we come to learn, “Hey, there’s nothing that can happen that—with God—can’t be handled.” That’s a great assurance.

Ultimately, through long experience and long exposure, we are meant (as we look back and see what God has done) to learn. We are meant to learn that there is nothing that can happen that can’t be handled through God. Nothing, nothing.

That's what this book of Romans tells us:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39 KJV)

Suffering is intrinsic to this life, and, dear friends, it doesn't get easier as you get older. As you get older, you've fewer human resources. You're thrown more upon the divine.

The island of your territory shrinks as you grow older. What you don't surrender is taken from you one thing at a time, one thing after another. You are thrown more and more upon God. That's good preparation for stepping over into the next life. Good preparation.

### **Gospel hope never disappoints**

Let's look at some more of Romans:

We gladly suffer, because we know that suffering helps us to endure. And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. (Romans 5:3–5 CEV)

Human hopes are usually liars. Most human hopes are like chasing the treasure at the end of the rainbow. There's not a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—just a cloud of wet mist. The fish on your line always seems a lot heavier than when you've landed it.

Everything in anticipation is so much better than the reality.

A good maxim in life is, “Nothing is ever as good or as bad as you think it's going to be. Only the things in Christ are as good as you hope.”

Paul writes here about a hope that won't disappoint. Dear friends, all other hopes disappoint. Only if our hope is in the will of God

will we never be disappointed. Only if our hopes are the hopes inspired by the Spirit of God and by the gospel of God, will we never be disappointed.

Life will get better and richer if we are living by the spirit of the gospel. That is the only way life can be rich and where hopes can find fulfillment. All hopes without God will cheat us. All of them.

### **Hope and God's love**

Paul says that hope doesn't disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given unto us. When, as the KJV expresses it, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (verse 5), that does not mean our love for God. It means God's love for us.

Our love for God is like the moon, rarely at the full; even at the best, full of holes; and more often, just a crescent streak; sometimes not even visible. That's our love for God.

God's love for us is like the sun, pouring out fully, instantaneously, without interruption. That's God's love for us.

You never concentrate on your love for God. You concentrate on God's love for you.

### **Eye-opening experiences**

"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5 NIV). No Christian lives on his or her own. We have God over us, the Father. We have God for us, the Son. We have God in us, the Holy Spirit.

Here is tremendous potential, tremendous depth. We never have grounds for despair. The troubles of life will either incite us to deeper trust or be our main reason for despair.

If we are aware of the Spirit of God and that we can count on him, life will be different. The Spirit is resident with the believer. If

we haven't let him be president in all we do, still he is resident. If we count on the resident Spirit, life will be different.

Hagar praised God even after she was thrown out by Abraham. She was dying of thirst in the desert. Her child was dying too. The angel of the Lord found her. "Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water" (Genesis 21:19). She saw a fountain of water (see also Genesis 16:6-8). The fact is the spring of water was there beside the road to Shur all the time. But Hagar did not see it at first.

When Moses brings the Israelites to the bitter waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23), the people complain. The Lord shows Moses a branch, a piece of wood. Moses throws the branch into the water and it makes the waters sweet. Now, the branch was there all the time. Moses just didn't see it at first.

Remember when Elisha is in Dothan, surrounded by armies who want to capture him? His young helper says, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15 KJV). "Look at all those soldiers surrounding the city!"

And Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:17 NIV).

Then the young man saw the host of angels. They far outstripped in majesty and number and power the earthly antagonists. All those angels surrounded them to protect them. Now, the angels were there all the time. The young helper just didn't see them at first.

### **The Spirit opens our eyes**

Now, friends, what the Holy Spirit does is he opens our eyes. He opens our eyes to Christ, the Well of Water. He's there; we just haven't seen him.

The Spirit opens our eyes to the branch which added to the bitter waters makes them sweet. That branch is the Tree of Calvary. Put the cross into your Marahs, and it will make them sweet.

Paul told his shipmates in a terrible storm, “We must run aground on some island” (Acts 27:26). You and I are all the time running aground. But if we put the branch of Calvary into those bitter waters and make them sweet, the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to the significance of the cross of Christ.

We are to share Christ’s sufferings. We are to fill up the tribulations of Christ’s body (see Colossians 1:24). The Spirit will open our eyes so we can see that we’re not alone, that the angels are all around us.

### **Believe first**

“God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:5 CEV).

That doesn’t always mean feelings.

Again, I repeat, there’s nothing more pleasing to God than when a human being looks around on a universe that God appears to have deserted— and obeys him just the same [C. S. Lewis]. We have to learn to obey, feeling or no feeling.

God’s order in life is Fact, Faith, Feeling. Most people reverse it to feeling, faith, fact. We look for the feelings. When we get the feelings, then we have faith. Then, we say, “Well, it must be true, because it feels so good. So it’s a fact.”

God’s order is the opposite. God loves me, the Spirit is in me because of the gospel, God works all things together for good. These are the facts. When I have faith in the facts, the feelings will come in God’s good time. Never reverse the order.

Fact—what it says. Believe the fact, and God gives the feeling in his time.

There's joy and peace in believing. Don't turn that around to its opposite, "Believing because I've got joy and peace." No! Believe first.

There aren't many good medicines, but there are some. When does a good medicine do you any good? After you take it. So it is with the facts of the gospel. After you believe, the joy and peace come. When you believe. This is the message of the Spirit that brings hope.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### Romans 5:6–10

Romans 5:6–10 tells us we were saved before we were born. At Calvary, Christ did all that was necessary for us to be reconciled to God. It's up to us to accept that reconciliation. While we are worse than we suspected, God is better than we dared dream.

Let's continue reading in Romans:

While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.  
(Romans 5:6–9 RSV)

Since today I stand, saved because I have laid hold of Christ's work at Calvary, when Jesus returns to destroy those who reject Calvary, I will still be safe. That's what this passage is saying. "I'll be saved by Christ from the wrath of God in the last day."

#### **We are saved**

Please note carefully the first part of the next verse, verse 10. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ... ."

Let's stop there for a minute.

You were saved before you were born. You were redeemed before you drew your first breath and opened your eyes. “While we were enemies we were reconciled.” The work of saving the world was accomplished 2,000 years ago. The message to the world now is, “Receive it, believe it, lay hold of it.”

Every person, every son and daughter of Adam has been saved. But they don’t all know it, and they haven’t all accepted it. It’s been done. You were reconciled.

Remember, the Israelites were saved by the blood, not when they got to Canaan, but while they were still in Egypt. That’s when the blood saved them, while they were still in the land of bondage.

And while we were yet sinners in our Egypt, Christ died for us. While we didn’t know him, he reconciled us to God.

### **What to tell others**

It’s very important to understand that. You don’t ever go to a person and say, “Look, if you do this and you do that, and you repent and say your prayers and read the Bible, God will be reconciled to you.” No, no. That’s not the gospel.

You go up to them and say, “Look, God’s already reconciled to you. Why don’t you become reconciled to him? Why not accept that reconciliation?” That’s what we’re to tell them. God’s already reconciled.

You see, it’s only in the Christian religion where you have God accepting people just as they are. All other religions say, “Clean up your act and then come to God.”

How do people clean up their act? We need God to clean up our act. It’s impossible without God!

So, you must come to Christ just as you are. The thing that impels us to do that is the awareness that the door’s open. The only thing

that separates us from God is not our sins, but our unbelief. That's the only barrier. Not our sins, our unbelief.

### **God is too good**

Dear friends, you're not saved by good works and you're not lost by bad works. That will not make us careless about either type of work, good or bad. But it's simply the facts, theologically.

You're not saved by good works, you're not lost by bad works. You're lost when you do not lay hold of God's provision in the gospel. You're lost when you refuse to believe that God is that good.

With many things we say, "It's too good to be true!" Especially advertising. If it sounds too good to be true, it is too good to be true.

However, with the gospel, it's the opposite. It must be true because it's so good!

You know, the word "God" is just a contraction of the word "good." The word "devil" is just an expansion of the word "evil."

God is good, "gooder" than we could ever think, just as we are "worse" than we ever thought. You have to keep the two at equipoise.

God is better than we ever considered. We're worse than we ever suspected.

### **How God forgives**

God gives like a God. Remember when Peter came up to the Lord and asked:

How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me? Is seven times enough? Jesus answered: 'Not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!' (Matthew 18:21–22 CEV)

The glorious thing about Jesus' answer is that he's saying, "Peter, be like me. That's how I give. That's how I forgive."

If God can say to me that I must forgive my brother or sister seventy times seven, then I say, "Wonderful!" Because God has to be at least that good to me, I'm not going to be better than God. He's not asking me to do something he doesn't do. That would be blasphemy.

So, I have a God that forgives seventy times seven—and then some. That's the gospel.

Now, we mustn't be like Oscar Wilde who said, "This is a great idea. I love sinning. God loves forgiving. Wonderful arrangement." No, no, no. Sin cost the death of the most wonderful, loving, gracious Being in the universe. We must hate all forms of evil.

### **Waste or worship**

When Mary broke the alabaster box to anoint Jesus with the ointment inside, the Bible says, "the sweet smell of the perfume filled the house" (John 12:3). That precious alabaster box was a symbol of Christ. When he was broken on the cross, the fragrance of his sacrificial offering reached out to fill the universe.

There were two reactions to Mary's box. Judas and the disciples asked indignantly, "To what purpose is this waste?" (Matthew 26:8 KJV). The angels sang "Hallelujah!"

If we see the Calvary event in true proportion, we'll be like the angels. If we don't see it correctly, we'll be like Judas, saying, "Why this waste?"

Let's find ourselves on the side of the angels!

### **Saving summary**

So, God is better than we've ever dared hope.

We were saved 2,000 years ago by Christ's work at Calvary. The human race is already reconciled to God. The only barrier now is whether we'll accept that reconciliation or not. It's free for the taking.

Many will be lost because it seems too simple. But there's no need to be to be lost.

If you believe God's word, "Take it up to thee" (2 Kings 6:7 KJV). "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12 NIV).



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Romans 5:10–21

Romans 5 contains the vital gospel principle of representation. We were lost in our representative Adam without our doing anything. We are saved in our Representative Jesus without our doing anything. To convince us, Romans resorts to repetition: Salvation in Christ is a free gift.

Notice the next part of Romans 5:10 in the Revised Standard Version:

Much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

#### **This text is often misunderstood.**

What it means is this: Once you are right with God through the death of Christ, you are to remember Jesus is not still down in Joseph's new tomb, sealed with a Roman seal.

Jesus is alive, and interceding for us, caring for us, representing us.

#### **The living Christ keeps us**

Because Jesus lives, because we know we have been reconciled, we know he'll keep us. He'll care for all that's to come. He's solved the problem of our guilt. Now, he's going to care for the rest of it. Being reconciled, we'll be saved by his life. He's alive!

A communist orator lectured a group in the Soviet Union for about two hours. When he finished, he didn't see much enthusiasm in the audience.

A poorly dressed peasant got up on the dais, and said just three words to the crowd. He didn't harangue for two or three hours, he just said three words. He just said, "Christ is risen!"

The whole crowd echoed him, "Christ is risen!"

### **God will not let go easily**

Because he's alive, God is not going to let go of us easily.

You and I hate to lose things we own. How our hearts go out to those in the fires in Laguna Beach and other places. They've seen all their possessions go up in flames. All the family heirlooms, all the photographs, all the mementos, all their labor-saving devices—they've seen them all go. How hard it is to lose something you esteem, especially a loved one!

We're made in the image of God. If we hate to lose loved ones, God sorrows even more. We are his children. He's not going to let us go easily. We will be saved by his life.

Commit your days to him—today, tomorrow, and the next day. Don't try to live all your life at once. Life in the future always has clouds, but God will be there, and he's bigger, better, and greater than the clouds.

We will be saved by his life.

### **The "many"**

Next, please look at verses eleven and twelve:

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

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned. (Romans 5:11–12 RSV)



I want you to particularly notice, farther on in the chapter, verse 15 which parallels the idea found in these verses.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (Romans 5:15)

Although Romans was originally written in Greek, the international language of the time, the author, Paul, is a Hebrew. The idioms and ideas behind his Greek are Hebrew.

The word "many" in Hebrew means "the many." It means all. It means everybody. So, here is a grace that abounds to all.

Paul summarizes his idea in verses 18 and 19:

Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18–19)

## **Two representatives**

What the Bible is saying here is: "We were ruined without asking for it in our representative, Adam. We are saved without asking for it in our Representative, Jesus."

We were ruined in our representative, Adam. When God created the world, he had to decide between dealing with people one by one or dealing with them through a representative. God chose the principle of representation. That's because in this world we are always, all of us, linked with other people.

Some theologians and philosophers reject the gospel principle of vicarious suffering. But every family knows about vicarious suffering. It only takes one member of the family to strike the whole family with pain.

So, God chose the representative principle, and we were lost in our representative, Adam. We were all in Adam and Eve when they sinned. Seminally, we were there. Thus, by the sin of one, condemnation came on all of us. We were born dead.

### **All Gifts from Calvary**

The only reason we are allowed to live is because the Son of God said, “I will go down and take their place and bear their penalty.” That is why every gift comes to us in this life stamped with the cross of Christ.

Christ’s cross is reflected in every water spring. It is stamped on every loaf of bread. Every breath of air we draw is a gift from Calvary. And all because Christ volunteered to take our place, before the foundation of the world.

In the Garden of Eden, God pronounced penalty beside the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17 KJV). Now, because of Christ’s offer, that penalty was interrupted. It applies in this world only to physical death. Our life was preserved because the Savior said, “I will pledge myself for them.”

Please grasp the important idea in these verses. Through a representative (Adam) we were lost. We had nothing to do with it. But through another Representative we were saved, and we had nothing to do with that. Calvary has undone the fall in Eden.

### **Freebie freebie**

Notice how the word “gift” is sprinkled throughout this passage. Verse 15 mentions “the free gift.” Verse 16 also mentions “the free gift.” Look at verse 17, “the abundance of grace in the free gift.”

I love to point out that “free gift” is an unusual expression. How many gifts are there that aren’t free? Why does God use this expression? Because we are so unbelieving. God has to say, “It’s a free gift.” It’s free, free.

God has to repeat himself, we're so dull of hearing.

We don't think anything—especially something as important as salvation—could be that good a deal. God is saying, “All that you need is free because it is purchased by me. Everything you need is free.”

### **Grace abounds summary**

Let's pause and sum up Romans chapter five.

Paul says that by faith in Christ we are justified, present continuous tense. That present continuous tense means that every moment we are justified by faith alone. Grace alone. We stand by the gift of God, by the mercies of God. We don't stand in ourselves, we stand in Christ.

Christ died for the ungodly. Christ justifies the ungodly. While we were yet sinners? Yes! We were reconciled 2,000 years ago, at Calvary. The only barrier between us and God is our unbelief. That's the only barrier.

Five times Romans 5 says, “Look, salvation's a free gift. A free gift! Get it? A free gift. Free gift. It's a free gift!”

Because we were ruined without our having anything to do with it, why then should it be difficult to understand we were redeemed without our having anything to do with it?

We were born bad. When we're reborn as a result of believing the gospel, we're reborn good. We still have our old nature to fight, but the Holy Spirit has come to us!

We receive a new heart, a new life. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV). It's been done for you.

Take God's free gift of salvation. “Receive it,” urges God. Look at verse 20. Here is a summary of all of Romans 5. “Where sin

increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20 RSV).  
Grace much more abounds—that’s the God we have.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### **Introduction to Romans Chapter 6**

We all suffer from besetting sins. Romans 6 reveals the secret of overcoming sin. Some say the gospel means we are free from the law and therefore free to sin.

The gospel says we are free from the law only as a method of salvation. The gospel says we have forgiveness.

Here's part of a letter I received from a lady a few days ago.

I've come to fear that what I thought was faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior is mere intellectual assent. My torment is I do not see or understand how to change this into a real saving faith.

About a dozen years ago when I was first away from home, I started to see evidence of sinful desires that I could barely control, which seemed to control me more than me containing them.

This brings me to my question of how to step past my intellectual knowledge that Jesus indeed has died for the sinners of the world and that, by faith, this can be mine. How to step past my intellectual knowledge to the actual saving faith that bids me to give up my rights to myself, calls me to repent, turn away from my sin, to love God more than self, and to choose things that are in the light.

God cannot choose for me. I must choose for myself to follow him and give up all for him. How does the flesh, the

ego, which thrives on self-preservation and survival of itself first put itself to death?

How do I come to a saving faith? Where's the power and will to slay the sinner's flesh? Christ died for sinners, but I assume not for those who will not go and sin no more, nor repent. I cannot seem to do it on my own. I'm in enslavement to my sinful flesh; yet, God can't choose for me either. I feel doomed in a gray no-man's land.

Notice the telling sentence, "How does the flesh, the ego, which thrives on self-preservation and survival of itself first put itself to death?"

### **Besetting sins**

This letter reminds me of other letters I've received with questions about besetting sins. We first need to realize that there is not one of us without besetting sins.

By that, I do not mean that we need be in bondage to any sin. A besetting sin is where there's some weakness in your temperament, and you feel temptation a hundred times stronger in that area than in others.

We all have many such weaknesses. Many people have no temptation whatever to drink alcohol. For instance, I've never even drunk a cup of tea or a cup of coffee, let alone alcohol. But that doesn't mean I don't have weaknesses in other areas.

All of us are strong in some things, but weak as putty in certain other areas.

That's the way we all are—lopsided. None of us is a clearly defined hero or heroine. It would be nice if we were, but even the best heroes have feet of clay. The truth is we have clay all the way through.

We're not strong at all. The Bible says, "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5 KJV).

As we go through Romans 6, I think we will find the answer to this issue of besetting sins. We will find an answer to the cry from this lady's letter.

### **The necessary accusation**

We're looking at Romans 6. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Romans 6:1 RSV).

Do you remember the question Paul asked at the end of chapter three? He asked, "Do we overthrow the law by this faith?" (Romans 3:31). Now the question is repeated in another form: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"

To those who preach and teach, let me say to you that if you are never accused of two things, be absolutely certain you are not preaching or teaching the gospel. These two things are, "You are making void the law" and "You are saying that you can sin and get away with it." If you're never accused of those things, you're not preaching the gospel.

Paul, the greatest preacher of the gospel since Jesus, was accused of teaching, "The law is finished with. You can sin and get away with it." Of course, Paul taught neither. He taught no such thing.

The fact is, truth and error often run very close to each other. The truth is that we are not under law as a method of salvation, though we are under it as a standard.

Nothing can ever change the fact that lying and stealing and impurity and adultery and idolatry are wrong. The cross didn't change that. Those things are forever wrong.

Christians are free from the law as a method because we've all broken it. It's too late to use the law as a method of salvation. You can't put your confidence in something you've smashed to smithereens. It's a broken-down horse. It cannot help you onwards.

## **There is forgiveness**

As for “Sin and get away with it,” there’s a sense in which we are doing that all the time. But the difference is this: We hate the sin that we know—so to speak—crucifies the Son of God afresh and puts him to open shame.

We are never condemned for sins we hate and sins we fight. That’s a different attitude altogether to, “Hey, God loves to forgive sins. I love to do them. Let’s go. We work well in tandem.” That’s quite different.

Paul was accused of saying, “We make void the law and you can sin and get away with it.” He didn’t teach these things, but the gospel is so gloriously good and fine, it comes close to sounding like that. That’s because you are not under law as the way of salvation; and there is forgiveness for your sins.

Friends, this is the truth. There is no excuse for sin, but there is forgiveness. It’s a hard saying, but it’s biblical. There’s no excuse for sin, yet there is forgiveness. But the secret of overcoming besetting sins we have yet to reveal.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### Romans 6: 2–11

Romans 6 reveals the secret of overcoming besetting sins. Paul makes clear that the gospel is the only source for pure Christian living. When Christ died at Calvary, we died with him. When we are tempted we are to count ourselves dead. How can we who are dead respond to temptation? Especially when we have risen to new life with Christ in his resurrection.

#### **You died to sin**

“How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:2 RSV). I want to warn you against the Authorized (King James) Version. Please don’t misunderstand—I love the King James Version. I think I know more memory verses from it than any other version. But it’s not always accurate.

The KJV has here “dead to sin.” Several times throughout the chapter we find the phrase, “we who are dead to sin.” I wish it were really true that we are dead to sin.

I am far from being dead to sin. I am as alive and quivering and sensitive to temptation as any person living. I am not dead to sin. What the Greek really says is: “You died to sin.”

There are eleven incidences of “*logizomai*” in Romans 4. Each of the 11 times it means a single act, “to reckon” or “count.” In the same way, every time in chapter six where Paul talks about our death to sin, he’s talking about the one single act when Christ died for us. That’s when we died. You see, “One died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV).

#### **The Secret to Overcoming**

What Paul is saying here is the secret for overcoming besetting

sins, and the answer to my friend's letter. Of course, only the Holy Spirit can help us see it.

Paul can lay the food on the table. He can't make us eat it. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. I've been to camp meetings, and a woman will come along and say, "Dr. Ford, please come with me and convert my husband. He's an unbeliever."

I say, "Ma'am, I cannot raise the dead." Some of the things I'm going to say to you, now, I suggested to the lady who wrote to me, but only the Holy Spirit can enable her to do them.

### **God's great mathematics**

Let's look closely at these verses and uncover the secret:

Verse 4: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death." We noticed in verse 2: "We who died to sin." That means we can't live in it. The last part of verse 4 says: "That we too might walk in newness of life."

Verse 6: "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin."

Verse 11: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin."

Ah! This is tremendously important. It's more important to understand this than to be a multi multi billionaire. What Paul is saying is, "God counts that your old nature died with Jesus Christ at Calvary. You are to count as God counts. You are to reckon as God reckons. You are to impute as God imputes."

### **No good kicking a dead dog**

Remember, whatever gets your attention gets you.

If what gets your attention is that you indeed died with Jesus Christ, when the devil comes and says, "Do this," you say, "Sorry, I can't. I'm dead."

You don't kick a dead dog. Even the devil will go away eventually. When temptation comes, you must do what God does. God reckons you dead, so you reckon you're dead.

You say, "Yes, there was a time when I loved to do that. But I died with Jesus. When I was baptized, I signified that I accept my incorporation with him on the cross (Romans 6:4-5). The hands that did those things have been crucified. The feet that walked to those places have been nailed to the cross. The head that thought those thoughts has received the crown of thorns. I reckon myself dead unto all that."

It is so if you will believe it.

### **Bad-tempered friend**

I had a very good friend who was brought up by a father who was an atheist. The father exploded in fury all the time. My friend was put in a position of responsibility, and now he too exploded. But not every day.

Another of my friends would say of him, "Whom he loves is blessed but whom he hates is really cursed." That's because if this man blew up, everyone around him felt the searing heat of it.

But I know my friend is a true Christian. His conditioning at home, as a child, made it difficult for him as he entered adult life. He has a short fuse, but he is a really good man.

I doubt he has the same problem today, though it may be still a strong temptation.

Suppose you have a short fuse, a short temper. Somehow we have to get into the habit of saying, "Yes, my flesh would love to explode in rage, but it has been crucified with Christ, it's in Joseph's new tomb. A stone has been rolled against it."

There are three days between that life and now. My dead flesh is corrupt. It stinks. It's gone.

Christ's flesh did not decay in three days, but human flesh has been in the tomb not just three days, but for 2,000 years!

When the devil comes to tempt you, you say, "I don't have to do that anymore. My nature died to that. I don't have to do that. I'm free." And, remember, whatever gets your attention gets you.

### **Battle for the mind**

The New Testament says in Romans 8, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6 RSV; see also verse 13).

It's what you think about a lot that you end up doing. When men indulge in pornographic magazines they are inviting trouble. What you think about, you do. When children watch one violent TV program after another, don't be surprised if they act out their fantasies.

This is where the battle is, up here, in the mind. The New Testament says, "Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). It's a hard battle. It's a difficult battle. "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). This is the crux of overcoming besetting sins.

### **You died**

It works, and it is the only thing that works. When we see the truth \*Roy Gee was talking about—that it's talking about the one event at Calvary—we'll understand this verse.

"One died for all, therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). We'll admit it's true. We won't deny that what it says here is true: "You died."

I find my flesh responsible for a lot of things. I say, "Lord, my spirit says, 'No,' but my flesh says, 'Yes.'"

\*Roy Gee was the pastor of Good News Unlimited in Auburn, CA at the time this was written. He also edited this book.

Never doubt it, friend. Our flesh is truly alive and well. That's why the Bible says, "count or reckon (KJV) yourself dead."

You wouldn't have to reckon yourself and your flesh dead if it were so in experience. It would say, "recognize yourself dead," not "reckon yourself dead."

Our battle with sin means that we set our minds on that great unity we have with our Lord in his atoning death. You understand that we, too, died at Calvary.

### **First and second looks**

Our first look at the cross is, "He died for me." Our second look is, "I died with him."

He died for me, that's justification. I died with him, that brings sanctification.

We all have loads of besetting sins. If you don't think you have them, ask your spouse! Your spouse will tell you all about them.

We all have besetting sins. To recognize them is step number one. And Romans 6:11 helps us recognize the reality. "Count yourselves dead to sin." It's telling us that in ourselves we are still very much alive to sin—we have many besetting sins. In Christ, we are to count ourselves as though we do not.

We can't do anything about our enemy until we know who he is. Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!" Sinners are their own enemy. It is hard to admit, but admit it we must.

We must face our problem and admit, "The Bible says only 'count' myself dead to sin. In myself, I'm not dead. I'm a sinner." Then we have to apply this rule of "Count yourselves dead to sin."

I recommend that you read the excellent paraphrase found in *The Living Bible*:

So look upon your old sin nature as dead and unresponsive to sin, and instead be alive to God, alert to him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:11 LB)

### **The devil is destroyed**

As I close, I want to comment on one verse in the heart of the passage we're studying, and that's verse 6: "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed" (Romans 6:6 RSV).

Here we have the same Greek word "*katargeo*" that is found in Hebrews 2:14. There it says of Christ that, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (NIV). "*Katargeo*" means to "render ineffective or powerless, to nullify, cancel, or destroy."

Now, you and I know that the devil is not really destroyed. We've probably met him several times today already. But the devil is ineffectual before the eye of faith and the mind of faith. The devil can have no more power over you than you give him by unbelief.

That's a very important principle, dear friends. The devil can have no more power over you than you give him by your unbelief.

When Christ has your mind and your heart, when you believe what the cross did for you, the devil is a defeated foe. You reckon your old nature as dead, you see yourself as risen with Christ.

We mustn't accept his death without accepting his resurrection. They go together. You should now have a new life, a new direction. You will stumble, but you are headed in the right direction, the right way.

That is the heart of the issue. We were at the cross.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### Romans 6: 12–7:4

Three illustrations from Romans 6:12 to 7:4 reveal our new relationship to Christ, sin, and law.

First, because we reckon ourselves dead with Christ, sin no longer reigns over us as a king. Second, Christ is our new master and we are his servants. Third, we are divorced from our old selves and married to Christ.

Paul now illustrates with three examples what he has said so far in Romans 6.

First, he uses an illustration about the relationship between a king and his subjects in Romans 6:12–14. Second, Paul uses an illustration about master and servants in verses 15–23. Third, Paul uses an illustration about husband and wife in Romans 7.

#### **King sin does not reign**

Look at Romans 6:12 “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (RSV).

I like Paul’s use of that word “reign.” A king may reign over his subjects, but sin no longer reigns over our mortal bodies.

If I took you to the St. Lawrence River when spring begins I’d say as we looked at that great expanse of water, “The dominion of the ice has been broken.”

“Ah, Des,” you’d say, “You need glasses. Look, there’s ice over there, some over there, and look, there’s some there, too.”

I’d say, “Yes, but the thaw has set in. The thaw has begun. That ice is doomed. Even though there’s some here and here and here.”

It's the same way with residual sin in you and me, dear friends. Residual sin has been made of no effect in the same way the devil has been made of no effect. Sin cannot dominate us any more. It cannot reign. It cannot be the prevailing thing of our lives. No, that's finished with.

### **Sin does remain**

Sin does remain. There is a residue. There is residual sin in our lives.

It will annoy you. It will tempt you. It's there. But it does not reign. So, keep in mind this one little line that's so helpful and so true: Sin remains, but it does not reign.

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (RSV).

Notice we still have passions. I wouldn't give a fig for a person who has no capacity for great anger. Neither would I give a fig for a person who indulged great anger every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

A person without passion doesn't have the necessary drive to accomplish great things. The secret is, passion can be controlled.

### **Yield to God**

The meekness of the New Testament is not weakness. It's controlled strength. Remember that—controlled strength.

Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:13)

Here are subjects yielding to a king. Yield your members—the various parts of your body—to God. We are free, and yet we are bond servants.



Real freedom, true freedom, is when you want to do what you ought to do. When we find that because of the Price paid for us, we belong to Another, to Christ, it is our most glorious privilege to say: “Lord, what would you have me to do?”

And we should say that to the Lord regarding every area of our life, whether it’s finances, food, clothing, housing, recreation, or the friends we make. “Lord, what would you have me to do?” “Yield your members,” answers the Lord, “yield them.”

### **Law and gospel**

Ah! Here’s a great text. Romans 6:14 says, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” I’m not under law. I’m now under grace. Sin is dethroned, and Christ takes its place.

What’s it saying? Remember how the verse begins: “Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law.” The Christian is no longer under law of the covenant. It’s a covenant of grace that we belong to. The covenant of “Believe and Live.”

It’s so important to see that there’s distinction, but no separation, between law and gospel.

Here’s the distinction: The law says, “This do and thou shalt live.” The gospel says, “Live and thou shalt do.”

The law says, “Make you a new heart.” The gospel says, “A new heart I’ll give you.”

The law says, “Pay me what thou owest.” The gospel says, “I truly forgive you all.”

The law says, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and your neighbor as yourself.” The gospel says, “Herein is love, not that we love God but that he loved us.”

The law is demand, demand, demand. The gospel is gift, gift, gift.

You are not under law's demand. You are so controlled by the grace of God that you're above that.

### **Law cannot control desire**

Law is powerless to resist desire. The reason most people are unhappy is not because of things from the outside. It's because of things inside. It's a great discovery to learn this. The reason most people in our world are unhappy—this is not always true in the Third World—is from things inside, not outside.

The law cannot control unsatisfied desires. “Give me this, give me that. Get her for me, she pleases me well. Get him for me, I want him. Give me that job, give me that position. Another car, another house.” Disappointed desires.

The law cannot control desires. It's like trying to hold shut the jaws of a wolf. The only motive that controls desire is the conviction that ‘God is mine and I am his.’ There's no more potent motivation in all the world than that. God is mine and I am his.

That's what it means to be under grace. Then sin cannot not have dominion over us. Sin won't have dominion over you because you're not under law, you're under grace.

### **Expulsive power of grace**

That does not mean you're free to go around and commit adultery, to steal, and to lie. No, no. It means that you have been swallowed up in a new relationship. The expulsive power of a new affection has swept out all your old habits.

The best way to get the darkness out of a room is to switch the light on. You don't sweep out the darkness with a broom.

The best way to get air out of a bottle is not to try and suck it out, but to fill it with something else. Water, for example. So, God fills us with his Spirit, and the old stuff is deluged away. We're preoccupied with something bigger and better.

## **Advantage of a good pursuit**

People who read, or people who are manually disposed, have a great advantage in the battle against sin. That's because anyone who enjoys some fascinating pursuit is greatly advantaged. Much depends, you see, upon whether you are going to be absorbed in good things or whether you are going to be available, open, to temptation.

When I counseled young men in college, I tried to tell them, "It's natural to have the temptations you are having. The best remedy is not to kneel down and pray that the Lord will take away all your sexual desires. Don't do that at all. Get busy with something more immediately important. Get busy with something more lasting, more finally productive of good. Don't be so preoccupied with yourself. Get involved in something bigger than you are."

This is the real answer, and it's what this text is saying. "Sin won't have dominion over you. You're not under law but under grace." Then Paul enlarges upon that idea by showing the relationship between servant and master. The keynote of our Christian walk is the obedience of love—for we are devoted to our new Master.

## **Looking unto Jesus**

I want you to come quickly with me to Romans 7.

Please notice in the last verse of chapter 6: "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Remember what we said earlier? The first five chapters of Romans are: "Free from wrath." Chapter 6 is: "Free from sin." It remains, but it can't reign; because I died to sin when I died in Christ. Sin is no longer my boss when I see myself on the cross.

Now, chapter 7 is going to say, "Free from the law." Then, in chapter 8, "Free from death."

But each one of them (as in the last verse of chapter 5) is

“Through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The devil will do anything to divert our attention to anyone or anything other than Jesus.

Jesus is to preoccupy us. “Looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2 KJV). “Consider him” (Hebrews 12:3). “We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).

That’s the way we are to go. Preoccupied by, and fascinated with, Jesus.

### **Death and the law**

Do you not know, brethren—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during his life? Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. (Romans 7:1–3 RSV)

How many pages have been written debating this!

It’s very difficult to make this parable walk on all fours (that is, fit in every detail). The main thing Paul is trying to teach us is that death works a change in our relationship to law. All theologians are agreed that is the main point.

Some theologians say you are married to the law, and when you become a Christian, the law dies. A man I respect very much, the late F. F. Bruce of Manchester University, took the position that the husband is the law. But he went on to say, “Be careful to notice it does not say the law dies.”

### **Our different relationship to law**

I don’t think our old nature was ever married to the law. I really

think that what the illustration is saying is that our ego, our personality, was wedded to an old way of life—but when we came to Jesus, that way of life died. That is certainly the theme of the previous chapter—chapter 6. So we would expect to find it continued here.

He died, that is, you died. Reckon yourself dead. Your former self died. So, the husband is the old way of life, not the law. Never does the Bible say the law died. Not ever. And very good men—and F. F. Bruce was one of the best of men—agree.

What this illustration is saying is: “Death works a change in our relationship to law.” And if, as the previous chapter said, “You died with Christ,” now you have a different relationship to law. You are not married any more to the old way of doing things. Now, you can be married to Christ and bring forth fruit unto God. That’s a beautiful thought.

“Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ” (Romans 7:4). You see, it is we who have died, not the law. You have died, not the law.

Further on in this chapter it says, “The law is holy, ... and just and good” (Romans 7:12). That’s an odd description for a corpse, isn’t it? The law is holy, just and good.

It isn’t, “The law used to be ....” The law never dies. It loses its claim over us, because we’re not under law as a method of salvation. But it never dies as a standard.

### **Married to Christ**

“You have died to the law through the body of Christ” (meaning Christ’s body on the cross) “so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.”

The beautiful picture is of a marriage that brings conception and brings fruit—children. Paul is saying, “When you are in the flesh,

you are married to an old way of life and all the children were bad.” All the children were bad in that union with the old life. But now, Christ’s death has changed all that. Now that your old nature died with Christ on the cross, you are married to him. Right through the Bible, marriage is used as a symbol of our relationship to Jesus.

From the time when, on the sixth day, the first Adam had his side opened and that which came forth made his bride, marriage has been a symbol of God’s relationship to us. That’s because marriage is the deepest union known to us in the flesh. So, it suitably symbolizes our union with Jesus.

You may be married to Another and bring forth fruit that is holy. Please note: We cannot do anything good until we are married to Jesus. There’s no such thing as a good life until we have surrendered to God.

Life begins with death—death of our old life. Life begins with resurrection, resurrection to a new life. Then, and then only, comes the true fruit.

This has to be the order, the sequence. God will accept no other.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### **Key Verses of Romans 6 Further Examined**

This verse 6:14 is a summary of the argument found in the preceding verses and an introduction to all that follows, both in this chapter and the rest of the book. It sounds notes of triumph and joy, assuring the believer that the failures they had always known in the battle with evil prior to their conversion would now be replaced by a life wherein all in Christ are “more than conquerors.”

Romans 6:14 is crucial for the proper understanding of this chapter. We read: “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (NIV).” Paul knew well the promises of Jeremiah 31:33 ff., and Ezekiel 36:26 ff., where God promised that believers in the era to come would have his law in their hearts and would be caused by his gracious influence to walk in the divine statutes and keep the sacred commands.

#### **The Law’s demand**

Central to Paul’s argument in the book of Romans is the thesis that the law demands perfect obedience but supplies no power to fulfill that demand. F. F. Bruce expresses well Paul’s meaning:

Christian holiness is not a matter of painstaking conformity to the individual precepts of an external law code; it is rather a question of the Holy Spirit’s producing his fruit in the life, reproducing those graces that were seen in perfection in the life of Christ. The law prescribed a life of holiness, but it was powerless to produce such a life, because of the inadequacy of the human material that it had to work on.

But what the law was powerless to do has been done by God. Now that God's own Son, sent to earth "in the likeness of sinful flesh," has given up his life as a sin offering on his people of the heart, the death sentence has been passed on indwelling sin. (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 162)

The Christian poet knew this truth well:

To run and work the law commands,  
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands;  
But better news the gospel brings:  
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.

### **Grace fulfills the law**

Centuries before that humble verse, Augustine put it this way:

"Grace was given that the law might be fulfilled... ."

It is essential to see that the apostle is not using the word "law" here in the sense of the Old Testament era, for that would be to say that all who lived in Old Testament times were under the dominion of sin. Rather, what we are to understand is that the moral law of the Decalogue is not the basis of God's gracious dealings with us. We are not under law as a covenant but under grace.

As Robert Haldane says:

Believers are not under the law as a covenant, because they have endured its curse and obeyed its precept in the person of their great Head, by whom the righteousness of the law has been fulfilled in them, Ch. 8:4.  
(*Romans*, p. 257)

Haldane continues by saying about believers:

They are in a state of reconciliation with God. They know the Lord. According to the tenor of that gracious covenant, his law is written in their hearts, and his fear is put within



them. He has promised not to depart from them, and that they shall not depart from him, Jeremiah 32:40; and their sins and iniquities, that separated them from God, are no more remembered by him. Being made partakers of the favor of God through Jesus Christ, in whom grace was given them before the world began, 2 Timothy 1:9, they have every spiritual supply through him who is full of grace. His grace is sufficient for them, 2 Corinthians 12:9. The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, has appeared to all men, teacheth them to deny ungodliness and worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, Titus 2:11. Not only is this grace manifested to them, but it operates within them. God works in them what is well-pleasing in his sight, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. They who are under the law have nothing but their own strength in order to their obedience; sin, therefore, must have the dominion over them. But they who are under grace are by God himself thoroughly furnished unto all good works; sin, therefore, shall not have dominion over them. (pp. 257–258)

As Martin Lloyd-Jones says:

In other words, we have here the final refutation of the monstrous charge as brought against the Apostle's teaching mentioned in verse 1: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" Here is the final answer to that question, the summing up of the detailed answer he has given in all the preceding verses.

*(Romans, An Exposition of Chapter 6, p. 179)*

### **Encouragement not exhortation**

The same writer reminds us that verse 14 is not a command or an exhortation but, rather, an encouragement. Paul is telling us that as regards to the guilt of sin, it is gone and that, furthermore, we are now dead to sin's rule.

A number of writers point out that Chapter 7 and the first four verses of Chapter 8 elucidate the heights and depths of

Romans 6:14. Chapter 7, in verse 8, points out that the law is often provocative of sin, and verse 11 says similarly. (See also verses 13 and 14.)

Thus, is stated the terrible power of sin over the natural heart. The opening verses of Chapter 8, however, offer the spiritual counterbalance, the motivation that the Holy Spirit brings to the soul when the gospel is received.

We quote Lloyd-Jones once more:

There's nothing that's so encouraging to holiness, so stimulating, so uplifting, as to know the certainty of my final salvation and glorification. Because I am certain of it, I join the Apostle John as he says, 'He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure' (1 John 3:3). You do not need a hospital, or a clinic, you need this instruction, this information, this command, 'Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Remember this, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you'—never—'for you are not under law, but under grace.' Realize, then, all that grace means; read again the terms of the New Covenant; and live as a man who has read the title-deeds, and who is proud of them, who has lost all his depression and all his hopelessness and despair, and who, looking at the glory which is coming, says to himself, 'I have no time to waste, I am longing for glory, I am looking forward to it. I must press on, I must purify myself "even as he is pure; I must prepare for the great day that is coming, so that when I stand before him I shall not be ashamed."' (*Ibid*, pp. 188–189)

Charles Cranfield has this word for us on Romans 6:14:

Those who know themselves freed from condemnation are free to resist sin's usurped power with new strength and boldness. (*Romans*, vol. 1, p. 320)

## **Strictly gospel**

That rigorous and holy man, John Calvin, thought of by most as one who was superlatively strict, has yet written in his commentary on Romans the following gospel interpretation of Romans 6:14:

We have here, an encouragement for the comfort of believers, lest they should fail in their attempts to attain to holiness through a sense of their own weakness. He had exhorted them to apply all their powers and obedience to righteousness, but since they carry about the remains of the flesh, they cannot do other than walk with uncertainty. Lest, therefore, they should lose spirit from realizing their own weakness and become despondent, he takes the opportunity of giving them new heart from the comforting thought that their works are not now exacted according to the strict rule of the law, but that God forgives their impurity and accepts them with kindness and indulgence.

The yoke of the law cannot be borne without breaking and crushing those who carry it. It remains, therefore, for believers to flee to Christ and implore his help as the defender of their liberties; for such is his character. Christ submitted himself to the bondage of the law, although he was not otherwise indebted to its commands, in order that, in the words of the apostle, he might redeem those who are under the law (Galatians 4:5).

Not to be under law, therefore, means that it is a dead letter which condemns us, because we have not the power to perform it. It also means that we are no longer subject to the law insofar as it requires of us perfect righteousness, and pronounces death on all who have transgressed any part of it.

Likewise, by the word grace, we understand both parts of redemption, that is, ... the forgiveness of sins, by which God imputes righteousness to us, and the sanctification of the spirit, by whom he forms us anew to good works .... The apostle is desirous of accompanying us and preventing us

from growing weary in striving to do what is right, because we still feel many imperfections in ourselves. However much the stings of sin may torment us, they cannot subdue us, for we are enabled to conquer them by the Spirit of God. Since we are under grace, too, we are freed from the strict demands of the law. We are to understand here, moreover, that the apostle takes it for granted that all those who are without the grace of God are bound by the yoke of the law, and held under its condemnation. So, on the other hand, we may argue that as long as men are under the law, they are subject to the dominion of sin.

(*Romans*, pp. 130–131)

### **Comments of noted exegetes**

Contrary to our usual practice in this book, so far, we are offering the comments of noted exegetes on this verse which are so crucial for our understanding of the gospel.

We add one last quotation:

Paul's point then is that in the new epoch ushered in by the death and resurrection of Christ the terms of grace are different than what they had come to be in practice within his own (pre-Christian) Judaism. As so often in Paul's talk of grace, the impact of his own experience is evident ... . The distinction between epochs is not an absolute before and after Christ, since Abraham accepted the promise and was justified according to grace (4:4,16). But the understanding of the covenant promise characteristic of the Judaism of Paul's day was too much at odds with the free sweep of the one God's grace, so that the antithesis can stand .... (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, p. 340)

Paul, by this summary in verse 14 of the first section of Chapter 6, has answered the charge of antinomianism and shown clearly that sanctification is implicit in the inevitable consequences of justification.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### **Introduction to Romans** **Chapter 7**

Chapters 6 and 7 of Romans are a parenthesis about sanctification. They are an aside from Paul's main discussion of justification. Paul includes three sections on sanctification.

- 1) The Principle of Sanctification,
- 2) The Practice of Sanctification,
- 3) The Preventive of Sanctification.

Sometimes when you receive a letter, it's the things written in parenthesis, or as an aside, that are of most interest.

It's important to understand that in the book we're studying—Paul's Letter to the Romans—there are two passages written in parenthesis. That is, there are two parentheses.

#### **The first parenthesis**

The first occurs after Paul sets forth the glory and wonder of the gospel in Romans 1:16-17:

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)

There's really a parenthesis after that, a bracket, or a pause, until the, "But now ...." of Romans 3:21. With this verse Paul begins to construct the acropolis of the Christian gospel. Paul writes about the sacrifice of Christ, the grace of Christ, and the love of God, as

manifested in the gift of Calvary.

So, from 1:18 down to 3:20, is parenthesis. In this interlude, or interval, Paul explains how the irreligious are lost, and the religious who don't know the gospel are lost. There are 14 statements in the parenthesis that say the whole world is lost.

### **The second parenthesis**

Now, where we reached last time ends another set of brackets, another parenthesis. Chapters 6 and 7 of Romans are a parenthesis. The theme of Romans after Chapter 5 goes straight into chapter 8, but chapters 6 and 7 are in parenthesis. Paul declares:

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.  
(Romans 5:1–5)

His thought then continues:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus . . . We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him. (Romans 8:1 and 28)

You can see how his thought skips over chapters 6 and 7. They are a parenthesis on sanctification.

### **The whole world acquitted**

Romans 5 continues with the theme of justification. "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Paul explains that by the sin of one person (Adam), all people were ruined (verses 12, 15, 17, 18, 19). Now, by the

righteousness of One (Christ), all people were acquitted (verses 15, 17, 18, 19).

Never forget: the whole world was acquitted at Calvary. It's just that everybody doesn't know.

Your message to your unbelieving neighbor is not, "If you clean up your act, God might feel a little differently toward you." Your message to your neighbor is, "Because of what God has done in Christ, the barriers between you and God are already breached and down."

The only barrier remaining is human unbelief. The barrier is never with God. It's not even in human sins. It's human unbelief, because you must come to God just as you are.

If you try to clean up your act before you come to God, you'll never have peace. You don't have to be anxious about what God thinks of you. You only have to be anxious of what God thinks of Christ, your Substitute.

You are not called upon to make your peace with God. You never have been so called. You can never do that, anyway. We are called to accept Christ who is our peace. We are saved by an objective gospel, something that happened outside us; we just lay hold of it.

### **Sanctification—a growth in love**

Having said all that in chapter 5, Paul wants to tell us: "Listen! This is what will happen in your life as a result. These are the changes that will come." This is what we call sanctification.

We are not saved by sanctification, but no person is saved without it, because God always gives his gifts with both hands. He justifies no one that he doesn't sanctify.

What is sanctification? Is it doing great things? No. Sanctification is a growth in faith, hope, love, prayerfulness, and

praise. Sanctification is the flowering and maturing of the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV).

All the fruits in this list are simply various forms of love. Joy is love in ecstasy. Temperance is love holding the reins. Patience is love under the burden. They are all forms of love.

Sanctification is growth in love. Remember, love is not a passion. The love the Bible talks about is not an emotion. It results in emotion, but it's not an emotion.

It is not some Hollywood-version emotional high. It's a principle of unselfish living, whereby we want the best for all men and all women. That's true love.

### **The principle of sanctification**

In this section of chapter 6 and 7 on sanctification, there are three sections on sanctification.

The first section contains the principle of sanctification. We noticed in the first dozen or so verses of Chapter 6 that Paul says (and I paraphrase), "When you see that you died on Calvary, sin loses its power."

The principle of sanctification is identification with Christ in his death. You must reckon that you are dead. Whether it's pride, or impurity, or selfishness, or tobacco, or alcohol, or sheer meanness, you have to reckon that you are identified with Christ in his death, and that the old way of life is over. It is so if you believe it. That's the key factor.

Your old nature was brought to nothing by the decree of God when he saw you in your Representative, Christ. When you understand that, sin will no longer have a claim on you. It will try



to, but you can say, “You have no claim on me. I’m dead.” A young woman was asked to go to a questionable dancing party. She refused. “This institution is under new government,” she said.

That’s true of all Christians. We are under new government. Now you understand the importance of Romans 8:5. “Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” Whatever you set your mind on, ultimately controls you. That’s the principle of sanctification.

### **The practice of sanctification**

Paul likens the practice of sanctification to a subject serving a king, a servant working for a master, and a wife caring for her husband. Paul climaxes the practice of holiness in sanctification by saying (and I paraphrase), “Look, when you are united with Jesus in his death, when you are one with him in your life, then the fruit of holiness appears spontaneously. It can’t be otherwise.”

You all know the many jokes made about human love. The man courting his sweetheart says, “I’ll climb the highest mountain. I’ll swim the widest ocean.” Then we usually have a few lines on the other side about his being too lazy to drive to her house and pick her up. These stories show that humanity is not as good as it sounds.

But the principle is right: Love leads you to lavish everything on your beloved. You can’t be captured by the love of Christ and be unresponsive to that love. When we are married to Christ, we bring forth the fruit of holiness.

### **The preventive of sanctification**

Paul’s third section on sanctification is the preventive of holiness. Here we come to the obstacle, the barrier. I always think of a great man called George Romaines, who said, “Blessed be God for the seventh of Romans.” I have echoed that same beatitude many times—and you will too as we begin our next study.

This whole seventh chapter tells us that the law is as helpless to sanctify us as it is to justify us. It is Jesus we need: First, Last, and Always!

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### **Romans 7, continued**

Paul begins chapter 7 of Romans by discussing the twin problems of sin and self. Great thinkers throughout history agree with Paul's pessimistic, but realistic, view of human nature. Only the blissfully unaware think they are worthy. A good beating from Moses would help them see their need of Christ.

Here we are going to study that after verse 4 in chapter 7 of Romans, from 5 down to 13, the problem of sin is spelled out. That's because sin remains in the justified person, though it doesn't reign.

Then from verses 14 to 25 of chapter 7, self is prominent. In these verses, you have "my," "I," "mine" 40 times. Every ophthalmologist should be interested in the person in these verses—he has "I"-trouble. He is self-centered. He is very self-centered.

It's good to remember that most of our discomforts grow out of our self-love. I've found it to be true time and time again. It's very humiliating to apply that principle when you are cast down. But it's true. Our discomfort grows out of our self-love.

The barrier to sanctification, as now set forth in these verses, is: 1) Sin as a broad principle, and 2) Sin as manifested in our natural, carnal self—which remains even though a new nature has been added by the Holy Spirit.

## **The reality of sin**

Let's look at what Paul says about these two:

While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit.

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet, if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proves to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me. (Romans 7:5–11 RSV)

Here the reality of sin is spelled out.

## **Testimony of literary greats**

History's greatest writers have been trying to tell us this same story. Seneca [c. 4 B.C.–A.D. 65] said, "There is no sin committed but that every man knows he might have committed it."

Ovid [43 B.C.–A.D. 18] said, "We see and approve the better, but we pursue the worst." Ovid also said, "We only have to be forbidden something, and we want it."

When William Makepeace Thackeray [1811–1863] wrote his novels, he proved he was a master of fiction by having no heroes. When George Eliot [1819–1880] wrote her novels, she always had the heroes possess mixed motives. It's vital to our Christian experience to understand that every thought or inclination in all of our life here below is tainted to some degree by self-love.

Only in the deep awareness of our natural depravity will we ever find safety. That awareness sends us to the great Rock. It sends us to the good Shepherd. For—should I ever be foolish enough to think that there is goodness in myself—I’d be done for.

### **No more heroes**

Thomas Carlyle [1795–1881] wrote many books in which he expressed belief in “hero” leadership. But he never finished one of them without getting disgusted with his hero.

Samuel Johnson [1709–84] said, “Every man knows that of himself which he would not tell to his dearest friend.” I think that’s true, and if you’ll think about it, you’ll know it’s true. In every heart, there is a robber, and a savage, and a maniac. If you doubt the last one, go for a week without sleep and see.

There is only a very tiny partition between proper, acceptable functioning in society and stepping over into gross abnormalities of behavior. That’s because everything is so twisted. Because of sin, the whole human organism is deranged. The imagination is corrupted, the faculties are perverted. The call of temptation from without brings an answering chord from within—even after conversion.

### **Amazingly unaware people**

One of the most famous writers of the Enlightenment was Jean Jacques Rousseau [1712–78]. He wrote a book called *Confessions*, and in that book Rousseau confesses all his sins. But he does it with such a spirit of gloating and pride and conceit that you are amazed. This man said, “No one can come to the throne of God and say, ‘I’m a better man than Rousseau!’”

For twenty years, Rousseau lived in immorality. He advocated suicide and profligacy. He never married the woman he lived with. Every child born of their union, he immediately put in an orphanage. This is the man who said, “No one can come to the throne of God and say, ‘I’m a better man than Rousseau!’”

Soon after he received his mortal wound, Lord Nelson [1758–1805], the hero of Trafalgar, said, “I am so glad I have never been a great sinner.” He was living in adultery right at that time.

One elderly lady of 92 said, “As I look back on my life, there’s not one thing I would have done differently.” That’s amazing!

### **A beating from Moses**

The most famous illustration of how close depravity is to all of us is the well-known one in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Let me paraphrase. Adam the First offers to Faithful, “Take your pick, any one of my three daughters: Lust of the Flesh, Lust of the Eyes, and Pride of Life.”

Faithful says, “No, I’m a Christian. I’m on my way to the Holy City.”

As he returns to his journey, he is very proud that he has overcome temptation. Suddenly someone catches up with him and begins to thrash him. It’s Moses.

“I bade him forbear. I asked him for mercy,” says Faithful.

Moses says, “I don’t know how to show mercy.”

Then someone came by and told Moses to desist. “I knew not who it was until I saw the holes in his hands and in his feet,” says Faithful.

In the middle of this story, Bunyan has Faithful say to Moses, “Why are you beating me? I resisted the temptation.”

“Yes,” says Moses, “but your flesh twitched.”

That’s the point.

Even when you and I succeed in resisting a temptation, it is natural for us to look back and say, “But I wish I could.” It is a mark of

how fallen we are that even after conversion, the fascination of sin remains, to some extent.

That is why we must be so dependent on Christ every step of the way on our pilgrimage.





## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### More on Romans 7

The person Paul confesses about in Romans 7 is a mystery to many. Some say the wretch is Paul before his conversion. Others say it is Paul who has not yet learned the secret of victorious living. Our study reveals that it is who Paul says it is. It is the mighty apostle Paul himself, the experienced Christian, still struggling with his sinful human nature.

Now we approach the storm center of Romans chapter 7. Theologians wrangle and wrestle—and have for hundreds of years—over the next few verses.

I have good friends who are divided over chapter 7. A husband and wife very near to us here don't agree. The wife has taken one interpretation, the husband the other. The last time the husband saw me, he said, "I think I'm winning her over." George Romaines stated, "Blessed be God for the seventh chapter of Romans," commenting on 7:14ff.

#### **Controversial verses**

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:14–25 RSV)

### **Paul's gulf of grief**

The next part of the verse is stunning, because it doesn't say what we expect. "So, then, I of myself serve the law of God." That's what we expect, what we'd like, but it's not like that.

So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind,  
but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)

What a shocker! What does Paul mean?

Let me tell you first what Paul doesn't mean. He doesn't mean that he's stealing, lying, committing idolatry and adultery—and all of those things.

No, here's a man whose view of behavior and duty is so lofty that the slightest diminution of love and praise fills him with condemnation. This is a man who is so intent on the will of God that a single wrong thought fills him with self-loathing.

This passage is talking about the gulf between ideals and performance. Stars are good to plot your course by, but no one can touch the stars. Browning said, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

### **Three views of one man**

Let's talk about this hotly contested passage. Does it apply to the unconverted person? Does it apply to the converted person who hasn't yet learned the secret of overcoming? Or does it apply to the deeply spiritual person who knows all there is to know in this life about the gospel? These are the issues.

Most Wesleyans believe it is about the unconverted person. John Wesley [1703–1791] is one of my heroes, but not at this point of exegesis.

The vast majority of modern evangelicals say, “The passage is about the converted person, who hasn’t yet learned how to overcome. When this person gets into chapter 8, he’ll be OK.” (That’s because chapter 8 speaks about the Holy Spirit twenty times instead of always referring to “I,” “my,” and “mine.”) That’s all this person needs to do: move into Chapter 8.

The third view is the one that John Calvin [1509–1564] taught. In my prejudiced opinion, it’s the one the best exegetes still teach. This interpretation is that this passage is the confession of a person such as Paul. Long after his conversion, desiring to glorify his Lord, he still knows and feels he constantly falls short of the goal.

### **Three reasons**

Let me give you three reasons for taking this position:

The first reason is it’s in the section on sanctification. It’s not in the section on justification. It’s not in that first parenthesis, where Paul’s talking about the unconverted. It’s in the section that follows the five chapters of freedom from the wrath of God.

You have been justified. You have the verdict and the status, because that’s what justification is. It’s a verdict and a status. You are declared righteous for Christ’s sake. You are declared 100 percent righteous (not 99 percent), and that arches over you all your days like a rainbow. So, number one, this comes in the section on sanctification.

The second reason is that when we get to this crucial section, the language passes from the past tense to the present tense. When we were in the preceding verses—verse 5 for example—they were in the past tense, talking about Paul’s pre-Christian experience.

Now, beginning with verse 14, he shifts into the present tense: “I am carnal . . .” (v. 14), “I do . . .” (v. 20), “I find . . .” (v. 21), “I see . . .” (v. 23).

It is present tense. And it’s first person. He doesn’t say, “Peter” or “John.” It’s “Me, Paul.” First person, present tense.

It’s farcical to suggest that Paul’s cry, “Wretched man that I am!” (v. 24) means he is writing about what he was 15 years earlier.

If the theory that the passage refers to the unconverted person is correct, then that’s where these verses would fit. They point back to 15 years ago, when he was unconverted, before his Damascus Road experience. Reasonably, the expression can only mean, “Wretched man that I am—today.”

Paul is saying that the law can no more sanctify us fully than it can justify us!

### **A converted person**

Furthermore, the third reason is that the person in this passage has a will always directed to the good. Every place where he expresses what he wants, it’s always good. You can’t say that about an unconverted person.

When Paul says, “I delight in the law of God” (v. 22), that doesn’t fit with an unconverted person’s attitude. The unconverted don’t delight in the law of God. Paul himself writes later:

The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.  
(Romans 8:7 KJV)

This passage has to be about a converted person.

He writes, “It is no longer I that do it” (v. 20). The “no longer” here is a translation of the Greek word “ouketi.” It means “it once used to be me.”

So, what Paul is saying here is, “My will is now set on God’s will. I do so want to please him now in everything. I love his law. It’s my meditation all the day. I want to run in the way of his commandments.”

But there’s a negative principle in me that dogs my footsteps and pulls me down. I become slow to praise and slow to trust.

### **Caught in a crisis**

Dear friends, all of us in the Western world pretty much live in the fast lane. We’re all caught up in the materialistic struggle—and many other kinds of struggles. Crisis in modern life is not asymptomatic. It’s symptomatic.

The only hope for any of us is to recognize that it’s very difficult to trust God while in crisis. We can trust only when everything’s fine, when the weather is good, and the bills are all met, and the family is well.

We don’t find it hard to trust God at such times. But such times are the exception, not the rule. Life is a time of crisis for most of us, and we find ourselves very defective in faith at the moment we need it most.

### **Paul’s word pictures**

I want you to see the picture Paul is painting with words. (And we need to remember this is still in the section on sanctification.) Here is a person who delights in the law of God. This person’s will is always in harmony with the will of God. This person speaks using the present tense, first person. Yet still, after years of being an experienced and mature Christian, he struggles with sinful human nature. That’s because sin remains, though it does not reign.

Surely Paul is painting a picture of himself—now! That’s why our peace is ever, only, always, found in the imputed righteousness of Christ. As sinful beggars we can accept and take that righteousness only with empty hands!

For the righteousness of justification is 100 percent—but not inside us. The righteousness of sanctification is inside us—but not 100 percent. At glorification, and then only, will righteousness be 100 percent and inside us!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### Introduction to Romans 8

The New Testament makes it clear that being a Christian is no guarantee life will be easy. Life is often a struggle, and God seems silent. But God is sovereign and loves us in Christ. We are to believe the wonderful promises of the Bible above our senses.

In Romans chapter 7, the apostle Paul writes about himself. He has been a genuinely converted Christian man for many years. Yet he confesses that he still must struggle against sin. He is no longer “in the flesh,” but the flesh is still in him.

Not that Paul is a flagrant and publicly notorious sinner. But over the years the gospel has sensitized his conscience. Any failing to love as Christ loved, to serve as Christ served, to resist evil as Christ resisted evil, breaks Paul’s heart. He knows only too well that sin remains in the Christian, though it does not reign.

#### **New Testament evidence**

Let me point out that there’s nothing inconsistent here with what’s said of the Christian life elsewhere in the New Testament:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 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. (I Corinthians 9:24–27 NIV)

Notice what Paul is saying here to the church at Corinth. “I’m running a race!” That takes effort. You know the old joke made about joggers. They enjoy it so much that they all look miserable! Paul’s running a race. He’s putting out some effort here. “I exercise self-control,” he says.

### **Self-control unpopular**

We don’t like exercising self-control. We long for a holiday from self-control. But Paul says, “I exercise self-control.” If a worldly athlete training for the Olympics has to do it, how much more the spiritual athlete.

You know, it’s strange when you think what people will do to fulfill worldly ambitions. If they’re in the Olympics they will train and train. If they’re trying to complete a scientific investigation—such as Edison with his 10,000 experiments to find a filament for the light bulb—they will work and work. Or if they’re just out to make money—people will do anything. Get up early, stay up late. Cheat their neighbors. Ruin their health. People will do anything for worldly ambitions.

When it comes to divine ambitions, we feel that putting out a lot of effort goes against the grain. “Lord, you ought to have an easier way than that.” But Paul is saying that if there has to be self-control for worldly people achieving worldly objectives, how much more is the need for self-control in the spiritual conflict, in the spiritual race.

Self-control in everything?—it goes against the grain. We don’t like it.

### **University of hard knocks**

Paul tells how bad it is. He says, “I have to punch myself continually.” That’s an interesting comment, isn’t it? “I pommel my body” (verse 27 RSV). One version has, “I beat myself black and blue.”

That’s a good and clever translation. I like the choice of words (though I don’t like the idea!) You’ve heard of the University of



Hard Knocks. The school cry is “Ouch!” and the school colors are black and blue. That’s the school you are attending. To be a Christian is to be in the University of Hard Knocks.

Dear friend, life is not a stroll on a spring day through a summer garden. It’s not that. Jesus said to Pilate, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11 NIV). No power except by divine permission. You could have no power at all against me.

We have to learn to say that to life. We must learn to say that to life. Life is never going to show us a friendly face for long. The world of the flesh and the devil are our enemies. They’re not our friends. They’re our enemies. They’re never going to show a friendly face for long. We have to believe that God is in control.

### **The sovereignty of God**

In this Book of Romans it says of God, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Romans 11:36 KJV). I have to fight and struggle to believe that. But the more I come to believe, the more restful my life will be.

“Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.” That doesn’t mean God originates evil. No, indeed. But it does mean that by the time that evil touches the Christian, it has a meaning, it has a purpose.

Remember when Joseph said to his brethren: “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” (Genesis 50:20). You meant it for evil; God meant it for good.

Remember when Shimei cursed David and cast stones at him. One of David’s friends, Abishai, said, “Let me go over and cut off his head.” David said, “If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who can ask, ‘Why do you do this?’” (2 Samuel 16:9–10 NIV).

What an answer. “God has told him to curse me!” We have to believe in the sovereignty of God.

### **The silence of God**

God is never the author of evil. God does not initiate evil, but he overrules evil in favor of good. He is the great Chess Player who gives the other contestant perfect freedom but who wins the game at last. The most obvious example in the world is Black Friday, when our Savior was crucified.

What could be more gloomy, what could be more hopeless, than this innocent Man being triumphed over, abused, cruelly treated—and Heaven does nothing about it! It is the silence of God that confuses us.

God was very silent at Calvary. The Man on the cross cried out, “My God, my God, why ... ?” When a Christian is trying to do the right thing, it’s twice as hard when things go wrong. “Look, Lord, I’m trying, and this is what I get for it.”

Well, no one ever tried as hard as Christ, and he succeeded. And yet he was brought to Black Friday. It was so black you can’t understand it until Sunday, the resurrection day, can you? Remember the aged preacher who said, “That was Friday. Sunday’s a’comin’!”

We’ve got to remember that. Pain and trouble and tragedy and threat—that’s Black Friday. But Sunday’s a’comin’!

### **God’s great gift brings all gifts**

Look further on, into chapter 8 of Romans.

“If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?” (Romans 8:31–32 RSV). The greater Gift implies the lesser gifts.

We all have more needs than the hairs on our heads. Whatever your need is now, your great assurance is that if God has given you the greatest Gift, Christ, everything less valuable is also included. But it is what God sees to be necessary, not what you think is necessary.

We can't change God's mind, because he knows reality. You and I live in a world of illusion, a world of unreality. For example, everything we fear about the future is grotesquely exaggerated. Our fears are liars.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” If God did not spare his own Son (this is an allusion to Genesis 22, where Abraham offered his son Isaac) how should God not also—along with Christ—truly give us all things? All things we need. In his time. And God is never in a hurry.

God allowed Lazarus to die. In God's time, it was better that Lazarus should die.

A resurrection is a much better thing than a healing.

### **Death is only a sleep**

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies (Romans 8:33 RSV).

Dear friends, we have a clean sheet with God! We can well bear all things by his grace. The worst happens and we pass on, and that's life. So what?

Death is only sleeping. How come? Because there's going to be a resurrection.

Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:3 NIV).

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud

command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The ancient saints who are dead have only been asleep for what seems like a second. It might have been a thousand years, but it's only a second to them. They fall asleep, and the next thing they know is the glorious return of Christ!

We do not know the passing of time when we are sleeping. We are not aware of time passing. And death is only a sleep.

If we've received God's justification—if we've got that—all the setbacks of life become very much secondary. The devil cannot take from us anything more than our spending money, if our eyes are on Christ.

### **The glorious climax**

Now notice the glorious climax of this section of Romans:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37–39 RSV)

Death's bony fingers can untie all lovers' knots, but they only fumble at the grave of the child of God.

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. (Romans 8, KJV)

What a beautiful picture! Now, friends, we have to learn to quote these verses to ourselves day-by-day. What happens to all of us—there's no exception—is that our self-talk is often very bad. What we tell ourselves is often awful.

### **Absolutize, catastrophize, rationalize**

For example, we absolutize. I do it all the time. My wife Gill has to constantly correct me. I say, “Look at this! The game’s up! It’s all over!”—or whatever. Gill says, “Don’t be silly.” And she’s right. It’s silly to absolutize. But we do it.

We catastrophize. We see a speck of blood, and we are convinced our whole body is going to lose all eleven pints.

We rationalize. We try to explain away our quite-natural mistakes and make them look good. We absolutize, we catastrophize, and we rationalize. Our self-talk is usually very poor stuff.

We have to learn to substitute God’s talk. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God’s love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord! (CEV).

This is what it means to “set your minds on things above” (Colossians 3:2 NIV). Fill your mind with these things. Let God do the talking here.

Don’t absolutize: “All is lost!” Don’t catastrophize: “It’s all up now.” Don’t rationalize: “I didn’t mean what I said!” Let God do the talking.

### **Christ—the Tree of Life**

The book of Romans begins with the midnight gloom of the infamy of human depravity. It talks about those who abuse their sexual gifts and about those who hate fathers and mothers. It talks about hatred and strife and variance and emulation and idolatry. It begins with the midnight picture of human depravity.

It finishes—this major section of chapter 1 through 8—with the love of God.

It began by saying, “There is no one righteous, not even one” (3:10). But this section closes with, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (8:37). Isn’t that a great contrast? It’s such a great contrast that it takes a real effort to believe it.

That’s because all of our senses shout out at times against it. You know we are often cheated by our senses. Advertisers constantly take advantage of us through our senses. We have to learn to go by God’s precious Word, the Bible, and not by our senses.

When by faith in Scripture you find Christ is the Tree of Life (and you cling to him), you have reentered Paradise!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### **Romans 8: The Sparkling Point of the Diamond**

The “sparkling point of the diamond” in Romans is chapter eight. In Romans 8, we learn the great truth of Christian liberty, that despite the dark revelations about ourselves in Romans 7, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus by faith.

If the Bible were a golden finger-ring with a precious stone in the socket, then the sparkling point of that stone would be the eighth chapter of Romans. (Romans, of course, being the diamond itself.)

One of the frustrations of being a preacher is that there is so much to cover in the earlier chapters of Romans, that there is never enough time to do justice to the eighth chapter!

#### **The sparkling point**

The eighth chapter of Romans is the Bible’s sparkling point of the diamond. It is the high point of truth about Christian experience. It is vital that we understand this chapter. All the rivers of truth from the rest of the Bible flow into this mother of rivers.

In this study we will go through a portion of Romans 8 word-for-word.

Except for our Lord’s final discourse in John (see chapters 13–17) the Holy Spirit is mentioned in Romans 8 more often than anywhere else in the Bible—twenty times.

In strange contrast, in Romans 7, you find personal pronouns such as “I,” “my,” “mine,” thirty times. Things are rather dour and sour in Romans 7. It’s not true to say, as some do, “Oh, that’s just someone that’s not really yet a Christian.” No. Sadly, Romans 7 is

about Paul, and therefore about any believer. Potential for sin lurks in any believer, however mature in experience.

### **The downside of Romans 7**

When we come to Romans 8, we are given the secret to the downside of Romans 7.

Paul wrote of himself, and every Christian:

What a miserable person I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is doomed to die? (Romans 7:24 CEV)

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. (Romans 7:15 NIV)

This frustration happens to all Christians. But Romans 8 gives us the secret that tells us that this frustration need not prevail.

### **Romans 8 and Christian liberty**

There is one word that sums up Romans 8. If we could scratch a single-word message on glass with a diamond, it would be the word “liberty.”

This precious portion of Scripture contains the secrets whereby we can be free from sin, from death, from ignorance, from loneliness, from meaninglessness, from decay—in whole or in part.

Some of these dark things remain, but, if you understand this chapter, they cannot dominate your life.

At this moment, there are millions of slaves in the Sudan. Some people think slavery is a thing of the past. Not so. There are millions of slaves, at this moment, under the whip in the Sudan, and in Mauritania in North Africa.

However, there are many more millions of slaves in America. Slaves to selfishness, impurity, hatred, and a thousand other problems. Romans 8 has the answer.



“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Hundreds of years ago, one great scholar said that there is no more unfortunate chapter division in the Bible than here—between chapters 7 and 8.

To understand what he meant, take a look at the last verse of chapter 7.

Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)

“Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” This is the answer to the question, “Who will rescue me?” in verse 24.

The Greek word translated “rescue,” or “deliver,” is from the idea of a soldier intervening between a fellow soldier—his friend—and an enemy.

### **No break between 7 and 8**

What a strange thing follows:

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)

What a strange way to finish chapter 7: “in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

Now, Paul did not put his quill down and say, “Time to begin a new chapter.” There were no chapter divisions in what Paul wrote.

He went straight on with: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Because of the gospel, because of Jesus Christ, there is still no condemnation—if you belong to Christ.

Even in your lowest experiences, even in your greatest failures, even when your heart is broken and your conscience is tormenting you because of some mistake, Paul says, “But there is no condemnation.”

### **No condemnation**

My friends, looking to Jesus, that is always true. Today, tomorrow, the next day, next week, next year, if you are trusting in Christ alone as your righteousness, as your life, there is no condemnation.

That is the essence of the good news of the Book of Romans. It is so important that it rings throughout chapter 8. Notice what he says toward the end of the chapter:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Romans 8:33–34)

Who can condemn? Notice Paul doesn’t say, “There’s no sin, no failure, no pain, no accusation, no problems.” He doesn’t say that. What he says is there’s no condemnation.

### **Importance of clear conscience**

Martin Luther said, “Lord, now my sins are forgiven, you can do what you like with me.”

That is a very wonderful insight. If you have a clear conscience, you can stand a lot of bad things. But if your conscience is weighed down, if your conscience is condemning you, the slightest thing can be an overwhelming difficulty to bear.

“Lord, now my sins are forgiven, do what you like.” In other words, while heaven is guaranteed to me, while I have the love of God, if I am in tune with the universe, what else matters? The things that are temporary, the things that are local—they don’t matter.

## **No condemnation is justification**

To say, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) is another way of saying that the believer is justified.

Never forget that key word, “justified.” It’s easy to remember its significance because justified means, “just as if I’d never sinned.” Justification is not just forgiveness. It is forgiveness, but it’s more than that. Justification is “not guilty.” That means, “innocent.” Justification goes beyond forgiveness. Justification is a declaring of righteousness, a declaring by God that we are righteous, for Christ’s sake, despite what we are in ourselves.

## **Sweetest name for God**

The sweetest name for God in the Bible, I believe, is in Romans. He is the “God who justifies the wicked” (Romans 4:5, “justifieth the ungodly” KJV).

That’s me. By nature, I’m not at all godly. But Romans says God justifies the ungodly.

I would expect a holy and just God to justify the godly. I would expect such a God to justify the perfect, the sinless, and those that never fail.

But that would be depressing to me, because I regularly fail. I need a God who, like Jesus ministering in Galilee, receives sinners (see Luke 15:2).

## **Forgiveness of sins**

The people said of Jesus, “He was gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner” (Luke 19:7 KJV).

I need a God who can say to the man beside him who had been a murderer and a thief, “I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43 NIV adapted).

I need someone who, like Christ, when he takes the Pharisees to

task for their harshness, says, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7 KJV). Then Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Neither do I condemn thee. The great message of the Christian religion is mercy—the forgiveness of sins.

### **My two-fold problem: 1. Guilt**

Once we see the real nature of God in his revelation of mercy, that shatters the reign of sin—breaks the neck of the beast, so to speak.

You see, I have a two-fold problem: 1) Guilt from my past. 2) What I am.

First, I have guilt from my past because of all the things done wrong that should have been done right, and all the things left undone that should have been done.

There are many, many respectable sinners who don’t apparently do anything wrong. Neither do they do much that’s right. The world would be just as good if they were dead.

So, I have guilt for the past; and I want someone to undo that guilt.

### **My two-fold problem: 2. What I am**

The second problem is not what I’ve done or left undone, but what I am.

Dynamite is not always exploding, but it’s always explosive. Vesuvius is not always erupting, but it can erupt at any time.

So with your heart, and mine. It’s not always exploding. None of us enjoy losing our tempers. But we’re always capable of exploding.

Remember the old illustration of a bottle of water with an inch of dirt at the bottom. The water looks clear enough to drink, but just give it a shaking. The dirt swirls up and the water becomes very unappetizing.

Some of us just haven't been shaken enough to find out the truth about ourselves. Given the necessary circumstances, any of us is capable of any sin. (If you doubt that shocking statement, go without sleep for a week. Then you'll believe it.)

An iceberg can represent all of us. Nine-tenths of an iceberg is beneath the surface, out of sight. When I look at you, I see only one-tenth of the reality of you, perhaps even only one-hundredth. When you see me, you see only one-hundredth of the reality.

Here is the great news:

There's no condemnation to them that are in Christ, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### **Romans 8: Sin Remains, but It Does Not Reign**

If we miss out on heaven, God's heart will feel the loss most of all. Although earlier chapters in Romans paint a dark picture of the human condition, if we give God his proper place, his grace abounds to us. Truly, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

What is this “law of the Spirit of life” we read about in Romans 8:2? It is another name for the gospel.

#### **We are in the age of the Holy Spirit**

According to 2 Corinthians 3, this age is the age of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to every believer as the pledge of everlasting redemption, and resurrection from the dead.

When you believe, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit—immediately. He comes into the heart. You cannot believe God loves you unless the Holy Spirit has come to you.

You don't need to speak in tongues to know that you have the Holy Spirit.

There is a Bible gift of tongues (see 1 Corinthians 12:10), though much of what passes for it today is a counterfeit. There is a Bible gift of tongues, but it's not the evidential sign that you are in Christ. The sign you are in Christ is when your heart receives the conviction that God loves you, even you—and that he always will.

#### **God's grace and our nature**

If you miss out on heaven, in all the universe it will be God's heart

that will feel it the most, because God has a place in his kingdom for you. The salvation outlined in the Bible is from “the gutter-most to the uttermost.” It’s for “whosoever believeth” (John 3:16 KJV), not just for those with a good hereditary background, a strong will, and a fortunate disposition.

There are many people who have a good nature, but not much grace. Because of their culture, because of their family, there are many people who are fairly easy to get along with—and that’s wonderful. But it may not be because of grace at all.

C. S. Lewis once said that there may be some vinegary old soul who is difficult to get along with that God regards as being much more a Christian than another person who just happens to have a good digestion. We need to distinguish between nature and grace.

### **No defeat**

Romans 8 begins with, “No condemnation” (verse 1). It ends with, “No separation.”

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39 NIV)

Between these two—no condemnation and no separation—it says, “No defeat.” That’s because, in Christ, we are more than conquerors.

### **Give God his place**

While we are trusting in the gospel, while we are looking to Jesus Christ, while we permit the Holy Spirit to have his way with us—at that point there is no defeat.

Unfortunately, what happens to all of us is that we look away, we forget God. We become absorbed in something that’s secondary or tertiary or way down the line, and God gets squeezed out. We treat



God as being the sawdust of life instead of the great Timber.  
But if I give God his place, he promises me no condemnation.  
Not only that, he also promises me no separation, and no defeat.  
Romans 8 is a great chapter with great news.

### **Themes of Romans so far**

All the themes of Romans, chapters 1-7 are summed up in the first three verses of chapter 8. No condemnation, no wrath.

Chapters 1–5 of Romans say, in effect: “You are free from the wrath of God if you believe in Jesus.”

Chapter 8 goes on to say: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets me free from the law of sin and death.”

The one thing God never made was sin; and the one thing God himself cannot do is sin. Yet, the one thing that you and I know more intimately than anything else is sin.

But you recall that in the first five chapters of Romans it says there is no wrath of God for the believer. Chapter 6 says: “Not only are you free from wrath, but you are free from the tyranny of sin.”

Sin remains, but it doesn’t reign and it cannot ruin. It vexes, it disturbs, it effervesces. Sin is always there, a breath away, but it cannot reign and it cannot ruin. You are free from the dominion of sin.

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

There is a great line in the previous chapter that says:

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound  
(Romans 5:20 KJV)

### **Grace much more abounds**

If grace just existed, I’d be happy. But it abounds. And it more

abounds. And it much more abounds. God is a generous God. When Peter and John healed the lame man in the name of Jesus, the man didn't just walk.

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (Acts 3:8)

When the father of the prodigal gave him a robe, it was not some old left-over shirt, but "the best robe" (Luke 15:22 KJV).

When Christ made the water into wine, there was not just enough for the wedding party, there was enough for the guests from miles around to take home. Christ always does things lavishly. God is the God of generosity.

There is nothing pinched, nothing meager, nothing stingy with our God. He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). What a statement! Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think! That is what our God is like.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### **Romans 8: The Law Cannot Forgive**

The New Covenant assures us that we are no longer under law but under grace. There is nothing wrong with law. The problem lies with us—we have a sinful nature.

Jesus came in our “likeness,” but had the same sinless nature as Adam. We must receive the Holy Spirit in the new birth, but Jesus always had the fullness of the Spirit.

Law is descriptive and prescriptive, but it has no power. Law cannot forgive, and reading the Ten Commandments to oneself in answer to one’s carnal desires is like trying to hold a wolf by the jaws; it won’t work.

#### **Limits of law**

Romans 1–5 says you are free from the wrath of God. Romans 6 says you’re free from the dominion of sin. Romans 7 says you’re free from law as a motivator and sanctifier.

Law has very limited capacity. It is only descriptive. The law serves to make us see that we are sinners. The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (see Galatians 3:24).

The law is the shepherd’s black dog that brings the sheep to the Shepherd. It is the terrible heat that makes us run to the shadow of the great Rock. It is the fisherman’s net that brings in the fish. It’s the surgeon’s knife that wounds in order to heal.

But it’s not a Savior. The law cannot forgive. When Christians fail and do something wrong, we don’t say, “Oh, I’ve broken the law.”

We say, “I’ve slapped the loving face of my Redeemer.”

Christians see their sins not as violations of two tables of stone, but as rejecting love.

To sin against love. There’s no worse sin than that.

### **Verses that summarize**

The first four verses of Romans 8 summarize all that the previous chapters have said:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1–4 NRSV)

The summary is: We are free from the wrath of God. We are free from the tyranny of sin. We are free from law as the motivation for our life; grace has taken its place.

### **New Covenant and grace**

We are not under law as a covenant. In the New Covenant, the law is written on our hearts, and the promises are: “I will cause you to keep my statutes. I will do it.”

Grace prevails in the New Covenant. Law remains as a standard. You can never make adultery right. You can’t make thievery right. You can’t make lying right. You can’t make murder acceptable. Law remains as a standard of life, but it is no effective method for being saved.

We’re not under law as the driving force, the motivation, the thing that pushes us to holiness, or to join the church. We’re not under

the law but under grace. When the heart is broken, we run in the path of God's commandments. "If you love me, [you will] keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

### **Nothing wrong with law**

Notice, please, that there is nothing wrong with the law. "What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did" (Romans 8:3 NIV).

Rather, everything's wrong with me.

A mighty sword in the hand of a baby is not very threatening. The sun at noonday doesn't avail for a blind person. The best penman in the world is helpless if the only paper available is absorbent and coarse. A sculptor, however good, is not going to build anything that lasts if the rock is prone to crumbling.

So, God is very careful to say here: "The law is weak through our flesh."

### **Meaning of flesh**

The word "flesh" has a continuum of meaning.

It begins with what we are in the body and goes right through to the most well-known theological definition: "All that we are by nature without the Spirit of God." That is, selfish and depraved. But it is a continuum of meaning. Sometimes "flesh" means the physical nature. But this passage is saying, "The law, in that it was weak through the flesh."

Because you and I find it easy to do the easy thing. It's so easy to do the easy thing. We don't want to sweat morally. We don't like to have to engage in great effort. We all take the easy course, unless there's some bribe that coaxes us otherwise. The law is weak through our flesh.

### **Christ and sinful flesh**

God sent his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, or,

as the Bible margin says, as a “sin offering.” (“For sin” is a Greek stylistic phrase that is the equivalent of “for a sin offering.”)

Please notice how careful Scripture is when it talks about the nature of Christ. Romans 8:3 says, “In the likeness of sinful flesh” (KJV).

If this was to mean that Jesus was just the same as me and you, it would have said he came “in sinful flesh.” But it says he came in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Why does it matter? Because sadly, tragically, there are many people who attend churches who say that if Jesus with my sinful nature could yet keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, then I’d better do the same—or else.

### **Christ the second Adam**

But the fact is, Jesus didn’t have my sinful nature. He was the second Adam, and sin was no part of the first Adam. The first Adam was tempted, though he had no sinful propensities. And Jesus was tempted, though he had no sinful propensities.

Jesus was tempted a thousand times more than you or me. The only tree that feels the full force of the storm is the one that never bends and breaks. Jesus never bent, he never broke. And what’s more, he had a way out that he was tempted to use all the time.

If you were God, you’d make short work of the devil or anyone else who tried to tempt you, because you were God. Christ always had this easy way out.

### **Christ never used powers for himself**

Before Christ began his ministry, the devil tempted him to use his deity. “Turn these stones into bread. Come on. You are a miracle worker. Do it.”

“Throw yourself down from the top of the temple. You work miracles, it’s not going to hurt you.” (See Matthew 4:1–11.)

So, Christ was tempted to use his miraculous powers for himself.

But Christ used his miraculous powers only for others, never for himself. That's why he couldn't even tell the day of his Second Advent. "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son" (Matthew 24:36).

Jesus didn't even know that the fig tree had no fruit on it. He went to it and found it had nothing but leaves (Mark 11:13).

The Gospels record about 200 questions Jesus asked. He would ask someone, "What is your name?" Jesus didn't know. That's why he asked. He never used his miraculous powers for himself.

But he came as that "holy thing" (Luke 1:35), because Jesus was to show that human beings as God created them could obey perfectly.

### **Glory is gone from us**

My friends, we are broken people, we are shadows.

We are not whole. That's why we have such trouble obeying perfectly. If we obeyed perfectly, it would mean never a vestige of selfishness.

The true reality for every Christian is that we face the threat of temptation to selfishness every day. It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian sixty years. You're continually facing the threat and opposing it and denying it.

But Jesus never needed to be born again. You and I were born without the Holy Spirit. Adam and Eve, our first parents, in the beginning, had the Spirit. They glowed with the glory, and only when they lost the Spirit did they realize they were naked, the glory gone.

That glory was that of the indwelling God. The reason we were made was to be temples for the indwelling of God, and

our first parents were. But when they disobeyed and sinned, they lost the Spirit.

### **We must be born again**

The little New Testament book of Jude speaks about certain people who have not the Spirit.

These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. (Jude 1:19 NIV)

That's everyone outside of Christ, everyone outside of God. That's why we have to be born of the Spirit. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3 NKJV). That is found in Chapter one thousand of Scripture.

"You must be born again" (v. 7). You must, you must, you must.

The fact that we must receive him back again, is because we have lost him. From the beginning. But Jesus had the Spirit from the beginning.

The Son was sent to speak God's message, and he has been given the full power of God's Spirit. (John 3:34 CEV)—alternately, "without limit" (NIV)

### **Official reception of Spirit**

Jesus had the Spirit's fullness from the beginning, from conception. However, the Spirit did come upon him in an official way at his baptism (see Mark 1:10). Jesus had the Spirit from conception, but when the Spirit came in an official way, he went forth and proclaimed:

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.  
(Luke 4:18–19 NKJV)

This is the proclamation of the jubilee. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### **Romans 8: We Stand in Justification**

Christianity is not a mechanical religion.

We do not receive forgiveness only for every sin  
remembered and confessed. We are so weak we are  
often unaware of our mistakes. Rather, when we  
look to Jesus we are justified all the time.

We are always right with God in Christ.

This brings to our hearts the love  
that is the intent of the law.

The first three verses of Romans 8 summarize the preceding 7 chapters of the book. They summarize Romans 1–5 and freedom from wrath; Romans 6 and freedom from sin; and Romans 7, freedom from the motivation of law.

They tell us of the tremendous blessings of the gospel. There is no condemnation for the believer, today, tomorrow, or the next day.

#### **We stand in justification**

I feel sad for people who think that justification happens only at the beginning of the Christian life to get us started—but after that it's all sanctification.

The idea that God does a mighty work for you and forgives you at the start, but then—you'd better not make any more mistakes or you'll be done in. That is not the teaching of the Bible.

We stand in justification, according to Romans 5:1:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,  
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;

through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1–2 NIV)

Being justified by faith, we stand; we have access.

In other words, justification is over us all the time, until we die, until Jesus comes.

### **God is greater than our conscience**

Not for one moment does God see me as I am. Thank heaven for that! God sees me only in Christ. God sees you only in Christ. Justification is a continuous, uninterrupted blessing all your days in all your ways, so that your standing before heaven is always 100 percent, even if your conscience is giving you a hard time. It says in 1 John:

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. (1 John 3:19–20 NIV)

Isn't that wonderful? When our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.

The KJV says, "if our hearts condemn us." Of course they do. Often. There's reason for our hearts to do it. They don't do it one-tenth as often as they should because our conscience is blunted. But even our blunted consciences tweak us, or stab us, every now and again. But the Bible assures us that if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he doesn't condemn us.

### **Gentle Jesus**

Please observe the following:

In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:4 NIV)

Once I become a Christian, I say, “Lord, I’ve messed up things for so long, I would like to do better now.”

I don’t want to be the cause of heartache. Neither do you. I don’t want to hurt those that I love, yet it’s so easy to do. We lack the sensitivity of Jesus. He never said a wrong word.

I suspect that even when Jesus walked, he walked so gently that he never woke up anyone who was slumbering. When Jesus touched someone that was sick, they were glad to have him touch them, for if anyone else had touched them, they would have jumped.

Jesus was gentle. Little children ran to him, they loved to be with him. Jesus was tender.

### **Brutal contrast**

But you and I are rather brutal sometimes with the things that we say. My conscience often prods me that I have not thought twice before speaking once. The obvious reason that God gave us two ears and one tongue is that we might listen twice as much as we talk, and that we might think carefully before we speak. We are to stop and think first.

### **Only peanuts**

Despite what I am, Romans 8:4 is saying, “Look, I can change you. When you believe that I love you, nothing else can dominate you.” You can’t find anything better than that. All that the world, the flesh, and the devil have to offer you is peanuts, just peanuts, in comparison.

“If you can have My love,” says God, “My acceptance, My protection, My guarantee that all things will work together for good for you, then all the rest of this stuff is going to be so tawdry. It is not going to bother you.”

That’s the real way the Christian life is meant to be.

The Christian life is not meant to be pushing a wheelbarrow,

sweating as you go. Yes, there is effort, there is conflict, and there is struggle in the Christian life. But it's not a self-initiated struggle all the time. Rather, it is what Ezekiel describes:

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. (Ezekiel 36:27 KJV)

We automatically do what is in our heart and mind.

### **Looking to Jesus**

So, what happens when you and I really believe the gospel? When we are really committed to the God who loved us above life itself—who humiliated himself for our sakes—suddenly, all the motivating power we need for living the right life comes to us. And it is ours for as long as we look to Jesus.

Because we are weak and in the flesh, because of the plurality of things that tempt us in this world, there is not one of us who always looks to Jesus all the time.

Every one of us at the end of the day has said, “Lord, I’m sorry I did such-and-such. I did those things I ought not to have done. And I left undone the things I ought to have done. Lord, continue to accept me in the Beloved.”

Don’t ever think that when you make a mistake you have suddenly slipped out of justification. God is not waiting for your memory to work so that you can pray about all your sins, receive forgiveness, and so be right with God again. No! Long before you ask for forgiveness, God gives it to you.

### **We are often unaware**

I’m glad of that because we don’t recognize most of our mistakes. Where would we be if forgiveness depended upon a good memory and a clear recognition of our sins? We’d be done for, because we don’t recognize many of the things we do wrong.

When our mistakes are flagrant, we recognize them. If there's blood flowing, we recognize it. But we do many hurtful things where there's no blood flow, and we don't even know we've done them.

Sometimes when I get home after I've been out with Gill, she says, "Do you know what you said to so and so?" I ask, "What did I say?" She'll tell me, then add, "You shouldn't have said that because of these circumstances ... ." Gill is often right.

### **Sudden death**

If I have to wait until my conscience corrects me, then I must hasten to pray and get my sins forgiven—what happens if I am killed in the meantime? That is why we must always return to Romans 8:1—there is no condemnation. (No condemnation, memory or no memory, whether your conscience is troubling you or not.)

You are always right with God when you are trusting in Jesus. That's the good news.

### **How we become righteous**

This is also how "the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us" (Romans 8:4 NIV).

This doesn't mean that we suddenly become perfect. The bumper sticker that says: "I am not perfect, just forgiven" is always relevant. We are not perfect. We are forgiven.

Do you remember how Micah expresses it?

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

What does Jesus say is the first and great commandment? In two words: To love (see Mark 12:28–31).

When Paul writes that “the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us” he doesn’t mean we can say, “Wow! I’m suddenly doing everything right.”

Who could live with you if you did everything perfectly? You would show up other people so shamefully they couldn’t stand it. What the text means is that the essence, or the intent of the law of God—which is love—has become the prevailing motivation of your heart.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### **Romans 8: Sanctification, Evidence to the World**

God gives his gifts with both hands. Justification and sanctification are united. Sanctification is the evidence that we are justified. To belong to Christ means to make primary things primary and secondary things secondary.

Still, in the gospel there is no condemnation even when we fail to meet God's standards.

Please remember, we have two problems: 1) The problem of being rid of our guilt. 2) The problem of changing for the better. The theological language for describing how to solve these problems is: 1) Justification, and 2) Sanctification.

#### **Sanctification is evidence**

God always gives his gifts with both hands. There is no such thing as justification without sanctification, or true sanctification without justification.

Now, this is important: The evidence to the world and to the universe that you have been justified—though not to God because he knows your heart already—is whether you are sanctified.

Now, “sanctified” doesn’t mean perfect. Thank God for that. “Sanctified” means that you are aware you have been set apart for God.

Remember the prince who went to public school. The other boys tried to lead him into all kinds of mischief, but he always said, “No, I can’t do that. I am a prince, of royal blood.”

That is what the Christian life is. “I belong to God. I’m separated

from the world, to God. I cannot do the things I once did. I belong to a holy God.”

### **Bad religion**

Holiness is wholeness for God. Holiness is not sanctimoniousness. Some of the best people I’ve ever met are the least sanctimonious. Some of the worst people I’ve ever met are the most sanctimonious. Holiness is not being sanctimonious; it’s a wholeness for God, whereby love to God and our fellow human beings dominates the life. Anything else that poses as a religion is a fraud.

Most of religion is bad.

I’ve been to Japan and watched people drop coins into Shinto shrines. (In Japan, the young people have given up the old religion. It’s just a cultural superstition now.) I’ve been in Third World countries where people are prepared to pierce themselves with knives or lie on beds of nails.

Or worse, to drink from the Ganges River which is considered a sacred river. In fact, it’s full of human excrement.

### **True religion**

To drink polluted water is not true religion. The only true religion that is acceptable to God is the religion that came from God. That is the religion of love to God and neighbor.

Love to God and our fellow humans. Nothing else is acceptable. This love is more stern than mere kindness, of course. When parents love a child, they don’t spoil the child. The love we’re talking about is more stern than sheer kindness.

Kindness can be indulgent. God is not a Santa Claus or Father Christmas. God really loves us. He doesn’t just want us to be comfortable with him, he wants us to do that which will guarantee eternal happiness.

## **How to know you're God's child**

Please notice a couple of important things.

First, “the righteous requirements of the law” are “fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4).

Second, notice the very pungent words that follow in verse 5, and on. These words are so piercing. Any one of us can know in one minute straight whether we belong to God or not. Whether if we die, we're right with him and have eternity.

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

## **Not controlled by sin**

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:5–14)

These are very pungent words:

If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)

Also, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9).

### **Primary and secondary things**

What does it mean, “if you live according to the sinful nature”? There isn’t anyone on earth who loves all the vices.

There are plenty of excessive drinkers around who can’t stand people who use drugs. And there are lots of people on drugs that can’t stand an alcoholic.

So, living according to the sinful nature doesn’t mean that you have all the vices. What it means is this: Are you making secondary things primary?

### **Important, but lost**

You can do that and be a church elder, a minister of a church, a bishop, a president of a country—and still be lost.

To set your mind on the things of the flesh is to make secondary things primary, and to make primary things secondary. To do that is to be lost.

It means we haven’t met God. When we meet God, everything changes.

The secret of living is to attend absolutely to the absolute and to attend relatively to the relative. Not to make mountains of molehills, or molehills of mountains. Not to make a world of an atom or an atom of a world. But to give things their right value as God sees them. If we don’t, we are lost.

## **Love's gravity**

But if we have received the Spirit of Christ, we will automatically gravitate to the things of the Spirit, which will bring us peace and life and joy and productivity. It is spontaneous through the Holy Spirit.

This is the great thing about the religion of love. It is not a “wheelbarrow-pushing” religion. It is spontaneous. Because of the Holy Spirit, good things happen automatically.

You can't look at a God who is love without getting some of that love in your own life. You can't believe in a Christ who loved you enough to die for you without being prepared to suffer a little martyrdom yourself.

Love happens as we look at, and contemplate, God's love in Christ. God's love for us is the greatest motivator in the world.

## **The legend of King Cyrus**

There's a legend about King Cyrus, one of the greatest of ancient kings—the Medo-Persian monarch who released the Jews from Babylon and sent them back to a new Jerusalem.

When he was born, a jealous prime minister said, “I must get rid of this boy. With him out of the way, perhaps I can take over.”

The prime minister called one of the soldiers of the guard, and told him, “I want you to take this baby and go out into the country. Find a herdsman who will expose it. Leave it out all night until it dies.”

The soldier took the new baby, Cyrus, into the countryside and found a farmer named Mithrydates.

“The Prime Minister says you are to expose this child,” said the guard. The farmer took the child home. He told his wife, “We have to expose this child.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort,” the wife said. “I’m going to keep this child. I will bring it up as my own.”

So Cyrus, the young prince, grew up in a peasant home. He thinks that the farmer and the farmer’s wife are his father and mother. Years later, when in the providence of God he does get to the throne, he amazes some of the people by some of the things he does, because he’s been brought up in a peasant home.

### **Raised in a peasant home**

There are two things that are important in this story.

Number one is we were born in a peasant home. Not literally, of course, but spiritually. We were born without knowing the riches of God.

My childhood picture of God was of a God looking down through a trapdoor. Up there in heaven, looking down through a trapdoor to catch me out in anything and everything I did.

He was the cosmic policeman, ready to catch me out in any crime I might commit. We were brought up in a peasant home as regards to the great reality that God is love.

God is for us. God loves the sinner. “This man receives sinners” (Luke 15:2. “He has gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner” (Luke 19:7).

These are the great realities of the universe, but we are raised in a peasant’s home. We don’t know anything about these great royal realities. We don’t know we are princes and princesses. We don’t realize all that God has done for us.

We are raised unaware that there is a great palace of Christian experience. In that palace we can be free from the law of sin and death, free from loneliness, free from accusation, and free from all

the things that dominate the life of the unbeliever. We don't know all that. But it is our privilege to know it. Romans 8 tells us all about it.

### **Peasant behavior in the palace**

The other point is: That Cyrus, even when he did get to the palace, sometimes did things that grew out of his years at the peasant home.

People do things rather differently in peasant homes than in palaces. And because of his long exposure over the years to living in a peasant home with its dirt floor and animals coming in through the kitchen door, he sometimes behaved like a peasant. Nonetheless a king.

And even when you and I are adopted into the family of God, every one of us sometimes acts as though we're back in the peasant home.

We have all been living in peasant homes, away from the riches of the palace. Even when we come to the palace and are accepted with open arms, without condemnation, we sometimes revert to acting as we did in the peasant house. Nevertheless, we are still kings, we are still queens.

Truly, there is no condemnation.





## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### **Romans 8: The Now and the Not Yet**

Romans 8 has key words and phrases:  
the Now and the Not Yet; the Indicative and  
the Imperative; and Fulfillment and Consummation.  
Understanding these key words helps  
us better understand Romans 8.

Let us look at key words from Romans chapter 8.

There are certain key words, or phrases, that theologians use that operate like marbles in understanding the New Testament. These words, or phrases, carom and bounce about, throughout the New Testament, hitting off one another like marbles.

Here is one of the phrases that theologians use:

#### **The now and the not yet**

Romans chapter 8 tells us that, in Christ, we are free from a whole list of things. Free from condemnation, free from separation, free from meaninglessness, free from loneliness, free from decay, free from weakness.

But, of course, we are not absolutely free. Loneliness, decay, and weakness still exist in life. They just don't dominate us anymore. But the day will come when we will be absolutely free. We'll be free from the decay of death, and the sicknesses that threaten us. We'll be free from weakness, from ignorance, from loneliness and isolation—one day they will all be gone.

Theologians express this by talking about the Now. That is, what we have in Christ through the gospel, now, the moment we believe.

This is: legally, everything. By possession, only the first fruits.

We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:23)

The complete harvest of the gospel is not ours until the life to come. That is why Christians rejoice, and also groan. Christians continue to groan.

“The now and the not yet.” Legally we have everything. In actual experience, we only have the beginnings.

### **Indicative and imperative**

Theologians use another phrase: The indicative and the imperative. Here’s the indicative:

Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (Romans 6:1–2 NIV)

Notice the indicative: We died to sin. Later, in chapter 8 of Romans, Paul writes about the imperative:

We have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:12–13)

### **Died, now die!**

Romans 6 says I did die, which is the indicative. Romans 8 says put to death.

The indicative? You died. Legally, God counts that you died.

The imperative? Because of the fact that you are legally dead in Christ, the apostle says, “Now, die.”

Ephesians 4:24 urges us, “To put on the new self.” Colossians 3:10 declares, “[You] have put on the new self.”

We already have everything in Christ. That’s the indicative. Christ secured it all legally, for us. He did it. Christ’s living and dying, that was my living and my dying.

Because of that, I have to live out the reality. You died? Then die. You put on the Lord Jesus? Put on the Lord Jesus.

### **Fulfillment and consummation**

Another way theologians discuss this is to talk about fulfillment and consummation.

At Christ’s First Advent and the cross, the Kingdom of God came. That was the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and prophecies.

However, as I look around at the world in which we live, it doesn’t look like the kingdom of God. There’s a hospital there, a cemetery over the way. There are accidents on the freeway, and all of us are getting older. If this is the kingdom of God, who wants it?

But God’s kingdom has come—legally. Right now, because of Christ, I am without condemnation before God. I do, already, have the Spirit. And the Spirit will not leave me or forsake me. However, the consummation is yet to come. That will not occur until the Second Advent.

These key expressions (Now—Not Yet; Indicative—Imperative; Fulfillment—Consummation) will help us understand chapter 8 of Romans.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### **Romans 8: The Unrivalled Goodness of Christ**

When Romans 8 tells us there is no condemnation for the believer in Christ, it is not suggesting that we are perfect. The law is powerless to save us, and sin continues to trouble us. But when we choose Christ as our Master, the Holy Spirit brings some of the glory of heaven into our lives, despite our weakness.

When verse 1 of Romans 8 says, “There is now no condemnation,” please notice that it does not say, “There is now nothing in us that deserves condemnation.” There is plenty in us that deserves condemnation.

Neither does it say, “There is now no sin in us.”

It does not say, “There will now be no suffering for us.”

We must keep this verse as it is. Remember again, the statement I often use from Luther: “Lord, now my sins are forgiven. Do what you like.” We must keep this verse as it is. It says, “There is now no condemnation.” No condemnation.

#### **Law has no power**

When verse 3 of Romans 8 says, “What the law was powerless to do,” it reminds us that the law never runs anything. The law is descriptive. The law has no power. A religion that revolves around law is a powerless religion.

This is the problem with all cultic groups. They mainly center on what human beings must do to be accepted of God and make it to

heaven. But the gospel says, “Look at what Christ has already done for you.”

When you see what Christ has already done for you, you’ll be glad to run in the way of his commandments. That’s because our doing is a result. It’s fruit, it’s never the root.

### **Weak flesh**

It’s very important to understand what Paul means when he says, “What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature ...” (Romans 8:3). The sinful nature is what other Bible versions call our “flesh.”

Remember the very comforting words of Jesus (though they can very easily be abused). He said when the disciples slept, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38 NKJV). Don’t we know it!

Think of your ambitions, think of your good resolutions, and then think of the paltry fulfillments. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is very weak. “What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh” (Romans 8:3).

### **Heaven enters our life**

Yet in verse 4 we read: “That the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us” (NIV). It doesn’t say “by us.” It says “in us.” That’s because when you have Christ, for the first time love begins to crowd out your old ways. When you have Christ, for the first time something of heaven comes into the life.

The great objective of the law is just that: to bring unselfishness and kindness and goodness and love. And this verse explains that when you hear the gospel, that objective is achieved. The main end of the law, which is love, has come. Imperfectly, yes, but it has come.

## **Two masters**

Please observe this verse:

Those who live according to the sinful nature [flesh] have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (Romans 8:5 NIV)

There are two masters we may obey, but there is only one we must obey.

We talk about freedom, but no one is absolutely free. We either serve the devil or we serve God. Yesterday I read one of the most pungent statements I've read in sixty years of reading. It came from my good friend, Ron Allen, of GNU in Australia.

I want to share it with you, because we're talking about something that happens when our life is dominated by something. We talk often about what a man does when he's in love. I have a friend I met recently who is usually a very real tough guy, a martial arts sort of man. Suddenly, he has become all soft and mellow. I discover that he's in love and he's going to get married. He's a different man.

When something dominates a man—be it love, alcohol, or the Spirit—it makes him different.

## **The necessity of Christ**

Here's what Ron Allen wrote:

Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' (See John 21:15,16,17 NKJV.)

The foremost question for all of us is: What do you want? What do you love?

If we do not love truth, beauty, and goodness as it is in Jesus, we'll love some other goodness of our own, some

other truth or reality. If we will not have Christ for our good, we are bound to find either a better or a worse one.

There are very few who can live in genuine atheism. To have nothing at all to live for is hell.

When a man or a woman lives for anything that Christ would not endorse, they waste their time. No one has seen everything that Christ means. We all live on but a fragment of what he is. We're worth just as much as we have apprehended of him. No more.

Our society spends its superfluous energies on activities that would seem to it insane—were it not so accustomed to them. Think of the billions of dollars that change hands over horse races or boxing matches.

There's no escape from the necessity of Christ. To dismiss him is to be left with the necessity of discovering one better than him. For a goodness less than Christ, leaves the world in misery still.

In Christ there is unrivaled goodness. There is such moral excellence in him that we're forced to face the true ugliness of evil, both in the world and in ourselves. To see him is to know that our extreme need is to be rid of evil.

Tolerance of cruelty, defilement, and injustice is not a consequence of having met Jesus. The fellowship of Christ's Spirit is one that shares his revolt against all that degrades. One cannot wallow in luxury while two-thirds of the world's people starve. One cannot sleep too soundly knowing that many lie unswaddled on city streets.

Upon Jesus' question: "Do you love me?" hung Peter's destiny and ours. To answer affirmatively is to be gathered into a great friendship, one with profound moral energies, which the world is waiting for.



What a great statement from Ron. Now, that's what Romans 8 is talking about: "Are you in the flesh or are you in the Spirit?"

### **God's seal of the Spirit**

Please observe this very strong statement:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Romans 8:9)

Either the mind is settled on self, the world, the flesh, the devil, me and mine; or it's settled on Christ, heaven, goodness, purity, truth, service. They are the options. If anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he's none of his.

A shepherd marks the sheep in his flock. A goldsmith puts a stamp on that which was genuine compared with that which was fraudulent. A king would put a seal on his letters so people would know that this was a real letter from the king.

And when we become Christians, God gives us a stamp. He seals us. The Bible, in referring to the believer receiving the Holy Spirit, calls the Spirit, "the earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14 KJV). An earnest is a pledge, or guarantee.

### **God's Spirit sends heaven into us**

When the Spirit of God comes into our lives, we experience a bit of heaven coming into us.

Christ said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (1 John 14:18). The coming of the Spirit is the coming of Christ. This is what makes the Christian.

Certain terms have been abused, and the term "Christian" has become almost innocuous. It is certainly not the pungent description it was in the first century. Christians then were

considered rebels; they certainly were nonconformists. And they were most different in that they were kind and loving, not cruel and selfish.

To be a Christian is to have some of the glory of Christ. And if anyone does not have that glory, they don't belong to him.

### **Not perfect but sweeter**

We are not talking about perfectionism, of course. Romans 8 has already explained that there is no condemnation for sinners—but it doesn't say there is no sin.

Unfortunately, sin remains, to vex and upset us. It cannot ruin us, however, because we have the Spirit of Christ. We've found something better.

As someone in our fellowship said, "You always sense that drawing. You know there's something higher, something sweeter, something more enduring in Christ than anywhere else."

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### **Romans 8: With the Spirit, We Have Life**

Though Romans 8 assures us that there is no condemnation for believers, it also explains about the tension between life in the Spirit and death in self and sin. Romans 8 is not about a person different from the one found in Romans 7.

Romans 8 continues:

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:10–11 NIV)

Your bodies are dead because of sin. Every funeral is a reminder that at the heart of all the evil of the world is sin.

#### **Sin, death, and sleep**

It is sin that has brought death, sorrow, and suffering into the world. Every pang we suffer is a result of sin.

Not necessarily our sin. Our bodies are condemned to death because of the original sin of our original parents, Adam and Eve, whom we have all copied, emulated, and repeated, day after day, and year after year. Because of this, the body must die.

But then Romans says that the Spirit is life. The Holy Spirit who came into your heart when you believed brings with him eternal

life. Many people will die without ever having lived. Christians do the opposite. They live and they'll never die in the ultimate sense.

Jesus said, "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26).

Yes, we will fall asleep. The undertaker will take charge of us, and loved ones will throw dirt on our coffins. But as far as the heavens are concerned, we are just asleep. Just asleep, awaiting awakening at the resurrection.

### **Spirit, life, and righteousness**

The Spirit is life because of righteousness. When you receive the earnest, the guarantee, the heavenly stamp—in other words, the coming of the Spirit—you say, "Christ loves even me. He died for me."

It's not something that has to come ecstatically, with tongues or miracles or great emotions. It is when you hear the gospel and your heart responds to the reality of God's love for you in Christ. When you know that, the Spirit has come. You cannot know it without the Spirit (Romans 8:16).

Paul writes about the Spirit of Christ "living in you" (Romans 8:11, see verse 9). The Spirit does not just come to visit. He comes to live, to dwell. The Spirit is not going to leave us when probation closes for the world.

### **Life is too big for us**

Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16 KJV). We are no longer on our own.

Not one of us is equal to everything. You see a few multi-gifted people, and you are tempted to think, "Hey, it doesn't matter what situation they're in, they can cope."

But that's not true. It doesn't matter how strong, how wise, how beautiful, how handsome, you are. You and I can be turned into nothingness so quickly. In the midst of life, we are in death.

Life is much too big for us. But it's not too big for God. When we have the Spirit of God. We have life.

### **Raised from the dead**

Romans 8 continues:

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:11 NIV)

In other words, resurrection.

We are dead to the flesh (sinful nature), so we do not live according to the flesh. If we do live according to the flesh, we will die. But if, by the Spirit, we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live.

### **Romans 7 and 8 are linked**

Many Christians think there is a tremendous contrast between Romans 7 and 8. To some degree that is true, because Romans 7 pictures our experience whenever we become self-focused, and Romans 8 when we become Christ-focused.

In Romans 7, we notice that a personal pronoun is mentioned about 30 times. That's self-focused. But that happens to all Christians at times. Paul is not talking about someone who hasn't learned "the secret of the victorious life."

Paul is not talking about someone outside of Christ. Even the most mature Christians at times have moments, have experiences, when they've taken their eyes off the Lord, and messed things up. Every Christian. That's Romans 7.

It's wrong when people say, "We need to get out of Romans 7 and into Romans 8." Romans 7 is a possibility at any hour of the day for any Christian.

Furthermore, in Romans 8 when Paul says, "Put to death the misdeeds of the body" (verse 13), he is telling us that self is very much alive and must constantly be crucified.

### **Say no to self**

But what does "Put to death the misdeeds of the body" mean? The Bible has a lot of expressions:

"Take up ... [your] cross" (Matthew 16:24, KJV).

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Galatians 6:14 KJV)

"Cast out the bondwoman and her son" (Galatians 4:30).

"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out" (Mark 9:47).

"If thy hand offend thee, cut it off" (Mark 9: 43).

None of this sounds pleasant. That is because the hardest thing in the world to do is to say no to oneself. Most of us enjoy saying no to certain other people. But saying no to oneself, that's a difficult task. And when the Bible says, "Put to death the misdeeds of the body," it's calling for mortification.

Jesus did not say, "Take up your pillow and follow me." He said, "Take up your cross."

### **Walking in the light**

Bearing your cross isn't putting up with your rheumatism or your mother-in-law. Bearing your cross is putting self to death. It means denying ungodliness and unworldliness. It means walking in the light.

It means that I will remember that my tongue was baptized as well as the rest of my body.

It means that I'll think in harmony with the truth that my Lord's brow was pierced with thorns that I might learn to think right. He paid for my bad thoughts.

It means to be surrendered, all I have for all he is and for all time. It means wholeness. Holiness is wholeness; it's completeness.

Anything less is not the genuine article. It's not infallibility, but it's wholeness.

Not yielding our members as instruments of unrighteousness, but as instruments of righteousness unto God.

That is what Scripture is calling for when it talks about putting to death the misdeeds of the body. Then you will live.





## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### **Romans 8: The Gentle Leading of the Sheep**

Romans 8 affirms that God's Spirit leads the Christian believer. Therefore, we are defined, not by the popular culture, but by the Spirit. The Spirit teaches us that each person is of infinite value, and we are children of God.

If children, we are also heirs. The Spirit helps us  
in our weaknesses, and leads us to pray.

Our study of Romans 8 continues:

All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons  
[children] of God. (Romans 8:14 NASV)

#### **Rushed and led**

The Bible has two words translated "led."

One is a tumultuous word: "like a great mass of water rushing onward." That is the word Peter used when he said that the prophets were motivated, or led, by the Spirit to utter their prophecies.

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. (2 Peter 1:21 NIV)

But the word Paul uses in Romans 8:14 is a word that means "gentle leading." This is the gentle leading of a shepherd for his sheep.

This is the leading of a mother with her little child. This is the leading of a guide for a traveler. This is the leading of a teacher for a student. This is the leading of a captain for his unit. This is a gentle going ahead.

Why do I need gentle leading? Because life is perilous and I am weak. That's why I need gentle leading. And the less I think I need it, the more I need it.

This is what Paul meant when he said, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

### **Modern culture is not real**

Hollywood and popular philosophy give us all the wrong images. Pop culture tells us, "You've got to be beautiful, to be clever, to be strong, to be 'with it,' to be happy and succeed."

The fact is, that none of us fits these categories in reality. Because we don't fit them, we need the Spirit. "All who are being led by the Spirit of God."

That is why the Bible gives us the warnings: "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19 NRSV); "Do not resist the Spirit" (see Acts 7:51); "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30 NIV).

### **Resist not the Spirit**

A little boy often played with a pet dove. One day when the dove came to light on his hand, the boy took his hand away. The dove came again and again, and the boy took his hand away. Later that afternoon, when the boy called the dove, it didn't come at all.

Similarly, we can resist the Spirit. The Spirit is very sensitive, very tender.

If we are going to be led by God's Spirit, we must have that same sensitivity. We must be leadable, we must be teachable. That is only possible as we begin to value people as Christ values them.

### **All are valuable**

There's a verse in Proverbs, which I've always found very searching.

He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy. (Proverbs 14:21 NIV)

Paul says something similar in Romans:

Do not by your eating destroy your brother [or sister] for whom Christ died. (Romans 14:15)

Every person is someone of infinite importance because that person is purchased of the blood of Christ. Unless I recognize that in my dealings with everybody, I am not Christian. I am to deal with each person as though that person were Christ.

How demanding! But if I'm going to be led of the Spirit, that is what the Spirit asks for.

### **Bondage versus privilege**

The world is a place of bondage. Worldly culture really consists of bondage, fear, and deception. The gospel offers us glory, liberty, and truth.

You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. (Romans 8:15)

Paul is saying, "See the contrast. Your old life was one of bondage and fear, but we are freed from that as we look to Jesus, and only as we look to Jesus."

### **Daddy, daddy**

Verse 15 goes on to say that we receive the Spirit of sonship when we cry, "Abba, Father." You've heard many times that "Abba" was the Aramaic word that little children used for "Daddy." You find "Abba" three times in the Bible. Jesus used it once, in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). Paul used it twice, once in Galatians 4:6, and once here in Romans 8:15.

When the Spirit comes into your life, and you become conscious of how much you are loved by God, the Spirit leads you to pray

the prayer of a trusting and confident child. You can call God your Father, “Daddy, daddy.”

### **The witness of prayer**

The evidence that we are being born from above (or born again) is that we find it instinctive to pray confidently. The person who doesn’t pray has never been born again.

We cry, “Abba, Father!” It is God’s Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. When you pray like that, that is the evidence that the Spirit of God has come to you.

When Samuel Wesley, father of the Wesley brothers was dying, he said, “The inner witness, the inner witness. Boys, the inner witness.” Samuel Wesley was referring to the fact that every Christian is ministered to by the Holy Spirit, who brings us the conviction of the love of God. Because that witness, or conviction, is in us, it is not always an overwhelming conviction. There are times when we don’t hear it at all.

It is like the difference between the moon and the sun. If the witness were up in heaven, it would be like the sun. But because it is in me, therefore, it’s more like the moon. But the witness of the Spirit is a reality for every Christian. It is the conviction I am loved despite what I am.

### **Helps our weakness**

This chapter speaks further about how the Spirit helps our infirmities.

Many people think they couldn’t possibly have the Holy Spirit. “Look at all my weaknesses,” they cry. Here is a glorious text that says:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.  
(Romans 8:26, NIV)

“The Spirit also helps our infirmities.” Romans is taking it for granted that God loves, and God dwells in people with plenty of problems and weaknesses. God helps us in our infirmities.

The verse does not say God helps us out of our infirmities. It would be terrible if you and I were so smart, so strong, that we sort of felt we could manage without God. There’s not really much chance of that if we are at all honest. Life is continually bigger than we are. We can’t even do all we want for the people nearest to us, let alone for the people in the mission fields.

What parent can decide for a child? None. It doesn’t matter how eloquent you may be or how great your biceps. You can’t decide for a child. But the Spirit dwells in those who have infirmities. That’s a very, very comforting passage.

### **Children and heirs**

Notice the illustration in the next verse:

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:17 NIV)

This verse depicts us as children, and, therefore, heirs. You can’t be an heir unless you’re first of all a child. Obviously, that means being born.

We cannot be born without Christ, and we cannot be born even through Christ without faith. Thus, the sequence is: Faith in Christ, rebirth as children, then heirs.

Heirs to what? There’s an Old Testament verse that says, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance” (Psalm 16:5 KJV). You and I think of things. But a wise man once said, “Without things, we cannot live. But he who lives for things alone is not a person.”

## **The inheritance of everything**

Our main inheritance is God himself. With God comes everything we need.

Imagine what it is to have God. It means to have God's wisdom to direct us; God's power to protect us; God's love to comfort us; God's home, the universe and eternity, for our abiding place.

God, our heavenly Father, is the author of music, of song, of laughter, of flavor, of fragrance. All good things—God is the author of it all.

To have God is to have everything. To have everything without him is to have nothing.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### **Romans 8: Suffering with Hope**

Romans 8 tells us there is no condemnation for the believer. But that does not mean there is no suffering for us in this life. We need to remember four things about suffering:

- 1) We are born to trouble.
- 2) We cause most of our suffering ourselves.
- 3) Suffering does not go on uninterrupted.
- 4) Suffering is alleviated.

In all our sufferings there is hope because all things work together for good for those who love God.

But, I've left out one thing. If you want Christ's wisdom and his love and his power, you must never forget Christ also has a cross. It costs something to be a Christian.

Verse 17 speaks about how "we share in his sufferings." Christ suffered for us, and we suffer for him. He suffered for us atoningly, and, of course, we cannot atone.

But one cannot be a Christian without suffering.

#### **Better for believers**

Let me comment briefly on suffering.

I just detest suffering, which is probably why I often preach about it. Trying to get used to it, I suppose. But I hate suffering.

There are many things we don't think about when we think about suffering. One is that if you are not a Christian, you are going to suffer worse. The person who sows only to the flesh suffers the most.

The human body is marvelously strong. I often marvel how we can get through to the end of our thirties and still be alive after abusing our bodies, left, right, and center.

But by the time we hit our forties, the harvest is beginning to come in. The person who wants to live on tobacco and bottles and live it up sexually, that person is going to have a great deal of pain, far beyond what any Christian will probably know.

### **The rise and fall of Ian Fleming**

Ian Fleming was the strongest athlete that the English private school of Eton ever knew. Fleming's ancestors were multi-millionaires, and he was wonderfully gifted. But he smoked seventy cigarettes a day, lived on steaks and Russian vodka, and, morally, was as loose as a flapping blind.

Fleming began to die in his forties. He had a massive heart attack in his early fifties and was dead at 56—just when his James Bond books were beginning to make millions.

### **Born to trouble**

Romans 8 speaks not just of glory, not just of the Spirit, not just about being led of God, not just about no condemnation. Romans 8 also talks about suffering, dying, and mortifying.

So there are a number of things I have to remember.

Number One: The Bible says, “Human beings are born to trouble just as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7 NRSV).

So, if you expect there to be no trouble in your life, the troubles will be much harder to bear. If you expect them, they won't be half as hard to bear.

We are born to trouble. We need it, because there is no teacher like pain. You can be told 30 things 100 times by your parents, but it doesn't mean a thing until life teaches you by pain. Then you might remember.



Even the worldly person has trouble in suffering, so let's not complain that Christians have it, too. If Christians were delivered from suffering, the church would be flooded with professing Christians who would destroy the whole spiritual enterprise. Christians must have suffering, too.

### **Often my fault**

Number Two: I have to remember that most of my troubles are my own fault.

Christians are not infallible. As Christians we are not always wise, and we are all egotistical. That old ego doesn't finally give up the ghost until death.

What's the use of my complaining? Many of my troubles are my own fault. I hate to get headaches. But every time I get a headache, I know exactly why I have it. It's been my own fault and nobody else's.

But there's some other things to think of that are more comforting. The pain and suffering a Christian endures never comes from guilt. That's because the gospel has dealt with guilt.

And, things don't weigh so heavily if you have the key to eternity. You know that God is for you if you are accepted in the Beloved. If the universe is walking in tune with you, these other things are a bag of tales. Our sufferings are all temporary, they're all small, compared with the fact that you are loved by God. Everything else is tiny.

Suffering is inevitable, even for Christians. But your suffering does not come from guilt. Your sins are forgiven in Christ. As Luther said, "Lord, it doesn't matter what you do, now that I'm right with you."

### **Suffering rarely lasts**

Number three: Suffering is rarely uninterrupted (this is especially hard for us to believe when we are suffering).

The fact is that most of our lives are free from intense suffering. It comes in bursts.

The weather's a pretty good example. It doesn't rain every day all day. Storms don't fill every week, every month, and every year. Storms visit us. And the storms of trouble visit us.

Most of us are healthy most of our lives. And this is why when we get sick it stands out so terribly. We object. We're not used to it. So a third thing to remember about trouble is that it is never unalleviated and uninterrupted. Suffering is the exception and not the rule, though it is recurring.

### **The upside of suffering**

Number four: Suffering always has its benefits.

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to be very, very sick, very, very down, and have no one that cared? That would be dreadful.

But we all have people that care. Not just God and the angels, but we have friends, we have spouse, we have brothers, we have sisters, we have parents, we have children. They are an alleviation to all our problems. And, you know, usually, if you've got something wrong with one part of your body, usually the rest of it is functioning not too badly.

I recently anointed a young doctor—a beautiful person—who was driving along the highway, and suddenly a car crashed on top of him.

One moment, he was driving happily along, and the next moment, it seemed to him, he was in Intensive Care, being told he was going to be blind in one eye. I'd hate to have that happen to me. But God's has given us two eyes. Isn't it marvelous?

God was so generous when he made us. You can lose a great deal of your kidney function and still live. You can lose a lot of your

liver function and still live. You can be without one lung and still live. We are marvelously and generously made. If only I could learn from God that, when I lose something, I should count what is left, I'd be a better person.

I'm always looking at what I've lost. But God's says, "Wake up, Des! Count what's left." There's always more left.

### **Suffering and hope**

However bad our sufferings, there are alleviations. That is why I often say to friends and intimates, "Look, if we can walk and digest, we shouldn't complain about anything."

Even when things get as bad as can be, you know there is a little word: "Hope." And it is free. In certain situations, I'd give just about everything I had for hope. And it's free!

When things are at their worst, there is still hope.

### **Promises Amid Trouble**

There is a great promise in the Scripture that I cling to:

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.  
(1 Corinthians 10:13 NRSV)

I see many people go through things that I don't think I could ever begin to go through, let alone go through and come out of. Not me. I'm not made that way.

But God knows how we are all made. God knows our peculiarities, and we all have many of them. The promise is clear: God will not permit you to be tried above that you are able to endure.

Paul's favorite comment is this: "We know that all things work

together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 NRSV).

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### **Introduction to Romans 9–11**

John Calvin used Romans 9–11 to teach individual predestination. Interpreted by the gospel, the passage is seen to be about God’s selection of nations for his service. Paul asks, “Why did Israel reject its Messiah?” Paul answers, “Because Israel preferred its own righteousness to God’s.”

Now we will conduct a brief overview of the remaining chapters of Romans. I intend no disrespect to Paul.

#### **Not individual predestination**

Let me begin with chapter 9, and onwards.

John Calvin used these chapters, especially chapters 9 through 11, to teach the doctrine of the predestination of individuals.

According to this doctrine some people are predestined by God to suffer everlasting torment, and some to enjoy eternal salvation.

They have no say in the matter. God decided long ago.

That’s not what chapters 9 through 11 are about. They are about election to service.

In chapters 9 through 11, Paul is tackling the matter of how God elected Israel to the service of God. Also, he seeks to answer the question, “Why does the majority of the elect nation now reject the gospel?”

## **National election to service**

When Paul writes here about Jacob and Esau (Romans 9:10–14) he quotes from Malachi 1:2–3: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Romans 9:13). If you check the passage in Malachi, you quickly see that the prophet is not talking about God loving or hating individuals. The prophet is using individuals to represent whole nations—Israel and the Edomites.

Pharaoh was raised up to glorify God (Romans 9:17–18).

Pharaoh did this by either letting Israel go, or by opposing Israel’s emancipation. God was going to make Pharaoh glorify God whichever Pharaoh did!

We must remember—if we would understand chapters 9 through 11 correctly—that they are not initially about individual salvation. They are about election to service (compare 3:2).

## **Why Israel rejected the Messiah**

The great problem Paul is wrestling with here is the question, “Why did the Jews as a nation reject the gospel?” When Calvin wrote his commentary on these chapters, he thought Paul’s theme was why some are saved and some are lost. No, no. The theme in chapters 9, 10, and 11 is why the chosen people rejected the Messiah.

So, let’s look at the inspired answer:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but that Israel, who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, as if it were based on works. (Romans 9:30–32 RSV)

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God and

seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified. (Romans 10:1–4)  
Please notice Paul's word, "submit." It takes humility to receive God's gift. Israel would not submit to God's righteousness, offered in Christ.

For Christ is the end of the law as a method of righteousness.

Those who believe in Christ trust in his righteousness. They do not trust in their own righteousness or their own efforts at keeping God's law.

### **Nothing in my hand**

In these verses Paul answers his question: "Why did the nation of Israel reject the Messiah?" Because of its legalism. Because of its looking to its own achievements. Because it did not believe in grace to the extent of accepting it as a gift. Because it wanted to earn its own way with God, thinking itself good enough.

To be saved, I must have the opposite of that spirit. I have to be aware that the hymnwriter was right when he wrote, "Nothing in my hand I bring." Spurgeon quoted that line so often that someone sent him a message one day, "We are sufficiently informed of the vacuity of your hand."

I wonder if heaven thinks we are sufficiently informed about the vacuity of our hands.

Nothing in my hand I bring.  
Simply to thy cross I cling.

So, you see, Paul has not wandered away from the gospel into what is popularly called predestination! He's still writing about the gospel, as in earlier chapters.

### **Submit to God's righteousness**

"They did not submit to God's righteousness."

Dear friends, we have to be in the place of a beggar. We have to be in the place of a blind person. We have to be in the place of a leper. We have to acknowledge our insufficiency, our disability, our spiritual disease. As sinners we are inadequate before God and guilty.

In submission, we must say, “Lord, You are my only hope. My only hope, Lord.” That is submitting to the righteousness of God. Notice the reason Paul gives for why we must submit. “For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.”

Christ is the end of the law as a means of our getting righteousness.

Christ is not the end of the law, period. You can never abolish the eternal Ten Commandments, and what they teach about life. You can never get rid of them. They are the Great Eternals.

Paul is using the “end of the law” about our gaining righteousness by means of the law.

And Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, only for those who believe. That is how Christ becomes the end. He alone, by faith, is our righteousness.

### **Rejection by unbelief**

Please observe that Paul goes over the same ground in chapter 11. He offers a summation of why Israel as a nation rejected its Messiah:

There’s no ‘once-saved-always-saved’ doctrine here, as predestination requires. To paraphrase Paul’s call to decision: ‘Otherwise you, too, will be cut off. Even the others, if they don’t persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in again.’

### **All Israel shall be saved**

Scripture promises us that, ultimately, all Israel shall be saved.



I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved. (Romans 11:25–26)

Remember, Paul, the same man who wrote this, said earlier: “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Romans 9:6). It’s a pity people forget these words.

Most Christians among the fundamentalists of America, think the promise, “All Israel will be saved” is a divine promise that every Jew is going to be saved. It is not.

There’s not one hint anywhere in the Bible that everyone in any given nation is going to be saved.

### **The Remnant**

The Bible is not promising that every Jew is going to be saved. “After all, not all of the people of Israel are the true people of God” (Romans 9:6 CEV). In other words:

... it is not the natural children who are God’s children,  
but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as  
Abraham’s offspring. (Romans 9:8 NIV)

What God is saying through Paul here is this (and I paraphrase):

“All those Jews who come to faith in Jesus Christ become part and parcel of the Israel of the flesh that will be saved because of the gospel. They are the remnant in every generation that hear the gospel and come to Christ in faith.”

Note, there is nothing here about Palestine, or a new temple, or a sacrificial system, or the Antichrist. The method of biblical interpretation that finds all that in Romans 9 through 11 is completely without exegetical support. Let me just say such words signal strong disfavor.

There's nothing here about Palestine and the temple. These verses simply say that ancient Israel lost out because of unbelief in the Messiah. But those that do believe in Christ will be grafted back in, and in the last days many will come to faith in Christ. They will constitute all Israel. But remember, they are not all Israel that are simply born into Israel. "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Romans 9:6 RSV).

Keep that in mind. Not the accident of birth but a grateful response to the invitation of grace is what brings salvation.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### The Truth About Predestination—1

The doctrine of predestination is summarized by the acronym T-U-L-I-P. While “T” is correct, “U-L-I-P” must come under close biblical scrutiny.

I want to talk to you about T-U-L-I-P.

Not tulips, the flowers. But T-U-L-I-P. That is the acronym for the beliefs of predestinarians.

You must not think that that word—“predestinarian”—is a swear word. Many of the greatest Christians who have ever lived or who are alive today are predestinarians.

#### **T-U-L-I-P**

What does predestination mean? It means T-U-L-I-P.

T stands for “Total depravity.”

U stands for “Unconditional election.”

L stands for “Limited atonement.”

I stands for “Irresistible grace.”

P stands for “Perseverance of the saints.”

#### **Total Depravity**

Total depravity doesn’t mean as bad as bad can be. It simply means that we are weak in every part.

And total depravity is a biblical doctrine. Isaiah says:

From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and bruises and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. (Isaiah 1:6 NIV)

Jesus said about us:

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:11)

So the Bible does teach total depravity, though that doesn't mean as bad as bad can be. If I have a glass of water and I put in a spoonful of salt and stir it up, it's totally salty. But not as salty as if I had put in half a cup of salt.

Humans still reflect the image of God. By nature, we are inclined toward many good things, because we are made in God's likeness.

But because we lost the Holy Spirit at the Fall in Eden, we are born selfish and self-centered, with lust and wrong desires prevailing.

Sadly, even after conversion, when the Holy Spirit has come into our lives, the old nature remains and must be fought every conscious hour of our lives.

### **Unconditional election**

The "T" in T-U-L-I-P is totally correct and biblical. But it seems to me that the others in the acronym are not so biblical.

That may strike you as a very vainglorious statement, because scholars who are a thousand times better than I would disagree. The "U" of unconditional election—what does that mean?

It means this: That God from eternity looked down and said, "Well, I'll save Roy but not Des." But it's worse than that. "Well, out of that group there at Auburn, we'll save Roy but none of the rest."

Unconditional election says that, from eternity, God arbitrarily decided (without any consideration as to how people actually behave), "Well, we're not going to crowd heaven with all of them, but we'll take some of them."

I must not be unfair. Too often evangelical doctrine is not accompanied by an evangelical spirit. I have often failed in that, becoming too tied up in argumentation. That is a mistake.

If you are a predestinarian, you cannot say to anybody, “Christ died for you.” You just don’t know. Unconditional election and limited atonement are linked.

If you believe in unconditional election, you have to believe in limited atonement.

### **Irresistible grace**

You must also believe in the others in T-U-L-I-P; irresistible grace, for example.

Irresistible grace follows limited atonement and says, “When I say you are going to be saved, you’re going to be saved—regardless.” That’s irresistible grace.

God is not going to say, “I will take Des,” and then let Des do what he pleases. God is going to work in Des, to will and to do of God’s good pleasure. God will not save Des against his will but does change Des’s will.

We must not caricature predestination. It doesn’t mean saving people against their will. It means changing their will.

That, of course, is a half-truth because God does that for everybody he converts. God changes our will, then our wants. God changes all of that.

### **Perseverance of the saints**

P is for “perseverance of the saints.” That is, “Once saved, always saved.”

It doesn’t matter if you commit adultery today, tomorrow, or the day following. It doesn’t matter whether you get drunk and gamble,

shoot your mother and bury your wife—you are going to persevere and you will be saved. I don't believe that!

### **Looking to Jesus**

Now, in the sad scenario of perseverance of the saints, there is one morsel of bait. (Again, I must beware of the danger of speaking about evangelical doctrine or evangelicals in a non-evangelical spirit.)

Perseverance of the saints is a very appealing doctrine. In my opinion, it is very close to the truth, because looking to Jesus, you cannot be lost.

However, God doesn't make us automatons, he doesn't make us puppets. God never takes away our freedom at any point. God is a gentleman, and never coerces.

The Bible does teach that looking to Jesus you cannot be lost. Jesus always has the door open for us in welcome. Nonetheless, in theory, the Bible says it is possible for us to shut that door in Christ's face. It is possible for those who have been purchased by the blood of Christ to fall away. The Bible says so in Hebrews 10:26–31, 38–39; and throughout John 15 and elsewhere.

But, looking to Jesus, ever trusting solely in his merits, you cannot but be saved and for all eternity.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

### The Truth About Predestination—2

The history of the doctrine of predestination is the story of conflict between great men.

From Augustine's debate with Pelagius, to Calvin's debate with Luther, Melancthon, and Arminius. Few modern Calvinists emphasize the doctrine because of its terrible decree: Most of humanity will suffer eternal torment through no choice of their own.

Now let's talk about the history of this doctrine of predestination. You are probably saying to yourself, "Well, predestinarians are so rare, why bother talking about predestination? There aren't many predestinarians around."

This is no longer true. Predestinarians are growing in number. Let me give you the history and then we'll discuss that.

#### **First 400 years**

This is a summary of the texts that rebut four-fifths of the acronym T-U-L-I-P.

For the first 400 years of the Christian church, the doctrine of predestination (as now popularly understood) was unknown. For the first 400 years of the Christian church, Christians said:

"Christ died for everybody" (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

"Whosoever will may come!" (Revelation 22:17).

"But remember, he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

And take heed that you resist not the Holy Spirit, nor grieve him nor quench him. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

### **Augustine of Hippo**

In the fifth century, a wonderful man named Augustine [A.D. 354–430] came along. (You must beware of very gifted men and women. They are often the ones who invent great heresies. No great heresy ever came from a modest man or woman.)

Augustine was a very great man. But in his early years, he was very lascivious. His Christian mother, Monica, prayed for him. He said to himself, “I’m going to get away from mother. She is a bad influence on me. She’s a Christian.”

Augustine went to Rome, and then to Milan. But his mother’s prayers followed him, and he was converted under the tutelage of the bishop of Milan.

Augustine reached his moment of decision when he was in a garden, thinking. Suddenly, he heard a child’s voice calling, “Take and read. Take and read.”

Because he was a scholar, he had a portion of the New Testament in his hand. He took it and read, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:14 NIV).

Though he was living with a concubine at the time, Augustine was converted. He became the most important man in the church for a thousand years. From Augustine has come almost all of the best things in theology since Paul—and also the very worst.

### **Pelagius**

In his time, a man named Pelagius [late-fourth, early-fifth centuries] arose. The essence of what he said was: “Look, there’s no excuse for Christian misbehavior. We know what we ought to do. Go and do it. Don’t use the excuse of original sin, about being born bad.”



Every child is a little angel and a little saint, every person is so born they can obey if they want to. There's no excuse for anybody.

We all have a perfectly free will, and we can do the right thing, if we so desire. There is no need for us to do the wrong thing, and we ought to be perfect.

### **Augustine's answer**

Augustine was a great polemicist. He jumped right into battle, and said something like this:

Mr. Pelagius, it's not so!

The Bible says that I was born in sin, conceived in iniquity, a transgressor from the womb. The imagination in my heart is only evil continually; for out of the heart come evil thoughts, adultery, fornications, thefts, sorceries. (Psalm 51:5; Genesis 6:5; Matthew 15:19)

Mr. Pelagius, don't you know that even the desire to sin is sin? The tenth commandment actually mentions wrong desires: "Thou shalt not desire wrongly." If the law is that deep and if our Savior could say you could break the seventh commandment simply by a look and you could break the sixth commandment by a single, unkind thought—then, Mr. Pelagius, you've got it all wrong.

### **Augustine and predestination**

The battle was very hot. Pelagius was no idiot. It is possible to make a good case out of a bad thing. You know the old saying about making "a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

Augustine, in his great old age, wanted to defend the greatness of God's grace, and emphasize the helplessness of human nature.

He looked around the church, and saw that not everyone was doing the right things. He did not fall into universalism (the doctrine that everyone is going to be saved). He said only some are going to be saved. And he came up with the doctrine of

predestination. He said, the truth is that we are so far gone, so dead in our trespasses and sins, that none of us can find our way to God. God must find his way to us. God must do it. God has to come in, and move upon us.

All that is true.

Then Augustine said: “And what God does, he does well. When God comes in, you only have to go with the flow, and you’ll be saved. I’m sorry, though. There are only a few people like that.”

### **The terrible decree**

There the doctrine lay for centuries. Then along came Gottschalk, who refined the teaching of predestination.

He taught both the predestination of the saved and the predestination of the lost.

You really can’t have one without the other. If I’m the nurse in charge of two children and a fire comes, and I only put my arm around one and save her from the fire, and I don’t put my hand around the other, well, I’m responsible for the death of the other.

Augustine really taught the doctrine of “the terrible decree.” (That is what theologians call John Calvin’s thorough restatement of predestination.) The horrible decree is that God said from eternity, “Most of the souls I have made will be lost.”

It’s actually far worse than that. The full reality of the doctrine is this: for every sweet moment you have in this life, there will be a trillion years of pain in hell—and you never asked to be born!

Can you see how terrible this teaching really is? Again, I’m not saying one thing against predestinarians, because they are often very great people. But the orthodox teaching of predestination is that for the vast majority of people who have come into the world (and none asked to be born), every single moment of joy will reap a trillion years of torture in an everlasting, ever-burning, fiery hell.

## **Thomas Aquinas**

Augustine began the doctrine of predestination, and Gottschalk boosted it. Next came Thomas Aquinas [1224–1274], the great Catholic theologian. He also taught predestination.

Aquinas was a very great genius. But at the end of his life, he said the wisest thing of his whole life: “As I look back, all my theology is only straw.”

## **John Calvin**

But the man who taught the doctrine so powerfully that it is still influencing us early in the twenty-first century was the Reformer, John Calvin [1509–1564]. (Calvin was a lawyer.) Calvin influenced the other Reformers, too.

John Calvin was very smart. At 25 he wrote one of the most famous books of history. If you were to select 20 books that have influenced the world most, one of them would be John Calvin’s *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

*Institutes* went through approximately 80 revisions, but was first written when Calvin was only 25. Calvin was a genius, but men of genius can be dangerous. In his *Institutes*, Calvin set out the teaching of a double-barreled predestination (“some elected to be saved, and some elected to be lost”) with great clarity.

## **Luther and Melanchthon**

Almost all the Reformers were predestinarian.

Martin Luther [1483–1546] wrote a book, mainly biblical, called *The Bondage of the Will*. Then Philipp Melanchthon [1497–1560], who started off predestinarian, said, “We must study this doctrine from the word of God. We can’t just take it from Calvin, we can’t just take it from Augustine.”

Melanchthon said, “The Bible doesn’t teach limited atonement. It says, ‘God so loved the world that whosoever believeth ...’ (John 3:16 KJV).”

Melanchthon wrote against predestination, and Luther commended Melanchthon. So the Lutheran church turned away from Calvinism.

### **Europe and predestination**

The Anglican church (Episcopalian) also turned away from it.

During the days of John Calvin, the Scottish Protestants sent their young men to Geneva, Calvin's city. (I've been in the church where he preached. I've seen his statue at the university where he taught.)

The British have sent their sons to Geneva. The people of Holland and France sent their young Protestants to Geneva. The great majority of the Christians of the sixteenth century believed in double-barreled predestination.

### **Arminius**

Predestination was challenged by a man called Jacob Arminius [1560–1609]. Arminius was a very wonderful Christian, always courteous, always kind.

He sat too much however. He studied too much, and his health fell apart when he should have had another twenty or thirty years of life. But he did a tremendous amount of work, and his main work was combating predestination.

From his name we take the term "Arminianism." I must warn you: Arminius was not an Arminian. By that, I mean that because of his success and many followers his teaching was somewhat abused.

### **Arminius's teaching**

Arminius put as much stress on the need for grace as did Augustine. Arminius also taught total depravity. In summary, Arminius said: "Unless God moves on us, we are done for. We need the grace of God." But God's grace never comes in such a way as to rob us of freedom. It is simply not biblical to say that "Christ only died for some."

The Scriptures teach:

“We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died”  
(2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

[Christ] “gave himself as a ransom for all men”(1 Timothy 2:6).

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”  
(Luke 19:10)—not just some of them.

Jesus “suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9).

“Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18).

Religiously, after Jacob Arminius pointed out some of these texts, there was quite an upset in Europe. A group called the Remonstrants rose up, making a protest against Calvinism. Since then there have been the two groups in Protestantism, the Predestinarians and the Arminians.

### **Contemporary Calvinists**

I can make mention of contemporary men you know, men beside whom I am unworthy. Arthur Pink was a Calvinist. J. I. Packer is still alive at age 91 (2018); he taught at Regent College. (I’ve corresponded with him. A very wonderful man.)

There are others whom you know, yet you may not know they are thoroughly Calvinistic. Why don’t you know? Because they don’t talk about their predestination doctrine much. Why not? Because it is, indeed, as Calvin said, a horrible thing, a horrible decree.

It would be horrible to believe that the majority of humanity are to suffer infinitely for their finite sins—and they had no choice in the matter! Happily, Scripture plainly says otherwise: “God so loved

the world ... that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,  
but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 KJV).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

### The Truth About Predestination—3

The greatest problem with the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination is that the Bible teaches that Christ died for all, not just for the elect. There are a few Bible texts that use “all” in a restrictive sense, but the context makes the correct meaning clear.

The overwhelming use of “all” in Scripture is that Christ died for everyone.

The greatest weakness in the predestinarian doctrine is that the Bible is so clear in statement after statement that Christ died for all.

#### **Calvin and Augustine’s all**

Naturally, you ask, “If John Calvin was so intelligent, why didn’t he see that?” Remember, Calvin was intelligent, but he was wedded theologically to Augustine, and Augustine had been a thorough student of philosophy. It is easier to make a philosophical case for predestination than it is to make a biblical case.

Calvin (and Augustine) reasoned away the difficult texts. When they came across a text that said Christ “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6 NRSV), they said that the “all” means people out of all classes, in all places.

#### **Christ, the Bible’s all**

John makes the Bible position very clear:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1–2 NIV)

You couldn't have it much clearer than that, could you? John says that Christ is the atoning sacrifice, or propitiation, for the sins of the whole world, not just for believers.

### **Christ died for all**

It is true that occasionally the word “all” has a restricted meaning in the Bible.

For example, “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed” (Luke 2:1 KJV). I'm quite sure the Aborigines in Australia were not included in that tax.

So there are places in the Bible where the word “all” has a limited meaning.

But it is impossible to limit the wide range of texts that obviously mean Christ died for all. Here is a sample:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9 NIV)

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. (Romans 5:18 NRSV)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 KJV)

In John 3:16 two circles are drawn. A bigger circle—“God so loved the world”—you can't have a bigger circle than that. The whole



world! And a smaller circle—“that whosoever”—of those in the world who would believe.

It is impossible to equate the two circles as Calvinists try to do.

### **More inclusive texts**

The Bible also says, “Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died” (Romans 14:15 NIV). People for whom Christ died can lose their way.

The Bible tells us that:

There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. (2 Peter 2:1)

This is a clear text. Here we have wicked people denying the Lord that bought them. Clearly, all of us were bought, including the wicked.

### **We are all ransomed**

“Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time” (1 Timothy 2:5–6 NRSV).

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9 NIV).

“We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:10).

Potentially, God saves all. But he won’t force people to believe because God is a gentleman.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

### The Truth About Predestination—4

Because the doctrine of predestination is so vast in its scope and importance, we would expect the Bible to speak about it a great deal. Yet the noun “predestination” is not found in the Bible at all! Only the verb “predestined”—and that only a few times. The major passage used to support predestination is Romans 9:11–21.

Let me make a parenthetical statement before we continue:

Why don't we hear more about the doctrine of predestination these days? We don't even hear much from those great preachers who believe it. Why?

Because of “the terrible decree.”

Many people have suffered great agony—possibly gone mad—worrying about predestination. “Am I predestined to be saved or not?”

What is the use of my reading the Bible, praying, going to church, being faithful with the tithe, being a missionary—if I don't even know whether I'm saved? It may be that God has decreed I am not among the elect.

#### **Predestination cuts you out**

Predestination is a horrible teaching, because, statistically speaking, the chances are you are not among the elect. No—that's not the worst of it. Statistically, the chances are that you are not elected to salvation. If I know that in crossing the road there is one chance in ten I'll be hit by a car, I'll be very careful. But if I know there are nine chances in ten, I'll choose another road, thank you!

Calvinistic predestination suggests that the chance of your being elected to salvation is infinitesimal.

### **Predestination not in the Bible**

Now note: There is a tremendous difference between the statement of predestination in the Calvinistic creed, with its gloom and doom, and the passages in the Bible that concern “predestination.” The latter are full of joy and hope, the very opposite of Calvin’s “horrible decree.” This contrast is very striking and in itself rebuts Calvinism.

Now, how many Bible passages are there using the word “predestination?” If you take a Strong’s Concordance, you won’t find any!

Obviously a doctrine that affects the destiny of everybody ought to be clearly spoken about in Scripture. And often. Correct? If a topic is a big deal, there ought to be big things written about it in the Bible. Yet, you don’t find the word “predestination” anywhere in Scripture.

### **Predestined is in the Bible**

However, you do find the word “predestined.”

Now we will look at all the passages of Scripture where we find the word “predestined”:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30 NIV)

Notice, please, that we have two uses of the verb, “predestined,” but no use of the noun “predestination.” You won’t find the noun anywhere in Scripture.

Let's look at another passage:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:4–6)

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).

You ask, “Isn't it a bit risky to hang a huge doctrine like predestination on these few verses?” The answer is yes. But there are other verses that are used, such as Acts 13:48:

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

This verse only means that all who accepted Christ, fulfilling God's appointed way of salvation, found eternal life.

### **Major passage**

But the most important passage is in Romans 9. Let's look at it:

Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’

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

raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?’ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?”’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:11–21 NIV)

### **Main passage and predestination**

Read on its own, the passage seems to offer support for predestination.

What, then, can we say about this passage?

God says that he has loved Jacob, but hated Esau. It does not depend on a person’s desire or effort, but only upon God’s mercy.

If God wants to harden Pharaoh’s heart, then God can harden it. Doesn’t the potter have power over the clay, to use it for a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor?

This is the main passage of Scripture supporting the idea of the horrible decree: that most of us were born lost, and despite anything we can do, we will burn forever and forever and forever and forever. A trillion years of agony for every second of existence here.

That’s a pretty horrible decree, all will admit, but a closer look at this passage will prove that the Bible teaches no such thing.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

### **The Truth About Predestination—5**

The major passage used to support predestination (Romans 9:11–21) has been mistakenly applied. The context reveals that Paul is not primarily writing about individual salvation (or lostness). Paul is writing about the problem of God's chosen nation having rejected the Messiah and gospel sent by God. Being called, or chosen, or elected, means that all who are in Christ have been chosen for eternal salvation.

What does the major predestination passage of Romans 9:11–21 really teach?

#### **Two purposes of Romans**

The more you know about the whole book of Romans, the better you can understand this isolated passage.

In the last two centuries, Bible exegetes have forsaken the Calvinistic interpretation of this passage, and left it behind. See, for example, the recent monumental commentary on Romans by James Dunn. What is the reason for this contemporary agreement against Calvinism?

Because in this book, Paul has two major goals, or two big problems: 1) He wants to tell people the gospel, and 2) He wants to say why the Jews, God's people, have not accepted it. So, in chapters 1–8, he explains the gospel. In chapters 9–11, he deals with the problem of why God's own people, the Jews, did not accept it.

#### **Why did the Jewish nation not accept the gospel?**

When we read chapters 9–11, we must always remember that Paul

is addressing the question why Israel as a nation has not accepted the gospel. (And our passage for study, Romans 9:11–21, is found in these chapters.) Paul, a Jewish Christian, is asking, “Why don’t most of our people—God’s chosen people—accept the gospel given by God?”

Truth is often so clear, we hit our heads against the wall in frustration, asking, “Why can’t people see it?” This is Paul’s dilemma. “I can see the truth of the gospel. Why can’t the rest of my people see it?”

### **Predestination is not the answer to Paul’s problem**

Paul could have solved the problem as to why the Jewish race had not accepted its Messiah by saying, “Here’s the answer: God has selected that only one person here and there will be saved. The others God has selected to be lost.”

But would that answer the question as to why most of the nation of the Jews had rejected the Messiah? No. To answer that God is going to save an occasional Gentile here and there, and an occasional Jew does not deal with the national issue at all.

### **The reason for the rejection of Israel**

Notice what Paul writes:

But Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. (Romans 9:31–32 NRSV)

See also the opening verses of chapter 10 which say that the Jews refused to humble themselves to accept the gracious gift of justification. When Paul answers the question, “Why aren’t the Jews accepting the gospel and becoming Christians?” he doesn’t say, “Because God did not predestine them to be saved.”

Rather, he says, “Because they insist on practicing righteousness by works.”



## **Predestination lacks context**

The number one difficulty with the way Romans 9:11–21 is used in support of predestination is that it does not fit the context.

The context surrounding Romans 9:11–21 is dealing with why a whole nation has turned away and not accepted Christ. To give an answer that God has elected only a few people here and there to be saved, fails to answer that national problem.

## **Jacob and Esau in Malachi**

The issues are much bigger. Look again at verses 12 and 13:

‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’ (Romans 9:12–13 NIV)

Do you remember where Paul is quoting from? It is from the beginning of the last book of the Old Testament:

An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.  
‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord.

But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’

‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ the Lord says. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.’

Edom may say, ‘Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.’

But this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘They may build, but I will demolish.’ (Malachi 1:1–4 NIV)

## **The descendants of Jacob and Esau**

What does Malachi mean? The context reveals that the phrase, “Esau have I hated,” is referring to Esau’s descendants, the Edomites (verse 4).

When Paul quotes, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated,” from the book of Malachi, the quotation is talking about the races, or peoples, who descended from the two boys, Jacob and Esau.

“Jacob have I loved” refers to the Israelites. “Esau have I hated” refers to the Edomites. Malachi 1:4 speaks of “Edom” (Esau’s descendants). Verse 3 speaks of “His mountains ... his heritage,” employing Esau as a representative of his descendants, the Edomites.

### **Races not individuals**

Paul’s statement in Romans 9 does not have to do with individuals, but races and peoples—the Edomites versus the Israelites.

So what does “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated” mean? Let me repeat: The verse, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated,” is a quotation from the book of Malachi. In Malachi, those names stand for the peoples who are descendants of Jacob and the descendants of the Edomites. Because the Edomites had persecuted the Jews, God said, “I’ll lay waste your land and you will suffer and you will serve.”

Literally, Esau never served his brother Jacob. When it says in Romans 9:12 that, “The older will serve the younger,” the prophecy was only fulfilled in his descendants.

### **Birthright and salvation**

God promised the birthright to Jacob. Did that mean Esau could not be saved? Of course not. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that Esau could not be saved.

True, Esau sought the birthright with tears, and was unable to get it, but nowhere does Scripture say that he couldn’t be saved. As a matter of fact, the Bible says God softened his heart toward his brother, and he welcomed him at the end of his life (see Genesis 33:4).

There is nothing at all in Scripture that takes this verse of Romans 9 and makes it apply to the eternal destiny of individuals. Similarly, the word “foreknew” is used in Romans 11:2 of a whole nation, not of individuals.

## **We are chosen**

We do read in the Bible about being “chosen,” or “election.” The Calvinist says, “‘Chosen’ (or election) means being chosen for eternity—like it or not.”

I think most of us would like it that way. But do you remember that Jesus once said, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (John 6:70 NIV). So being chosen does not necessarily mean eternal salvation. Is Judas going to make it to eternal bliss?

Jesus said: “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man [Judas] who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24 and Mark 14:21).

Does the Bible teach an unconditional election, an unconditional choosing? No.

## **All are called**

To understand this more clearly, we must look to the beginning of Romans. (We haven’t finished with Romans 9 yet.)

And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:6–7)

Paul addressed “those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” Who are these called? “All in Rome”—or, all the church, the visible church. He told them all they were all called.

This reminds us of what we read earlier:

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.  
(Romans 8:30)

## **All believers chosen**

We read in Ephesians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:3–6 NIV)

Who is Paul talking to when he says, “For he chose us in him”? Verse 1 says, “To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” That’s to all the believers in Ephesus—and they are all spoken of as chosen, the whole congregation!

Furthermore, in Romans 11:2, Paul affirms that God “foreknew” the whole nation of Israel—not just those who would be saved.

## **All in Christ are predestined to be saved**

My friends, when God says he calls, chooses, and predestines, the truth is this: From eternity, God planned beforehand (which is what predestine means) salvation in Christ. Whoever came to Christ would be saved forever. That is biblical predestination.

Whoever comes to Christ is saved with Christ eternally. That and that alone meets the plethora of New Testament texts, not just the three or four passages that the Calvinists are stuck with.

- “God so loved the world” that “whosoever will may come.”
- “Whoever is thirsty may come.”
- “He that cometh I will in no wise cast out.”
- “This man receiveth sinners.”
- “God is not willing that any should perish.”
- “He gave his life a ransom for all.”
- “He tasted death for every man, that the righteousness

of Christ might come upon all.”

(See John 3:16; Revelation 21:6; 22:17; John 6:37; Luke 15:2; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15; 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; Romans 3:22; 5:18.)



## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

### **The Truth About Predestination—6**

The potter illustration in Romans 9 (taken from Jeremiah 18) helps us understand that the election Paul is writing about is being called to a special work for God. Paul is not writing about individual salvation. Modern Calvinists are mostly silent about the extreme doctrine of predestination. That is because the idea that God chooses who is lost or saved without reference to human choice is a terrible decree.

It is as repugnant and unbiblical as  
the doctrine of eternal torment.

So when we consider Romans 9 and find puzzling passages such as we have read, we need to remember that what Paul is saying is: “You Jews are complaining—and all because God is giving the Gentiles a chance.”

God has often elected people for his own reasons and for service, and God has a right to do that. God elected Cyrus to build the temple. God called Paul to be an apostle. God can ordain, select, choose for all sorts of purposes, not necessarily involving personal salvation.

#### **Potter illustration**

Think of Paul’s illustration about the potter:

Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:21 NIV)

Does “common use” mean destruction forever and ever, or does it simply mean to be given a lesser task? Esau had a lesser task than

Jacob, for it was Jacob who received the birthright. Does a potter ever make a vessel in order to destroy it? Never.

### **Potter explained in Jeremiah**

Paul's illustration is taken from Jeremiah 18:

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 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. (Jeremiah 18:1–4)

This is what Paul was quoting in Romans 9. Here is God's explanation:

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. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.' (Jeremiah 18:5–10)

### **Service not personal salvation**

The passage that Paul is quoting from Jeremiah is about a potter working with a vessel. If by disobedience the vessel is marred, the potter doesn't throw it out. The potter says, "Please repent. I want to save you. Turn from your evil, and I'll save you."

This is what Paul is saying to the Christian Jews in Rome. He urges them not to get upset because the nation of Israel has not accepted Christ. "Don't get upset because many of the people in the Roman



church are Gentiles. God has a right to select whomever he will to serve him and help spread the gospel.”

These passages are about service, not primarily personal salvation and eternal life.

### **God calls to service**

God often calls people to special service. For example, if you read the Exodus story, God called Pharaoh to release the Jews. True, it says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (see Exodus 7:13; 9:12). It also says many times that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (see Exodus 8:15; 9:34).

We can say that God, by bringing Pharaoh to the place where he had to make a choice, hardened Pharaoh’s heart. It was Pharaoh’s own fault. God did not make him harden his heart. God brought Pharaoh to the place where Pharaoh had to make a choice. If Pharaoh did not go with God, it meant that the situation to which God had brought Pharaoh would cause Pharaoh to harden his own heart.

No potter has ever made a vessel in order to destroy it. What Scripture is saying is that God has a right to choose whom he will to help spread the gospel. He can choose Jew or Gentile, Esau or Jacob—it is up to God. Scripture does not say that those who are not called to a position of honor are going to be lost forever.

Esau was reconciled with his brother. When Scripture says, “Esau have I hated,” it is a quotation regarding the descendants of Esau who opposed the Israelites, and how God had to punish them.

### **Silent Calvinists**

There are many Calvinists in the United States. You rarely hear them talk about predestination.

For example, we have all heard of R. C. Sproul. Sproul is a very fine man, a very intelligent Christian, always worth hearing, always worth reading. He is also a dedicated Calvinist. He believes most

people born in the world are born for hell. And there are many others like Sproul.

Yet you rarely hear such people talk about predestination. Why? Because it's very depressing. It is very discouraging if I cannot say to you: "Jesus died for you."

A Calvinist cannot say it, because a Calvinist cannot know.

Sometimes a Calvinist must even wonder about preaching itself. After all, whether there is any preaching or not, the saved will be saved, and the lost lost according to the decree.

Perhaps a Calvinist even has doubts about saying, "God is love."

After all, if God is love, how could God issue this terrible decree, and do this wicked thing?

And how dare a Calvinist talk about rewards and punishments. If we have to go this way or that according to the decree, there can be no such thing as rewards or punishment.

If irresistible grace is true and unconditional election is true, then God cannot say to anyone, "You are guilty." They had to be. God cannot say to anyone, "You are righteous." They had to be. The reason we don't hear much about it is that it's not a happy thing to proclaim.

### **Comparison with eternal torment**

The doctrine of predestination is in much the same position as the doctrine of an eternally burning hell. You don't hear much about hell these days, even on Christian television. Why not?

Because it's not very nice. It is not very nice to think that a God of love could take creatures who didn't ask to be born and torture them forever and ever and ever in the burning flames of hell. Punished infinitely for finite sins!

Imagine: One slip and you burn. No wonder you don't hear much about such a cruel and unfair teaching. Many profess to believe the doctrine of eternal torment, but you don't hear much because it's so unappealing.

Neither is it biblical. The Bible says:

But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord  
shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke  
shall they consume away. (Psalm 37:20 KJV)

“The wicked shall perish.” The word “perish” does not mean live on forever.

### **Smoke and fire of hell**

The text does talk about smoke: “into smoke shall they consume away.” Does smoke burn anything? What is the significance of smoke? It means the fire has done its job.

The Bible does talk about everlasting fire (Matthew 18:8; 25:41). However, in the Bible, the word “everlasting” is sometimes not very long. Jonah said he was in the deep waters, in the belly of the great fish, in the deep, “forever” (Jonah 2:6). I can imagine he felt like that.

A slave in Old Testament times who wanted to continue to serve his master, after his first apprenticeship, had his ear bored. That was a sign he would serve his master “forever” (Exodus 21:6; Deuteronomy 15:17). Often, the term “forever” has a very limited meaning.

### **Punishment and punishing**

The Bible does talk about “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46), because the punishment God inflicts on the wicked will be everlasting in its effects. There is no way out. Once God is done punishing the wicked eschatologically, it is done. The wicked have perished—and gone. There's no coming back again. That's it.

But “everlasting punishment” is not everlasting punishing! The Bible talks about “eternal judgment” (Hebrews 2:6). That does not mean that God is going to be dragging his heels for millennia, taking eternity to judge. It simply means that the results of God’s judgment are eternal.

The Bible does teach everlasting punishment, because the results are final, finished, and everlasting. If the wicked perish, they perish. That’s it.

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12 NIV).

The terrible teaching of everlasting torment came from the ancient pagans. They taught everlasting fire and everlasting torment. It doesn’t come from the Bible.

### **Momentary Gehenna**

The Bible uses the Greek word “Gehenna.” Gehenna was the name for a rubbish dump outside Jerusalem. Rubbish was continually being burned there. As long as there was rubbish, the flames continued to burn.

At the end of the world, there will be a momentary Gehenna just before the new heavens and the new earth appear:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.  
(2 Peter 3:9–13 NIV)

### **Hell in the Bible**

Those who do not have heaven within them (because they have rejected the gospel), will be put to sleep by that rubbish burn-up. Those who would turn heaven into a hell will be cast into that momentary Gehenna. From those cleansing fires, heaven and earth are born anew.

That is the hell of the Bible. It is momentary, not forever and ever (in the general sense in which we understand such terms).

It is no wonder that today we hear very little of the doctrine of everlasting-lasting torment. It is not appealing and it is not biblical. And the same is true of Calvinistic predestination.



## CHAPTER FORTY

### The Truth About Predestination—7

“Predestine” in Romans is the music of joy. Though all things change, all things work together for good for those who love God. Pain protects from further injury.

In God’s plan for our life, all the pain of life is for our good. That is because we know God has called each one of us in Christ.

#### **Now for the crunch point.**

All the creeds, all the bold statements of the doctrine of predestination, are terrible!

John Stott says you cannot think of such things as eternal hell for more than a quarter of an hour without teetering on the verge of madness.

He is right. That is why most people refuse to think about it. Better to eat, drink, and be merry. Tomorrow we die.

But if the creeds teach predestination, and if the Bible teaches it, then we should shout it from the housetops. But Calvinists don’t. Why? Because it’s too depressing.

#### **Predestined in Romans**

Again, let me say, the word “predestination” nowhere occurs in Scripture. But the verbs “predestine,” or “predestinate,” do. First, in Romans 8, and then in Ephesians 1.

Let’s look at Romans 8:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be

conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28–30 NIV)

### **Predestination is full of joy**

Now, here is the crunch point: When Paul uses the word “predestined,” it is a song of joy. It is full of joyous music.

In contrast, when a Calvinistic predestinarian gives a doctrinal statement about predestination, it is the saddest of all pictures. (That is because the idea that most humans will suffer eternal torment through no fault of their own is cruel, melancholy, and sadistic.)

Let me repeat: When the predestinarians put out their creeds about this doctrine, it is gloom and doom. “Most people are born to burn in hell forever,” they say.

Not because of any bad in you but because God yawned and said, “Okay, I’ll close my eyes and stick a pin in that name.”

### **A caricature of Calvinism**

Forgive me, I mustn’t fall into an unevangelical spirit. But, stated crudely, the doctrine of predestination amounts to the caricature I’ve given. God, without any reason or response in the person, says, “I’ll save that person. But that one there, I’ll damn.”

My comment is: All the doctrinal statements of predestinarians are terrible, sad, wrench the heart, and drive you mad if you believe them.

However, when Paul uses the word, it is full of music. Which shows that he doesn’t mean what predestinarians mean.

Do you see that? When Paul uses the word, it’s full of music, not sadism.



## **All things work together**

Please read Romans 8:28 again, which is Paul's introduction to his statement on predestination:

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

To know the truth of this verse is better than visiting a therapist every day of the week. If you can believe this verse, you've got it made.

We know that all things work. Yes, that's the law of change. But knowing that on its own is very depressing. I'm going to get older, I'm going to lose my loved ones, they're going to lose me. Things I own are going to fade away, and I'll disappear before they do. All things work. That much is depressing.

But it says all things work together.

## **Our love for God is a reflection**

That phrase changes everything. All things work together. There is a plan to everything, there is a purpose, there's a divine intent. We are not immersed in chaos or chance.

Things work together, and they work together for good to those that love God.

It is very rare that the Bible talks about our love for God. Scripture mainly talks about God loving us. I'm glad it is this way. After all, our love is but a faint echo of God's love for us. Our love is only a dim reflection of his.

You cannot love God until you are sure God loves you. That's one reason why this doctrine of predestination is so damnable.

Many wonderful saints have held the doctrine, but they were saints despite it, not because of it. Romans 8:28 shows a God far different from the God of the Calvinist.

### **Never be lost**

There is one luscious morsel in the doctrine we are considering that is very, very tasty. That is the compelling thought that, because God has chosen you, you cannot be lost. But how can you be sure you are chosen?

Predestinarians can never be truly sure that they are called. This weakens the appeal a bit. But if you once can get over that hurdle and go on to say, “Hey, I am among the elect,” well, you’ve got it made.

The truth is, the believer—every believer—has it made. That is because when we are looking to Jesus we can never be lost.

### **Physical pain is protective**

We are talking about the fact that when the Bible uses the term “predestine” or “predestinate,” it is full of joyous music. It is not doom and gloom and sour and bitter and wrenching at your heart and making you depressed. It is full of music.

“Predestinate” says, “Listen, all these bad things in your life, and surrounding you—they are all going to work together for good.”

We’re reluctant to believe it. But let me give you an illustration.

Most pain is protective. I love George Sheehan, the joggers’ philosopher. He says, “You get all sorts of problems when you’re a jogger, but it’s okay to run through irritation and things like that.

But you must never run through pain, because pain is a warning.” He is echoing all scientists and physicians when they assert that pain is meant to be protective.

I’ve told you before about our cat Lucy who jumped on top of our

hot woodstove and burned her paws. She flew off like a lightning flash. Lucy never jumped up there again! Pain is protective.

### **Other pain is also protective**

If we never felt pain, we would lose fingers, we'd lose toes, we'd lose life. Pain is protective. So now we accept the principle, physically.

My friends, understand this: Our other pains are protective, too. Those things that bring heartache and headache, they are protective too. They are part of God's predestined plan to remake us.

If you and I did not have any problems, or any troubles, we would not need God. Pain is protective, because pain shatters the illusion that everything is okay. Life can seduce us and say, "John Doe, everything's all right. Jane Doe, life is hunky-dory. Live it up."

But pain is more realistic. Pain says, "This life is a dangerous business, John and Jane, you and I need help." That is pain's message. Just as physical pain is protective, so our other pains are protective.

Our emotional, mental, spiritual, and social pains keep us near to God. We don't have to be reminded to say our prayers when we are in trouble. It isn't hard to be humble when you're in trouble.

### **We are all called**

Paul's comment that, "in all things God works for the good of those who love him," is the first part of his song. He then goes on with his music:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30 NIV)

**The clearest text**

We are going to be like Jesus one day.

Those whom God predestined, he also called. Remember, the book of Romans began by saying that everyone in the visible church of Romans was called. So to be “called” or “chosen” is not predestination in the Calvinistic sense.

The clearest text in Scripture on God’s predestined plan of salvation is John 3:16. And it is glorious music for all who believe.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 KJV)

[See also pages 335–339 and 340–341 for further comments on Romans 9 to 11.]

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

### **Romans Chapter 10: The ABC of Salvation**

“A” is for “Admit.” Before God can convert us with the gospel, we must first admit that we are lost. It is God’s law that helps us see that we are lost, because the demands of the law are so great. Jesus came for sinners—which we all are.

The A-B-C of salvation is:

- A: Admit
- B: Believe
- C: Confess

Admit that we are lost, guilty, condemned, helpless sinners. That’s “A”—Admit.

Remember, it is not our wickedness that the Bible says is filthy rags; it is our righteousness (Isaiah 64:6 KJV).

There is something to be done before breaking off from our sins—and that is to repent of our righteousness, our self-righteousness.

#### **Dust in the air**

If you have a sensitive conscience, the next few paragraphs will be agony for you. It is agony to “A”—Admit that we are fallen, helpless, guilty, condemned, dying sinners. (After the agony, we’ll apply the healing ointment.)

We’ve all been in a dark room and seen a beam of light shine through a shutter. Immediately, we become aware of something we hadn’t known before.

In the beam of light, we see ten thousand motes, ten thousand specks of dust. Suddenly we see that the room that seemed so clean and hygienic is really full of dust. It doesn't matter how scrupulously you may have dusted the room, dust fills the air.

### **Light of the law**

My friends, that's what happens to the room of the heart when the light of the law of God shines upon it.

If you preach too much the law  
The people go out the door.  
If you preach too much believe,  
The people do as they please.

But we must preach the law so that people can find saving belief. When we get the two in the correct focus—law and grace—we will have what the New Testament talks about at the beginning and the end of that book of faith, Romans.

In the first and last chapters of Romans we read about “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26 NIV). Not the faith of obedience, because whatever is not of faith is sin.

### **Exceeding broad**

The New English Bible translates Psalm 119:96 as, “Thy commandment has no limit.” The King James Version says: “Thy commandment is exceeding broad.”

Let me illustrate, “exceeding broad.”

It was the law in Israel that if you saw your neighbor's ox or donkey going astray, you didn't just say, “Poor old Isaac, he's lost his ox.” You were guilty unless you got that ox and restored it to the owner.

Now, if I am guilty, if I do not help my neighbor when his ox or his donkey goes astray, how guilty am I if I let him go astray? Am I my brother's keeper? Don't be like the ape in the zoo who asked, “Am

I my keeper's brother?" That's not the issue. "Am I my brother's keeper?" That's the issue. And the answer is one I don't want to hear. The answer is, "Yes."

The hardest commandment I know in the Bible—next to the obvious ones about loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself—is this one: "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in his guilt" (Leviticus 19:17 NIV).

I don't like that commandment. But, if I'm responsible for a straying donkey or ox, how much more if my brother strays? And who is my brother? Every man. Who is my sister? Every woman.

### **Mixed motives**

And then, when I look at the law more closely, it says in one place that I am to worship God with a single eye (see Proverbs 7:2; Luke 11:34). In other words, the whole, untrammelled, undivided heart.

But that is not possible. Everything we do, we do with mixed motives—whether it's preaching or praying or giving. We have never done anything with a single eye in our life. Everything we do is with mixed motives.

Augustine said that there's an element of sin in the choice of any lesser good. What? Am I to take literally the statement, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NKJV)?

Must my every thought and imagination be as good as Adam could do before the Fall?

I am shot down. I am in pieces. I am in shreds as I consider the breadth of the law of God.

### **The law is unable to save**

But it is God who is helping me to admit this, you see. God can't save me until I admit.

So the law is the Surgeon's knife that cuts in order to heal. It is the fisherman's net that brings the fish to the Fisherman. It is the thunder in the sky that sends me racing to the shelter of the great rock. It is the shepherd's black dog that brings the sheep to the Shepherd.

One thing the law cannot do: it cannot save. Another thing the law cannot do: it cannot forgive. The law convicts and condemns, but it doesn't pardon and it doesn't save.

The Bible is opposed to anyone bringing forward their righteousness. The righteousness of the law is condemned. "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse" (Galatians 3:10 NIV).

### **Delays in doing good**

Let me apply the law even more piercingly.

There is infinite guilt in every split second that I delay my "Yes" to God and play with an invitation from the devil.

We are all tempted a thousand times a day toward some lesser good. It might not be an outrageous thing because that would hurt our pride—we all like to be goody-goodies—so we would not do the outrageous thing.

Our temptations often appeal to us. We say to ourselves, "Life is tough. I've got to have some recreation, some enjoyment. What are my appetites for? After all, God, you gave them to me!"

But there is an element of sin in the choice of every lesser good. And every momentary delay in saying "Yes" to the Spirit of God is an infinite sin. I'm not playing with a worm. I'm dallying with my Maker and Creator.

Think of the tussles that we all endure as we make our choices. And remember that a split-second delay in saying "Yes" to God is an infinite sin.



### **Absolute and relative**

Every moment is fraught with eternal consequences, which doesn't mean that every moment must be spent on religious activities. But every moment must be spent as God would have it. That's because righteousness is attending absolutely to the absolute and relatively to the relative.

Sin is when I reverse the formula, and attend relatively to the absolute and absolutely to the relative. When I give anything more importance than it should have—that is sin.

### **Christian stewardship**

There is also the horrible awareness that I don't own anything. The Bible thrusts this awareness upon me every moment. I don't own "Des Ford," or the use I make of my talents, my opportunities, and my time.

How demanding the law is. Think of the Christian doctrine of stewardship! Why, the use I make of every cent shows whether I love God supremely and my neighbor as myself. What a devastating thought!

The truth, of course, is that because we are fallen, because we are born in sin, because we are born without the Holy Spirit, because the curse of Adam's sin is upon us from the beginning, we cannot perfectly obey a holy law.

Not even after conversion. That's because every converted person is really two people.

### **A ship with two captains**

Imagine a ship. The master of the ship, the captain, has defied the owner of the ship. The captain uses the ship as though it were his own. He bosses the crew around, goes where he likes, takes all the profits from the cargo.

This is an illustration of what it is to be a converted sinner. What happens at conversion? Is the captain killed? No. No. But

another Captain comes on board. True, the former captain is still on board, though he is now a condemned captain held captive in the hold. (We won't be rid of him until we pull into port.)

### **Old ship, new captain—battle on board**

What happens when I'm converted? I'm still the same ship; and my old nature, the old captain, is still on board. The crew—which represents my subconscious thoughts, drives, appetites, motives, and my conscious actions—are accustomed to obeying the old captain.

Although I know that it is written that the old captain is condemned, and that my old nature is under sentence of death, occasionally that sly old seadog tricks me into doing things I used to do.

I suspect or know that they are wrong and I rebel against the new Captain, but that doesn't change the direction of the ship. The new Captain has the helm, and even if the old captain could see the ship's papers, he wouldn't know how to read them.

Only someone who has God's Spirit can understand spiritual blessings. Anyone who does not have God's Spirit thinks these blessings are foolish. (1 Corinthians 2:14 CEV)

So even after conversion, never for one day do I fully fulfill the law of God. That's because I still have an old nature.

### **Jesus came for the sick**

When I see this, I realize what it means that the Lord did not come for the righteous but for those who are lost sinners. He didn't come for the whole, he came for those who are sick.

Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17 NIV)

There are lots of people who think they are righteous and who think they are whole. They need to measure themselves by God's standards. They need to "A"—Admit that there is nobody who is whole and nobody who is righteous.



## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

### **Romans Chapter 10: The ABC of Salvation—2**

Key words in Romans reveal what the book is about.

It is about two righteousnesses: Righteousness of the law and Righteousness which is of faith.

We can only trust Christ's righteousness counted to us, which is justification. We must never trust our sanctification because sin still struggles with us. That struggle ends only at glorification.

We have summed up the ABC of salvation as:

“A”—Admit that we are lost, guilty, dying, helpless, and condemned sinners.

“B”—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This means believe in our heart, not just with our head. The devil believes in his head. But “B” means believe with all your heart, all your trust, all your hope, with all there is of you—believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“C”—Confess Christ. Confess him before men and women with our mouth, with our life, with everything we do—confess him.

#### **Submit to God**

There is another way of summing up the ABC basics of salvation though not using the same letters:

Admit, Submit, Commit, Transmit.

Let's turn to Romans 10. Notice verse three. Speaking of the

rebellious ones, Paul writes, “They have not submitted to God’s righteousness” (Romans 3:10 NRSV).

They would not submit! We can’t be proud and go into the kingdom. That’s impossible.

When we look at God’s law, we are so cut down to size, we don’t have to open the door to the kingdom, we go out underneath it, we’re so small.

### **Admit, submit, commit, transmit**

Commit everything to God. All our worries, all our fears, all our hopes, all our ambitions, all our complaints. We are to hand them over to God because they are too big for us.

Then we are to Transmit. The person who feasts alone doesn’t truly feast. Being a missionary is one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.

We are to Admit, then Submit to Christ, then Commit all we’ve got to him, then Transmit. Pass the gospel on.

### **Two types of righteousness**

Again, let us read Romans 10:

Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness.

For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that comes from faith says .... (Romans 10:1–6)

Please note that there are two types of righteousness. One is a righteousness of the law, and the other is a righteousness of faith (verses 5 and 6).

### **The righteousness of the law**

The righteousness of the law is our good deeds. The righteousness of the law is that which springs from our best efforts. It's our religiosity, our church-going, our Sabbath-keeping. It's our health reform, our tithe-paying, our missionary endeavor, our singing of hymns. That's all the righteousness of the law, and it's all wonderful; but it won't get us into God's kingdom, because it's never good enough.

If we were going to get in by the righteousness of the law, our obedience would have to be always flawless, always willing. A lot of things I do aren't willing at all. I do them because they are right, not because I want to do them. I should be fervent for the right, not reluctant.

I say, "Well, Lord, if you want it, I guess I'd better do it." That's not being fervent.

I must be consistent. Morning, noon, and night, I must be fervent for what is right. When I am sick and when I am well, when I am down and when I am up, when I've just been hit hard by circumstances and when I'm riding on the crest of the wave.

If I want a righteousness of the law that's going to get me into God's Kingdom, it has to be like that—flawless, willing, fervent, consistent, total.

It must begin with my first breath. It must begin from the very first moment when my mother said, "What a little angel!" (Mother didn't know she had the wrong identifier. She only learned that in later years.)

### **Righteousness of faith**

So, there is a righteousness of the law which comprehends many

good things, but it cannot save us, because it's not good enough.

And then there is the righteousness which is of faith. The Book of Romans is all about that. "Faith" occurs 64 times in Romans. It's the book about faith.

Remember, "faith" means trust. It's not just a mental "Yes." It is trust, a personal relying on God.

Relying on God for yesterday, today, and tomorrow. For my spirit, my body, my mind. My children, my ambitions, my wealth, my health. Trusting God for all these things.

Such trust begins with trust for eternal life, but it goes on to trust for everything. Faith is a big word.

### **Righteousness = justification**

In the Greek, the word that we translate into English as "righteousness" is also the word for "justification."

[This is a problem only for English readers. When you read the Bible in any other language, you don't have our English problem of having two translations of one word.]

Many people quarrel when they read in Romans about the righteousness which is of faith.

"Now, what is that? What is 'the righteousness that comes from faith'? Is that justification? Or is it justification plus sanctification? Or is it sanctification?"

Those who know something about the original Greek never ask that. They would know that "righteousness by faith" always means justification.

### **Christ our Righteousness**

Justification is the 100 percent righteousness that is put to my account. That's the righteousness that's outside of me, the one



that's been accomplished by Christ, the one that's in Christ, the one that's credited to me—that's the one that saves.

Fortunately so, because my other righteousness, the righteousness of law, is so tattered and deficient and defective and marred. "Filthy rags" is what God calls all my righteousness(es) (Isaiah 64:6 KJV).

That's not my wickedness God is calling filthy rags, but my righteousness. That's pretty hard to swallow. I was proud of those good deeds. God calls them, "Filthy rags."

### **Key words of Romans**

Here are the key terms of Romans: "Faith" (spoken of 64 times). "Justification," or faith righteousness (50 times). "Holy Spirit" (26 times). "Holy" and "Sanctification" (four times). "Live" (15 times). Let's not overlook one more key word: "Sin," or "Sins."

The first five chapters of Romans, which are all about justification, speak a great deal about sin. Chapter 1 lists many sins, and damns all of us when we read the list.

Chapter 3 reminds us that we all come short of the glory of God. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23 KJV).

All have sinned (past tense), and all come short of the glory of God (present continuous).

The early chapters of Romans are describing how to get right with God, and so have much to say about sin and sins. They even list many sins.

But Chapter 3 moves into the topic of how to be made right with God. This chapter tells me that God declares me right, 100 percent right, in Christ—and it's done in a moment.

There's life in a look. The penitent thief only had to say one

sentence, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42 NIV), and he received eternal life. Perfect righteousness was his. Paradise. Eternal life.

### **Justification and sanctification**

The righteousness of faith is mine in a moment—by a look of trust to Jesus.

Having given me the righteousness of faith because of his work for me, Christ now begins a work in me.

God does not forgive the rebel and let the rebel still carry a gun. God cannot declare the leper clean and then let him die in his degradation. So, having declared me righteous (which is what “justify” means), God sets about making me righteous.

Here’s where most of us Christians err—we keep looking at our progress. And if we are honest, there’s not a lot to see. Other people may see more than we do, but other people don’t know our hearts.

Justification depends on what Christ did for me, and that is a perfect, 100 percent righteousness. It’s mine by faith. Sanctification is what Christ does in me by the Holy Spirit.

### **Sanctification and glorification**

About the first righteousness, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30 KJV). The second righteousness is never finished in this life.

If I live to be as old as Methuselah, the Holy Spirit and the angels will still be wringing their hands, saying, “Oh dear, we’re still having a lot of trouble with Des. We’ve been trying for a thousand years, and look at him!”

Sanctification is never complete in this life.

Sanctification is completed in what we call Glorification. At the second coming of Christ, every cell of body and mind is changed

and transformed in the twinkling of an eye (see 1 Corinthians 15:52) and all the impact of sin in our lives is taken away.

You see, we are the product of everything we've ever seen, everything we've ever heard, everything we've ever read, everything we've ever done, everything that's been done to us—we are the product of all that. And we don't get rid of those scars until the Second Advent.

### **Never trust sanctification**

It's because of those scars, and because sin brings incapacity as well as guilt, that I can never depend on my sanctification. I have already squandered part of the talent given to me at birth by my years outside of Christ.

The devil would direct our attention to navel-watching. The devil directs our attention at ourselves. "How am I doing?" we ask. The answer, if you are honest, is, "Pathetic." Pathetic compared with what we should be doing. The law can be summed up in one word: Love. Love God wholly, love your neighbor as much as yourself. How do we stand on that? Not very well.

What sort of a steward am I of moments, of money, of talent, of opportunity? I try to be a good steward, but in God's sight I have more failures than successes. Even my best is still not good enough.

### **Sin the great problem**

Now you can see why I have had to add "sin" or "sins" to the list of key words in the Book of Romans. Sins are the topic of the first five chapters. The chapters after that (except Chapters 9 and 10) deal with sanctification and are all also about sin.

My real, deep, enduring problem is not my transgressions before I was in Christ. My enduring problem is that sin is still in me. The old captain is still on board. Though he's been condemned, he's still trying to run the ship. He knows all the crew members very well. He's trying to get all of them—my faculties, my appetites—to rebel against the new Captain.

So Romans Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are all about sin, sin that dwells in me. That is my great problem.

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

### **Romans Chapter 10: The ABC of Salvation—3**

The key words “faith” and “righteousness” in Romans help us understand the distinction between justification and sanctification. Justification is by faith alone. Sanctification also demands faith, but our striving is greatly involved. King David is a profound biblical illustration of how we make serious mistakes in sanctification, yet God does not count them against us.

In the list of key words of the Book of Romans, the large numbers belong to “faith” (52 times) and “righteousness” or “justification” (42 times).

These two words are linked (by being in the same verses) about 13 times. Yet you never find “sanctification” linked with “faith.”

#### **Faith and striving**

Doesn't it take faith to be sanctified? Yes. Then why are they never linked? Because faith linked with justification is always faith alone. And we can't be sanctified by faith alone.

The New Testament uses 27 verbs that have to do with effort, such as “fight,” “struggle,” “run.” Sanctification takes effort. There's no such thing as an undisciplined, mature Christian. It takes a lot of discipline to walk the path of sanctification. A lot of saying “No” to self.

Paul writes, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27 NKJV). “We must fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). “We must run the race that is set

before us” (Hebrews 12:1). “We must strive to enter through the narrow gate” (Luke 13:24).

Justification by faith alone—that’s just receiving a gift. Now we have eternal life. God has made provision for my past, my present, and my future.

But the battle inside me, that’s not by faith alone. Which is why the New Testament never joins sanctification with faith in the same breath. It’s important to understand that.

### **For us and in us**

Chapters 1 through 5 of the Book of Romans deal with the subject of Christ’s 100 percent righteousness. This is Christ’s righteousness for us, that is imputed to us through faith.

Then, in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, the topic of sanctification— what Christ does in me by the Spirit—is discussed.

Then, in Chapter 9 through 11, the question is asked (and answered): “How is it that the nation, or people, of Israel will not receive this gift righteousness?”

Chapters 12 through 16 deal with sanctification.

### **Justification and holy living**

We only find the word “live” once in the opening chapters of Romans—the chapters on justification.

Remember, the key sentence in Romans is: “Those who are just by faith shall live” (Romans 1:17). The King James Version said: “The just shall live by faith.” The better translation is: “He who through faith is righteous will live” (1:17 RSV).

The word “live” only occurs once in these chapters on justification because their theme is what Christ lived, what Christ did. The emphasis is not on how I am living, not on how I’m doing. I come

for justification just as a beggar, as a receiver. There can't be much about my living in the chapters on justification.

The Holy Spirit is only mentioned once, also. Holiness is only mentioned once.

### **Sanctification and holy living**

In contrast, when we look at the chapters on sanctification—Chapters 6, 7 and 8, and 12-16—they're all about how we are to live, about how to behave. (Not that I really want to know—my old nature, that is. Only my new nature wants to know.)

“Faith” is now mentioned only 14 times. (It was over 50 times in the opening chapters on justification.) “Righteousness,” occurs only 8 times. “Live,” however, is now mentioned up to 14 times. That's because these are the chapters on sanctification, on holy living.

There is much in these chapters about effort. “Holiness” occurs three times; “Holy Spirit” 25 times! (Remember, he was mentioned only once in the chapters on justification.)

So, sanctification is particularly the work of the third Member of the Godhead (the Holy Spirit) in me.

Justification is particularly the work of the second Member of the Godhead (Christ) for me. The work that was for me is finished, gloriously finished. The work that's in me is unfinished.

### **We all make mistakes**

These figures, if we understand what they are saying, can make our life full of melody. If you understand this, you can have joy when you are down in the depths, when you've messed things up again, when you've spoken inadvisably with your lips, when you've done something stupid. (This applies to our future as well as to our past.)

A beautiful white horse was startled in a meadow. As it galloped, it didn't see the glass sliding doors on its owner's house. It crashed through the glass into the house. In its panic, it smashed through the

house and made a terrible mess. But the owner loved the horse, and didn't have it shot because of what it had done in its fear and fright. You and I are often like that beautiful stallion. We make all kinds of messes. Every one of us has spiritual problems, spiritual weaknesses, as manifold and as manifest as a little child's physical problems.

Please understand that. It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian 50 years, you still have as many spiritual problems as there are bees in a hive, as there are ants in an anthill.

### **God does not count sins**

Nevertheless, Romans is a testimony that God is shouting to us: "I love you just the same! I accept you just the same! I don't see in you these problems."

God doesn't see in us the vileness of the sinner. He only sees in us the likeness of his Son.

My friends, let me give you an example that I have been criticized for using, but commit to your judgment. One of the greatest men in the Bible committed some of the greatest sins. (Don't follow his example!)

David was a murderer and an adulterer. Yet he prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12 KJV).

He didn't pray, "Restore to me thy salvation." Why not? Because David was being held under chastisement, and if he had not repented, he would have been lost. But he had not been cast off, even after murder and adultery.

### **Eternal and temporal**

I commend to your judgment that the Scripture never says that this great believer was cast off by his follies. He did lose his joy while he was under the chastisement of God; that's because we can never escape the temporal consequences of sin.



Christ has taken upon himself the eternal consequences of sin. The temporal consequences still remain, and fall upon us. David was under chastisement; David was under judgment. He lost four sons, one right after another. There was rebellion in the kingdom. Oh, it was a miserable life for David!

For a few seconds of sexual pleasure, it wasn't worth it. What madness! David struggled with his terrible burden. Night after night he couldn't sleep. He'd embarrassed his family and his kingdom—but God had not cast him off. Sweltering under the heat of his guilt, he said, “Lord, restore to me the joy of thy salvation.”

But he has not been cast off. He does not have to pray, “Restore to me thy salvation.”

### **Failures after conversion**

Most of the sins that a Christian commits are unpremeditated slips, failures, and shortcomings.

That is typical of all of us, all day long, from the first breath to the last. None of us is without some outrageous mistakes that we regret in later life.

Why do we fail? Because we are fallen, unholy, broken, tarnished creatures. That's still true after conversion.

The devil will try to tempt you to look at yourself and your past record. He will say, “I know all about your past.” You must say in return, “Hey, that's nothing. I know all about your future!”

### **No condemnation**

Answer the accuser of the brethren (see Revelation 12:10) with the blood of Christ. Remember, Scripture says about the faithful and the accuser, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11 NIV).

When the devil says, “Des, you did this, you did that, and you did the other,” I must say, “That’s true, though you’ve forgotten some of the worst. However, they’re all dealt with.”

All has been paid for. Scripture states:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1 NKJV).

[Because we are] “accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).

We are “complete in him” (Colossians 2:10).

In the reckoning of God, we are “seated with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6 NIV).

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

### **Romans Chapter 10: The ABC of Salvation—4**

While we are to live Christian lives, for salvation our focus must be only on Christ's work for us. Romans tells us we do not have to climb to heaven or dive to hell to find salvation—in the gospel it is as near as a call to God for mercy. There is no difference between people. Any one of us can call upon the divine Christ and receive salvation.

This statistical resumé of the key words of Romans is meant to focus your faith, your hope, and your joy on what Christ has done for you. And while just as certainly Christ works in you through the Holy Spirit, you never put your trust in how that's going. That's because you've got a share in that.

If only Christ had the major share in it, things would be fine. But Christ has to work through me, which tarnishes everything immediately.

Here is the great joy of Christians. We can sing with Luther: "Yes, I'm always a sinner, but not a willful one. I'm always a penitent, but I'm always right with God."

#### **Our sins**

Probably you are not going to murder people, as King David did, so you don't have any real reason for discouragement. In Christ, you are always right with God. The Christian is a sinner and a saint at the same time—but not a willful sinner!

Almost always the Christian's sins are: "Boom! I slipped." Overwhelming temptation? I erred. Tired out? I spoke inadvisably

with my lips. Short fuse? I exploded.

All have experienced these, and they can be very dangerous. If you fall into a rage, inhibitions disappear, and when inhibitions disappear, you are capable of doing any evil thing.

Recently, at a distant airport, waiting in a long line, I found out a few things about myself that were new to me. Standing there, I was thinking of all the planes I was missing, of my wife expecting me to turn up at home, of having already waited around for five or six hours, getting three standbys and missing all of them.

Yes, I learned something new about myself.

## **Heaven and hell**

Scripture says:

The righteousness that comes from 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 abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ (Romans 10:6–11 NRSV)

It was an idiom, or proverb, among the Jews of New Testament times that when you talked about something difficult, you would say, “That’s like climbing up to heaven,” or “That’s like diving down to hell.” (That’s why it says in John 3:13 that no one has ascended up into heaven. We know that Enoch and Elijah have. But John is using this idiom.)

## **Your salvation is near**

But Romans 10:6 says we don't have to climb up to heaven or climb down to the abyss (v. 7). The message of salvation is offered to us on a plate. Verse 8 says the word is near us.

Paul says, "Don't think you've got to do some big thing. What you've got to do is take it. Receive it. Believe it—the word of faith."

Then, if you do receive it, "You'll confess with your mouth as a result of believing in your heart, and you will be saved" (see verse 9).

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:12–13).

Notice, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord over all is generous to all that call upon him, for whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved! (This is a quotation from Joel 2:32.)

## **The divinity of Christ**

The manner in which Paul uses this quotation suggests that he is asking, "Do you know that this Christ we believe in is the Jehovah of the Old Testament?"

Over 6,000 times in the Old Testament, God is called "Yahweh" (translated "Jehovah" in older translations of the Bible). The Greek word for that is "Lord."

Therefore, when Paul writes here that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord will be saved, and is also talking about Christ, then Paul is asking, "Do you know that your Savior is God? He can do mighty things because he is God."

There's also an allusion to Jeremiah 23:6, where it says, "And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord our righteousness.'"

## **No difference**

Think of that statement:

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:12–13 KJV)

There is no difference between peoples. This language occurs three times: once in Acts and twice in Romans.

“And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9).

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. (Romans 3:22–24)

“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Romans 10:12).

## **We must call**

Notice you don’t even have to work up a lot of faith. All you have to be able to do is call.

Can you call? No one is unable to call. So no one has an excuse.

The penitent thief called. As he hung upon his cross, he didn’t have a good record to present to the Master. He didn’t say, “Look, Jesus, wait a moment. I’ve got my grade card here. Let me just show it to you.”

He had no record or resumé of any worth. He just called. “Jesus, Lord, remember me” (Luke 23:42).

Salvation is as easy as that, as easy as calling.

### **A busload of ancestors**

And there's no difference—whatever your past, whatever your inheritance. None of us has a perfect genetic inheritance. Every one of us has about a million ancestors, if you include all the relatives that contribute to our gene pool. (I'm not talking just about our immediate mothers and fathers, but all their relatives, too.)

Every one of us is like a bus traveling down the road with hundreds of passengers inside. Every now and then, various occupants stick their heads out of the window and poke out their tongues.

That's how we all are. We are that bus. We have all those ancestral passengers who emerge uninvited, unexpected, and uncontrolled at the wrong time and in the most embarrassing ways.

People standing by say, "Just like his uncle." "That's the very thing her aunt would have done." That's what happens to all of us all of the time.

"But the same Lord over all is rich unto all them that call upon him."

### **We are to receive**

A sailing ship off South America had its distress signals displayed. Another ship came by and signaled, "What is your problem?"

"We've run out of water," was the answer. "The crew is dying of thirst."

They received the message: "Lower your buckets over the side. You are in the mouth of a mighty river. The water is fresh and drinkable."

There are millions of people in this world dying of spiritual thirst—unnecessarily. All they need to do is lower their buckets. To dip down into the fresh water of the gospel.

How does a plant live and grow? A plant cannot run and hunt. The plant simply bares its bosom to the sun and the moon and the falling dew and all the elements of heaven. As it does so, it draws up from beneath it all the nutrients God has put in the soil. What the plant does so it can grow is to receive. Do you want to grow spiritually? Receive.

[The pertinent portions of Romans 11 have been covered in the chapters on Predestination. Now we move on to chapter 12.]



## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

### Romans 12: Part One

In Romans 12 Paul calls upon Christians to serve God by presenting their bodies as living sacrifices.

Because of the traditional teaching of the disembodied immortal soul, Christians have often neglected to care for their health. But we are to do our best in every area of healthful living.

Romans chapter 12 begins with a hard saying:

I appeal to you, therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1 RSV)

Paul here uses the language of sacrifice. He uses the actual word “sacrifice.” But he also uses other language associated with the Jewish system of sacrifice. “Present”—that’s a word of sacrifice. “Worship”—that’s a word of sacrifice.

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

#### **Soul heresy**

What I’m going to say is not popular, because it’s sacrificial.

The Christian church quickly swallowed the heresy—it came in during the early centuries—that you don’t have to bother about your physical body. That’s because you possess an immortal soul.

The body is just a sack of dung that contains the precious jewel of the soul. The precious jewel of the soul is all that we need worry about.

Because of this heresy, the church has been plagued down through history with off-balance anchorites, hermits, desert monks, nuns, celibate priests, geeks, extremists and more. That kind of thing is unnecessary considering the teaching of the Scriptures.

### **A letter of inquiry**

The Bible knows of no such thing as a soul that can function without a body. There are over 1,600 references to “soul” and “spirit” in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Not one of those references describes a human soul or spirit living independently of a body.

I have written about this topic to many prominent radio and television ministers whom I respect. I have written, in effect:

Dear Fellow Minister:

I love your program. But I am perplexed. You often allude to hell fire and associated topics. I have a problem with this.

When I consider the whole sweep of the Bible’s 1,600 verses or so that use ‘soul,’ not one ever says a soul can function without a body.

Have I missed the crucial verse? Please write to me and give me the text I’ve overlooked.

Yours sincerely ...

### **The body temple**

No one ever responds with the missing text. No surprise. They never come up with one, because it’s not there.

Why is it important?

Because, dear friends, our whole culture and civilization is still governed by the idea that what is important is the soul and the spirit—not the body. And it’s a great mistake.

Whatever affects your body in some way affects your mind and spirit. (By “spirit,” I simply mean the “self” functioning in spiritual areas.) You cannot be a mature Christian, living up to all of God’s potential for you, if you are careless about your body.

Your body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). It’s holy and sacred. The person who willfully defiles it, God will destroy.

### **Not to judge**

Not that it is a Christian’s duty to judge others in this matter. We love to judge other people and correct them. We’re all good at that.

Rather, it is a Christian’s duty not to judge other people, because we are all different. The Bible says, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Corinthians 11:31 KJV). This is where we should start. If everyone would sweep in front of his own door, the whole world would soon be clean.

So, we’re not talking about other people, because we all function differently. We are made differently. Some people I know need nine or ten hours of sleep at night to function really well. If I get six, I thank God and function about as well.

We’re made differently in the area of nutrition. Some people thrive on beans, others cannot tolerate beans.

### **Fussy about health**

While we are not talking about making rules for others, we are asserting the New Testament principle that our bodies are the temple of God. We’ll never have the happiness, the satisfaction, and the usefulness we could have if we neglect this part of sanctification.

I feel somewhat hypocritical as I say these things, because my own life is often very, very intemperate. I violate time zones constantly in my travels, and my life is very irregular. I often eat irregularly because of my travels.

I regard traveling in an airplane one of the most unhealthy things a person can do. One person with a virus can infect a whole planeload because the air-circulating system cannot filter out viruses. This fact is often not discovered because the passengers end up at different destinations and go to widely scattered doctors when they get sick.

But I also have to tell you I have a prejudice in this area. I early became aware that, though a Ford, I wasn't born a good Ford—a Lincoln Town Car, for example. (I certainly wasn't born a Mercedes-Benz!)

I early realized that unless I took that into account I wasn't going to function long. A doctor told me in my early twenties that I'd be finished at forty.

So, some of us have to be more fussy than others. But all of us should be concerned about our health, because we belong to God.

### **Hierarchy of health—mind**

Let me give you a thumbnail sketch of how I think it works:

Consider the image of a human being.

We start with the mind, my friends, where we think. The first step to good health is to think well.

If we are constantly thinking negatively, fearfully, hatefully, doubtfully, we'll get sick ultimately. As a person "thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).

### **Hierarchy of health—lungs**

Then we drop down to the lungs. Dear friends, the air you breathe is even more important than the food you eat. I cannot go into too many details.

We live in a culture that is very technologically advanced, and very retarded regarding preventive medicine.

We have multitudes of sick buildings in America, and some people live all their days away from the sun, away from the wind, dependent on air-conditioning.

That's not the way we were meant to live.

Much of the air in those buildings is not very good. Of course, even if you exchange it for outside air, that's not always a lot better.

But you do the best you can. The air you breathe is more important than even the food you eat.

### **Hierarchy of health—stomach**

Then we come to the stomach. Eating is very important because “You are what you eat.” Think about it. Who wants to be a hamburger or french fry?

Here's a truth about America, Australia, and all of Europe, including the United Kingdom. In these countries, three out of every four will die many years ahead of time because of diseases of the heart and arteries—mainly from wrong diet. (I say mainly from diet, not solely from diet, because disease is not always a person's fault.)

Let me repeat that by way of emphasis. Three out of four persons in America, Australia, and Europe, die unnecessarily years ahead of time of diseases caused, for the most part, by wrong diet. (One out of four persons will die of cancer.)

I say, “for the most part” because we must never forget heredity. That is an important factor, too.

### **The danger of luxury**

We don't judge other people. But we do say, “Hey, as for me, I don't want to be one of those three.”

We know from our study of nutrition what causes this problem. It is the luxury and technology of our countries that causes it. In

Third World countries, away from the cities, only about one person in twenty dies of things such as heart disease and cancer. One in twenty, because they can't afford luxurious or processed foods.

In a nutshell, you don't have to be a vegetarian. But if you are a Christian, you'll remember that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do" you will "do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV).

### **The value of vegetarianism**

In practical terms, the nearer you get to a sensible vegetarianism, eating food as grown, the better. It's not wise constantly to eat out of cans and packets and bottles. They are for emergencies. We have them at our place, and we use them.

But packaged food is not meant to be the typical fare. We are meant to eat food that is grown, and the nearer to vegetarianism, the better.

The main cause of death in the United States, Canada, Europe, England, Australia and New Zealand is the excessive use of animal fats and refined products, including refined oils.

Let me emphasize the principle: You belong to God. Don't ignore your body.

### **Hierarchy of health—legs**

From the stomach we drop down to the legs. If I can use the old adage about exercise again, "They never bury anything that moves."

If you want to know the condition of your brain, feel the muscles in the calves of your legs. Nietzsche said, "Never trust a thought you have sitting down." Undoubtedly, we should have all these Bible School sermons while on the run.

Friends, we do not move enough. God said, "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food" (Genesis 3:19 NIV). If you never

sweat, you shouldn't eat. Let me quote Paul: "If you don't work, you don't eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10 CEV).

### **Do your best**

The principle is clear: We belong to God. We should do the best we can.

Now, none of us can do it all right. If I were only concerned about health, I wouldn't be in evangelism. I would not travel. You can't go to the extreme of selling your soul to keep your body alive—it's not worth that.

You do the best you can. And God will give you 100 percent interest in return for every cent of effort you make.





## CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

### Romans 12: Part Two

Love, Grace, Mercy, Imputed  
Righteousness—So What?

In his commentary on this chapter, F. F. Bruce says:

Doctrine is never taught in the Bible simply that it may be known; it is taught in order that it may be translated into practice. ‘If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.’ (John 13:17)

Hence, Paul repeatedly follows up an exposition of doctrine with an ethical exhortation, the two being linked together, as here, by ‘therefore.’ (cf. Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 3:5.)

William Barclay speaks similarly when he affirms that Paul:

Can, and does, wrestle with the deepest problems which theology has to offer, but he always ends with the ethical demands which govern the situation and life of every man. (*Romans*, page 168)

#### **Mercy and transformation**

We have in the first two verses what Bishop Anders Nygren calls “the basic rule of Paul’s ethics.” Having received the mercy of God, our lives are transformed. This is ever Paul’s approach to morality.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The opening verses of this chapter are saying that true worship is the offering of every talent and every opportunity and every day

to God for service. We are now reminded that when we are born anew into the body of Christ, our special work is born with us. Our natural faculties are set alight by the Holy Spirit and become spiritual gifts for serving the church and the world. (See verses 3-8.)

No Christian must strive to be everything. It is not so important to do all the good that we could do, as to do the good that God indicates that we should do, remembering we are only members of the body, a tiny portion of an ever-growing, multifaceted organism indwelled by the Spirit of God.

Whatever gifts we have of body, mind, or spirit are God's generous bestowments upon us. We cannot lay claim to anything, for all has been given.

The only thing which is really our own is our sin.

### **Love, the firstfruits**

The substance of verses 3-8 parallels Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 12 about the body of Christ, and the following verses of this chapter have their counterpart in 1 Corinthians 13.

Regarding this second section, Nygren writes:

It is not by chance that Paul mentions love first. He does so elsewhere. When, for instance, in Galatians 5:22 he speaks of 'the fruit of the spirit,' it is love which is named first.

That love has that place does not mean it is only first in a series of comparable qualities, but that it includes the rest in itself. (*Romans*, page 425)

The same author suggests that to see this truth clearly, we need only to make "love" the subject throughout these verses to see the parallel to 1 Corinthians 13.

So we would read: "Love hates what is evil but clings to what is good. It loves the brethren and never flags in zeal, being aglow in

the spirit and serving the Lord. Love rejoices in hope, is placid in tribulation, and is constant in prayer,” etc.

### **We worship everywhere**

In view of the loving admonitions of Romans 12, it is our privilege to say not only, “I regularly attend church to worship God,” but, “I worship God in my daily work, in my home, my office, my factory, among fellow employees and neighbors.”

Remember the man who arrived at church very late and found the people emerging: “Oh, the service is over!” he said with regret. “No, service is just beginning,” was the reply he received. And the only service acceptable to God is the service of love.

Any service rendered with the intent of earning heaven reveals that the person is entirely ignorant of the gospel and is the possessor of a wretched religion.

Loving service alone is wings—not weight, privilege—not burden. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).



## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

### **Romans 13: The Christian and the State**

In his opening chapter, Paul had set forth the theme of his letter: “He who through faith is righteous shall live” (1:16–17 RSV). His first chapters enlarged on the thesis that one can be righteous only through faith, but the last chapters of the Epistle enlarged the second thesis: “shall live.” He has not turned from good news to good advice, but he is showing that there is an inevitable, practical result in the life of those who claim to believe the good news.

The sword of the Lord has two edges. One is law and one is gospel. The gospel is concerned with the indicative, but the law with the imperative.

For example, in Colossians 3:3 we read: “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

That is the indicative and tells the gospel truth that when Christ, our representative, died, God counted that the whole race died legally.

But in the fifth verse, we find these words:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

#### **The imperative to change**

Here is the imperative that causes us to experience a life change. One should note that the imperative always grows out of the

indicative, not the other way around. Thomas Erskine of Scotland long ago said: “The gospel is grace, and ethics is gratitude” (see Luke 7:47).

The New Testament echoes with wonderful indicative statements. See Ephesians 2:5-6, which tells us that we died with Christ, rose with him, and sat down with him in heavenly places.

See also Romans 7:4: “You also died to the law through the body of Christ.”

### **Christ’s experience, not ours**

The important thing to remember is that all these indicative statements are talking about the experience of Christ which is imputed or reckoned to the believer. The imperative always has to do with our response. There must be receiving through believing before there can be any achieving.

Colossians 3:9 and 10 is an excellent example of the principle under discussion:

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

Paul is not saying that if we stop lying, then we will put on the new nature. He is saying the opposite—if we put on the new nature, we will stop lying. With Martin Luther we can joyously proclaim:

Mine is Christ’s living and dying as if I had lived his life and died his death.

Thus, sanctification is always the fruit of Christian experience and never the root.

When John Wesley heard the gospel, he gave up his legalism but continued his self-denying life, not now as the root but as the fruit of his faith.

## **Passive and active**

Legalism says: “You must be good to be saved.” The gospel says: “You must be saved to be good.” It’s not an issue of who you are, but whose you are.

Salvation is a gift, and our part in receiving it is passive. But the results are always active. Sadly, those who turn the passive into the active also often turn about and turn the active into the passive and teach a sanctification that’s all of Christ’s doing.

It is not that way with the New Testament admonitions. Read again Colossians 3.

For example, note verse 8:

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

In sanctification, we cooperate with the moving Spirit of God and respond and choose and do, working out what he is working in us.

## **Justification, then life experience**

The order of Romans follows these gospel truths. Chapters 1–5 spell out justification by faith, and then beginning in Chapter 6, we move into the quality of life experienced by those who receive the gospel.

That is given in principle in Chapters 6–8, but now in Chapters 12 to the end of Romans it is spelled out in detail.

Beginning with Chapter 12:1, Paul gives a series of new relationships for the believer.

He will spell out the Christian’s relationship to God, to him or herself, to brothers and sisters in Christ, to enemies, to the state, to the law, to time, to church controversies.

### **Romans 13—the Christian and the state**

Let us attend now to Romans 13, the chapter that deals with the Christian's relationship to the state. Historian J. W. Allen has said that this chapter "contains what are perhaps the most important words ever written for the history of political thought."

But its practical import was to guide Christians who were to witness a series of persecutions from the Roman state, leading to martyrdom for many.

### **The state is appointed by God**

Paul in this chapter enlarges on the words of Christ found in Mark 12:17: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

Essentially, he says these things:

- 1) The state is appointed by God to govern. Even bad government is better than anarchy.
- 2) It is for the citizen's benefit to obey the government in all its legitimate demands.

### **The divine right of the state**

However, it should be remembered that while there is such a thing as the divine right of the state, just as surely there is a divine right of revolution. Paul, here, is stating a general principle for normal conditions. He is not setting forth an absolute.

When we compare Revelation 13 with Romans 13, we find the state to be a servant for the devil instead of a servant for God, and, therefore, a servant claiming to be Lord and not to be obeyed.

The midwives in Egypt disobeyed Pharaoh when his regulation was evil; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar; and Daniel disobeyed Darius.



The determining principle is found in Acts 5:29: “We must obey God rather than men!”

### **Show obedience where appropriate**

The everyday practical significance of this chapter is clear. Obedience must be rendered to the government in all areas where it has the right to govern, and rendered not merely as a matter of prudence but as a matter of conscience.

We obey not only because it is dangerous to do otherwise, but because it is right to submit to the representatives of God. But John Stott offers an important caveat:

We need to be cautious, however, in our interpretation of Paul’s statements. He cannot be taken to mean that all the Caligulas, Herods, Neros, and Domitians of New Testament times, and all the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins, and Saddams of our times were personally appointed by God, that God was responsible for their behavior, or that their authority is in no circumstances to be resisted.  
(*Romans*, p. 340)

Paul now moves to the matter of our relationships to individual citizens, and particularly our brothers and sisters in the church. We quote him:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.

The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor.

Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8–10)

### **The love of Christ before ethics**

It is important at this point to remember the New Testament never deals in mere morality or ethics. These only come to the fore after the constraining love of Christ has been given its prior place.

Again we say: “The gospel is grace, and ethics is gratitude.” At the right time and in the right place, Paul is not at all squeamish in quoting divine laws. Too many Christians have forgotten that love has to do with motive, rather than with matter.

We still need guidance about conduct, for our thinking is not always clear.

### **You will love one another**

The New Testament, in quoting the Decalogue, puts most of the stress on the second table, because in the first century the Jews were meticulous about the first table but often neglected the second. Both Christ and Paul reversed that emphasis.

The mark of the Christian is that he or she loves people. Jesus could say:

All men will know that you are my disciples, if you will love one another. (John 13:35)

And the beloved disciple wrote:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love, remains in death. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he’s a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 3:14, 19–21)

## **Forever in debt to our brothers**

Origen commented on this passage in Romans 13:

The debt of love remains with us permanently and never leaves us; this is a debt which we both discharge every day and forever owe.

What a different world it would be if this Christian injunction was understood and applied. Scripture says, 'We are members one of another.' (Ephesians 4:25 RSV)

Every man and woman we meet is the purchase of the blood of Christ and is to be respected. 'He who despises his neighbor is a sinner.' (Proverbs 14:21)

## **From love to hope**

Paul has talked about the animating principle of love, and now he turns to the purifying motive of hope.

We quote him again:

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:11–14)

## **Deliverance draws nigh**

Paul is probably thinking of the Roman soldier who, at the rising of the sun, awoke, laid aside his sleeping garments, and put on his gleaming armor. Paul is saying that the night of sin is near its end, and soon the glorious day of final deliverance will be here, and we should live accordingly.

We are to put on the armor of God that is described in Ephesians 6 and live worthy of our calling. It was when Augustine heard a child's words while playing—"take and read"—that he took up the manuscript of Romans and read these words and was touched by the Spirit of God.

When he was changed, he began to change the world and left his mark on it forever.

### **Time is short**

Many sensitive people down through the ages have been haunted by the shortness of time. Bunyan said: "If a man would live well, let him fetch his last day to him and make that his company keeper." It is good to remember that the first twenty years is the longest half of our life. With Andrew Marvel, "we should always hear 'Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near.'"

Paul in this passage is thinking of the Second Coming of Christ, but we should remember that for us, the end of the world may be not that great, climactic, stress-filled event, but our own encounter with death.

The good news is that once we have accepted the love of God as manifested in Christ, we are at that very moment ready for death and for the Second Advent and for heaven.

If the penitent thief, who had known little of sanctification, could yet be sure that heaven was his, should not every believer have the same joyous assurance?

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

### **Romans 14: Help for the Sensitive Soul**

We often hear about the unscrupulous, and we fear them. But there is something else to be feared—excessive scrupulosity. For hundreds of years in the Roman Catholic Church, there have been wise teachers of the art of dealing with those who are excessively scrupulous. It is equally needed in Protestantism. One should never abuse one's conscience, but also one should never let one's conscience abuse him.

This chapter is known as the chapter of the *adiaphora*—the chapter concerning things indifferent. Here, Paul will deal with typical situations where believers are inclined to turn molehills into mountains and atoms into worlds.

#### **The nonessentials**

Paul would have loved the later dictum of Augustine: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

Having dealt with the essentials in his earlier chapters, Paul now comes to the nonessentials, which can often be made to loom too large and destroy the peace of Christians, individually and in community.

While the Christian should have an intense concentration on God's viewpoint about everything and desire to please God in the jots and tittles, he or she must strive to maintain a sense of proportion, lest spiritual life be eclipsed by gnats.

### **Love is everything**

These verses are a call to Christian charity and remind us of the limits of Christian liberty. Earlier, Paul had written that he was “free from all men” and “servant of all.” We are to remember both.

The Christian is thoroughly emancipated from irrational inhibitions and taboos. But as F. F. Bruce has reminded us, we are not to be in bondage to our emancipation.

Remember, it was this apostle who not only wrote that “circumcision is nothing,” but also that “uncircumcision is nothing.” But love is everything. And that love is a disciplined love, not an emotional plethora, irrationally poured out.

### **Patient with the weak**

The warning in this chapter is for those who believe themselves to be mature Christians. These are to be gentle with those who are excessively scrupulous, because the latter are not well-informed about what is and what is not required of Christ’s followers.

Christian freedom is not to be used in such a way as to make another believer stumble, for whenever we encourage anyone to do anything against their conscience, we do them harm.

### **Conscientious about food**

Paul is particularly looking here (verses 2-22) at the issue of fast days. Some believers on certain days ate only vegetarian fare and believed that that was a vital obligation for them.

Let it be clearly understood that this is not a discussion about physical health. If anything has been made clear by science in this generation, which has practical bearing for all of us, it is the fact that the nearer we get to a completely vegetarian diet, the better our health should be.

### **Not the Decalogue here**

Neither is this a discussion of the fourth commandment. Paul would never have said about any commandment of the Decalogue

and our relation thereto: “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”

None of the sacred precepts spoken by the voice of God and written by his finger were or are up for grabs. The New Testament greatly deepens the implications of each one of them.

What a challenge for Christian charity when Paul writes: “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall” (v. 21).

Or, as he says earlier, “Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way” (v. 13).

### **Christians and discipline**

The chapter is reminding us that Christianity is not essentially a matter of rules and regulations. Any life that is governed primarily by such is not essentially Christian.

On the other hand, to be thoroughly Christian is to be thoroughly disciplined; but all things are subject to the one principle expressed by the question: “What is most to the glory of God and the good of man?”

### **Tolerance or despair?**

We should be aware also of the temptation to “the open mind.” It has been well said that some people’s minds are so open that their brains fall out. The only excuse for an open mind is the same as for an open mouth—that it may fasten on something worth digesting.

Lots of people’s minds are open at both ends and nothing is retained ever.

Neither does Paul intend to encourage us to a non-Christian tolerance. We should remember the wise words of Dorothy Sayers:

In the world it is called Tolerance, but in Hell, it is called despair ... the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing,

seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.

The true Christian should be intolerant of every kind of evil and yet be filled with charity for the inevitable weaknesses and deficits in knowledge and achievement of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

William Barclay suggests that the first verse of this chapter could well be translated as follows: “Welcome the man who is weak in the faith, but do not introduce him straight away to the discussion of questions which can only raise doubts.”

It was G. K. Chesterton who said: “We have found all the questions that can be found. It is time we stopped looking for questions and started looking for answers.”

Barclay also quotes the words of Goethe: “Tell me of your certainties, I have doubts enough of my own.”

### **We all think differently**

We are all as different as flowers or weeds in a garden. A famous Cambridge saying goes like this: “Whatever thy hand finds to do, do it with all thy might — but remember that someone else thinks differently.”

Because we are different, we think differently and feel differently. There is no need to surrender our own convictions, but we need sympathy and understanding and true tolerance for those who see things otherwise.

We are to remember the words of Oliver Cromwell: “I beseech you, by the bowels of Christ, consider that you may be mistaken.”

### **We are not islands**

Throughout this chapter, Paul is reminding us that it is impossible to live an isolated life. We are all connected with one another. “No



man is an island.” Yet, there is a time when we will be very much alone—when we stand for the unpopular truths of God.

Verse 17 shines out like a beacon light in this chapter:

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

### **Gnats and camels**

The sure mark of Phariseeism is when we make an atom of the world and a world of an atom—as made clear in Matthew 23. Each of the indictments against the religious leaders who opposed Christ offers an illustration of trivializing the great and magnifying the minute.

Think of the hyperbole regarding those who swallowed camels and strained out gnats, who crossed sea and land to make a convert and then turned that one into someone worse than themselves, who adorned the prisons of the prophets of their forefathers yet lived covetously and maliciously after their holy task of whitewashing had been achieved.

### **Keeping your balance**

We should remember the words of Luther, that man is like a drunken peasant who falls out of the saddle of his horse one side or the other.

The kingdom of God is not food and drink, yet our individual decisions about food and drink may affect our usefulness in the kingdom of God and the amount of joy in our service.

Peace and joy are difficult to achieve when one is suffering from stomach upset or headache or excessive fatigue.

As regards the matter of righteousness, food and drink have little to offer. But as regards the issue of effective service for Christ and the enjoyment of good health, food and drink are tremendously important.

What we eat and drink today walks and talks tomorrow. Most people in the civilized world suicide by knife and fork.

### **Bad bread**

We have turned God's good gifts of the field into gastronomical absurdities, beautifully wrapped and appealingly set forth by those eager to take our money for that which is not bread.

It will seem narrow to some but wise to others to suggest that in this generation, total abstinence is a better Christian choice than temperance.

The clear rationale for this is that alcohol brings an overwhelming burden upon at least a quarter of the families of the nation.

### **The dangers of alcohol**

About one in eight drinkers becomes a compulsive alcoholic, and who knows if he or she will be the one?

Should we encourage another person who might find himself or herself enmeshed in such a dreadful tyranny? In Bible times distillation was unknown, and mild wines were sometimes more healthful than the water available.

Furthermore, in those times men who had drunk deeply did not follow that exercise by sitting at the wheel of a highly dangerous machine.

### **Implications for all**

We suggest that the principles of this chapter have far-reaching implications for every thoughtful Christian in our own danger-filled society.

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

### **Romans 15—The Supreme Example**

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up, for even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’ ... May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:1–3, 5–7)

Chapter 15 of Romans continues the theme of Chapter 14 and invokes the heaviest of spiritual artillery in the war against selfishness and conceit. Paul looks to the example of Christ as a supreme motivation for a life permeated with unselfish love.

#### **The unity of Jews and Gentiles**

Paul, in this chapter, moves almost imperceptibly from his theme of unity in the church, despite the disparity between the weak and the strong, to the unity of Jews and Gentiles as followers of the same Lord. And in both instances, the unity brings forth praise to God—worship with united voices and consequent individual service.

How telling are his words of challenge, that we are to accept one another because Christ has accepted us.

Who are we to withhold love from another when Christ has loved us so?

It is so easy to forget that love is the debt we owe to everybody. Christians, too, are guilty of selfishness, not only in deed and word, but even in glance.

None with whom we are associated should be neglected. All are precious in God's sight, and the nearer we live to God, the nearer we come to those who are the purchase of Christ's blood.

### **Realism versus pessimism**

Paul next invokes passages from the Old Testament, predicting the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles, and climaxes this collection with these words: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (13).

The Christian is a realist, but never a pessimist. The Christian is both realist and idealist. Christians believe in positive thinking, and yet are aware that all the positive thinking in the world could not on its own have delivered John the Baptist from his fatal dungeon.

Paul has pointed us to the promises of God found in Scripture, and earlier in this chapter, he had declared:

Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope ....

It is fitting that this book, which had begun with its discussion of the atonement of Christ as a manifestation of God's love and then moved to the demand for faith, that we might inherit all the good things of grace, should now, towards the end, speak about hope.

### **The riches of hope**

The person who has hope has everything, but the person without hope has nothing. With hope, the poorest man is rich, and without hope, the richest man is poor. The death of hope leads to the hope for death.

But it must also be said that hopes often deceive us. It is a legitimate question to inquire whether the hopes we entertained before we were Christians gave us more pleasure or more pain.

Hope that is not linked to the gospel is often a false prophet, and its pictures are too highly colored, casting illusions over the future. As Alexander Maclaren, the famous preacher, declared:

Hope can color the far off hills with glorious purple which reaches to barren rocks and cold snow. Hope has held out prizes that are never won, and made millions toil and struggle to find ultimately only empty husks.

Despite these facts, it is clear that hope is a faculty implanted by God, intended to find its true foundation only in the gospel. It is the objects of the Christian hope that are certain and sure, guaranteeing all blessedness.

### **Right feelings, right thoughts**

Observe that verse 15 of this chapter does not make faith succeed the experience of joy and peace, but, rather, the order is the reverse. It is as we believe, that joy and peace and hope are God's gifts to us through the Holy Spirit, who comes and who abides as we trust the Redeemer.

Right feelings are the result of right thoughts.

In the later verses of the chapter, Paul speaks of his own personal hopes. He hopes to see the believers in Rome shortly, and to be blessed by them and to bless them. He hopes to minister in Jerusalem again and then go on to Spain.

His eyes were ever fixed on "the regions beyond," and he tells his friends in the Imperial City of his wide-reaching plans, that they may join him in prayer for the successful fulfillment of his hopes.

### **Practical Christianity**

Observe from this latter part of the chapter how practical true

Christianity is! Paul affirms that he's taking a love gift from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia to the needy Christians in Jerusalem.

He is suggesting that the Gentile churches owe the believers in Jerusalem all their spiritual blessings, and that it was a worthy response that they should make a material gift to help those who had ministered to them in spiritual things.

Love that is not expressed in giving is not love at all. Those who claim to love God and never give to fellow Christians in need are mistaken about their relationship to heaven.

These last verses are reminiscent of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." Paul had begun his letter by talking about the gospel as being the power of God to salvation to every individual who believed. Paul, now, towards the end of his letter, draws from Scripture the promise that multitudes from the ends of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, will become a united people, who with one voice will praise God throughout eternity.

## CHAPTER FIFTY

### **Romans 16: The Roll Call**

The last chapter of Romans is not only a list of Paul's faithful Christian friends in Rome. (A list that reminds us that God knows all of us by name.) Chapter 16 also assures us that Christ will soon crush Satan. Until then, we cling to salvation through faith alone. That faith produces a fruit called obedience, and lays hold of Christ's strength.

The list of Paul's Roman friends found in the last chapter of this letter reminds us that the names of all believers are written in heaven, and that one day "the roll will be called up yonder."

Here, we have a pre-intimation of the calling of the saints to glory at the last Great Day. Paul offers personal greetings to 26 individuals here, and refers to five house-churches.

#### **Women are prominent**

Particularly notice how many of these individuals are women.

Indeed, one of them, Junia, is called an apostle, and another, Phoebe, is described as being an officeholder in the congregation at Cenchrea. The phrase about Phoebe, that she had been "a great help," comes from a Greek word implying leadership.

The New Testament is undoubtedly the most pro-woman book in the ancient world. It declares that there is "no longer male nor female" in the sense of the priority of spiritual privilege.

As Christ was ministered to by many women, so the greater part of his church in all ages has been composed of the gentler sex.

Christ, himself, who embodied all the virtues of both sexes, has ever made overwhelming appeal to women to hear the gospel. It is quite clear that women were prominent in Christian ministry in apostolic times, and this chapter alludes to that fact repeatedly.

Where Phoebe in verse 1 is referred to as a servant, it is implied that she was prominent in ministry, for this same Greek term is elsewhere translated “minister.”

### **Loving words for his friends**

How lovingly these words read! How affectionate Paul was and how appreciative of the loving service of others! We can understand, therefore, why John Stott declares that:

The most interesting instructive aspect of church diversity in Rome is that of gender. Nine out of the 26 persons greeted are women. (*Romans*, 395)

Observe that Priscilla of verse 3, there and in three other New Testament passages, is named before her husband. She was obviously the better known of the two and probably the most active in Christian work.

Again, Stott’s comment is worthy: “Paul appears to recognize and not to criticize her leadership” (*Ibid*, 396).

While some translations in verse 7 use Junias, most scholars agree that the better translation is Junia, which is feminine; and, as earlier observed, she is here classified as an outstanding apostle.

We should remember the term “apostle” was used often in a broader sense than just the twelve whom Christ had personally appointed. They were the equivalent of what we would call missionaries today.

All of this makes clear the truth that, again, Stott expresses so well when he writes that Paul “was not at all the male chauvinist of popular fantasy” (*Ibid.*).



### **The individual touch**

Another name that stands out is the name Rufus. And note that Paul says that the mother of Rufus is his mother, too. A beautiful touch. This Rufus may be the son of Simon the Cyrenian. (See Mark 15:21, where Simon is described as the father of Alexander and Rufus.)

The fact that Mark identifies the father through the sons means that the sons were well-known to the community that received that book, though the father may not have been. Furthermore, Mark's Gospel originally was written for the church at Rome.

### **The mighty and noble few**

These verses suggest that while it was true that not many mighty and not many noble were numbered among the Christians—there were some mighty and noble. And some of the few were in “Caesar’s household.”

Many commentators believe that Aristobulus who was mentioned was the grandson of Herod the Great and a close acquaintance of the Emperor Claudius, and that Narcissus of verse 11 may have been the well-known freed slave of that name who powerfully influenced the same emperor.

These verses are not necessarily claiming that these people were themselves Christians, but that their households included such. William Barclay has a splendid comment on the last verses of this chapter:

One of the most interesting things in this whole chapter is the way in which again and again Paul characterizes people in one single sentence. He has no space to say more, but a single sentence sums up the people about whom he is writing.

Here (verses 21–23) there are two great summaries. Gaius is the man of hospitality; Quartus in one word is the brother. It is a great thing to go down to history as the man with the

open house and the man with the brotherly heart.

Some day people will sum us up in one sentence. What will that sentence be? (*Romans*, 241)

### **Seed warfare**

But I want you to notice verse 20:

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.  
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.  
(Romans 16:20)

The first part of the verse, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” is an allusion to Genesis 3:15.

That verse, so early in Scripture, tells of the warfare between the woman and the serpent, Eve and Satan, between the two seeds, the church and the world.

Eve’s particular Seed (Christ) will crush the serpent’s (Satan’s) head, though Satan will bruise the Crusher’s heel.

This all happened at the cross, legally. The complete outworking of it, the consummation, takes place at the Second Coming—and the Third Coming, after the millennium when Satan is destroyed.

### **When warfare ceases**

Paul, alluding to Genesis 3:15, is promising us that the battle between good and evil is not always going to continue. Every one of us gets tired of the battle—every one of us.

I don’t think there’s a Christian minister who ever lived who hasn’t been tempted to retire prematurely. It’s only a temptation, because the minister soon thinks of Paul’s words, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16 NIV). And he’s too scared to invite that woe.

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” In other words, the conflicts, the troubles that now face you will one day be over.

It will be good in that great day to be able to show that you were a man, a woman, in your time of trial. It would be a terrible thing when Jesus comes to wipe away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 7:17; 21:4), if we had none to wipe away!

Paul could say, “I bear on my body the marks [or scars] of Jesus” (Galatians 6:17 NIV). We don’t have a bruise on us that he doesn’t recognize. They identify us to him. But the battering of this world is not forever.

### **Last word faith**

Come now, please, to the very end of Romans.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16:25–27 RSV)

Friends, I want you to notice that just before the last part of Paul’s doxology, the phrase, “to the only wise God,” the last word just before it in verse 26 is “faith.” And that “faith” is part of the phrase, “the obedience of faith.”

### **Saved through faith**

Never make the mistake of thinking that faith is a work. Or that you are saved by works. Faith is just a channel along which grace runs.

You are never saved because of faith. You are saved through faith. In fact, where you read, “salvation through faith,” you could better

paraphrase it as “salvation through Christ,” or “salvation through grace,” or “salvation through the mercy of God.”

Paul uses “faith” simply to emphasize that salvation is something I have to accept. That’s the only way to receive salvation—because it’s a gift. We shouldn’t be so proud, or so neglectful, as to hesitate to accept it, to lay hold of it.

### **Obedience of faith**

You notice it is “the obedience of faith.” Paul doesn’t want us to fall into the error of cheap grace.

We mentioned earlier that if people don’t accuse you of saying, “The law is finished. You can sin and get away with it”—you’re not preaching the gospel. However, what they accuse us of is not true. It may sound as though we are preaching antinomianism, but we are not. We believe in the obedience of faith.

### **The obedience springs from the faith**

It’s never “the faith of obedience.” As if the sheer effort of obedience could produce faith! Rather, obedience is the fruit, not the root, of our relationship to Jesus.

Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 7:1–4? I paraphrase: “You are married to Christ that you might bring forth fruit unto holiness.” It’s the union with Jesus that brings forth goodness and holiness.

That union depends upon having Christ in your mind, upon studying the Word, the Bible, upon believing the Word, and practicing the Word. That’s how the union with Christ happens.

It has to be constant, like breathing. You don’t breathe once for all time. You keep on breathing, all the time. Forever. He will enable you to do it if you ask him.

### **Lay hold of Christ’s strength**

The last thought I leave with you from our study on Romans is

one you've heard before. It's not so much new light that we need. We need to practice the old light we already know—that's what we need.

Here is the climax of Paul's "gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ" (Romans 16:25). It is, "To him who is able to strengthen you" (verse 25).

Oh, I need that strength. I need that strength so much. And so do you.

In order to get it, remember what Martin Luther said: "If I look to myself, I do not know how I could ever be saved. But if I look to Christ, I do not know how I could ever be lost."

So, my friends, whatever your situation is—and many of us carry heavy burdens, I know—Christ is the answer. But in his time, and in his way. Don't try to dictate to him.

Pin your eternal hopes on him. Pin your present hopes on him. Hand over to him your worries. Hand over to him your burdens. Confess your weaknesses. Say, "Lord, you are my chief need." Lay hold of Christ.

That is the way of salvation. And it is glorious!



## CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

### Looking unto Jesus

“Three words only:  
but in three words is  
the whole secret of life.”

*Theodore Monod*

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;  
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. (Hebrews 12:2, KJV)

Looking unto Jesus in the Scriptures, to learn there what he is,  
what he has done, what he gives, what he demands; to find in his  
character our model, in his requirements our instruction, in his  
precepts our law, in his promises our support, in his person and in  
his work a full satisfaction offered to all the wants of our soul.

Looking unto Jesus crucified, to find in his blood shed our ransom,  
our pardon, our peace.

Looking unto Jesus risen again, to find in him the righteousness  
which alone justifies us, and permits us, all unworthy as we are, to  
approach with assurance in his name him who is his Father and  
our Father, his God and our God.

Looking unto Jesus glorified, to find in him our heavenly advocate,  
completing by his intercession the work of his mercy and of our  
salvation, appearing even now for us before the presence of God,  
and supplying the imperfection of our prayers by the efficacy of  
those which the Father always hears.

Looking unto Jesus revealed by the Holy Spirit, to find in his

abiding communion the purification of our defiled hearts, the enlightening of our darkened minds, the transformation of our rebellious wills; to be enabled to triumph over all the assaults of the world and of the evil one, withstanding their power by Jesus our strength, baffling their wiles by Jesus our wisdom; sustained by the sympathy of Jesus who was spared no temptation, and by the succor of Jesus who yielded to none.

Looking unto Jesus to receive from him the task and the cross of each day, with grace sufficient to bear the cross, and to fulfill the task; patient with his patience, active with his activity, loving with his love, asking not, "what can I?" but "what cannot he?" and waiting upon his strength which is made perfect in weakness.

Looking unto Jesus in order that the brightness of his face may be the light of our darkness; that our joys may be holy and our sorrows calm; that he may humble us and he raise us up; that he may afflict and he may comfort us; that he may make us poor, and he make us rich; that he may teach us to pray and he answer our prayers; that even while leaving us in the world, he may separate us from it, our life being hid with him in God, and our conduct bearing witness to him before men.

Looking unto Jesus who having reentered his Father's house, is occupied in preparing there a place for us, in order that this blessed hope may encourage us to live without repining, and may prepare us to die without regret, when the day shall come to encounter that last enemy, which he has conquered for us, which we shall conquer through him, that enemy of whom he has made a friend, once the king of terrors, now the messenger of eternal peace.

Looking unto Jesus, who gives repentance as well as remission of sins, to receive from him hearts that are conscious of their misery and come to deplore it at his feet.

Looking unto Jesus, that he who is the author of faith, as he is its subject, may teach us to look to him, that he who is its finisher may keep us in that faith unto the end.



Unto Jesus, and not to ourselves, to our thoughts, our desires our purposes. Unto Jesus, and not to the world, to its lusts, its examples, its maxims, its judgments. Unto Jesus, and not to Satan, whether he seek to frighten us by his rage, or to seduce us by his flattery. Oh, how should we rid ourselves of useless questions, of disquieting scruples, of dangerous parleyings with the evil one, of dissipation of spirit, of vain fancies, of bitter disappointments, of painful struggles, of lamentable falls, by looking straight to Jesus, and following him whenever he leads, too anxious not to lose sight of the path which he marks for us to cast even a glance to those in which he does not think fit to lead us!

Unto Jesus, and not to our meditations and prayers, to our pious conversion, or to our edifying reading, to the holy assemblies we frequent, nor even to our partaking of the Supper of the Lord. Let us faithfully use all these means of grace, but without confounding them with grace itself, and without turning off our looks from him, who alone can render them efficacious by communicating himself to us by their means.

Unto Jesus, and not to our position in the Christian church, to the name which we bear, to the doctrine which we profess, to the idea which others form of our piety, or to that which we form of it ourselves.

Unto Jesus, and not to our brethren, not even to the best and most beloved among them. In following a man we run a risk of going wrong; in following Jesus we are certain never to go wrong. If Jesus keeps his place between us and our nearest friend, our attachment to man will be at once less direct and more sweet, less passionate and more pure, less indispensable and more useful, an instrument of rich blessings in the hands of God when he pleases to make use of it, and in its absence a blessing still, when he pleases to do without it.

Unto Jesus, and not to the obstacles which meet us on our journey. As soon as we stop to consider them they startle us, they stagger us, they overthrow us, incapable as we are of understanding either

the reason for which they are permitted, or the means by which we may overcome them. The Apostle was engulfed as soon as he set himself to look at the billows, agitated by the tempest; so long as he looked unto Jesus, he walked upon the waves as upon a rock. The more difficult our task the heavier our cross, the more needful it is that we should look only unto Jesus.

Unto Jesus, and not to the temporal blessings which we enjoy. To look first to these blessings is to expose ourselves to be so captivated by them, that they hide from us the light of him who gives them to us. To look first unto Jesus is to receive from all these benefits, chosen by his wisdom, bestowed by his love, a thousand times more precious because we take them at his hand, to enjoy them in his fellowship and to use them to his glory.

Unto Jesus, and not to our sins. The contemplation of sin only brings death; the contemplation of Jesus brings life. It was not looking to his wounds, but looking to the serpent of brass that healed the Israelite.

Unto Jesus, and not to the law; the law gives commands, and does not give strength to perform them. The law always condemns, and never pardons; to place ourselves again under the law is to withdraw ourselves from grace. In proportion as we make our obedience the means of our salvation, we lose our peace, our strength, our joy, because we have forgotten that Jesus is “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” As soon as the law has constrained us to seek him, our only Savior, it is for him only to require of us obedience; an obedience which he at once bestows and prescribes and which, rightly understood, is less a consequence of our salvation than it is a part of that salvation itself, and, like all the rest, a grace.

Unto Jesus, and not to what we do for him. Too much taken up with our work, we may forget our master; it is possible to have the hands full and the heart empty. Taken up with our master, we cannot forget our work; if the heart is filled with his love, how can the hands not be active in his service?

Unto Jesus, and not to the apparent success of our efforts. Apparent success is not the measure of real success, and besides, God has not commanded us to succeed, but to work. It is of our work that he will require an account and not of our success; why then take thought about it before the time? To look to success is to walk by sight; to look to Jesus, and to persevere in following and serving him in spite of all discouragements, is to walk by faith. Unto Jesus, and not to the degree of grief which our sins have caused us, or to the degree of humiliation which they produce in us. If only we are so humbled by them as to be no longer satisfied with ourselves, if only we are so grieved by them as to look unto Jesus that he may deliver us from them, it is all he demands of us, and it is, moreover, this look more than all besides that will make our tears flow and our pride fall.

Unto Jesus, and not to the liveliness of our joy, or to the sensible fervor of our love; otherwise, if only this love seem to cool, if only this joy chance to fail us—whether as the consequences of our sloth, or for the trial of our faith, immediately, our emotion being lost, we shall think we have lost our strength and shall abandon ourselves to melancholy depression, if not to culpable inactivity. Oh, rather let us remember that, if sometimes the emotion and its sweetness fail us, faith and its power remain to us; and that we may be able “always to abound in the work of the Lord,” let us look without ceasing not to our hearts, which are always changing, but to Jesus, who is always the same.

Unto Jesus, and not to our faith. The last device of the Adversary when he cannot make us look elsewhere, is to turn our eyes from our Saviour to our faith and thus to discourage us if it is weak, and to fill us with pride if it is strong. And both in the one case and in the other to enfeeble us; for it is not from faith that strength comes, but it is from the Savior by faith; it is not by looking unto our look, it is by looking unto Jesus.

Looking unto Jesus, while we remain upon earth; to Jesus from moment to moment, without suffering ourselves to be distracted either by the recollections of a past, which we should leave behind

us, or by the anticipations of a future, of which we know nothing. Unto Jesus now, if we have never looked to him. Unto Jesus anew, if we have ceased to do so. Unto Jesus alone.

Unto Jesus again. Unto Jesus always, with a look more and more earnest, more and more confident: “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” and thus waiting for the hour when he shall call us to pass from earth to heaven, and from time to eternity—the promised hour, the blessed hour, when at length, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

[This article was written by the French writer Theodore Monod (1802–1856).]

## CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

### Questions on Romans

Q: The study of Romans certainly helps us gain great respect and reverence for Scripture. Please explain the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture as defended by the late Francis Schaeffer.

A: Francis Schaeffer, with whom I have spoken, was a very great Christian. He would probably be classified as an intelligent fundamentalist.

He was a godly man, a very good man. No doubt about that. He would have claimed for the Scriptures probably that they are inerrant in all their discussions of things historical and scientific, as well as religious. I think that was probably his position. (I recommend you read his books. They are worth reading.)

He was not necessarily correct in his view.

1) The Bible is perfect for its purpose. That purpose is given: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

2) Thus, the Bible is given for practical purposes. Take it as it reads, and none of you will be lost.

But don’t use it for purposes it wasn’t given for. It’s not an “Inquire Within” upon everything, on every topic and subject. The Bible’s main theme is the salvation of the soul through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to Timothy:

From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:15–17)

Paul did not write to Timothy:

From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise in history, trigonometry, physics, geology, mathematics, and geography.

The Bible is reliable in the great themes whereof it speaks. It is inerrant in every area where it intends to teach.

Why do I say such things? Let me give you a few examples:

At Christ's baptism, the Voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Right?

"No," someone says. "It says, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:17).

Which was said? "You are" or "This is"? Or did the Father repeat himself? (Nobody really believes that.)

Is this an error? No. In another sense, Yes. If you want pure, historical, factuality, it's an error. In terms of soteriology (the study of salvation), no.

God was conveying both ideas. To the Son, it comes across as "You are my beloved Son." To the crowd, it comes across as "This is my beloved Son."

Understood one way, these two verses look like an error. Taken another way, a rich insight.

John tells us about the disciples rowing in a strong wind on Lake Galilee. "When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water" (John 6:19).

Tell me, didn't the Holy Spirit who inspired these words know, or not care, whether it was three or three and a half miles?

Paul says to the rowdy Corinthians, "I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius" (1 Corinthians 1:14). Two verses later he remembers, "Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas" (verse 16). Has the Holy Spirit a bad memory?

The Bible is perfect for its purpose. It is inerrant in everything it intends to teach. When it says 76 times "the sun rises and sets" it is not trying to teach astronomy. It is using the language of appearance, which is just as legitimate as scientific reference. It is not an error.

Q: You say that Romans first teaches justification, then later deals with sanctification. I agree this is Paul's order in his letter. You teach that justification is the root of salvation, while sanctification is the fruit of salvation. Are you suggesting that sanctification automatically follows our believing the gospel?

Another part of my question is: If sanctification is not automatic, where do we find rules and methods to achieve some measure of sanctification?

Also, what is the place of my effort in sanctification, and how does that effort differ from works?

A: Sanctification is the fruit of salvation, but it doesn't come automatically.

Dear friends, the Bible uses about 20 verbs of effort in connection with its discussions about the God-devoted life. Here's a sampling: "Strive," "agonize," "run," "fight," "keep the body under," "mortify." There's not a hint in the New Testament of any kind of passivity in sanctification. There are only verbs of action.

However, sanctification differs from works, in that there is nothing meritorious in our efforts. All our efforts are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Not a leaf can move in the soul without the blowing of the Wind of the Spirit. So, God is the Author and the Finisher in sanctification, as well as in justification. The difference is that our efforts are enlisted in sanctification.

Both the Old and the New Testaments say we should examine our habits. “Let us examine our ways and test them” (Lamentations 3:40). Sanctification is an intense concentration on God’s viewpoint about everything.

Sanctification is your really wanting to know what God’s will is in this, that, and every other thing. Then, your part is to respond to the moving of the Spirit and will to do the good thing. It takes your effort, but it’s never initiated by you. It’s initiated by the Holy Spirit.

The method of sanctification is “looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2 KJV), “abiding in him” (see John 15:1-8), and “whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5).

**Q:** The “wrath of God” and “God’s wrath” are mentioned many times in Romans (2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19). What is meant by these terms?

**A:** It’s very important to understand that where there is an intense love, there has to be an intense antagonism to whatever might threaten the loved one.

The mother becomes angry with her child if he plays with fire. Why? Because she loves her little one.

The term “wrath of God” is not used to teach us that we have an overemotional God. With us, wrath or anger is an unpredictable, impulsive sort of thing manifested by people who are often unstable.

God’s wrath is not like that. God’s anger is his irreconcilable antagonism to evil, to whatever would do harm to those he loves. It



means God's resolution to wipe out all evil.

Q: What does Romans 2:13 mean? "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Romans 2:13 NIV).

A: The first thing we need to remember is that after an extensive explanation (or argument), this same writer says on the next page: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his [God's] sight by observing the law" (Romans 3:20).

So, however we are going to understand 2:13, it must be reconcilable with what 3:20 says.

What does "it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" mean? Well, note first what it doesn't say.

It doesn't say, "The doers of the law will be justified because of their obedience."

What the verse means is: "The thing that characterizes those who receive the forgiveness of God, those who receive the grace of God, is an intense desire to obey him." Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15 NIV). Or, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (KJV).

Here's all this verse is saying: "The thing that will be characteristic of the justified will be obedience." It is not saying that the saints' obedience is good enough to justify them—that it's not saying. Furthermore, the reference is to eschatological justification in the Last Judgment. It is not a reference to soteriological justification with its instant acceptance now.

Please also notice the warning in Galatians 5:4: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (NIV).

Q: If "the blood" in Romans 3:25 represents Christ's death,

does his flesh, or body—broken and shared—represent his righteousness shared with the whole world?

A: Remember, our Lord said at the Last Supper both, “This is my body given for you” and, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Matthew 22:19–20 NIV). The body was broken, the blood poured out.

They both represent his surrender of life, both of them. They are just two different ways of talking about the surrender of life. Because of Christ’s life, we can live forever. Because of his death, our death becomes only a sleep and not a permanent death. “The blood” and the “broken body” are both symbols of Christ’s death for us.

Q: Please comment on, “In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another” (Romans 1:27). I recently heard someone on a talk show claim that you cannot prove from the New Testament that homosexual and lesbian activities are wrong. Is such a claim correct? If not, how can I show from the New Testament that homosexuality is wrong?

A: I have talked to homosexuals who love Christ and who love the Bible. Those with homosexual inclinations that they do not fulfill live daily in one of the most difficult situations I know.

There are many misconceptions about homosexuality. Perhaps the major misconception is that the majority of homosexuals have willfully chosen that pathway. The truth is otherwise.

1) Because of problems in upbringing, many young men find themselves with homosexual proclivities before they even know how to spell the word. Such problems might include too recessive a father (or an absent father) or too dominating a mother. That is one thing that we must keep in mind—the early environment, the early home situation.

2) Another thing to keep in mind is that there's a big difference between having homosexual drives and fulfilling them. There are many, many, many men in this world who have homosexual drives who do not fulfill them.

On the other hand, when the Bible talks about the gift of celibacy, it makes it clear it's for very few. So, the homosexual or lesbian Christian faces a very difficult task. I believe it's that task that every homosexual or lesbian who claims to love Christ must attempt. But let's grant it's not an easy task. It's something that will mature Christian character quite rapidly.

3) Both the New Testament and Old Testament oppose homosexual practice. They are not opposed to homosexuals as such, because there is a difference between inclination and practice.

Let me read some relevant New Testament verses from Romans:

Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Romans 1:26–27)

You cannot read these texts and the rest of the passage in Romans and think the New Testament teaches that homosexual practice is normal and acceptable. You would have to negate the plain meaning of English, Greek, or Hebrew words to come up with the idea that Scripture sanctions homosexual practice. (See also 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and compare Leviticus 18:22.)

It is perfectly clear from both Old and New Covenants that the practice of homosexuality is not a practice designed of God. God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. But let's not be more pious than God and assume that because God is against homosexual practice, we can be against homosexuals.

Let us not make the mistake of thinking that the sins of the flesh are the worst sins. The Bible says the opposite of that. Sins of the flesh are sins. But Christ could say to the Pharisees (who were perfectly respectable in matters of the flesh), “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matthew 21:31).

After all, pride is a much worse sin than homosexuality. Yet, in our society, a person can indulge pride, and we allow that person to be a pastor of a church, president of a conference, bishop over a series of churches, or president of a world state!

4) Something has gone wrong with all of us, with human nature. That fundamental faultline manifests itself in many ways. It makes some people have a tendency toward alcoholism. Other people have a short fuse, a bad temper. Others have an irritable tongue.

Others are just sheer gluttons. Others crave human praise. None of us is whole. We’re all cracked to some degree, every one of us.

But, having said that, that does not endorse the practice of alcoholism, or bad temper, or gluttony. These practices are clearly wrong.

So with homosexuality.

I recently wrote to a very well-known author. I won’t name him. In my view, his approach to the topic of homosexuality goes beyond the limits of Scripture. I wrote to him:

A majority of homosexual men (not women), have hundreds of partners in a lifetime. This results in a Pandora’s Box of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). This places the health of individuals and societies in jeopardy. How any Christian could ever endorse such a dangerous life-style is beyond me. The Sixth Commandment forbids any practice threatening to health.

In summary: the New Testament and the Old Testament are both opposed to homosexual practice. Neither are opposed to homosexuals.

There are many homosexuals with the drives who do not practice homosexuality. It's not true that most have willfully chosen it as a cherished perversion. Most find themselves with these proclivities early in life (behavioral, genetic?).

Let's always remember the words of Jesus:

If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone. (John 8:7)

Our sins simply differ, that's all.

Q: What is the law of faith in Romans 3:27?

A: Let me read the verse from the KJV: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith."

A "law" here simply means a description of the way a thing works. Therefore, the "law of faith" is talking about "the principle of faith."

This is made clear in the NIV's rendering of the verse: "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith."

Q: Romans urges us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God (12:1). But what about death? What are your thoughts about cremation?

Romans warns us not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world (12:2). I have heard that in ancient times it was mainly the pagans who burned their dead. Believers buried their dead to teach about resurrection. What does the Bible say about cremation?

A: The Bible says nothing specifically about cremation. That would indicate it is not an issue of great importance.

After all, the New Testament teaches that whatever happens to our body, resurrection is sure in Christ. God does not have to use the same elements for resurrection that we had in this life. There could be an old sailor who lost a leg in one ocean and lost an arm in another ocean; he's still going to come together again in the great resurrection!

There are Christians who have been blown into thousands of pieces—into smithereens—by bombs. They will still be recreated at the resurrection.

So, as far as the New Testament is concerned—for example 1 Corinthians 15—it doesn't matter what happens to this old body. God has our DNA plans carefully filed away. God has the schematic diagrams to our persons. He will be able to put us together again on that great Day—and he will!

Now, some individuals (and I am one of them), may elect to say, “I will act out even in death the biblical truth about resurrection. So when I die I will be buried.” But that's an individual affair. It's not something mandated by Scripture.

Q: While the last chapter of Romans lists many of Paul's friends, he does warn about people who cause divisions (Romans 16:17–18). Does the Bible specifically speak of individuals going from a state of being saved to losing their faith, thus dying unsaved?

A: It's difficult to dogmatize on this.

We read of Demas who deserted Paul, having loved this present world (2 Timothy 4:10). But we don't know what happened in Demas's life after Paul's comment. And his comment doesn't say that Demas is lost.

There's the example of Judas, but many think he was never

converted anyway. So Judas doesn't fit into this question's category. I think the usual rule in Christian life is that a person soundly converted rarely pulls away from Christ. However, the New Testament is so suspicious of human nature it does not teach "once saved, always saved."

If you read the whole book of Hebrews, salvation is conditional on perseverance. For example, "The people God accepts will live because of their faith. But he is not pleased with anyone who turns back" (Hebrews 10:38 CEV). Most modern translations render this verse similarly—and correctly so.

It's rare for a person to apostatize who has become a true Christian. And looking unto Jesus, you need never fall away. Even if you make mistakes aplenty, looking unto Jesus you are still accepted in the Beloved.

But we have to allow that it's always possible to turn away.

**Q:** Romans 14 speaks about observing rules regarding days and food. What about tithe? Is the New Testament Christian required to pay tithe?

**A:** The New Testament has no law about tithing. However, Jesus said we are not to be neglectful of tithing (Matthew 23:23).

There are many passages that make it clear that if the Jew of old in a dispensation of limited privilege could pay up to about a quarter of his income, how much more should the Christian pay! (There was more than one tithe in Old Testament times. The first tithe was just for starters!)

I was just looking for something the other day, and as often happens, I found what I wasn't looking for. I found this:

Our society has become so affluent, so materialistic, so conditioned by mass media, we have drifted far from the concept of generosity portrayed in the Bible. We have come

to regard so many of life's luxuries as necessities. We have full closets, full toy boxes, full garages, full basements, full refrigerators. How full is our treasury laid up in heaven?

How much do we contribute regularly to the needs of others and to sharing the gospel?

Consider for a moment some of the things we spend money on: cosmetics, eating out, cable TV, pet care, amusements, records and tapes, liquor, music lessons, lottery tickets, movies, hobbies, vacations, new clothes, beauty treatments. Many would argue there's nothing wrong with these, with any of them. But where does God fit in?

Does he come first, or does he get what's left over, if there's anything left over? Does giving to him come at the top of our priority spending list or somewhere down with hobbies, pet care, and music lessons?

In the USA more money is spent on cats than on God. No wonder this country will be visited with devastating judgments in the years to come. We are a materialistic, idolatrous society, and God only gets the sawdust, never the logwood.

The truth is that God's demands should come first in every aspect of our lives, including finances. If giving to God has no significant impact on our budget, we have a serious problem. We really don't know what Christianity is all about.

God so loved that he gave. You can't be a Christian without giving. You can't be. And if the ancient Jew gave up to a quarter of his income, the Christian (who has many more privileges), should be giving more.

But it's not a law in the New Testament. Giving is to spring, spontaneously, gladly, from our faith in the gospel.

It is a privilege to give. It might be that on Judgment Day the main



book God considers could be our checkbook—not a book of sins!

Q: Paul's doctrine of justification by faith is most clearly found in Romans. This was the issue during the Protestant Reformation. How do Roman Catholics understand justification?

A: Many Roman Catholics understand justification by faith as you and I do. That it is a declaration by God that we are righteous because of the perfect righteousness of Christ. When we believe the gospel, Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed, or reckoned, to us. God declares we are righteous not because we are in and of ourselves. But for the sake of his Son, Jesus!

However, in reaction to the Reformation the Council of Trent froze Roman Catholic theology into what is called Tridentine theology. It is this theology—still official church theology—we now turn to.

Tridentine theology teaches that justification is an infusion (or pouring) of God's grace into your life. This grace enables you live a holy life, thereby allowing God to declare you righteous—because you are righteous!

Some of you are familiar with a well-known Lesson Quarterly published four times a year. It contains daily lessons for people to study. This way they can be ready for the class discussion on Sabbath.

In recent years, these Lesson Quarterlies have taught the Tridentine view of justification. That is, when you are converted the Holy Spirit comes in and makes you righteous.

This is a devastating doctrine for people who still have a struggle with sin. And how many is that? Every converted person has a struggle with sin!

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They

are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Galatians 5:17 NIV; see also Romans 7:14–25 and James 3:2.)

Every converted person has a struggle with sin. The person who doesn't have a struggle with sin is not converted. You know the old story of the person who jeered, "I've never met the devil." The evangelist said, "That's simple. You and he are going the same direction, and two parallel lines never meet."

But once you go against the devil, by turning to God, you do meet the devil.

The Tridentine view is that when you are converted, through the medicinal sacraments such as the Lord's Supper and baptism, goodness is poured into you. That won't meet life's facts for a minute, because the law of God requires 100 percent righteousness.

No wife in her right mind will accept a husband's protestation that, "I'm very faithful to you six nights a week." God's law requires 100 percent obedience. Unless we are recreated into the image of Adam at conversion (and obviously we are not), we are going to be found still lacking.

Unfortunately, the Tridentine view is prominent in some evangelical groups, but it is not biblical.

**Q:** To me, Paul clearly teaches in Romans the gospel principle of substitution. Why then do certain scholars and others draw on Romans to support the Moral Influence Theory of the atonement?

**A:** Ultimately, most of us, unless we are in the habit of weighing issues very carefully, believe what we want to believe. The facts of the case usually come about last.

Emotions are the ruling principle in many, many decisions. Imagine I ask myself, "How come I'm in the church I'm in? How

come I eat the diet I eat? How come I vote the way I vote?” What is my answer? Very few of us can answer all three questions by saying, “Well, I sat down and summarized all the facts of the case and then decided.”

The fact is there’s no biblical basis whatever for the Moral Influence Theory. Not in Romans or any book of the Bible. The MIT is a philosophical teaching, not a theological one. It is dragged illicitly into theology. All the New Testament verses about “Christ died for our sins” deny such a teaching. (In the Old Testament there are 12 such references—just imagine, 12—in Isaiah 53 alone!)

This is not to deny that the cross has tremendous moral influence. We are only contending that the truth of substitution denied by MIT theology is a biblical teaching.

Q: Some former Sabbath-keepers use Romans 14:5-8 as one reason why they are no longer sabbatarians. They also say, “Jesus didn’t repeat the Sabbath command as he did all others.” I don’t think these arguments are valid, but please suggest some ways I can discuss sabbatarianism with former Sabbath-keepers.

A: First of all, let’s remember that in a climate of controversy, all of us are led to some extent by our emotions rather than the facts of the case. All of us, with no exceptions.

In such a situation, it is easy to say, 1) “You are throwing the baby out with the bath water,” or 2) “You are holding on to the baby’s swaddling clothes too long.”

My friends put me in the second category. I put them in the first category. We continue to love one another across the categories. The reason Jesus went to the cross, historically speaking, was because he reformed the Fourth Commandment!

I quote G. Campbell Morgan, in essence: “The reason he was crucified was because of his reforms of the Fourth

Commandment.” Most New Testament scholars of the twentieth century would agree with Morgan.

The first time we read, “the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus” (Matthew 12:14) it was the result of Christ’s deliberate attempt to teach true Sabbath-keeping (see verse 12). You don’t clean up an old shed and then burn it down. You don’t clean the barnacles off a ship and then sink it.

Well nigh all recent scholarly commentaries on the Gospels say that the New Testament passages on the Sabbath deal, not with the issue of whether it should be kept, but how to keep it. (Approximately one chapter in every eight of the Gospels refers to the Sabbath.) Therefore, if the New Testament is so concerned about how to keep the Sabbath, it’s not likely the New Testament is thinking of abandoning the Sabbath.

The New Testament does not list rules for Sabbath-keeping. It gives principles. That’s because God’s people—the church—are now a worldwide people. Things you could do in the one little country of Palestine might not always be practical for a worldwide church.

Principles can apply to everyone, everywhere. So the New Testament gives principles of Sabbath-keeping. Works of mercy, piety, and necessity are in harmony with the Sabbath and glorify God. “Then Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?’” (Luke 6:9). Obviously, the answer is that it’s lawful to do good and save life on the Sabbath.

Jesus did speak very much about the Sabbath. He claimed he was Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27–28). He said it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4). He risked his whole mission to teach how the Sabbath should be kept (John 5:16–18).

He affirmed that the Sabbath was made as a gift for the human race. He thereby bedecked it with undying freshness (Mark 2:27).

The Gospels purposely state that it was on the sixth day (late in the day) that the Last Adam (Christ) fell asleep in death in order to have a bride (the church). This exactly parallels the experience of the First Adam, who fell asleep that God might remove a rib from his side and create for him a bride, Eve (See Genesis 2:20–24).

Immediately before surrendering his life at Calvary, the Last Adam used the sabbatical term, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He said this as the Sabbath approached, at the exact moment those words were being read from Genesis 2:1–3 in all the nation’s synagogues. Having said all this in favor of the Sabbath, the person who thinks he is saved because he keeps one day rather than another is very much deluded.

Salvation’s price is Jesus plus nothing. Jesus plus nothing. You are not saved by Sabbath-keeping. You are not saved by Sunday-keeping, Monday-keeping, Tuesday-keeping, or any other day-keeping. You are saved by Jesus Christ.

The New Testament does say, however, that there are things that accompany salvation. And where the Lord leads you to those things that accompany salvation, follow your conscience. Pinocchio was right: “Let conscience always be your guide.”

Jesus kept the Sabbath in life (Luke 4:16; 13:10). He kept it in death (Mark 15:42–47). The only whole day Jesus spent in the tomb was that day, the Sabbath.

If I had been in Jesus’ situation, I would have been itching to get up and go and visit Pilate and all the rest of that decadent gang. Yet Jesus stayed there all day in the tomb. He rested in death. He therefore made the Sabbath a memorial of the new creation, as well as the old.

The Sabbath was always meant to be a symbol of the gospel. We who believe the gospel enter into rest (Hebrews 4:3). The physical rest of the Sabbath day is meant to be an outward sign of the rest of heart you have all week long because of Christ’s finished work. If

the Sabbath is not that to you, you are not really a Sabbath-keeper.

Let's not judge others, of course. Let's follow our own consciences. But our conscience should be an educated conscience, one the sun shines on. Conscience is like a sundial. It only tells the truth when the sun is shining on it. Don't go by the conscience that's uneducated, careless, or ignorant.

**Q:** Romans certainly gives me the impression that, in Christ, sin was dealt with once and for all—past, present, and future. How then am I to understand, believe, and interpret 1 John 1:9?

**A:** John writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” This teaches a truth similar to the one found in John 13: “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet” (John 13:10). When we became Christians, we were washed in the great Fountain, opened in the side of the Savior for the washing away of sin and uncleanness. We were baptized into Jesus Christ. We don't go rushing into the baptismal waters every time we fall short. Otherwise, we'd be in the water every day. We'd be in all day! What we need is simply to wash our feet that have picked up some dirt on our Christian journey through life.

What we say to the Lord is, “Lord, I'm sorry. I did that thing badly. Do you forgive me? Lord, I missed an opportunity there. Forgive me.” I find that most of my prayers are about three words long, and continue from dawn until dusk.

1 John 1:9 simply means that you apply that great Reservoir of merit that was provided at Calvary to cover all of time and all of experience. You lay hold of it by the hand of faith—and it's yours.

**Q:** What happens if I die before I have remembered to confess my last sin?

**A:** Now, here is good news, dear friends. Whether you remember or not, you are covered!

I'll tell you why this has to be so: because we don't know most of our sins. All of us do certain things without being aware of how wrong they are. Think about your Christian life. Things you tolerated at the beginning of your Christian life you would never tolerate now—if you are still growing, that is. I won't detail my behavior, but I can think of many things I did when I was 15 to 20 I wouldn't do now.

You are covered by Christ's merits. The idea of confession of sin is to relieve the burden of guilt. That's all. We do not confess in order to be forgiven. You have already been forgiven by the cross of Christ. You are just laying hold of it to allay the feeling of guilt.

**Q:** What is the proper biblical method for anointing a sick person? What should be the spiritual condition of the sick person and the one anointing the sick person? Where is the line between faith in God and presumption? Is it a denial of faith to use the medical profession after one has been anointed? What part does faith and the will of God have in the anointing of a sick person? Are there any conditions we must observe?

**A:** We need to be clear about what the New Testament teaches about healing. Romans itself does not discuss this issue. The New Testament teaches that God is the same God of the Old Testament, who forgiveth all our iniquities, who healeth all our diseases.

But that healing is not complete in this life. Gray hairs, extra eyes, new teeth, toupees—all testify that, for Christians, the healing is never complete in this life.

“We, ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).

Christians die, Christians get old, Christians get sick. “Lord, the one you love is sick” (John 11:3). Paul wrote to Timothy, “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach

and your frequent illnesses” (1 Timothy 5:23). Notice that: “frequent illnesses.”

The reality is this, dear friends: that Christians also get sick, Christians also die. But the dear Lord lets nothing happen that he hasn’t provided and planned for. The Lord has a purpose of good in the most heavy events that overtake us.

God is trying to wean us from this world. The world is a very attractive place, with sights and sounds, and fun people. The world is a very attractive place, but it’s a deception. The deception is that the world never gives what it offers. It always cheats us.

All that we are looking for in the world is only to be found in Christ! And God often permits pain to come to us to teach us, to divorce us from this world, so we will become attached to him. Now, having said that, there is a time to pray for the sick.

Romans 8:26 says we don’t even know what we should best ask for in prayer. If that is so, how can we demand healing? We don’t even know what we should ask for!

It must always be, then, that when we ask for anything in prayer we pray, “According to your will.” The Son of God, himself, in Gethsemane said, “Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

There is a time for anointing. I’ve anointed many people. I say to them beforehand, “Look, Jesus healed some instantaneously, he healed some people gradually, and other people he did not heal at all.”

In some cases, because of their unbelief, Jesus left them. But don’t ever think that it’s always because of unbelief that a person is not healed. That’s an unwise thing to think, because it’s not true.

The New Testament tells us we are to pray for the sick (James 5:13–16). The use of oil in anointing the sick (verse 14) is simply a



symbol of the Holy Spirit. That's all it is. The oil has no power in and of itself.

You must pray with a surrendered will. Let me tell you a secret: continued life is not always the best thing. Therefore, we don't really know whether it's best for a person to be healed or not.

Why not leave the judgment up to God? He is the God that heals us, but some of that healing will not take place until we are raised in glory at the great resurrection of the righteous. Then, and then only, will much of the healing we pray for now be done.

Q: Some people say that Jesus is less than fully God. What will happen to those people who do not claim that Jesus is God Almighty?

A: If God has their hearts, I believe we'll rejoice together around the throne.

I'm glad salvation does not depend upon possessing a perfect theology. None of us would make it.

The Good Book says, "My friends, we should not all try to become teachers. In fact, teachers will be judged more strictly than others" (James 3:1 CEV). That should make me want to run away and hide!

It is not given to us to know much. Spurgeon was right: "All we know can go into a thimble—and a girl's finger as well!"

Old Testament worthies did not have the full truth about Christ, but we know they will be saved. There's a long list of such worthies in Hebrews 11. They are all saved because of Christ, even though they didn't understand all about Christ. Not one of them knew as much about Christ as a simple reader of the Gospels—yet they will be saved.

God looks at the heart. Where hearts are surrendered fully to the

light God has given to them, salvation through God's grace is granted. It matters not how small that light might be. Where the heart has responded fully, there is salvation by grace.

Q: Please explain the Trinity.

A: I can't.

If you had asked me to explain an amoeba, I couldn't do that either. Or a blade of grass, or a rainbow, or a human cell, or how the human eye functions. I can't explain any of them.

If I can't explain the least, how presumptuous if I attempt to explain the most.

In the scale of life, things get more and more complex as they rise. From the single-celled amoeba up, life becomes more and more complex. The Trinity is at the top, way above where we are.

But I'll comment on the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine teaches that there are three, equally divine Persons in the one Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each Person is distinctive but never separate. They are different in their work but always associated and present with each other. They are equally divine, equally to be worshiped.

As seen and known, God is Three. As seeing and knowing, God is One.

God is three Persons in himself and one Person to himself. See especially Matthew 28:19, where the one Name includes the three Persons. (The word "person" in the early centuries did not have the ideas and meaning we now give it.)

This the Bible teaches, but not in much more detail. We can't go much further than what I have already said. We could spend a lot of time studying the Bible passages on the Spirit, on the Father,

and on the Son—but we still wouldn't have explained the divine mystery of the Trinity.

**Q:** You have said that the Old Testament festival, the Day of Atonement, was not a foreshadowing of 1844. You claim that the Bible sees the Day of Atonement as fulfilled only in the death of Christ.

You have paralleled what happened to the high priest in preparation for his role in the ancient Day of Atonement with what happened to Christ during his Passion and death. Are there any Bible texts telling us about how the high priest was kept up all night changing his clothes and being interrogated, etc?

**A:** The best statement on this is in an appendix of my book Daniel 8:14, *The Investigative Judgment and the Day of Atonement*, otherwise known as the Glacier View manuscript.

However, it's not something I wrote. It's a quotation from the Old Testament scholar, J. D. M. Derrett. First, he summons all the evidence from the Jewish writings before the time of Christ as to what happened to the high priest during the Day of Atonement. Then, he concludes, "All of this we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

Here is the quotation:

They linked Jesus's sufferings with the usual dramatic preparation of the High Priest, on the Even of the Day of Atonement. The latter was taken to an upper chamber, where he communed with the "elders of the Court." He was adjured, and was kept awake all night. The tending of the Altar fire, which normally took place about cock-crow, was advanced, and before cock-crow the Altar was made ready for the High Priest's personal sacrifice.

During the ceremonies the High Priest was robed and disrobed several times and his final vestments were glorious.

The gospel texts have retained the coincidences, some of them trifling in themselves, because the role of the High Priest and the outlines of his ritual were perfectly well known, and because a succession of mere hints was enough to make the point that Jesus was the real High Priest and was just about to effect the real (and everlasting) Atonement.

That he was interrogated by the High Priest and elders in the High Priest's dwelling ... is a perfect piece of New Testament irony. And that the Day of Atonement and Passover have little in common seemed irrelevant, on the theory that Jesus's life summed up and gave meaning to all the Torah. (J. D. M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, pages 410–411)

The only Bible texts I could give you, then, are those in the four Gospels, where they tell about the sufferings of Christ. Derrett found his information on what happened to the high priest during Yom Kippur in extrabiblical Jewish writings.

Q: Please comment on 1 Corinthians 11:29:

Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (NIV)

A: There are a few shocking texts in the Bible, and this is one of them. We need to read a little more:

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (vv. 30–32)

In order to understand this difficult passage, you need to read the whole context. The Corinthian church had come out of rank paganism, where impurity, profligacy, drunkenness, and idolatry were second-nature. These new Corinthian Christians

dragged some of that flotsam and jetsam with them into the new Christian church.

Some were getting drunk at the Lord's Supper! They took each other to court. They had all sorts of problems. Have a look at 2 Corinthians 12, as an illustration of what I'm talking about:

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.  
(2 Corinthians 12:20–21)

I'm glad I wasn't their pastor! That would have been difficult. Keeping in mind what the Corinthian church was like, we can now understand the first passage we read, 1 Corinthians 11:29–32.

To paraphrase, Paul is saying: "You are not very reverent when you come to the Lord's Supper. You forget that this is commemorating the most sacred event of all history. You do not discern the solemnity of what you are doing. You are using it as an occasion of the flesh. If that is your attitude, you will ultimately separate yourself from Christ—and die."

The passage is an appeal for reverence, and it's a well-grounded appeal.

Q: You say, "In Christ, you will sleep but you will never die." What do you mean by that?

A: Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep" (John 11:11). His disciples misunderstood, "so then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead'" (verse 14).

There are two deaths in the Bible. The first death we all die (sometimes called the “anesthetic death”). Then there is the “second death” referred to in Revelation 20:14. This is the death of total destruction from which there is no resurrection.

All sinners deserve to die. Forever. Incredibly, Jesus died the second death for us on the cross. That is why his resurrection is so unique. No one was ever expected to come back from the second death. But Jesus was raised from the second death! No one else will ever be.

Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we too shall rise. Now the sting of death is removed. Christ has made it so harmless to us (because of his strong promise of resurrection) that it is nothing more frightening than sleep. You fall asleep at night, and know nothing until you awake refreshed at dawn.

So, we will sleep [die the first death]. But we will never die [the second death]. Because of Jesus, though we are sinners, we avoid destruction. We will not perish.

Read John 3:16 carefully:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (NIV)

## APPENDIX ONE

### The Debated Exegetical Issues of Romans

It is the ideas of most value or significance to humanity that call forth the most spirited debate. Does life have meaning? Is there a God? Did we arrive by creation or evolution? Are all cases of abortion wrong? Is lying ever justified? Is situation ethics appropriate if the whole situation is taken into account? Can pacifism work in an evil world? Should Christians join secular armies? Is there any such thing as a just war today? Was Christ God? Is the Bible true? Are all the commandments of the Decalogue still binding upon professed Christians?

The truth of some issues is hard to arrive at because of the complexity often hidden by a simple statement of inquiry. Truth often is polygonal rather than linear, that is, it has many sides to it. Often an answer is not either/or but both/and. Even some answers delivered as generalizations may fall short in specific situations. Exception proves the rule in the sense of making trial of it, not necessarily in the sense of confirming it.

The issues in the book of Romans are not dissimilar in principle to some suggested above. In some cases where exegetes have fought hard for their side, the answer may well be that there is truth on both sides. It is so easy to see the glory of the gleam of truth from one angle and be so preoccupied with that angle, that we miss the truth shining from other angles of the same topic. In the following paragraphs are some of the issues that divide exegetes on the book of Romans and theologians and preachers.

Does the Greek word for “justify” mean to declare righteous or to make righteous? If in some sense it can mean make righteous, is that sense identical with that taught in the Council of Trent — that justification makes a person internally righteous? Is the issue in the book of Romans the same that confronted Lutherans in the sixteenth century — choosing between salvation by grace and what seemed to many a system whereby salvation was by works? Or is Romans, like other books of the New Testament, addressing a broader issue, namely the inclusion of Gentiles now in the plan, promises, and blessings of God? Is Krister Stendahl correct in saying that many have misread the book of Romans because they have read it through the eyes of Martin Luther rather than through the lens of the first-century situation?

What is the meaning of the expression “the righteousness of God”? Does it refer to an imputed righteousness or to the active work of God in bringing salvation to his people? Is the expression a subjective or objective genitive? Are Romans 9-11 discussing individual destiny and the issues of divine sovereignty versus free will as taught by John Calvin, or do the chapters pertain to the first-century issue of why the Jewish nation has apparently dropped out of the plan of God? Is the Greek word translated “propitiation” in some versions and “expiation” in others to be understood in only one way, and, if so, which way? Does Romans 2:13 contradict the apparent meaning of other passages in this book? Is the main issue in Romans 7 the timing of the experiences there recorded, or is the issue whether the law can sanctify any better than it can justify? Should Romans 9:5 be used as positive proof that Christ is called God in Romans? What is meant by “the end of the law”? What is the meaning of the word “law” in the book of Romans? Do “the works of the law” mean only those things that distinguished Israel from righteous Gentiles — circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath-keeping? Does Romans 16:7 support the movement for the ordination of women? Does Romans 14:5 indicate that Sabbath-keeping was a dead issue as far as Paul was concerned?

There are, of course, a multitude of other issues, most of them minor by way of comparison. But our purpose here is to touch upon some that are most frequently debated. It is not our intention to be exhaustive in our discussion of these points but suggestive, as befits the size of this little book.

### **Krister Stendahl and the Theme of Romans**

In his well-known book, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, Stendahl has correctly pointed out that a major concern to Paul, as he wrote the book of Romans, was the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Stendahl holds that the doctrine of justification by faith was outlined by Paul for the specific purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to all the promises of God's original covenant with Israel. Because of this feud, Stendahl holds that the climax of the book is Chapters 9-11. Stendahl also sets forth the view that Paul suffered pain but not guilt, pain because of his physical weakness, but not guilt, because he did not have an introspective conscience. Thus, Stendahl feels strongly that traditional Christianity has too easily bought the package of Martin Luther's message and used it as a procrustean bed when approaching Romans.

Stendahl is a brilliant writer and thinker, and there can be no denying that he is correct in believing that for Paul the relationship between Jews and Gentiles was a matter of tremendous significance. But when Stendahl denies to Paul the experience of guilt, we feel he is going beyond the biblical evidence. He says on page 91 of his book, "We look in vain for a statement in which Paul would speak about himself as an actual sinner." He probably rejects as Pauline the statement made to Timothy, claiming to be the chief of sinners. But scholars as a whole do not reject the Pauline authorship of the book of Romans, and it is there we find the expression, "Oh wretched man that I am [etc.]," certainly indicating an experience of guilt beyond that of the vast majority of men.

In another place (page 89), Stendahl writes, "Paul knew he had made up for this terrible sin of persecuting the church, as he says in so many words in 1 Corinthians 15:10." How Stendahl drew such a conclusion from the passage he quotes is beyond me. I do not believe there is any evidence to support the idea that Paul felt he had compensated for his contribution to the deaths of some of the early Christians. Indeed, the mark of the saint is always that of a continued penitence as surely as the cherishing of a living faith.

John Stott points out that Stendahl never quotes Paul's words in Romans 7:14-25, words which certainly seem to be autobiographical. Paul's words in Philippians 3:6 about a blameless righteousness can only refer to his perfect fulfillment of all outward duties. (See the NIV translation of this verse.) It is clear from Romans 7 that he saw that sin is even more what we are than what we do. As Paul points out in that chapter, specifically to the Tenth Commandment, we see his perception of the subtlety of sin, and we doubt Stendahl's claim that Paul had a robust conscience. John Stott has rightly said that "a truly healthy conscience disturbs our security and shames our pride, especially when the Holy Spirit comes to 'convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment'" (Romans, p. 25).

Somewhat related to Stendahl's views are those of E. P. Sanders, as set forth in his book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. His main thesis is that the traditional Protestant view of the first-century Jews as nourishing "a religion of legalistic works-righteousness" and that of Paul's gospel as being purposely the opposite is contrary to the historical facts. Again, there is some truth in this position, for any well-instructed Jew of the first century believed that salvation was of the grace of God. The Old Testament taught that very plainly. (See especially Psalms and Isaiah, as well as the sermons of Deuteronomy.)

Professor Martin Hengel has given sufficient evidence to prove "there was no such thing as this one Palestinian Judaism with the one binding view of the law." (The Pre-Christian Paul, p. 49.) Put with this reminder the truth that "popular religion may diverge widely from the official literature of its leaders" (Stott, *Ibid*, p. 28). And we will hesitate to sweep away the very plain indications that many to whom Christ spoke, as well as Paul, were works-oriented rather than grace-oriented. The fact is, self-righteousness is endemic to human nature, and the Pharisee lives within each one of us. It is most unlikely that early Judaism did not have to contend with the spiritual weakness that has plagued all men in all



times as they have tried to earn the favor of God through their own religious efforts.

We think a fair reading of Romans makes very questionable Stendahl's view that Chapters 9-11 are the climax of the book embracing its chief theme. Most reading the book for the first time or last are more likely to conclude that the message of the grace of God through Christ, whereby Gentiles as well as Jews are accepted is the larger issue. Chapters 9-11 merely deal with the natural objection that would emerge from Paul's teaching that all men have been legally redeemed by the blood of Christ and, therefore, all may have the gracious gift by faith alone. The natural question would be: "Well, what about the Jews to whom God first gave salvation and whom he elected to take his message to the world?"

There are two verses worth comparing. One says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The other: "There is no difference, for the same Lord is rich unto all them that call upon him." (Romans 3:22,23; 10:12,13 KJV). It is certainly correct that it is easy to read too much of the sixteenth-century situation into the first century, but we think it is even more false to forget that the work of God in every age has been to convince man of his guilt in order to point him to the more abundant grace available to the penitent believer. In our chapter, "The Continuing Controversies Over the Law," we expand our discussion of these issues.

### **The Meaning of "Law" in Romans**

The Greek word "nomos" is the equivalent of the Hebrew word "Torah." It has varied significations, including the Pentateuch, the whole Old Testament, instinctive drives within the human being, the ceremonial ritualism of Judaism, etc. It is not to be taken as an exact synonym for Decalogue, though sometimes the Decalogue is included within its compass.

When Paul writes in Galatians that "it is written in the law that Abraham had two sons," it is obvious he is not referring to Exodus 20. One need only take a concordance and study the use of "nomos" throughout the New Testament to quickly learn that its main application is not to the Decalogue but to something much wider and broader.

A key passage on this topic is Exodus 34:27-29, where we find three words translated respectively as "covenant," "commandments," and "testimony." The only one of these three that only ever means the Ten Commandments is "testimony" (when it is associated with the tabernacle). The other words, "covenant" and "commandments," are much more encompassing as a rule. Nevertheless, while Galatians puts its stress on the ceremonial aspects of the Torah or law, in Romans the stress is on the moral aspects; and thus, the Decalogue does come sharply into focus, as Romans 7 particularly makes clear. (See verses 7-14.)

Thus "nomos," while not a synonym for the Decalogue, often includes the Ten Commandments. The contrast between Galatians and Romans should be clearly understood, for the emphasis in the first book is on the ceremonial aspects of Judaism, while the emphasis in the second is on the moral teachings.

### **Romans 1:4**

Who or what is meant by "the spirit of holiness" in this verse? Is the third member of the Trinity intended? Recent scholarly studies of Romans have emphasized that the first chapters of the book are concerned primarily with the work of the second member of the Godhead, resulting in the justification of sinners, and then from Chapter 5 onwards (and climaxing in Chapter 8), the third member is prominent as the subject turns to sanctification.

The context here is decisive. Verse 3 said of Christ that he was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh." The following words present us with a contrast between

“according to the flesh” and “according to the spirit.” Paul is stressing the spiritual nature of the Savior who was not only human, but divine. Robert Haldane has summed up the matter well:

There are various interpretations of these terms, but the proper antithesis can only be preserved by referring them to Christ’s divine nature .... Spirit of Holiness may be used here rather than the phrase Holy Spirit, because the latter is usually assigned to the third person of the Trinity. Though the exact expression does not occur elsewhere in the Scriptures, other passages corroborate this meaning, as ‘the Lord [that is, Christ] is that spirit,’ (2 Corinthians 3:17). He is called ‘a quickening spirit,’ (1 Corinthians 15:45), which character belonged to him in a particular manner after his resurrection .... The unusual expression, Spirit of Holiness, appears, then, here to denote His Deity in contrast with His humanity, characterizing Him as God, who is a Spirit, essentially holy. (Romans, 26-27)

### **Romans 1:17**

What is meant by “the righteousness of God”? Does the phrase refer, as Martin Luther believed, to the status of righteousness given to the one trusting in Christ alone? Or does it signify the active, saving work of God? Or is it just a description of God’s own holiness?

Very often when variant positions are held by individuals, it is not because such positions are contradictory, but in many cases because the positions held are complementary. I believe John Stott to have spoken wisely when he said, “I have never been able to see why we have to choose, and why all three should not be combined.” Evidence can be drawn from Scripture for each of the positions, but the closing words of verse 17 suggest that the emphasis in this instance should be primarily on the status afforded the believer, the divine gift of the imputed merits of Christ. We think the NIV is correct when it renders the phrase in both Romans 1:17 and 3:21 as “a righteousness from God.” Philippians 3:9 supports this when, instead of a simple genitive, it uses a prepositional phrase. Thus, we read, instead of “the righteousness of God,” “the righteousness from God.” Romans 10:3,4 is added support, as it contrasts the righteousness that comes from God as a gift and our own works righteousness.

Notice the repeated word “gift” towards the end of Romans 5 when righteousness is being discussed. Charles Cranfield paraphrases Romans 1:17 as follows: “For in it (i.e., in the gospel as it is being preached) a righteous status which is God’s gift is being revealed (and so offered to men) — a righteous status which is altogether by faith” (Romans 1:100). When Paul expands the meaning of this righteousness, he uses the Greek word for “credited” or “imputed” eleven times in Romans 4. See also 1 Corinthians 1:30 where it is stressed that Christ is our righteousness.

When Martin Luther thought of the expression as signifying the character of God, he could only see hell before him and was in deep despair; but the day he came to understand it as connected with the reference to the good news of the gospel in the context of faith and signifying God’s merciful gift of a righteous status to the believing sinner, he saw paradise opened and was energized for decades of toil and sacrifice.

Should the closing words of this verse be translated as traditionally understood, “The just shall live by faith,” or “He who through faith is righteous shall live”? The context points to the latter translation as correct. Faith has been mentioned four times in verses 16 and 17, which verses constitute the thematic statement of the Epistle. Thus, Paul’s meaning is that of a righteousness that now comes by faith. Secondly, the structure of Romans indicates the words “by faith” should be connected with “he who is righteous” and not with “live,” as in the RSV.

To the end of Chapter 4, Paul is stressing the first half of his thesis, namely, that

by faith alone a man is justified. Then in the later chapters culminating in Chapter 8, he stresses the second half of his theme — the life of the justified one. He “shall live.” In the first four chapters, faith occurs at least 25 times, whereas in Chapters 5-8 it is found only twice. The word “live” is found only twice in the first four chapters, but then in Chapters 5-8 it occurs 25 times. Thus, the translation: “He who is righteous by faith shall live” fits best the structure of the Epistle, as well as the context, of these particular words.

### **The Doers of the Law Are Justified? Romans 2:13**

Romans 2:13 has been puzzling to many when it declares that the doers of the law are justified. What Paul is saying is not a contradiction to his conclusions in Romans 3:19 and onwards but, rather, that if one talks in terms of doing and justification, it is the usual rule that the person who fulfills all legitimate requirements is the one who is vindicated. And, similarly, in the last great day, those who will be eschatologically affirmed as righteous will be people in whom obedience has become a principle of life. But he’s not saying in Romans 2:13 that the doers of the law are justified because of their obedience. And the reason is plainly given in the next chapter where verses 9-21 are crucial for the understanding of the whole book. (See also Romans 7-14.)

While some may dispute about Romans 2:13, the other passages are beyond dispute as teaching that no one by law has a right to claim to be righteous. Anyone who has broken the law once in feeling, thought, motive, word, or deed can never claim righteousness through the law.

To Paul, in Romans 2:13-16 as elsewhere in his writings, obedience is the outward sign of a right relationship with God, but it is never the purchase price of a right standing with God, which can only come through the gift of grace. Only those who have recognized Romans 2:13 as a hypothetical statement which must be compared with 3:19-21 can be consistent in their understanding of this book.

Romans 2 is reminding the Jews that the fact they had a wonderful system of law in Judaism was not enough to ensure their acceptance by God, for the central thing about law has never been that of knowing but of doing. The worst man knows more about duty than the best man does, and therefore all of us need grace and mercy.

### **Propitiation or Expiation? Romans 3:25**

Should “propitiation” or “expiation” be used in the first part of this verse? We have alluded to this issue elsewhere in this book, but more needs to be said. The objection to the use of “propitiation” in this passage is based on the idea that such a term suggests the pagan view of irrational anger requiring placation. However, the divine wrath is never so pictured in Scripture. It is, rather, the inevitable reaction of holiness against evil. Furthermore, throughout Scripture it is always God who provides the sacrifice for the sins of the world, not man. In other words, it is God who takes the initiative in sheltering man from the results of his sin.

From the early centuries of this era, it has been pointed out that the Greek word here used occurs 27 times in the LXX [Septuagint], and in 21 of these instances it refers to the mercy seat in the tabernacle. In such instances, the article is always used except in Exodus 25:17, whereas the article is not present here in Romans 3.

However, it is possible that the last argument regarding the article has been overstressed. Commentators are agreed, for example, that the presence or absence of the article with “nomos” is not significant. It is hardly likely that Paul could have used this word without thinking of its Old Testament usage.

What is also almost certain is that Paul is thinking of Christ’s death as the antitype of the sin offerings of the Day of Atonement, when blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. While the Greek verb “hilaskomai” in secular Greek undeniably signifies to “placate,”

our English word “expiation” has to do with “annulling guilt.” We would stress the fact that the latter really does imply the former, and therefore it is wrong to make a sharp distinction between the two.

In Chapter 1, Paul has already stressed the wrath of God, and there is no need to be nervous about referring to it again in this context. It is not the wrath of an irrational, pagan deity, but the wise, judicial action of a loving father who must remove all that threatens the good of his creation.

Not only the New Testament, but the Old, stresses that it is the merciful God who gave what was necessary for the task of removing guilt. (See Leviticus 17:11 and compare Romans 5:8; 8:32.)

### **Romans 3:31**

What is meant by “law” in this verse? Is the Old Testament, as a whole, signified, or its commandments about human duty? We think the context is decisive for the latter in this instance, as well as the sequential use of the word “then.” Paul has been talking of the inadequacy of all attempts of human obedience to the revealed word of God, and it is not likely that having used the term “law” in that regard that he would depart from it now. And the use of “then” ties verse 31 to the preceding verses. Olshausen has a magnificent comment on this verse:

The gospel establishes the law, because it is the most sublime manifestation of the holiness and strictness of God. Sin never appears more fearful than at Golgotha, where, on account of it, God spared not His own Son. (Romans, 158)

### **Romans 4:25**

It is important to point out that, literally, this verse reads in the original that Christ was “delivered because of our offenses, and raised because of our justification.” The word “*dia*” is found in both cases, both for the deliverance and for the resurrection. In other words, the text is really saying that the resurrection of Christ proved that legally the whole world had been justified by Calvary. As his death was consequent upon our guilt, so his resurrection was consequent upon our deliverance from guilt. Bishop Handley Moule put it this way: “We sinned, therefore he suffered; we were justified, therefore he rose.”

John Stott thinks this conclusion cannot be right because justification is dependent on our believing. But his objection will not hold because the New Testament refers in places to the legal justification of the whole world quite apart from what happens to individuals when they lay hold of that legal accomplishment. Of course, it should be stressed that we are not saying that the resurrection had atoning justification. We are saying that it had a manifestive justification.

The glorious truth proclaimed here is that the resurrection is God’s answer to our doubts and questionings and spiritual timidity. So Romans 4:25 is another way of declaring what we have in Romans 8:34: “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

### **Romans 5:12**

Here we find another, *crux interpretum*, one of the most famous for theology. What does the Scripture mean when it says: “In this way death came to all men, because all sinned”? Do the words imply that death is the result of our individual sins or is the passage saying that when our representative, the first Adam, sinned, all men sinned in him? Inasmuch as the following verses which stress the parallel between the two Adams reach their climax in the words of verse 18, which speak of our corporate identity with both Adams, we

suggest that verse 12 must be read as anticipating that climax. As F. F. Bruce writes:

The whole of mankind is viewed as having existed at first in Adam. Because of his sin, however, Adam is mankind in alienation from God: The whole of mankind is viewed as having originally sinned in Adam. In the full narrative of Genesis 3, "All subsequent history lies encapsuled"; its incidents are reenacted in the life of the race and, indeed, to some extent, of each member of the race. (Romans, 126)

John Stott says:

Five times in these five verses (15-19), once in every verse, Paul states that the trespass or disobedience of one man brought death, judgment or condemnation to all men .... Verse 15 clinches the matter: The many died by the trespass of the one man. That is, universal death is attributed to a single solitary sin. (Romans, 152)

The whole race hangs at the girdle of both Adams. We were ruined in the first Adam, and we were redeemed in the second. Both are true legally for all men, but the second becomes experientially ours only as we believe.

The reason people have trouble with this interpretation is because we are not used to the principle of corporate identity so well known to the Semitic mind. In the beginning, God could have chosen to have dealt with each person individually or representatively, and Scripture clearly teaches in this chapter that he chose the second. Is it not thrilling to realize that by the mercy of God we are all counted as having been in Christ when he suffered and died? Thus, his merits can be put to our account through simple faith. (See 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.)

#### **Who and When? Romans 7:14-25**

We would suggest that this entire seventh chapter has as its purpose to teach that the law can no more sanctify than it can justify. Paul here points out that all of us recurrently violate the Tenth Commandment, and what is easily recognized as regards this closing commandment of the Decalogue applies equally to all the others, could we but see and understand their depth. And this is as certainly true, though not to the same degree, for believers as for unbelievers.

The New Testament knows nothing about perfection in the flesh. The most saintly and obedient of all believers have to confess that they are unprofitable servants according to our Lord's own words in Luke 17:10. And James tells us that "in many things, we all offend" (James 3:2); while John in his first Epistle says, "If we think we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). When Paul declares that the things that he would, he does not and the things he would not those he does, he is not picturing the wayward manner of an unconverted soul, but protesting that even after many years of Christian experience, he never fulfills his own ideals or the commandments of God. He is not confessing to terrible violations of God's law, but rather intimating that things that wouldn't worry most people do, indeed, worry him, such as the slightest diminution of love, praise, thanksgiving, and prayerfulness, etc.

The will in this passage is always directed to the good without exception. This is not true of the unconverted, and it is not true of the immature believer. When Paul uses the Greek expression, "Ouketi" (no longer), he is certainly talking about his present experience and not the experience before conversion. Similarly, the use of the present tense in this passage in contrast to the past tense in the first section of the chapter points

to the same conclusion as does the use of the first personal pronoun. When Paul cries out, “O wretched man that I am,” he certainly does not mean, “O wretched man that I once was.” He is talking about himself as he is after many years of Christian experience.

Furthermore, there is nothing in this passage that is inconsistent with what is described of true Christian experience elsewhere in Paul’s writings. (See Galatians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; and Galatians 2 regarding Peter’s behavior.) But the passage should never be read without Romans 8:1, which assures us that our standing is always perfect with God, even though our state is never what either we or he would like it to be. For the righteousness of justification is 100 percent, but it is not inherent.

While the righteousness of sanctification is inherent, it is not 100 percent. Only at glorification will our righteousness be both 100 percent and inherent, and glorification takes place at the coming of Christ. (See Romans 8:23 and 1 John 3:2.) But having said all this, it must be stressed that the main purpose of this chapter is not where most polemicists have put it, but rather it is seeking to show that the law can no more sanctify us than it can justify us.

#### **Romans 8:4**

What does Paul mean when he declares that as a result of the Spirit’s dwelling in us (God’s gift at justification), the righteousness of the law is now fulfilled in our lives? Many commentators have endeavored to make the meaning still that of justification, but that would not explain the final clause of the verse which speaks about our conscious experience from day to day. Neither will that opinion stand that holds that Paul here means a perfect fulfillment of the law is now made possible. Throughout this chapter, the believer is still struggling, mortifying his flesh, experiencing the tension between the old and the new creations.

According to verse 23, the newborn soul still only knows the first fruits of the Spirit and not the full harvest. So the term “fulfill” here cannot be taken in a one-to-one sense but, rather, has a more profound meaning. It signifies that the essential requirement of the law of God is now accomplished in our lives.

It should be observed that the term “dikaïoma” (just requirement) is in the singular, not the plural, as mistranslated by the NIV. This is important because it implies that it is the moral law viewed as a whole which is now fulfilled. This is further explained in Chapter 13:8-10, where Paul says that our love for one another is the fulfillment of the law. The meaning is not far removed from that found in Matthew 5:17-19. To “do and teach” the commandments is, in this passage, the equivalent of fulfilling the law, whereas to willingly “break one of these least commandments and to teach men so” is the equivalent of destroying the law. But neither in Matthew 5 nor in Romans 8 is the believer represented as sinless. He or she must still pray for the forgiveness of sins whenever they pray. (See Matthew 6:12.) Compare Luke 17:10, where we are told that having done all things that we’ve been commanded, we are yet to acknowledge that we are “unprofitable servants.”

This fourth verse is in the section of Romans that deals with sanctification; therefore, it is in error to apply it to the experience of justification. Although it remains true that at no moment of experience is the believer free from the necessity of the imputed merits of Christ, that is to say, continuous justification; it is the Christian walk that is here being discussed, not the entrance into the Christian life.

#### **Do Chapters 9-11 of Romans Teach the Calvinistic View of Predestination?**

(We give here a summary of what is expanded in our earlier discussion of this topic.)

Since the Protestant Reformation, many have used certain of the statements in these

chapters to prove the Calvinistic view that from eternity God had elected to save certain specific individuals and to damn the rest. Passages in Romans and elsewhere using the words “predestination” or “election” or “cognates” have been so interpreted as to prove the distinctive tenet of Calvinism. Such expressions as “vessels of wrath” and “whom he will he hardeneth” have been drawn into service towards the same end.

The first thing that should be said is that the great body of ancient expositors in discussing these chapters never gave them the meaning that Calvinists have since attributed to them. These expositors understood such terms as “the elect” and “the predestinated” as being the whole body of Christians, that is, the church visible. Secondly, when we consider these chapters in their contextual position, the Calvinistic view becomes untenable. Paul, having presented the gospel, now tries to answer the question as to why the Jewish race had not accepted it when they had been God’s chosen people. The last verses of Chapter 9 and the early verses of Chapter 10, as well as Romans 11:20-23, answer this question clearly.

Paul’s references to divine sovereignty are used not to prove that certain individuals were elected for salvation from eternity, but rather to show that God had the right to choose whom he would for special service, as the ancient church in the wilderness and the church of New Testament times. Most exegetes today realize that Calvinistic commentators have confounded the collective election for service with personal election.

Not only throughout these chapters, but also in the early verses of Romans 3, it is made clear that the Jewish nation was elected to possess special religious privileges in order that they might be a source of blessing to other nations of the world. Truth was “entrusted to them,” says the apostle. (See Romans 3:2.) When our Lord told Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” he was saying that the mere physical descent from Abraham counted nothing. Similarly, even Christian groups who are addressed as the “elect” are exhorted to give diligence to make their “calling and election sure” and are warned against turning back to destruction.

Ephesians 1 should be closely studied in this regard; and it will be observed that the word “elect” there is applied to the universal church of Christ, which is a chosen generation, according to 1 Peter 2:9. This reference to the Christian church being chosen is an allusion to the choice made of old of the Jewish people. The Jews were once God’s elect people, but now all who accept the gospel are the elect.

There is certainly no hint in Ephesians 1 that certain members of that visible church were destined to salvation and the rest to damnation. Instead, all professing Christians are referred to as elect. The fact that the visible group of believers is referred to as the light of the world and the salt of the earth implies God’s special intention that through them the world should be enlightened and seasoned with the message of grace. This is not to deny God’s plan that those elected for service, should they persevere in faith, will find ultimate entrance into eternal life.

The stress in the New Testament on the terms “predestinate” and “elect” has primarily to do with collective groups rather than individuals. We would urge readers to take Romans and read it at one sitting and ask whether the issue in Chapter 9-11, read in context, is linked to the Calvinistic view.

Verse 7 of Chapter 9 stresses that it is the children of the promise who are the true Israel — not the children of the flesh. Yet it is the children of the flesh that are clearly included among those whom the opening verses of this chapter say that God originally “foreknew.” The continuing argument of the chapter shows that the seed intended in the divine promise did not include all of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instances of exclusion are given. Thus, God in these verses is not speaking of any personal election or rejection of Isaac or Ishmael or Jacob or Esau, but of their descendants as elected to be the acknowledged church of God.



When we read further on in the chapter about the elder serving the younger, it should be kept in mind that this was never fulfilled of Esau personally. And the expression, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated," which is a quotation from Malachi 1:2-3, again expresses God's dealings, not with the individuals, Jacob and Esau, but with their descendants. Thus, Malachi says, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." These particular judgments did not come upon the man Esau, but upon the Edomites, his descendants. Never forget that in this section of Romans, Paul is talking about the rejection of the Jews as a nation. That would have been quite irrelevant if individual salvation or reprobation was the central thrust of his message.

The words, "I'll have mercy on whom I'll have mercy, and I'll have compassion on whom I'll have compassion," spring from Exodus 33:19, and there the mercy and grace spoken of apply not to individuals for salvation or damnation but, rather, the granting of special favors and privileges for purposes of service. God has a right to select whom he will to enjoy special privileges and to be entrusted with his gospel.

We also read that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. Isaac had willed that Esau, the firstborn, should get the blessing; and his son ran for the venison, but Jacob obtained the blessing. Nevertheless, that blessing was not so much personal as for the people for whom Jacob was the progenitor.

When we consider the figure of the potter forming some vessels to honor and others to dishonor, it must be remembered that dishonor is not the equivalent of destruction. There is no potter who makes vessels purposely in order to destroy them. When, however, a vessel that is made becomes marred, then it will be destroyed. So God called the Jews and made them a vessel unto honor, but they became marred in the hand of the potter, and through unbelief were destroyed. Observe also that in the original source of this parable as found in Jeremiah 18, even a vessel that was marred was not outside the reach of the divine favor but could be refashioned for wonderful use. The Jews in Babylon were there in the form of dishonored vessels, and they repented and became vessels unto honor once more when they returned to their own land.

When men are hardened, it is because they are reaping according to their own sowing. The Exodus record says repeatedly that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. God hardened it only in the sense that he put Pharaoh in the position whereby he had to make a choice. And when he made the wrong choice, God permitted the natural consequence of that choice, namely the hardening of his heart. God is always spoken of as doing whatever he permits to be done.

Fatal to the Calvinistic view is the fact that there is no text of Scripture which teaches that a limited group of men have been arbitrarily elected to eternal life. Most of the arguments used in support of Calvinistic predestination are philosophical, rather than scriptural, though wearing the garb of Scripture passages or ideas. Calvinists rightly point out that by nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins, and no dead man can call himself to life.

But Scripture teaches that God calls all men to life, and as the gospel is proclaimed, if it is not resisted, regeneration takes place; for faith is God's gift to all who hear the Word, provided they do not interpose a perverse will. Thus, Christ's words to the Jews of old: "How often would I have gathered you and ye would not?" Scripture can say: "Ye frustrate the grace of God" and also "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound." This could hardly be true if the Calvinistic view were correct. A tiny minority elected to salvation and the rest to damnation would hardly be an instance of grace abounding much more than sin.

Divine predestination is not of persons "unto faith and obedience," but of believing and obedient saints unto eternal glory. It is true that in John 6 it is said that none can



come to God lest the Father calls them. (See verse 44.) But to draw and to teach means the same thing, and the context says: "And they shall all be taught of God." So John 6 is not a case of Christ telling the Jews that only a certain few elect from eternity and given to him by the Father could come to him, but rather the Jews were being told that their not coming to Christ was the evidence of their unbelief in Moses' writings — that they were not taught of God, that they had not learned of the Father.

It is hard to see how any could be accounted guilty for not believing the gospel if it had been determined from eternity that they were not going to be permitted to believe. Furthermore, other elements of the Calvinistic picture are clearly anti-scriptural, such as the perseverance of the saints as commonly understood and the limited atonement. It is true, indeed, that genuine saints persevere, but it is not true that all who once only professed faith in Christ are necessarily saved eternally. The whole book of Hebrews warns against that error. (See particularly Chapters 6 and 10 of Hebrews.)

The Scripture in several places talks of those who have been bought by the blood of Christ and yet who have backslidden or have been lost. Believers are admonished "not to destroy thy weak brother for whom Christ died." And as for the limited atonement, what could be clearer than 1 John 2: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world"? This is almost as clear in John 3:16, where we could draw a large circle to represent the world that is spoken of and put a smaller circle inside of it to represent those comprehended by the expression: "Whosoever believeth." It seems clear that the company believing is smaller than that company which God has so loved that he gave his son for them.

In summary, the Bible does teach predestination. It teaches that God has predestined that all who accept the gospel, and do not interpose a perverse will to frustrate the movings of the Spirit when the gospel is proclaimed, shall have eternal life. The Bible does teach election, but its primary sense is usually a collective sense, whereby groups like Israel are called to be entrusted with God's truth for the sake of the world. It is, of course, always hoped that those thus entrusted with truth will themselves embrace it and cling to it undeviatingly, and thus be elect in the secondary sense of salvation, for they have fulfilled the condition of faith.

Calvinism has rightly seen some of the deep philosophical problems implicit in the fact of divine sovereignty, but it may not have given sufficient attention to the equally prominent teaching in Scripture of human responsibility. One of the dangers of the Calvinistic system is that God is blamed by it for the entrance of sin into the heart of Lucifer and then Adam and his descendants. It is probably best to confess that we do not have the answers to all philosophical questions, but that we do know that nowhere does the Scripture explicitly teach what Calvin taught about election to salvation and damnation. The fact that there is to be a last great day of judgment indicates that human beings, for the most part, are responsible creatures. That can only be if the privileges of salvation have been offered to them.

We quote from one of the most scholarly and most recent commentaries on Romans:

The recognition of the coherence and climactic character of these chapters in relation to the argument of Romans as a whole strongly reinforces the now widespread objection against the older attempts to interpret Chapters 9-11 primarily as the exposition of a dogma of predestination in relation to the individual .... (Romans 9-16, James D. G. Dunn, p. 520)

## **Romans 9:5**

The NIV reads as follows: "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human

ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.” But the NEB reads: “Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them, in natural ascent, sprang the Messiah. May God, supreme above all, be blessed forever! Amen.” Here are two different understandings of the text. One that makes Christ God and one that does not. Which is to be preferred?

In other places, Paul clearly affirms that Christ is, indeed, sovereign “over all,” but the issue is whether he would have called him “God.” Certainly, more often “Son of God” is found, as in 1:3,9; 5:10; 8:29. See also 8:3,32. Yet, he does give him the divine title of Lord, as in 10:9,13 and Philippians 2:9 ff. Also, in Hebrews 13:21 we have a doxology addressed to Christ. Cranfield and Dunn take opposite sides on this issue. Cranfield regards it as “virtually certain” that Paul here is describing Christ as God, but Dunn believes that it would be unusual for Paul so to do and too much of an apparent conflict with Israel’s Monotheism. Dunn, however, grants that elsewhere Paul ascribes divine functions to Christ, as in 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. It should also be noted that the expression “the judgment seat of God” in Romans 14:10 is referred to in 2 Corinthians 5:10 as “the judgment seat of Christ.”

The way in which Paul applies Isaiah 45:23 to Jesus in Philippians 2:10 forward suggests that, for him, the confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” actually means “Jesus Christ is Jehovah.” The fact is, from the standpoint of language, either position is tenable, but from the standpoint of Paul’s practice, the NEB seems preferable. Many other passages could be invoked, such as John 1:1, Acts 10:36, and Romans 10:12, but in all honesty, the case should be left open and arguments for Christ’s deity should be based on clearer passages which are perfectly adequate on their own.

### **Are “The Works of the Law” Merely Those Things That Distinguish Jews From Christians? Romans 9:32; Galatians 2:16; 3:2,5,10**

James Dunn, in his splendid commentary on Romans, suggests that the works of the law means primarily circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and the food laws. In so doing, he has put together what God has put apart. The Decalogue enshrines the Sabbath at its heart but says nothing about temporary, fading obligations, like the food laws and circumcision. Romans throughout has its main emphasis on moral obligations rather than ceremonial, in contrast to the book of Galatians. There is no ground whatever for believing that the early Christians had ceased to be Sabbath-keepers. Certain of the insights of form criticism are true, and when form criticism tells us that the items included in the Gospels were related to the current situation of believers in the first century, no doubt it speaks the truth. The Sabbath is referred to in about one in every eight chapters in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and it is never an issue of whether it should be observed by believers in Christ, but rather how. (See our remarks on Romans 14:5.)

The word “works” is found eight times in the book of Romans, but in none of these eight instances is it made clear that what is intended is the observance of those distinctive things that marked off Jews from Gentiles, if we are to include Sabbath-keeping among keepers in every great city of the known world who did not keep the food laws and were not circumcised. Even in the first century, Sabbath-keeping was viewed by many as being on a different footing than circumcision and the observance of dietary restrictions. We think that Dunn is correct in seeing that observance of the food laws of Moses and of circumcision were made prominent badges by Israel in the first century and that Christians were warned against such legalism. But we see no legitimacy for including in that rubric of works a commandment enshrined in the heart of the moral law of the Decalogue.

### **Does “End” in Romans 10:4 Mean “Goal” or “Termination”?**

The Greek word here used, “telos,” can have either meaning. Clearly, the New Testament teaches that Christ is both the goal and the termination of ancient Judaism and its

requirements. (See Matthew 5:17; Isaiah 42:21; and Romans 8:3 ff. Then compare Galatians 2:19; 5:1; and Romans 10:1-13.)

The stress in Romans 10 is on Christ as the termination of the law “as regards righteousness.” Many in Christ’s day were using the law as a means of obtaining a right standing with God, although the Old Testament was opposed to such a perversion. Paul is saying the time has come when that error must be corrected by the gospel. He clearly sees that Christ is the one pointed to by the prophecies, histories, and laws of the Old Testament. As a shadow stops at the tree, so Judaism as a system stopped at Calvary. But one can destroy a house without destroying the light that’s within it. Similarly, much that was of eternal significance in the Old Testament is carried over into the New, especially the moral law of the Decalogue. Thus, in this same book we read that the law is both spiritual and holy. (See 7:12,14.)

### **Romans 11:26**

When Paul writes “and thus, all Israel will be saved,” does he mean that every living Jew on the eve of the Advent will become a convert to Christianity? Many like W. H. Griffith Thomas believe that the expression “all Israel” does not necessarily mean every individual Jew, but, rather, the whole nation as distinct from the present conversion of individuals. But is that really the apostle’s teaching? Elsewhere he speaks of God’s wrath having come upon the nation “to the uttermost.” (1 Thessalonians 2:16.) This, of course, agrees with our Lord’s comment in Matthew 21:43: “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.” (See also Matthew 21:19, where he acts out the parable of cursing the fruitless fig tree and declares: “May you never bear fruit again!”) The record adds: “Immediately the tree withered.”

The final book of Scripture warns believers twice to beware of “those who say they are Jews and are not.” (Revelation 2:9; 3:9.) And in this very book, Paul, in the ninth chapter, affirms that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (Romans 9:6). And he adds: “Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children .... In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Romans 9:7-9).

Yet, it does not seem exegetically sound to say with many of the older interpreters that “all Israel” means “all spiritual Israel,” i.e., Gentiles in the main. There are repeated references to Israel in the context that target the literal nation, for the most part. But also in these chapters we have Paul’s teaching about a remnant of literal Israel who respond to the mercies of God in every age. Thus, that interpretation which suggests that “all Israel” here means all those who respond to the gospel from Jewry throughout the ages is to be preferred. It is important to observe that the Greek words “kai hautos” refer to “manner,” not “conclusion” or “time.” Thus, the meaning is “and in this way,” not “and at that time.”

Those who hold the traditional position that this is a promise of the restoration of the nation of Israel have to ask: Why should only that last generation be assured of salvation by some kind of divine decree? There is no parallel to this anywhere in Scripture. God is a “gentleman” who never compels. In the fourteenth verse, Paul has expressed the hope that “some of them” might be saved, indicating he believed that many would reject all efforts for their conversion.

There is no other statement of Paul that suggests he contemplated the salvation of the nation. Throughout this entire chapter, we see Paul’s burden for his fellow Jews, as he contrasts their salvation with that of the nation’s present unbelief; and throughout the chapter, the Jews are referred to in the third person and the Gentiles in the second. All of which suggests that the faithful remnant mentioned in verse 5 are to be found in every generation, and ultimately every Jew who accepts the gospel will find salvation.

In this immediate passage, Paul is saying two things: (1) The day will come when all the Gentiles who respond to the gospel will have been gathered in; and (2) at that time also, it will be seen that all the faithful in Israel from all ages will likewise have been gathered. Certain it is that there is nothing in the New Testament that makes a prediction about Israel returning to Palestine and building a temple and starting again the sacrificial services. Such a view is blasphemous and denies the efficacy of Calvary.

The commentator Olshausen was in the habit of grasping every exegetical nettle firmly, and we now quote him at length on this absorbing topic:

The first question which occurs, on our attempting to ascertain more exactly the sense of this remarkable prophetic expression, is — what does the Apostle wish to be understood by *pas Israel*? Does he mean all the individuals who ever belonged to the fleshly Israel? And consequently, among them, Judas Iscariot, Absalom, and all the cut off branches? It might seem so, according to verses 15 and 23, where the possibility of engrafting is declared with respect to those who have been cut off, that is, the reprobate. This is also strongly favored by verse 11, where it is expressly stated that the design was not that they should utterly fall, but that they should be stirred to emulation. Still, the *kakeinoi* only means the Jews were regarded as a whole, in opposition to the Gentiles, but not the single individuals of the nation who had contracted this special guilt. If all individuals were one day to be made blessed, there would, as has been remarked already, be an inward untruth in St. Paul's grief (9:3); and so, too, in the separation between the spiritual and the fleshly Israel (11:6), since in that case the whole of Israel would be spiritual, only that this character would not be developed in some until a later time.

Or (2) does *pas Israel* signify only those Jews who live in the last days, so that we must suppose all earlier generations as a people of Israel excluded from bliss? If so, the history of Israel since Christ's coming would be like the forty years in the wilderness, only that, as the space of time is greater, the repetition also would be on a larger scale. In the one case, it was necessary that the old generation should utterly die out, in order to make room for a new; in this case, it would be necessary that a whole series of generations should die off, in order more and more to gather together the scattered seeds of a better life, and at length to exhibit them united in the last generation, as in a matured fruit .... But the Christian spirit is opposed to this representation, on the ground that according to it, the one saved generation would not stand in any proportion to the many who perish, while yet the loss of salvation would not appear as caused by any personal guilt of the latter, by their resistance to grace.

Rather, the Apostle unquestionably means that the *leimma kat'eklogen charitos* (11:5) is to be conceived of as existing in the nation at every period of time. Israel would have ceased to be Israel if this had been utterly wanting in any generation. Consequently, we can only understand the prophecy in such a sense that all those members of the Israelitish people who ever belonged to the true *leimma* attain *sōtēria*; at the end of the world, assuredly, the people enter in a mass into the kingdom of God, but even then too there will be no want of such individuals as are Israelites after the flesh only. (Romans, 374-37)

## APPENDIX TWO

### **Are We Saved by Christ's Faith or by Our Faith in Him?**

The contemporary scholar, S. K. Stowers, has made much of the fact, long-known to most scholars, that Romans uses contemporary rhetorical style, such as diatribe. But Stowers' chief challenge is one he shares with a number of other moderns, namely that the expression "through faith in Jesus Christ" means the fidelity of Jesus himself, rather than the believer's trust in the Savior.

It must be admitted that the Greek phrase is potentially ambiguous, for the Greek word "pistis" signifies both "faith" and "fidelity." The genitive construction can be understood in more than one way. We think that James Dunn has spoken to the point admirably:

But Christ's faithfulness is not something which Paul draws attention to elsewhere in the extended exposition of Romans, even where it would have been highly appropriate — particularly Chapter 4, where Abraham's *pistis* is the model for the believer, not for Christ, and 5:15-19, where the antithesis *apistia pistis* would have been very natural, had Christ's faith been a factor in his thought .... The emphasis in the section as a whole (21-31, or indeed 3:21-4:25) is clearly on faith, the faith of those who believe .... Faith is the human condition or attitude which is set in contrast to 'works of the law' .... This sense was clearly central to the thematic statement of 1:17. (Romans, 166)

The position taken by Stowers and others on this matter ignores the clear teaching of Romans 10:14, Galatians 2:16, and Philippians 3:9.

As to Stowers' other contention on the contemporary style of writing used by Paul, it is a comparatively empty observation. It is the distinctive content of this book, rather than the literary style adopted, that is as significant for the modern reader as for the ancient one. Rhetorical writing styles were part of the formal education of every well-educated school boy in the first century. It helped make him functional in society.

## APPENDIX THREE

### **The Everlasting Ten**

From the apostle Paul's day to our own there has been much "striving about the law" which has frequently proved "unprofitable and vain." With good reason did Martin Luther declare that one of the most important tests of true theology is the ability "rightly to deal law and gospel."

The Scylla and Charybdis menacing every mind that has not been illuminated by the Holy Spirit are legalism and antinomianism. While the former by law "would frustrate the grace of God," the latter would "make void the law through faith." The Pharisees of Christ's day and the Zwickau prophets of the Reformation era typify the extreme forms of these perversions. Remarkable indeed is the fact that the great symbols of the Protestant faith at the time of the Reformation successfully steered between these doctrinal monsters, and affirmed the perpetuity of the normal requirements of God once written with the divine finger on tables of stone. (See *Answers to Objections*, F. D. Nichol, pp. 496-501.)

Since the nineteenth century there has been an increasing departure in Protestant circles from the landmarks of the Reformation, and we would anticipate that this would be true with reference to the biblical code of duty, as well as in other areas of Scripture.

Those who in modern times present the commandments of God, in contrast to the traditions of men, encounter much opposition from the churches that once affirmed in the strongest terms the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments. It would appear that the battle against antinomianism needs to be fought again, and this time more conclusively than in the sixteenth century.

The spearhead of the attack against the binding obligation of the code proclaimed at Sinai consists usually of the misuse of texts such as Luke 16:16; John 1:16,17; Galatians 2:19; 3:18-25; Romans 3:21; 6:14; 7:1-6; 2 Corinthians 3; and Colossians 2:14-16.

It must now be admitted, as the firm Protestants admitted, that on the face of them, these texts do testify to a New Testament opposition to law. This cannot truthfully be denied. The passages referred to all mention law, and do so with some apparent aspersion. What explanation is there for this?

First, it should be recalled that the New Testament was written when the extreme of legalism, rather than antinomianism, dominated the religious scene. The New Testament exponents of "righteousness by faith" therefore aggressively repudiated law as a method of salvation, in order that men might turn to Christ and to him alone for righteousness. There is, however, another reason also for the confusion resulting from some interpretations of these texts. Interminable striving about law has been possible these many centuries because the term itself has several meanings rather than merely one. This is why texts "against" law can be used to "contradict" texts "for" law.

When opponents on the Sabbath use such texts as these listed above to confound those who believe in the present standing of the Ten Commandments, they are frequently interpreting "law" in these texts as a synonym for the Ten Commandments. Inasmuch as most of the contexts concerned give emphasis to the dissolution of the obligation of the Mosaic code as a whole, it becomes apparent that such interpretations of the word law are erroneous and misleading. Believers in the Decalogue need to be careful lest they repeat the same error in their use of a different line of texts employing the Hebrew word "torah" or the Greek "nomos." As Dr. E. Heppenstall has pointed out, "there must be a distinction made between the term 'law' as it is used in the New Testament and this term as it is used in the Christian church."<sup>1</sup>

One Bible dictionary in its article on "law" recognizes the various meanings of the term acknowledged by twentieth-century scholars:

[Hebrew Torah: "direction," "instruction;" dath: "regulation," "law;" Greek nomos: "rule," "principle," "law."] In the Bible, a set of principles or standard of conduct. The usual Hebrew term translated 'law' is torah, a term signifying all the revealed will of God, or any part of it. Unless the context indicates otherwise, "law" in the Old Testament usually denotes the divine 'instruction' God has given his people. (Genesis 26:5; Exodus 16:1,28; Psalms 1:2; 19:7; 119:1,165; Isaiah 1:10; 8:16,20; etc.) This "law," or written revelation of God's will, made known the divine purpose for the Hebrew people in Old Testament times.

To the devout Jew, God's 'law' was equivalent to his plan for the salvation of the world. It is in this sense that Isaiah says "the isles shall wait for his law" (Isaiah 12:4). The instructions God imparted to Moses came to be known as 'the law of Moses,' that is, the instruction given by Moses. (Joshua 8:31; Nehemiah 8:1; Luke 2:22; 21:14; Acts 28:23; etc.) In view of the fact that the instruction imparted to Moses occupies a major part of the first five books of the Bible, commonly known as the Pentateuch, the Jews often referred to the Pentateuch as "the law of Moses." (Luke 24:44; John 1:17; cf. Matthew 5:17,18.)

In the New Testament the term 'the law' is used with various shades of meaning, and unless these different aspects of "law" are kept in mind, and the

context examined to ascertain which shade of meaning the writer is alluding to, the modern reader of the New Testament is almost certain, at times, to misconstrue the Jewish religious system. The different nuances of the word 'law' were clear, and a speaker or writer could shift rapidly from one to another without being misunderstood, since the context of his remarks would be sufficient to make this meaning clear. In fact, to the devout Jew all the different shades of meaning implied by the word 'law' were, for practical purposes, one, and each blended almost imperceptibly into the other. Furthermore, the Jews did not ordinarily distinguish between moral, ceremonial, civil, and health regulations, since God was the author of them all, and all were binding upon his people. To the modern reader, on the other hand, this can all be very confusing. In the New Testament the word "law" is used in two distinct but closely related senses: (1) Scripture as a revelation of the divine will. (See John 12:31; 15:24; etc.) In Jewish terminology the word 'law' may refer to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, in contrast with the Prophets and the Writings, or the Hagiographa—the three divisions of the Old Testament according to the Hebrew canon. (See Luke 24:44.) Occasionally they used the expression "law of Moses" when referring to the Pentateuch, but more often simply the word 'law.' (See Matthew 7:12; 11:13; 12:5; 22:40; 23:23; Luke 10:26; 16:16,17; John 1:45; 7:19; 13:15; Romans 5:13,20; 7; etc.)

At times the word "law" is used in connection with the Decalogue, though in some instances 'law' may refer specifically to the Pentateuch, of which the Decalogue is an integral part. (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 7:7; James 2:10-12.) (2) The Jewish religious system as a whole, or some particular part of it. (John 1:17; Acts 18:13,15; 22:3; Romans 6:14,15; Galatians 3:19-25; etc.) The Jewish religious system was, of course, based on the revelation of God's will as contained in the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly the Pentateuch. Sometimes the term 'law' refers particularly to the ritual law, the characteristic outward feature of the Jewish religious system. (Luke 2:22-24; Acts 15:5,24; etc.) The expression "works of the law" commonly refers to the requirements of the ritual law, though such law is also spoken of as 'the law of the Lord.' (Luke 2:23.) In Hebrews 7:12 "law" refers to that part of the Law of Moses dealing with the priesthood.

Obviously, texts referring to 'the law' should be used only after the most careful study of the context in order to ascertain the intent of the inspired writer, and with a fine sense of discrimination. (SDA Bible Dictionary, article "Law," pp. 641-642)

In view of the fact of the multimeaning significance of the term "law," we might well ask: Is there some more direct route in presenting the truth of the eternal nature of the Ten Commandments rather than striving about "law" texts? The burden of this article is to point out that there is such a route, one that is completely reliable from a biblical standpoint and which also is irrefutable in polemics.

It has often been pointed out that the one book in the Bible written especially for the last days and the last church is the eschatological book of Revelation. This is the Scripture that most of all deals with the last things. From the first chapter to the last, it points to the return of Jesus, and the last half of the book, in particular, describes the final crisis that will determine the destiny of the generation living on earth just prior to the Second Advent. In these last chapters we find a call to that wholehearted worship which is manifested in complete obedience to "the commandments of God."

Twice the remnant church is characterized as a commandment-keeping church.



(Revelation 12:17; 14:12.) Attention often has been called to these points. What has not been so frequently observed, however, is the fact that the writer of Revelation nowhere uses the word law in the Apocalypse or in his Epistles.<sup>2</sup> It would seem that the Holy Spirit, foreseeing the controversies that would ensue over the Pauline reference to law, admittedly containing “some things hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:15,16), planned that John should exalt God’s moral code above all possible misconstruction and polemics.

Central to all the visions of the Apocalypse is the heavenly sanctuary. (See Revelation 1:12; 4:1; 8:3; 15:5; etc.) In Revelation 15:5 John refers to this sanctuary as “the tabernacle of the testimony,” thus directing us in the omega of Scripture to the usage of that same term found in the alpha of the Inspired Word. In the Pentateuch of Moses “the tabernacle of the testimony” is referred to repeatedly. Why was it given this name? Because in its heart resided the ark, which housed the “tables of the testimony”—the Ten Commandments. The term “testimony” as found in the Bible’s first five books means the Ten Commandments and only the Ten Commandments, and the recurrence of the term in the last book of Scripture identifies these same commandments as still central in the plan of God during the Christian dispensation.<sup>3</sup> The focal point of the work of redemption in heaven is referred to as “the tabernacle of the testimony,” revealing afresh what was typified by the Mosaic sanctuary—namely, that the sacred will of God is the cynosure of all heavenly beings, and the very basis of all divine acts.

The Mosaic recital is so written as to make it evident that the whole of the typical ceremonial service would have been unnecessary but for the presence in the Most Holy Place of the record of the holy will of Jehovah. (See Exodus 25:10, in which the first item of the sanctuary discussed is the ark containing the Ten Commandments; compare Leviticus 4:1.) Furthermore, this ancient history makes it clear that God himself made a distinction between the tables of stone and his other requirements. The Ten were written by his own finger and placed within the ark, while all other commandments were written by Moses and placed at the outside of the ark. (Deuteronomy 31:26, margin.) Thus, it was God, not man, who separated the Ten Commandments from all other features of the Mosaic code.

Many authorities may be cited as recognizing the biblical evidence that the Ten were frequently referred to as the “testimony.”

TESTIMONY ... The two tables of stone, whereon the law, or Ten Commandments were written, which were witnesses of that covenant made between God and his people. (Exodus 25:16,18,21,31.) (Cruden, A Complete Concordance.)

The Decalogue, which is often called “the testimony.”

(Exodus 16:34; 25:16,21, etc.) (*The Pulpit Commentary*, on 2 Kings 11:12)

Before the Book of the Law was completed, the word “testimony” (eduth) was used specially to denote the Ten Commandments. (Wordsworth Commentary, on 2 Kings 11:1)

He now uses a word “Marturion” (testimony), familiar to Jewish ears, especially to readers of the Pentateuch in the LXX, “where it is found about thirty times, and signifies the “testimony” (eduth), i.e. of the Holy of Holies .... The Tables of the Law were “the Testimony,” and the Ark was “the Ark of the Testimony.”

See Acts 7:44; Revelation 15:5.

(*Wordsworth Commentary*, on 1 Timothy 2:6)

The testimony ... the term commonly used of the Ten Commandments. (The S.D.A. Bible Commentary, on 2 Kings 11:12)



They are ... “the testimony,” the witness to men of the divine will, righteousness itself, demanding righteousness in man .... It is by virtue of their presence in it that the ark becomes, in its turn, the ark of the covenant (Numbers 10:33, etc.), that the sacred tent became the tabernacle of witness and testimony (Exodus 38:21, etc.) (McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 10, p. 272. Art. “Ten Commandments”)

A designation of God’s law is testifying to the principles of his dealings with his people. So the ark of the covenant is called the “ark of the testimony” (Exodus 25:22), as containing ‘the testimony’ (verse 16), i.e., the Tables of the Law upon which the covenant was based. (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 1852)

(Ten Commandments) still more frequently ... called “the Testimony” as the attestation of the will of God concerning human character and conduct. (C.Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 272)

Something evidential, i.e. (general) evidence given of (specific) the Decalogue (in the sacred Tabernacle). (*Strong’s Concordance*, on Marturion)

(See also Smith’s Bible Dictionary, et al.)

Two other terms are used by John in Revelation for the Ten. They are “covenant” and “commandments.” A similar passage to Revelation 15:5 is Revelation 11:19, which refers to the “ark of his testament,” and between these two texts are others which describe the people of God on earth (in the sanctuary’s court) as those who “keep the commandments of God” (Revelation 12:17; 11:12). Exodus 34:28 and 29 makes it clear that all three terms—testimony, covenant, commandments — may be applied to the Ten, and it is in this way that John uses them. Earlier in the New Testament such texts as Galatians 5:1-3 clearly testify to the fact that now the rule of life to follow is not the keeping of the whole law.

Such references, however, as Galatians 5:6; 6:15; and 1 Corinthians 7:19 show that whatever in the law has ceased to be binding, the commandments, implemented by faith and love in one who has become “a new creature,” remain forever. It is John who identifies these enduring commandments by the texts in Revelation already mentioned. He portrays both the people of God on earth and the worshipers in heaven as paying allegiance to that same code which was once enshrined in the ark of the earthly Holy of Holies. It should be emphasized that this code in both cases consists of all ten of the commandments; and, therefore, the Sabbath remains sacred throughout all dispensations.

The worker for God, today, is counseled to present the binding obligation of God’s eternal requirements by dwelling upon the evidence from Revelation as supported by the parallel reference from the Pentateuch.<sup>4</sup> Such an approach in any preliminary presentation of the truth will avoid all controversies over texts employing the word “law” and will result in the conviction of many. It should be remembered, however, that the compelling mental assent is useless unless the heart is won; and the Lamb of God who honored the divine code by his atoning death should be so exalted by every minister in his word and manner that the hearts of the listeners will be melted and the truth become desirable.

#### **NOTE A**

The Hebrew word for testimony is “eduth,” and in the New Testament it finds its nearest

Greek synonym in the word “Marturion.” This is amply demonstrated by the Septuagint. Neither of these words in themselves necessarily signify the Ten Commandments, but when they are associated with the service of the tabernacle, they always do so refer. (See Numbers 1:50,53; 17:8,10; 18:2; Acts 7:41; Revelation 15:5.)

## NOTE B

### Two Approaches to the Ten Commandments

First Approach — based on the three terms for the Ten Commandments used in the book of Revelation:

- 1) Revelation 15:5            Tabernacle of the Testimony
- 2) Revelation 12:17        Commandments of God
- 3) Revelation 11:19        Ark of the Testament

These texts prove without any dispute that the Ten Commandments are in prominent focus sixty years after the cross, and, thus, they were not affected or abolished at the cross. (The Basic Old Testament Text, Exodus 34:28,29)

- 1) Covenant equivalent of testament
- 2) Ten Commandments
- 3) Tables of the Testimony

Ark of the Covenant (from Hebrew “berith”):

Numbers 10:33; Deuteronomy 10:5; Joshua 8:33; 1 Samuel 6:15; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Chronicles 35:3; Psalms 132:8; Hebrews 9:4; Revelation 11:19. Greek “Diatheke” — Covenant or Testament.

Commandments of God (from Hebrew “asereth hadebarim;” Greek “entolas”):

Exodus 20:1-17	Matthew 5:19
Deuteronomy 4:13	Matthew 19:17
Deuteronomy 10:1	Mark 7:7-15
Deuteronomy 5:29	Luke 23:54-56
Deuteronomy 13:4	John 15:10
Joshua 22:5	1 Corinthians 7:19
1 Kings 2:3	cf. Galatians 5:6;6:15
1 Chronicles 29:19	2 Corinthians 3:1-3
Psalms 78:7	1 John 5:2,3
Psalms 119:151	Revelation 12:17
Proverbs 4:4	Revelation 14:12
Ecclesiastes 12:13	Revelation 22:14
Isaiah 48:18	

Testimony of the Lord (from Hebrew “eduth”):

Exodus 31:18	Exodus 38:21
Exodus 25:16,22	Numbers 17:4,7
Exodus 16:34	Numbers 18:2

Exodus 40:20	2 Chronicles 21:6
Leviticus 16:13	Acts 7:44
Numbers 4:5	Revelation 15:5
Joshua 4:16	(Testimony from
2 Kings 11:12	Marturion which refers
Numbers 1:50	to the Decalogue in this
Numbers 1:53	passage according to
Numbers 10:11	Strong.)

Having proved from the terms used in Exodus 34:28 and 29, and also in Revelation, that the Ten Commandments remain in the New Testament era, the texts employing the word “law” can be used strongly to support the Ten. The Law is based on the Ten and becomes the inspired exponent of them in application and elaboration.

Second Approach — based on texts using “law” (to be used only after the above):

Exodus 24:12	Joshua 1:8
Psalms 19:7	Isaiah 8:19,20
Matthew 22:36–40	Romans 3:20
Romans 7:12	James 2:8–12
Acts 15:21	Hebrews 8:9,10
Deuteronomy 31:26	Psalms 1:1,2
Isaiah 42:21	Matthew 5:17,18
Luke 16:16,17	Romans 3:31
Romans 8:6,7	1 John 3:4
1 Timothy 1:6–10	2 Corinthians 3:4–16

#### Footnotes

- 1 *Our Firm Foundation*, vol. 1, p. 460.
- 2 1 John 3:4 in the Authorized Version is a mistranslation. *Anomia*, rendered “transgression of the law” means “lawlessness,” as in the Revised Version.
- 3 See Appendix A.
- 4 See Appendix B.

## APPENDIX FOUR

### The Continuing Controversies Over the Law

In the previous chapter, “The Everlasting Ten,” we discussed the manifold meanings of the Greek word “nomos.” It not only means “the rules and regulations of Judaism,” but the Pentateuch, sometimes the Old Testament, a principle of action, etc. We mentioned also that the first Protestant leaders declared that the ability to distinguish between law and gospel is the mark of a true theologian. The reason they said that was because the New Testament seems to have texts that are supportive of law and texts that are against law. Thus, someone trying to delineate the gospel in all its fullness must deal with these paradoxical passages.

The chief key to the dilemma after learning the multifaceted nature of law is to recognize that the New Testament is against law as a method but for it as a standard. And we are here using law in the sense of the moral heart of the Old Testament religion found in the divine words from Sinai. The New Testament is clear that the old covenant is gone forever and, thus, Judaism as a system is no more. But as surely as a house can

be destroyed without harming the rays of light which illuminate it, so the cult of Judaism could cease, and yet its moral heart remain. That this is the case is clear from the New Testament statements that constantly quote the Decalogue and assume that those principles of behavior are still a guide for the believer.

Jesus could quote from both Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 in connection with the two great commandments, and it is crystal clear that not for a moment could he ever have thought that these commandments were to vanish away. The first verses of Ephesians 6 assume that all Christians knew the Ten Commandments and even the order of those commandments, and regarded them as guidance for Christian living. Our Lord and the apostles quote particularly from the second table, as religion of the first century was very meticulous regarding observance of the first table, in outward form at least, but was slack regarding the second.

One facet of the problem is the contemporary situation when the New Testament was written. Were those from the Gentile nations who found Christ to be compelled to become Jews before they could enter the Christian church? The book of Galatians, Acts 15, and other passages give a resounding "no!" to this question. The new believers were not to be circumcised, nor compelled to keep the festival days or offer sacrifices.

Thus, most of the negative statements about law in the New Testament can be explained by the contemporary situation and the fact that the shadows of Judaism had now met their substance and were, therefore, no longer binding; and secondly, in the tendency toward legalism, which exists in every human heart and which both the Old and the New Testament condemn. While the New Testament, like the Old, nowhere uses expressions such as "the moral law" and "ceremonial law," what is implied by those titles and which has been recognized by church leaders in all centuries is the essence of what the New Testament says about the Old Testament law.

The moral relationships that existed before the Fall remained after the remedy had been offered for that Fall, that is, after Calvary. But the types and symbols of that remedy which have met their fulfillment have all passed away. Furthermore, the law as our creditor has been met and has no longer power. Our note of indebtedness, so to speak, has been nailed to the cross, and we shall see it no more. But the moral law itself like him who hung on the cursed tree, was resurrected with him, but in the height and depth of the new covenant, as promised in Jeremiah 31.

The above conclusions are not formed out of any cultic necessity but are those of the best theologians in recent centuries. Even Bultmann in our own time could write as follows:

It is clear that Christ is the end of the Law so far as it claimed to be the way to salvation. All as understood by man as the means of establishing 'his own righteousness,' for so far as it contains God's demand, it retains its validity. Of course, it's self-evident that so far as the nomos of God is represented to Paul's mind by the Old Testament Torah, with all its cultic and ritual rules, it cannot be valid in its whole extent .... Where Paul calls the Law 'holy' and 'spiritual' (Romans 12:14), he is thinking of only the ethical commandments .... (Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, p. 341)

In very recent years, men like Paul Sanders, Krister Stendahl, James Dunn, Charles Cranfield, Heikki Räisänen, Lloyd Gaston, John Gager, and others have written on this topic of law.<sup>1</sup> Not one of these agrees precisely with any of the others. It is probably the case that all of them are wrong to some degree in what they affirm.

We have talked elsewhere of the position of E. P. Sanders. He holds that the Judaism of Palestine has been misrepresented by Protestants since the time of Luther and that they were truly believers in grace and not in legalism. But he has perhaps made too much

of a good thing, for the heart of man is naturally legalistic; and while he may talk much about grace, in his bones he is still trying to earn his way. Recent evidence has been found in the Dead Sea scrolls that legalism was a pronounced tendency among the Jews before the time of Christ. Forth Esdras teaches the same. And it is not possible to read Romans 4 and 10 without seeing that Paul is opposing a rampant endeavor among his own people to earn their way to glory. He clearly says that the Jews of his day, for the most part, were refusing to submit in humility to the gift of righteousness and endeavoring instead to work out their own. In Philippians 3, the same writer affirmed that his only hope was a righteousness that would come from God, entirely distinct from his own efforts.

For James Dunn, the works of the law are particularly the boundary markers between the Jews and the Gentiles, such as circumcision, clean and unclean foods, and the keeping of holy days. The trouble with this position is that those three are never mentioned together by Paul. Furthermore, there are references in Paul to works of the law that are clearly wider than just the boundary markers. Paul's reference to the depth of the Ten Commandments (Romans 7) makes it clear that Paul's chief objection to the law is that men cannot keep it because of their own spiritual natures and because of the infinite depths of that law which was made for paradisaical man before the Fall.

The chief passage in Romans concerning the law — Romans 3:27 to 4:8 — gives no evidence that circumcision, the holy days, or the food laws are in Paul's vision. Not one of these is mentioned in that context. The case is similar in Philippians 3:4-6, where Paul, again, goes beyond mere listing of these distinctives of the Jews. When Paul wishes to expound his comment at the close of Romans 3 about the one way of salvation of the Jews and Gentiles, his words of explanation at the commencement of Romans 4 do not even refer to those things that divided Jews and Gentiles. Similarly, the argument about David in verses 6-8 in the same chapter has no reference to circumcision, etc., because David was blameless in these areas. So if David was accounted righteousness apart from works, the works mentioned could not be those that Dunn has in mind.

Räisänen believes that Paul keeps contradicting himself, but this is hardly a legitimate exegetical strategy. A famous British philosopher once said that if one was inclined to doubt the reasoning of Paul, one should first begin by questioning one's own. It is far more likely that both Sanders and Räisänen are at fault in the way they view ancient Judaism than that they are correct in the way they view Paul.

Everything in exegesis depends on the premises assumed by the exegete. One can almost predict an exegete's positions if one is aware of his or her basic theology. Whether he or she be of Bultmannian persuasion, or a fundamentalist, may have more to do with the results of his or her investigation than the facts of the case.

F. W. Farrar has written at length to prove that the history of exegesis is a history of error, and if black and white really mean different things, then the statistics are in favor of the one-time Dean of Canterbury. H. Riesenfeld asserts:

... It is inevitable that the innumerable contributions devoted to gospel research are stamped to a greater or lesser degree by the attitude of the writer in question toward the person and character of Jesus. The fatal thing is that there is no such thing as research without presupposition. The more emancipated the scholar thinks he is, the less he is in actual fact. (*The Gospel Tradition*, (Oxford, 1970), 51)

One of the best illustrations of these words is found in the history of the theology of Baur, whose work was so influential for decades on later scholars. Despite his protestations to the contrary, it does seem that the inference of Hegel's dialectical triad worked as a leaven amidst all his research. Stephen Neill suggests that:

It is in the field of its suppositions, which in themselves have nothing to do with critical historical method, that the whole great structure of the work of Baur comes to grief. Again, and again, when the presuppositions are exercising their unfortunate inference, critical method is for a time being abandoned. (The Interpretation of the New Testament, (London, 1966), 27)

What has been demonstrated as true regarding research on the Gospels is now being demonstrated as true in the research on the Epistles.

We would but recommend that the reader take his or her concordance and study each text that uses the words "law" or "commandments." It becomes clear that in harmony with such passages as Romans 8:4, the righteousness of the law is to be fulfilled in the Christian, because the commandment is "holy, just, and good" and "spiritual," as Romans 7:12-14 affirms. Faith does not make void the law at its heart. See Romans 3:31. But whoever depends on his own endeavors to fulfill the heights and depths, the length and breadth of divine requirement is severed from Christ and accursed. See Galatians 3:10-13; 5:1-4. Insofar as the law was against us by its barriers between Jews and Gentiles, and by its condemnation of our guilt, it has been removed. See Colossians 2:14. As a guide for the spiritual Christian, the commandments are still pertinent. 1 Corinthians 7:19. The truth is best summarized in three Pauline verses that include the same rubric. Compare Galatians 5:6; 6:15; 1 Corinthians 7:19.

#### Footnote

1. When Sanders wrote a second book for his critics, he was much more specific in his conclusions regarding Paul's epistles than he was in his first volume. And, in his second book, he affirms that Paul is negative about the law because he does not see it as a condition of entry into faith in Christ, and yet he simultaneously holds in a positive way that after entrance into the faith, Christians should fulfil the law as a pattern of behavior, except for those that distinguish Jews from Gentiles that were not essentially moral.

It should be stressed that there is much truth in the positions taken by Sanders, Dunn, and Stendahl, but it is very important to recognize that each man has been subject to trenchant criticism and there are weaknesses in each case. John M. G. Barclay, who was a lecturer in New Testament at the University of Glasgow and who did his Ph.D. dissertation on Galatians for Cambridge University, has written at length, critiquing these earlier writers. It is Barclay's conclusion that Paul did not see in the cross the complete abolition of the law, but only some parts of it.

Barclay believes that Sanders and Stendahl are correct in affirming that Paul does have his eye on the problem of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles and whether Gentile believers needed to live like Jews. But Barclay insists that Sanders has failed to see an increasing generalization in Paul's letters about the topics of "works" and "grace."

Philippians is, therefore, broader than Galatians, and Romans broader still; and once we reach Romans, according to Barclay, the law is much broader than those areas that distinguish Jews from Gentiles. In other words, Barclay recognizes that Paul appeals to a general principle whereby works are in contrast to faith and grace.

Therefore, the traditional Lutheran theology has good grounds, even if the same traditional position did not cover all the issues. An important emphasis by Barclay is that the apostle uses a special vocabulary of "fulfilment" when talking about the Christian's relationship to the Torah. For Paul, the law's basic admonitions can be obeyed without necessarily observing all the rules of Judaism. It is almost as though we have traveled full circle and come back to the positions of classical exegetes who affirm that the ceremonial elements of the Torah have gone, but that the moral ones, in principle, remain forever.

## APPENDIX FIVE

### The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament

Many years ago Thomas Dehany Bernard wrote a classic with the title listed above. Such a name for a book does not sound inviting; however, the facts prove otherwise in this instance, for the content is most compelling. The author's thesis is that the New Testament very clearly reveals the marvel of a divine superintendence over the succession of books, which by divine providence ultimately became our New Testament.

Bernard points out that with the exception of the Council of Jerusalem and the charge to the Milesian elders, all the discourses found in the book of Acts are directed at those who are not yet Christians. They tell us how Christ was presented to the unbelieving world, but they do not tell us how he was presented and taught in the church. The Epistles fill in these lacunae. Even the form of apostolic teaching is significant and reveals a considerable advance in the New Testament over the Old. Says Bernard:

The Prophets delivered oracles to the people, but the Apostles wrote letters to brethren, letters characterized by all that fullness and unreserved explanation and that play of various feeling which are proper to that form of intercourse. It is in its nature a more familiar communication as between those who are, or should be, equals. (*The Progress of Doctrine*, 140)

Next, Bernard considers the method the apostolic writings employed as they set forth evangelical doctrine. It is in harmony with the form, for it is a method of companionship, rather than dictation. There is no record of a series of visions given to Paul. Neither does he, in chapter after chapter, declare: "Thus saith the Lord."

He rouses, he animates, he goes along with the workings of men's minds by showing them the workings of his own. He utters his own convictions, he pours forth his own experience, he appeals to others to "judge what he says," and commends his words "to their conscience in the sight of God." He confutes by argument rather than by authority, deduces his conclusions by processes of reasoning, and establishes his points by interpretations and applications of the former Scriptures

Consider, for instance, the argument of justification in the early part of the Epistle to the Romans, which accomplishes every step by the aid of the former Scriptures. Why all this labor in proving what might have been decided by a single announcement from one entrusted with the Word of God? Would not the apostolic declaration that such a statement was error, and that such another was truth, have sufficed for the settlement of that particular question? Doubtless! but it would not have sufficed to train men's minds to that thoughtfulness whereby truth becomes their own, or to educate them to the living use of the Scriptures as the constituted guide of inquiry.

It is the same with those records of personal experience, and those effusions of personal feeling, which teach us how the revelation of Christ tells upon the believer's heart. We see, for instance, in the seventh and eighth chapters of the same Epistle, the writer's own heart thrown open; first in its passage from the law of sin and death to the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus; and then in the assured consciousness of the vast and various blessings, present and future, that belong to the children of God, and the heirs together with Christ whom nothing shall be able to separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus their Lord. This is not only definite information, it is also effective education,

showing the revelation of God as wrought into its ultimate and subjective form, and assisting by sympathy and ratifying by example the same process in our hearts. (Id., 142-144)

Bernard then inquires: "Who are the appointed teachers of the church?" His point is that not only were certain of the authors of the Epistles men who had known Christ, but the most significant writer was one who had not been a witness of the Lord's life on earth. While the other writers were the Apostles of the manifestation of Christ, he was the apostle of its results. He becomes the representative and example of the millions in subsequent years who never saw Christ yet rejoiced to embrace his gospel. It was, therefore, most appropriate that he who would have most to say about the gospel would be one of a kind with the great army yet to join the church.

Thomas Bernard also points out that the Pauline Epistles have been habitually arranged, with very small variation, in the order in which we read them today—an order which is highly significant. Again we quote:

Especially ... does the Epistle to the Romans claim the place which it has habitually held as the first step in the Epistolary course. The subject on which it gives a full and decisive exposition is not only vital but fundamental, namely, the need, the nature, and the effects of the justification for individual souls which the Gospel preaches and which faith receives. As there can be no repose for a soul while that first point of personal anxiety, "how can man be just with God?" is left unsettled, so there can be no solidity for a system of doctrine until the true answer to that question has been distinctly shaped and firmly desposited. Moreover, if the Gospel of St. Matthew fitly opens the whole evangelical record by connecting it with the former Scriptures, so also for the same reasons does this great Epistle fitly open the doctrinal series, for what the one does in respect of fact, the other does in respect of doctrine, justifying throughout the intimation with which it opens that the gospel will here be treated as that 'which God had promised before by His Prophets in the Holy Scriptures.' In the constant references, and in the whole line of argument, we see the illustrious genealogy and lineal descent of the Christian doctrine of justification by faith traced, like that of Jesus Himself, from Abraham and David, and vindicated by the witness of the Law and the Prophets, so that we enter on the final exposition of the truth with a settled sense that in all the successive stages of its revelation, the truth has been won. (Id., 151-152)

The same writer proceeds to show how appropriate it is that following Romans come the two letters to the Corinthians and the Epistle to the Galatians, for these letters deal with the two heresies that lie on either side of the true gospel — antinomianism and legalism.

Thus, in the first four Epistles, the first questions have been answered and the first dangers averted; and the apostolic or Pauline doctrine has established its divine character and developed its essential features. In the Romans, by connecting itself with the inspiration of the Old Testament; in the Corinthians and Galatians by asserting its own. (See, especially, 1 Corinthians 2 and Galatians 1.) (Id., 153)

The New Testament is a magnificent temple of truth. It first tells the passion story four times over in the Gospels, and then sets forth the missionary movement that followed Pentecost. Having described the conversion of thousands to the new faith, it proceeds in the Epistles to outline what was taught to the converts. Paul stresses faith; James, who follows him, will stress works, though true to faith; Peter will emphasize the virtue of



hope, even amid suffering and trial; and John, the Beloved, will stress the supreme virtue of love. While faith must always have been seen as the first virtue for Christians, love remains the chief. What else is necessary? That believers should persevere. Perseverance is the theme of the writer who follows John, namely, Jude.

Thus, the apostles and Acts have presented the past; the Epistles deal with behavior in the present; and the capstone comes in the final book of the Bible, which points to the future. Only God could have so planned this magnificent volume which we call the New Testament.

## APPENDIX SIX

### The Moral Influence Theory and The Book of Romans

Romans uses the Greek word “nomos” (law) over seventy times, and the various Greek terms signifying righteousness and its cognates occur over fifty times. Here, then, is a highly legal stress, yet this is the chief part of the Bible when allied with Galatians against legalism. It is important to say that respect for law need not imply legalism anymore than respect for reason need imply rationalism. We trust that every Christian marriage is legal, but it is our hope that they are not legalistic. However, the Moral Influence theory associated with the name of Peter Abelard shows a decided antagonism to law and sets it up as a straw man in opposition to the Almighty.

No great branch of the Christian church has ever accepted the Moral Influence theory, but it keeps reappearing because it reflects something in our own human nature which is opposed to law and opposed also to the need for the covering righteousness of another. It cannot be too strongly affirmed that both the Old and the New Testaments revolve around legal categories. Our word “testament,” which is a translation of the Greek and Hebrew words for “covenant,” implies a legal relationship. The very heart of the old covenant system was the Decalogue in the ark in the holy of holies. The fact that the first five books of the Old Testament were called “the law” points to the same truth. In Leon Morris’s book, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, we find these words:

The Old Testament consistently thinks of a God who works by the method of law. This is not the conception of one or two writers but is found everywhere in the Old Testament, and is attested by a variety of conceptions, many being taken straight from forensic practices. Among the heathen, the deity was thought of as above all law, with nothing but the dictates of his own desires to limit him. According to his behavior, he was completely unpredictable, and while he made demands on his worshippers for obedience and service, there were few if any ethical implications of this service and none of a logically necessary kind. Far otherwise was it with the God of the Hebrews. (p. 258)

And in another place the same writer says:

Yahweh and law went well together ....

The Old Testament consistently thinks of a God who works by the method of law .... Thus, as we approach the question of the use of justification in the Old Testament, we are dealing not with an isolated conception which appears briefly now and then, but with an idea of law which runs through and through the ancient Scriptures. (*Ibid.*)

There are approximately 300 Old Testament references to covenant, and far more than half of them refer to the Sinaitic covenant. So important was this covenant and its central concept of a gracious God who could be trusted to act, not arbitrarily but consistently with his own nature, expressed by his law, that the 39 books of the Old Testament have been named after it.

The famous Hebrew word “hesed,” translated as “kindness” or “goodness” or “loving kindness” or “steadfast love,” when used of God, is very nearly the equivalent of “grace.” John Bright affirms that the term refers to the favor of God which summoned Israel to covenant relationship. (See *The Kingdom of God*, 28.)

Central to God’s covenant people was their law-court procedure whereby disputes were settled at the city gate by judges. All of this was modeled upon God himself and his behavior, for God is set forth in Scripture as a God of judgment. (See Malachi 2:17; Psalm 89:14.) Entire books of Scripture revolve around what scholars have called “the ribh controversies.” The Hebrew word means “to judge or decide.” (See Isaiah 41:1,21; 50:8; Jeremiah 25:31; Micah 6:1.) A well-known scholar, G. B. Caird, has written a classic monograph on this. We quote him with reference to the use of the terms “witness” and “testimony,” which, of course, have legal reference:

The repeated use of the words ‘witness’ and ‘testimony’ is one of the many points of resemblance between the Revelation and the Fourth Gospel. In Greek and English, these words could be treated as dead metaphors, without any conscious reference to the lower court, which was their primary, forensic sense. The author of the Fourth Gospel, perhaps inspired by the example of the Second Isaiah, presents his argument in the form of a lower court debate, in which one witness after another is summoned, until God’s advocate, the Paraclete, has all the evidence he needs to convince the world that Jesus is the Son of God and so wins his case. In the Revelation, the courtroom setting is even more realistic; for Jesus had borne his testimony before Pilate’s tribunal, and the martyrs must face a Roman judge. What they have to remember as they give their evidence is that the evidence is being heard in a court of more ultimate authority, where judgments which are just and true issue from the Great White Throne. (*Revelation*, 238)

A. Trites has written *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, which enlarges on this theme. Commenting on the theme of martyrdom throughout the book of Revelation, Trites says:

John knows that the Roman proconsul of Asia possesses great judicial power, symbolized by the “sword” (compare Romans 13:4), but he writes to remind his fellow Christians that it is Christ, not Caesar’s representative, who has the ‘sharp two-edged sword’ (Revelation 2:12). Soon some of them will be hauled into law courts and sentenced to martyrs’ deaths .... Already Antipas, Christ’s faithful witness, has been slain (Revelation 2:13), and the seer sees him as the first of many Christians who are about to make the supreme sacrifice for holding “the testimony of Jesus.” (pp. 155–56)

When G. B. Caird comments on Revelation 12:7-9, he affirms it to be a judicial scene, where the prosecutor in the heavenly law court has been defeated by the legal victory of Christ on Calvary. (238).

We have referred to the use of law-court imagery throughout the Old Testament concerning man versus man and God versus man, and also to the use of the same motif

in John's Gospel and the book of Revelation. But it is in Romans that this theme finds its most precise elaboration.

The book of Romans, in early chapters, reads like a lawyer's brief. In Chapter 1, the pagan world is found guilty. And in Chapter 2, the religious world is likewise condemned. In the third chapter, using fourteen statements from the Old Testament about human evil, the whole world is indicted before God. The climax in 3:19 pronounces on all human beings: "Not one of them has any excuse; in fact, all the world stands hushed and guilty before Almighty God." Then it is that the great advocate is set forth in what scholars call the Acropolis of the New Testament (v.v. 21-26).

Heresy is usually truth amputated or otherwise distorted. This is true of the Moral Influence theory which holds that the cross reveals and motivates love quite apart from all legal implications and requirements. No one doubts that the cross is an evident demonstration of the love of God melting the hearts of sinners. But the New Testament constantly affirms that the wages of sin is death and that Christ consented to be made sin for us, and we accept those wages in our place. (See 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Galatians 3:10-13; Romans 3:21-26, 5:10-19.)

According to the Moral Influence theory, humanity's main problem is its ignorance; but for the New Testament, ignorance is only the fruit of the real problem, which is sin — our self-centered rebellion against our Creator. For Moral Influence theorists, Jesus is primarily our example. But the New Testament sets him forth first as a Savior and Redeemer. Thus, the New Testament, like the Old, pictures the primary characteristic of God as holiness — a circle comprehending all his other attributes, including love. This holiness demanded that sin could not be ignored.

A penalty for disobedience had been pronounced at the beginning of Scripture, and that penalty had to be carried out or God would cease to be God. The words of Anselm should never be forgotten: "You have not yet considered the seriousness of sin." As John Stott has said: "The 'Moral Influence' theory offers a superficial remedy because it has made a superficial diagnosis" (*The Cross of Christ*, 220).

At the heart of the Moral Influence theory is a fatal flaw. The cross of Christ reveals the love of God because it is a death in sinners' place. (See Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:10.) Therefore, the cross can be recognized as evidence of God's love only when simultaneously seen to be a proof of his holiness and justice. As G. C. Berkouwer has declared: "In the cross of Christ God's justice and love are simultaneously revealed, so we can speak of his love only in connection with the reality of the cross." (*Work of Christ*, 277-278.)

The truth about the atonement is that God revealed his love by saving us. This stands in contrast to the error of the Moral Influence theory that God saved us by revealing his love. Or as another has said: "The revelation consists essentially in redemption, rather than the redemption in the revelation." (H. W. Robinson, *Suffering Human and Divine*.) Thus, Abelard was correct in seeing the cross as an evidence of divine love, but he was wrong to deny what Anselm affirmed, when the latter set forth the atonement as satisfying God's own character of justice.

Some have used certain of the parables of the New Testament in support of the theory under discussion. It is claimed that there is no allusion to Christ and his cross in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, or in the parable of the Prodigal Son, or again in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. In response it must be said that no parable tells the whole story. Furthermore, is there not sacrificial humiliation in the way the father of the Prodigal humbles himself and runs to his rebel son — something no typical father in the East would ever have done? The parables are stressing, by their contrast between two characters opposed to each other, the condition of forgiveness, not its ground. Only at the cross do we see all three parables together. There at Calvary was the supreme showing of the sacrificial love of God in Christ, who died for sinners.

In an excellent book entitled, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, Dr. Kenneth E. Bailey discusses Luke 15 and finds the cross, where many have missed it. He stresses the truth already alluded to, that in this story, while a man of his age and position always moved in a slow, dignified fashion, the father of the Prodigal takes upon himself the shame and humiliation due to his rebel son and exposes himself in a humiliating fashion in the village street. Says Bailey: "The humiliating spectacle in the village street hints at the meaning of the cross." He goes on to say: "The suffering of the cross was not primarily the physical torture, but rather the agony of rejected love." (Id., 56.)

The gospel is "law and love combining." Any attempt to separate what God has joined together is forbidden by Holy Writ. It sounds wonderfully winning to elevate love, but both Testaments make it plain that before we speak about love, we should consider the holiness of God. When love is used as a substitute for justice or for law, it is misused. We quote a classic statement from Horatius Bonar on this matter:

Love is not a rule, but a motive. Love does not tell me what to do; it tells me how to do it. Love constrains me to do the will of the Beloved One; but to know what the will is, I must go elsewhere. The law of our God is the will of the Beloved One, and were that expression of his will withdrawn, love would be utterly in the dark; it would not know what to do. It might say, I love my Master, and I love his service, and I want to do his bidding, but I must know the rules of his house, that I may know how to serve him.

Love without law to guide its impulses would be the parent of will-worship and confusion, as surely as terror and self-righteousness, unless upon the supposition of an inward miraculous illumination, as an equivalent for law. Love goes to the law to learn the divine will, and love delights in the law, as the exponents of that will; and he who says that a believing man has nothing more to do with law, save to shun it as an old enemy, might as well say that he has nothing to do with the will of God. For the divine law and the divine will are substantially one, the former the outward manifestation of the latter. (*God's Way of Holiness*, 77-78)

A ready example lies to hand of the pertinence of this comment. Holding to the principle of love alone might mean the countenancing of polygamy and adultery. Without the divine law, why not? Similarly, unless the cross is seen as the payment of the debt of sin because of violation of law, it loses its significance and potency. There was law and love combining in Eden, again at Calvary, and so it will be seen in the last Great Judgment Day. "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" is a principle that applies to more than marriage.

## APPENDIX SEVEN

### Key words and concepts of Romans

1:17 "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (RSV)

#### Introduction

Section A: Justification—"he who through faith is righteous" (chapters 1-5; 9-10).

Section B: Sanctification—"shall live" (chs. 6-8; 12-15).

**Key words in whole book**

Faith (or “believe”—same word in Greek)	64 times
Justification (or “righteousness” and cognates, being from same Greek root, they are interchangeable)	50 times
Holy Spirit	26 times
Holiness or Sanctification (same Greek word)	4 times
Live	15 times

Note that faith and justification or equivalents occur more than twice as often as other key words. Figures approximate.

**Section A:** “He who through faith is righteous” (1:17)

**Justification:** Romans 1-5, 9-10 (9:30 to 10:17)

**Chapters 1-5:** The way of justification for all people.

**Romans 1:** Introduction and condemnation of Gentiles

**Romans 2:** Condemnation of Jews

**Romans 3:** Condemnation of all people (1-20)  
The “out” for all who believe (21-31)  
= the righteousness of faith based on Christ’s atonement (21-26).  
This is the chief cluster of “faith” and “righteousness” words.  
Nothing here emphasizing sanctification.

**Romans 4:** Justification illustrated. Righteousness apart from works in Abraham, David and all who received the promises prior to Sinai. Note the elevenfold use of “impute” and “reckon.”

**Romans 5:** All lost in Adam. All redeemed in Christ. Righteousness repeatedly called a gift (15-17).

**Chapters 9:30 to 10:17** How the heathen found justification, but not Israel.  
The difference between the righteousness of the law and righteousness by faith (RBF). Israel tried the first, but the Gentiles the second. Salvation is available to all who believe, for justification is by faith alone.

**Key Words in Section A:**

Faith (or cognates)	52 times
Justification or “righteousness” (and cognates)	42 times
These two key words above are linked in the same sentence or in the same verse. (Never so linked in “sanctification” passages 6-8, 12-15)	13 times
Holy Spirit	1 time

Holiness or Sanctification (same Greek word)	1 time
Live	1 time

### **Passages Linking Righteousness with Faith =**

1:17; 3:22, 26, 30; 4:3, 5, 11, 13, 22-24; 5:1; 9:30; 10:4,6, etc.

Notice that “righteousness” and “justification” are linguistically interchangeable. See the Bible in all other languages. Compare the KJV and RSV at 1:17; 3:26; 10:4; Galatians 2:21. See also NEB at 2 Corinthians 3:9; Romans 8:10.

Translators use such a hodgepodge of terms that none but the initiated would ever suspect that Paul is using words of the same stock ... the mere English reader will not know that the three words occurring in 3:25f., “righteousness,” “just,” and “justifier of,” ... are all words of the same root in the original (AUSS 8:91).

### **Summary of Section A:**

Righteousness by faith (RBF, or the righteousness of faith), means justification only. This is the imputed merits of Christ.

### **Section B:**

“... shall live”      Roman 1:17

**Sanctification:**      Romans 6-8, 12-15.

Chapters 6-8:      A new life for God’s people

Romans 6      Because you “died in Christ,” reckon your old nature dead. Yield yourself in obedience to him.

Romans 7      The law is as helpless to sanctify as to justify. It is a perfect standard, but a hopeless method.

Romans 8      Sanctification is by cooperation with the Holy Spirit and is completed at glorification.

Romans 12-15:      How to live the new life of love  
Here are described the practical duties of a sanctified person.

### **Key Words in Section B**

Faith (not once linked with “righteousness”)	14 times
Righteousness (righteousness of deed, not of belief)	8 times
Live	14 times
Holiness (Sanctification)	3 times
Holy Spirit	25 times

(The key words in Section B are seldom used in Section A. The key words of Section A are seldom used here. The emphasis in Section A is the imputed status of righteousness through our surrender to Christ through faith. The emphasis in Section B is the imparted righteousness of state manifested in works.)

### **Passages Linking Sanctification and Faith = None**

“Justification” and “righteousness” are interchangeable terms. “Sanctification” and “righteousness” are not. Sanctification is never asserted to be by faith alone in Romans. The cooperation of diligent effort is essential. “Mortify” (8:13 KJV), “put to death” (RSV).

### **Summary of Section B:**

Sanctification is the fruit or consequences of righteousness by faith (RBF). All admonitions to strive after sanctification show holiness yet to be incomplete and therefore the necessity exists of continual justification, that is, continual dependence on Christ’s imputed righteousness in order to stand before a holy God and His infinite law.

### **Conclusions**

Such phrases as “righteousness of faith,” “righteousness by faith” are used only in the discussion of justification—never in the section on sanctification.

While the word “faith” is the dominant word in sections on justification, mention of the Holy Spirit is dominant in the discussion of sanctification.

Believing, not doing, is the emphasis in the chapters on justification, but doing, not believing, is the emphasis in the chapters on sanctification, though faith remains implicit.

Faith in connection with righteousness is not referred to in the sanctification section, and the Holy Spirit is only once referred to in the section on justification.

The words “justification” and “righteousness” are interchangeable (same Greek root), but the words “sanctification” (or “holiness”) and “justification” are not so. Thus “righteousness by faith” and “justification by faith” mean the same thing, but neither include sanctification, according to the linguistic and contextual evidence.

## **APPENDIX EIGHT**

### **Justification**

J. H. Morrison

Romans 3:24 — “Being justified freely by his grace  
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

The great Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, once set in the forefront of Reformation theology, has in these days fallen from its pride of place. To many the term is simply meaningless, to others it is repellent. It brings with it the aroma of the law courts. It is suggestive of legal proceedings in some criminal case, with a judge on the bench and a prisoner at the bar anxiously awaiting sentence, which things are felt to be out of harmony with the Beatitudes and the gracious words spoken in Galilee, and the whole spirit of the gospel.

The question may be asked, however, whether those who neglect the doctrine have really understood it, and whether they have ever faced the situation with which it deals. It should make us pause when we reflect how the experience of justification stirred to its depths the mighty soul of St. Paul; how it made Luther’s blood leap in his veins; how it gave to our fathers a source of peace and courage and assured hope such as we may well covet.

There must be more in it than we think. After all, a law court is not a cloister where lawyers pore and mumble over dusty books. It is a place where vital interests are involved, where dramatic situations arise and hearts beat with painful intensity, where life itself

may be at stake. If any man, anxiously awaiting judgment, has heard an unexpected sentence of acquittal, or when lying under sentence of death has received a free pardon, surely the experience would be incomparably thrilling and forever memorable.

If St. Paul and Luther and Bunyan and many another feel that they have had such an experience; if by the infinite mercy of God they have escaped his righteous judgment on their sins; if they have received a free pardon and a new standing in the sight of God, and boldness to enter into his holy place; is it to be wondered at if they speak with full hearts of their justification and set it in the forefront of their thanksgivings? We shall do well to inquire earnestly what they mean when they speak of "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

It will bring us face-to-face with the central problem of our moral life.

## I.

That problem is: How shall a man be right with God? As soon as man awoke to moral self-consciousness, he realized by a divinely implanted instinct that God is one "with whom we have to do." That is an inescapable conviction. So long as men believed in many gods, it was not easy to tell how to be right with them. Men could only try by terrible and costly service to avert wrath and obtain favor.

But when the knowledge of one living and true God, Maker, Ruler, and Judge of all the world dawned on man's mind, then there awoke the dread anticipation of a righteous judgment to be pronounced on every human life, and it became a living and momentous question with serious-minded men how they could possibly face that judgment.

This is a problem which has exercised heart and conscience in every age from the most ancient times and far beyond the bounds of revealed religion. It is not a problem created by the Christian revelation; it is a problem which that revelation came to solve.

Upon St. Paul, as a devout and thoughtful Jew, the problem pressed with special weight and insistence through the teaching of the Mosaic law. God had made himself known to Israel as a righteous and holy God, one who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. His law demanded nothing less than perfect righteousness.

The law was an organic whole, so that he that offended in one point was guilty of all. It was an impossible demand, which reduced thoughtful and earnest men to despair. "In thy sight," so they confessed, "shall no man living be justified." "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand?" "How can men be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand." St. Paul has left a record of the agonizing struggle he made to achieve righteousness by the works of the law, and of how he found it impossible to attain peace with God along a road swept with all the dread artillery of the Ten Commandments.

No doubt the mercy, as well as the righteousness of God, was made known to ancient Israel, and we cannot but suppose that devout souls found consolation there. St. Paul, himself, we may be sure, had blinks of sunshine even in his pre-Christian days. There must have been times when he hoped in God's mercy. But to a profound and deeply searching mind like his, the question would ever recur, pressed upon him by an awakened and sensitive conscience: "What ground have I for hoping in God's mercy? Do I not rather deserve condemnation under a righteous and holy law which I daily transgress?"

It is evident from the verses which immediately follow our text that St. Paul found reconciling God's righteousness with his remission of past sins a real moral problem. As for himself, he says at a later point in this epistle, "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." By this he means that his sense of God's righteousness, pressing upon his guilty conscience, made him feel morally helpless, and reduced him to a point



where he despaired of salvation.

St. Paul's problem is ours also. How shall we be right with God? The science of our time has produced in the modern mind a strong conviction that the whole world is a realm of unalterable law, and many who have no belief in God, speak of the importance and necessity of being "in tune with the universe." To the religious mind the laws of nature are an expression of the righteousness and self-consistency of God who has given to the world its constitution, which he will unchangeably maintain. Both physical laws and moral laws are alike the manifestation of the constant will and purpose of a righteous and holy God.

It is this which makes the fact of human sin so terrible a problem. Smuts, the great statesman and philosopher, referring to his religious experience, speaks of a crack running through the world, "and that crack runs through me." There is something fundamentally wrong, cracked, and broken, in the individual heart and in the social life of humanity. None can possibly deny it. And such a crack in the machinery of the universe must lead to ultimate disaster. The world goes on its unalterable way; consequences are inevitable. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Over against this concept of law there are, of course, voices which confidently affirm the love of God, and speak as if his mercy were to be expected as a matter of course. It is difficult to understand how intelligent people can view the situation so lightly and imagine it to be so easy of solution. How are you going to find room for the operation of mercy in a world constituted and governed as we know this world to be? The science of our time says quite frankly and decisively that there is no room for it. Forgiveness is impossible, evil must run its course, and the sinner must eat the fruit of his sin. What is even more serious, the awakened conscience supports this verdict. Its witness is that sin ought not to go unpunished. And so, however fondly the sinner may hope in the mercy of God, that hope is insecure. There will always be the haunting fear that mercy will not be able to prevail against judgment. "God may be merciful, but do I deserve mercy? What is my plea? What is my ground of hope?" Thus feeling fluctuates, like shifting sand, and there can be no settled peace.

We are brought at last to this, as St. Paul was, that if there be a remedy for sin it must be a remedy that goes sheer down to the root of the trouble. It must deal with the whole situation effectively. It must be no mere slurring over of moral distinctions. It must involve no obscuring of the righteousness of God, no hint of favoritism, no secret opening of some back door of admission for the favored few. We must boldly affirm that as there is a physical order by divine appointment, so there is a moral order which must be maintained in its integrity throughout all God's dealings with men.

Good and evil are essentially and eternally distinct, and it is unthinkable that anything should ever be done to obscure the difference. God will never deal in an arbitrary way with men, letting the law have its course with some, but removing others beyond its reach. Such inconstancy in God, if it were conceivable, would result in moral chaos, as surely as the suspension of physical law would lay the world in ruins. And thus we may take it as certain that if we cannot be saved in full harmony with the righteousness of God, we cannot be saved at all.

Few things are more necessary in our time than to make plain to all men that grace is no violation of law. It is this misconception which makes so many among us regard the gospel as negligible and quite out-of-date in a scientific age. Miracles are rejected as impossible because they are misconceived as being violations of natural law, and the forgiveness of sins is dismissed as a fairy tale because the laws of the universe must take their unalterable course. We are as reverent of the divine order as any.

We are convinced, as St. Paul was, that "forgiveness, if forgiveness there is to be, must vindicate the moral law that sin has outraged. The very act that mediates pardon

must also proclaim judgment. Mercy cannot replace justice; it must itself be justice."

## II.

Is this possible? Can such a forgiveness be found? Can the problem of man's sin be solved in any such way? It was St. Paul's conviction that the solution was found in Christ. In him, by a crowning act of grace, God had reconciled the world unto himself. In him, Paul found himself "justified," delivered from the guilt and condemnation of the law.

What the law could not do, God's grace had done, and in such a way that so far from "making void the law" it had "established the law." This is a mystery before which all human words and thoughts fail, a mystery which grows ever deeper the more it is pondered. "Justification," says Brunner, "is the most incomprehensible thing that exists. All other marvels are miracles on the circumference of being, but this is the miracle in the centre of being, in the personal centre."

If the question be pressed, "What did Christ do?" we can only make answer in words the full meaning of which we cannot fathom. He came into the world, as he said, "to give his life a ransom for many." He made atonement for the sin of the world; he died for the ungodly; he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. And every Christian heart, making a personal application of all this, says, "He loved me and gave himself for me." We joyfully accept the fact, because it is a veritable experience, but we are not able to speak worthily about it, or to frame an adequate theory of it. What can we say but that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." We may think of him in his Godhead, taking upon himself the burden which man could not bear. We may think of him in his humanity, identifying himself wholly in love with our fallen race and offering in our name the sacrifice of a perfect obedience in life and death. His was an atoning death, the supreme and unapproachable example of that self-sacrificing love which leads the innocent willingly to suffer for the guilty, a love which we reverence as the divinest element in human nature.

In the sacrifice of Christ, God's righteousness and mercy are revealed in wonderful union. "I will sing of mercy and judgment," says the Psalmist. Nowhere can that song be sung more fitly than at the cross. Here, indeed, we see that "mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." In the cross there is a revelation of the righteousness of God. There, as nowhere else, sin stands condemned. It is indelibly branded as utterly hostile to God and hateful in his sight. No one who has found mercy at the cross can be for a moment in doubt that sin is under the condemnation of a holy God, and is absolutely to be renounced and put away.

At the same time, in the cross there is a revelation of the mercy and love of God. We there behold a divine love which could not be overcome by any degree of provocation. The Savior, having wholly identified himself with sinful men, held on firmly to the end, even though it seemed in the last dark hour to cut him off from fellowship with God. It was as if, in the infinite intensity of his immeasurable love, he had vowed that if the world were to be condemned, he would share and bear its condemnation. He was willing to be made a lost soul for the salvation of sinners. In his hour of agony, he faced that dread prospect, and not even the oncoming of death could turn him from his redeeming purpose. It is a mystery and a miracle of grace beyond our power to fathom. What can we say but just this: that he did all that needed to be done for man's salvation, he fulfilled all righteousness; in St. Paul's phrase, "he broke down the middle wall of partition and reconciled the world to God." He won the kingdom of Heaven for himself and for all his people; he entered in his own right into the holiest of all, and left the way open for all who would follow him.

### III.

On the ground, therefore, of his finished work and perfect sacrifice, sinners are justified in the sight of God through faith in him. This is the good news, the very heart of the gospel, that salvation is a free gift of God in Christ. A gift, of course, needs to be accepted, and faith is simply our acceptance of God's free gift. There is no sinner in all the wide world who is not entitled to say with St. Paul: "He loved me and gave himself for me." "In my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood." When we accept this in faith, then we are united to Christ; one might even say, identified with Christ, so that in him we have a new standing in the sight of God.

It may seem a cold and external and artificial thing to say that our sins are laid on him and we are clothed in the robe of his righteousness; but what is meant is that a bond is formed between the believer and Christ which, like a perfect marriage bond, issues in a union of love involving a complete identity of interests and gifts and privileges and fortune.

Once this is grasped, we are in a position to understand and to feel the thrill which comes to the sinner who knows that he is justified. It is no mere legal transaction, but a complete divine salvation. It gives a ground of hope such as can be found nowhere else. The believer says, in effect, "My righteousness is nothing, and I wholly abandon it, and base no claim upon it. Nothing in my hand I bring. But Christ's righteousness is perfect, and by the grace of God I am privileged to take my stand on that. And I do take my stand on it with all holy boldness and confidence. I dare to say with the apostle, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that shall condemn?' Paul's Christ is my Christ too and, therefore, being justified by faith I have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such is the wonderful experience of justification by which Christ's people have access into the grace wherein they stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. It inspires the great evangelical hymns, such as Zinzendorf's hymn as translated by John Wesley:

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

Bold shall I stand in thy great day;  
For who aught to my charge shall lay?  
Fully, through these, absolved I am  
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

This may seem to many a heady and presumptuous doctrine, and so it would be if it were in any degree the voice of self-righteousness. But it is the song of those who have attained to hope through utter despair of self, and who now say, "To God alone be the glory."

This doctrine of justification, which has often been denounced as subversive of morality, on the contrary, becomes in the believer the greatest possible incentive to a good life. Being justified by grace, we are brought into the favor and into the family of God. We are no longer servants but sons and daughters, and we are inspired to live and work as sons and daughters by the new spirit given to us.

And so it may confidently be said that God's justification of sinners in Christ is justified by its fruits in life and service. But we must begin at the beginning. We must

enter the kingdom by the lowly door of faith. We can never be right till we are right with God, and the one foundation of all Christian living is to be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

(This article came to me in its present form decades ago. I regret I do not have any information regarding the time and place of its original printing—Des Ford.)

## **Appendix Nine**

### **Justification**

C. H. Spurgeon

“How shall man be just with God?” is a question of infinite importance to every child of Adam; a question, however, which could never have been answered if Jehovah had not manifested his sovereign grace towards his apostate creatures. Far from being a merely speculative point, it permeates the whole system of Christianity, and lies at the foundation of personal religion, and of all right views of the character and moral government of God. Whatever else may be considered different or nonessential, this cannot be; it is a capital article of that faith which was once for all delivered to the saints, and a mistake here may prove eternally fatal. Well might Luther call it, “the article of a standing or falling church,” i.e., the article on the reception or rejection of which the stability or subversion of the church depended.

This, then, is the subject to which we invite the attention of our readers in this paper. At first, as to the nature of justification, or that in which it consists. The term justification is forensic, referring to the proceedings in a court of judicature, and signifies the declaring a person righteous according to law. It is not the making a person righteous by the infusion of holy habits, or by an inherent change from sin to holiness, this is sanctification; but the act of a judge pronouncing the party acquitted from all judicial charges. This is the sense in which the words just and justify are used in the Old Testament Scriptures. For example, it is said, “If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked” (Deuteronomy 25:1). Here it is evident that to justify the righteous, signifies not to make him righteous but to adjudge him to be so, just as to condemn the wicked is not to make him wicked, but to declare him to be so. (See also Proverbs 17:15; Psalms 143:2; Luke 7:29-35; Romans 2:13 and 8:33.)

We must not confound justification with the doctrine of sanctification, for though inseparably connected, they are quite distinct and widely different, and ought, when we are treating of the way of a sinner’s acceptance with God, to be kept apart. Justification respects the person in a legal sense, is a single act of grace, and terminates in a change of state. Sanctification regards him in a physical sense, in a continued work of grace, and terminates in a change of character. The former is by the work of Christ without us; the latter is by work of the Spirit within us. That precedes as a cause, this follows as an effect.

Justification, then, is a change of state in the eye of the law and of the lawgiver. It includes pardon, but it is something more than mere pardon. Among men and before an earthly tribunal, these two things are opposed to each other, for an individual cannot be at the same time pardoned and justified; but before the bar of God, he who is pardoned is justified, and he who is justified is pardoned. When a person is pardoned, he is considered as a transgressor, but when he is justified, he is considered as righteous. A criminal when pardoned is freed from an obligation to suffer death for his crimes; but he that is justified is declared worthy of life as an innocent person. There are then two constituent parts in

this justification: There is the pardon of sin and the acceptance of our persons; a removal of guilt and condemnation, and a right to life.

First, we shall now inquire into the grounds of the sinner's justification in the sight of God. If justification is, as we have seen, a judicial sentence absolving man from guilt and accepting him as righteous, such a sentence can be passed only on some valid grounds, some just cause shown, for he who justifies is God, the holy and righteous Judge. How then shall man be just with God? I answer, Not on the ground of innocence, for all are by nature under guilt and condemnation. In the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, where the doctrine of justification is logically discussed, the apostle Paul establishes it as an undeniable truth, that every man in his natural state lies under the just condemnation of God as a rebel against him in all the three ways in which he has been pleased to reveal himself, whether by the works of creation, the work of the law written on the heart, or by the revelation of grace.

It has been well remarked that God, having purposed to establish but one way of justification for all men, has permitted in his providence that all should be guilty. For if there had been any excepted, there would have been two different methods of justification, and consequently two true religions, and two true churches, and believers would not have that oneness of communion which grace produces. "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin." Not on the ground of human desert. The apostle Paul, having proved by an appeal to undeniable facts that the Gentiles and the Jews were both guilty before God, draws the following obvious and inevitable conclusion: "Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight;" i.e., by our own obedience to it, however sincere, shall no flesh be justified, accepted of God, and pronounced righteous.

No law, human or divine, can justify the transgression, and the law of God far from justifying the offender denounces utter destruction against him. "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." We see from this that there is no acceptance with God on the ground of law without perfect obedience. Such an obedience none of the human race can possibly exhibit, and hence it follows that man cannot procure his own justification. There are two ways in which he might attempt it, but neither jointly nor severally could he accomplish it. First, by a voluntary return to his former obedience. But this he could not do. He has by his sin lost his original power, and a return to obedience is an act of greater power than a persistency in the way of it.

As man could not effect his own justification, so he would not attempt it. He is entirely alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, because of the hardness of his heart. "He possesseth a carnal mind which is enmity against God, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Second, man must make satisfaction to justice. This, added to obedience, would effect restitution and result in justification. But as a return to obedience is impossible, so was satisfaction for the injury done to the moral government of God by his rebellion. All that he could do under any circumstances was due from him in that instant of time in which it was performed. Impossible then that by anything a man can do well, he should make satisfaction for anything he has done ill. An old debt cannot be discharged by ready-money payments for the future. Man, sinful man, then, cannot merit his own justification.

I notice, lastly, that justification cannot take place on the ground of compromise. A man must be justified wholly by law or wholly by grace. If by law, he must keep the law perfectly; if by grace, he must trust exclusively on the merit of another. There can be no compromise, no commixture. Paul's strong language in reference to the Galatian perverts is applicable here: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ

shall profit you nothing. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Paul excludes all works of every kind, works before and after conversion, works moral and works ceremonial, yea, he even excludes the works of Abraham, the father of believers. (See Romans 4:2; Romans 11:6; Titus 3:5; 2 Timothy 1:9.)

What, then, is the meritorious ground of a sinner's justification? If all mankind are sinners under condemnation, if the supreme Governor of the world neither will nor can justify any without a perfect righteousness, and if such a righteousness cannot possibly be exhibited by man, it is absolutely necessary that righteousness wrought out by a substitute should be imputed to us or placed to our account. Where, then, but in the finished work of Immanuel, can we find this vicarious, law-magnifying, justice-satisfying, God-honoring righteousness? "Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom."

The justice of God had been trampled upon, and it must be satisfied; the law of God had been violated, and it must be fulfilled; the debt had been contracted, and it must be discharged; heaven had been lost, and it must be regained; therefore, on restoring the sinner, the lost sinner, God must, he cannot but have, respect to every attribute of his offended majesty, to every requirement of his unalterable law. In no other way could the forfeitures of the law be restored, in no other way could mercy be sent to the guilty.

God sends his own Son, Christ undertakes our desperate cause and says, "Lo I come to do thy will, O God." In order to do this, he assumes our nature, that as our kinsman redeemer, he might have the right of redemption. Justice recognizes him as the sinner's surety, and exacts from him the full penalty due to sin. God puts the cup of wrath into his hand, and Jesus drains it to the very last dregs. The sword awakes against Jehovah's fellow; the shepherd is smitten that the sheep might go free. Hence, he said to the representatives of justice: "If ye seek me, let these go their way." He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. "Christ," says the apostle, "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

Nor is this all. If nothing beyond the suffering of the penalty of the law had taken place, men would only have been released from the punishment due to sin. If they were to obtain the reward of obedience, its precepts must also be obeyed; and this was accomplished to the utmost by Jesus Christ. To every requirement of God's holy law, he yielded a complete and sinless obedience; every command it enjoined, as well as every prohibition it contains, were in all respects fully honored by him.

The righteousness of Jesus, therefore, is two-fold, consisting in his spotless obedience and meritorious sufferings, and this is that very righteousness by which sinners are justified before God. To this and to this only the Moral Governor of the universe has respect, when he pronounces the sinner just and acquits him in judgment. "Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." This obedience of the Son of God conferred more honor on the law and on the lawgiver than could have resulted from the obedience of the whole human race had Adam never sinned.

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness,  
My beauty are, my glorious dress,  
'Midst flaming worlds in these array'd,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Christ's righteousness, then, is the meritorious ground of our justification.

Third, but to whom does it become actually efficient for justification? or, in other words, how does a sinner obtain an interest in this righteousness in order to obtain justification? The Scriptures are very clear on this. Simply by faith. (See Romans 3:21; 4:4,24 and 25; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; Acts 13:38 and 39.) Faith is the divinely-appointed medium of union to Christ, whose righteousness is imputed to the believer: "Even as David describeth the blessedness of man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works."

It is of the nature of faith to lead the sinner away from self, self-confidence and self-righteousness, to the finished work of Jesus. Hence, we are said to be justified by faith, not by love or humility, or any other grace, but by faith only, because faith is opposed to all works, and all graces too in the matter of our justification. Yet not for faith, or on account of faith, as if faith itself were our righteousness or that for the sake of which we are justified. This is obvious from the following considerations. No man's faith is perfect, and if it were it would not be equal to the demands of the law. That obedience by which the sinner is justified is called the righteousness of faith, righteousness by faith, and is represented as revealed to faith. Consequently, it cannot be faith itself. This is apparent from Philippians 3:9. Again, if we are justified by the act of believing, then, as there are degrees of faith, some believers are justified by a more and some by a less perfect righteousness, in exact proportion to the strength or weakness of their faith; which is absurd.

Faith is as necessary in justification as the righteousness of Christ, but necessary for a different purpose. Faith is the hand by which we lay hold on Christ, the eye that looks to Christ, the ear that hears the voice of Christ, the feet that run in compliance with Christ's invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I shall only add that this justification which is by faith, is perfect and complete at once, the moment a sinner believes in Jesus, so that he may triumphantly challenge the universe to lay anything to his charge: "Who shall lay anything 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."

Once justified, the believer can no more come under condemnation. "There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Whom he hath justified, he hath glorified." (Romans 8:1, 30.) No justified person now dead ever failed to reach glory, and all believers are kept by the power of God unto final and eternal salvation.

Last, their justification is evidenced by good works. (Titus 3:8; Micah 6:8; James 2:17,18,26.) Hence the decisions of the final judgment will be according to men's works. (Matthew 25:34-36.) Observe, however, that though it is said that any one shall be justified according to their works, it is not said that any one shall be justified on account of his works.

The righteous are bought into the judgment to be there manifested and acknowledged as the Lord's people. Justified already in God's sight and in their own, they are now to be justified in the sight of men and angels, and that in such a way that the equity of the divine procedure will be apparent to all. Hence, then, works are appealed to as fruits and evidences of their union to Christ whose righteousness justified them. The sum of the whole is this: We are justified freely by God's grace, meritoriously by Christ's righteousness, instrumentally by faith, and evidentially by good works.

