

Sound Living

Romans Vol. 1

Jerry Nelson

Paul's greatest written work, his magnum opus, is the book of Romans. It is the most comprehensive and systematic declaration of the Christian faith of all the books of the Bible. It is a letter, a letter written within thirty years of Jesus' resurrection, to the church in Rome. It begins and ends as a letter but between it reads more like a theology primer, setting forth the basics of becoming and living as a Christian. Prepare to be changed as you read.

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Table of Contents

1.	Jesus, The Reason for Life Romans 1:1-17	pg. 7
2.	The Bad News Romans 1:18-32	pg. 21
3.	In Name Only Romans 2	pg. 39
4.	The Verdict Romans 3:9-20	pg. 53
5.	The Good News Romans 3:21-26	pg. 77
6.	By Faith Romans 4	pg. 95
7.	Peace with God Romans 5:1-11	pg. 109
8.	Death Through Birth and Birth through Death Romans 5:12-21	pg. 125
9.	Free to Serve Romans 6:1-23	pg. 139
10.	The Real Me! Romans 7:1-25	pg. 151
11.	Real Change Romans 8:1-13	pg. 165
12.	Adoption—A Child of God Romans 8:14-17	pg. 179
13.	The Best is Yet to Be Romans 8:18-25	pg. 197

14.	Grace for Waiting Romans 8:26-28	pg. 211
15.	The Preservation of the Saints Romans 8:29-30 (31-39)	pg. 229
16.	God is for Us! Romans 8:31-39	pg. 247
17.	God's Sovereign Choice Romans 9	pg. 259
18.	Whosoever Will Romans 9:30-10:21	pg. 275
19.	Jesus for Jews Romans 11	pg. 293
20.	Why Do You Live the Way You Live? Romans 12:1-2	pg. 307
21.	Prerequisites to Transformation Romans 12:3-8	pg. 321
22.	The Perfect Church Romans 12:9-21	pg. 337
23.	God and Country Romans 13:1-7	pg. 349
24.	An Unpayable Debt Romans 13:8-10	pg. 365
25.	Wake Up! Romans 13:11-14	pg. 383
26.	Why Can't They Be Like Us? Romans 14-15	pg. 399
27.	Who is Your Offering to God? Romans 15:14-16:27	pg. 419
	Appendices A—N	pg. 433ff

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Chapter One

Jesus, the Reason for Life

Romans 1:1-17

Gerald Mander was a successful advertising agent who had achieved most of what he wanted from his career. But slowly he began to question the purpose of it all. Mander says, (In my youth) “when I thought about my ‘career’—always a hot topic around our house—certain images would fly through my mind. Since so many of the images were from the advertisements of the period, the world of advertising seemed (right for me).

“There was something about that life-style, those big cars, the great white yachts, the polished people on them and the life of leisure and pleasure: The Dream. “It wasn't so much that I was especially interested in wealth or that I ached to have all the goodies that were being shown in the ads...I didn't want to own the cars and yachts so much as I wanted to be like the people who did.

“Despite some early setbacks, by (the time I was in my 40s) much of my dream was realized. By then I had already concluded a successful career as head of a theatrical publicity agency and joined a celebrated San Francisco ad agency, which became Freeman, Mander and Gossage. We concentrated on so-called class clients: Triumph, Land Rover, Eagle shirts, Paul Masson wines, KLH audio, Scientific American, Advent Corporation, and Random House publishing. Ours was the most elegant office in town. I was commuting coast to coast weekly, taking five-day vacations in Tahiti, eating only in French restaurants, jetting to Europe for a few days' skiing.

“At some point, not very long into this new career, I began

to realize a kind of hollowness in myself. I caught myself smiling pasty smiles. I noticed that despite all (I had) I was not having a good time. I think I hit an emotional bottom... while cruising through the Dalmatian Straits, observing rocky cliffs, rolling seas, dazzling sky, and colors as bright as a desert. Leaning on the deck rail, it struck me that there was a film between all of that and me. I could 'see'

Is there often uneasiness about life, even among Christians? Is it possible for life to be truly satisfying and worth it?

the spectacular views. I knew they were spectacular. But the experience stopped at my eyes. I couldn't let it inside me. I felt nothing. Something had gone wrong with me.

"I remembered childhood moments when the mere sight of the sky or grass or trees would send waves of physical pleasure through me. Yet now on this deck, I felt dead. I had the impulse to repeat a phrase that was popular among friends of mine, 'Nature is boring.' What was terrifying even then was that I knew the problem was not nature, but me... If one seeks critical moments to explain later acts...then perhaps that was one such moment for me. It was clear that I had chosen a fraudulent path toward an equally fraudulent image of a very cold sort of 'happiness.'

"One of my partners in the ad agency was Howard Gossage, a genius of sorts who for years before he died... agonized about the absurdity of working in such a profession. He said, 'I'd hate to go to my grave remembered as the man who invented Beethoven sweatshirts or competitions for paper airplanes.' (Gossage) loved to tell the story of the retired adman who once said to him: 'I got out of this business when I woke up one day and (realized I didn't really care) whether they sold more

Quaker Oats than I sold Cream of Wheat.”¹ Mander’s circumstances are certainly more exotic than those of most of us but the condition of his soul is probably reflected in the souls of millions of Americans—even Americans in churches on Sunday.

How many people struggle with the “why?” of living? “Why am I doing all this?” “Where is all this activity and effort taking me?” Some achieve their goals but still end up very dissatisfied. Others struggle and never achieve their goals and end up frustrated and angry at life. Still others never try—assuming the system is rigged anyway or they want something other than an 80-hour workweek, a three-car garage and a vacation home they never have time for. Am I right? Is there often uneasiness about life, even among Christians? Is it possible for life to be truly satisfying and worth it?

I want you to hear from a man who was probably in his 50s, maybe even 60s. He was no novice in life. This man had more reason than most of us to be incredibly discouraged and tempted to just coast out of life.

- Five times flogged with 39 lashes
- Three times beaten with rods
- Once stoned until they thought he was dead
- Three times shipwrecked and subject to drowning

He had nearly frozen to death, nearly died of hunger, spent years in prison, and in danger more times than he could count.

This wasn’t Bruce Willis or Matt Damon in the movies—this was for real. The man was the Apostle Paul. What I’m captured by is how focused he was, how deliberate he was, and how perfectly at peace he was with his place in life. The Apostle’s greatest written work, his magnum opus is the book of *Romans*. It is the most comprehensive and

systematic declaration of the Christian faith of all the books of the Bible. It is a letter, a letter written within thirty years of Jesus' resurrection, to the church in Rome. It begins and ends as a letter but between it reads more like a theology primer, setting forth the basics of becoming and living as a Christian.

Look at Romans 1:1-17:

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 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. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

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

It is the most comprehensive and systematic declaration of the Christian faith of all the books of the Bible.

The opening words of Romans are clearly introductory. Here Paul:

- introduces himself to the church in Rome.
- mentions his credentials—why it is they should read what he has to say.
- speaks of his long-standing desire to visit them and of his ongoing concern for them.
- and Paul ends the introduction in verses 16-17 with a strong affirmation of his confidence in the message he proclaims.

Yes, the opening words are an introduction but they are so much more. Unlike Gerald Mander, whom I mentioned earlier, these words are powerfully descriptive of a man with a purpose for living.

What caught my attention as never before was the singular focus of Paul's life. Education, relationships, career, recreation, and everything else about his life was guided and made valuable by his one passion in life. What's impressive is that whether he was in prison or out, it didn't affect his ability to live out his purpose. Whether he was in one country or another, whether he had much or had nothing, whether he was sick or healthy, or whether he

was acclaimed or ridiculed made no difference to the fulfillment of his life's objective. What was that single focus, that consuming passion, that life-purpose? Do you think you know what I'm going to say?

As you look at the text again you see Paul in verse 1 declaring himself an apostle, set apart for the gospel.

- In verse 5 he writes, *"we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."*
- In verse 9 he writes, *"I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel..."*
- And in verse 15 he writes, *"I am so eager to preach the gospel to you also..."*

With all that, I think I could build a good case that Paul's primary purpose was to proclaim the gospel. And the

Paul's singular purpose is in the first six English words of the letter: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus." Paul understood and never forgot who he was.

application to us would be to commit our lives to that same purpose—to witness and evangelize here and around the world. It would serve as the motivation for the worldwide outreach we have as a church with missionaries serving among more than 20 different people groups.

But that is not what I see as Paul's singular purpose. The proclamation of the gospel is clearly one outcome of his purpose but it is not the focus of his life. Then what is? The answer is in the first six English words of the letter: *"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus."* Paul understood and never forgot who he was. He had the most humble and at the same time the most privileged position—a mere servant but a

servant of Jesus, God the Son. Jesus was, for Paul, both the source and the sum of his life.

Paul's identity was never in doubt. Too many of us spend a lot of time trying to find out who we are or trying to be something. I think Paul would say, "Give it up. All those things you're trying to be or do don't matter." You have just one simple role to play—be Jesus' servant.

- Look at verse 6 - "*You are called to belong to Jesus Christ.*"
- Look at verse 7 - "*You are loved by God and called to be His people.*"

Jesus is the very source and the sum of our lives! In verse 9 Paul reveals his passion: "God, *whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son.*" Paul's life was based on a relationship—a relationship with Jesus and he longed for one thing only, to serve Jesus.

In my study, I was impressed over and over again how much these opening words of Romans are all about Jesus. Everything Paul writes is about Jesus.

Look at it in your own Bible:

- 1:1: Paul the servant of Jesus
- 1:2,3: The gospel regarding Jesus
- 1:5: Through Jesus and for his name's sake
- 1:6: Called to belong to Jesus
- 1:7: Grace and Peace to you from Jesus
- 1:8: I thank my God through Jesus
- 1:9: I preach the good news of Jesus

On whatever subject Paul speaks, he constantly connects it to Jesus. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*"

In verse 1, Paul speaks of the gospel; that is the English translation of a word that means "good news." What is this

"good news?" Again look at verse 1: What does he call it? "The good news of God" but keep reading to verse 3, the good news "regarding his Son." God's good news is Jesus! He says Jesus is the good news. Elsewhere Paul wrote 2 Timothy 2:8 *"This is my gospel, Jesus Christ, descended from David and raised from the dead."* (word order rearranged) Christianity is about Jesus; it all connects to Him or it isn't Christianity.

When elsewhere Paul speaks of commands to be obeyed he speaks of them as us responding to the knowledge of Jesus.

- When he speaks of obeying, he speaks of Jesus who gives us the example and power to obey.
- When he speaks of the promises of God, he speaks of them as all finding fulfillment in Jesus.
- He calls Jesus the head of the church.
- We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works.
- Jesus is the object of our worship.
- Jesus is the one who will bring all history to a conclusion.
- It is Jesus' love that motivates us to love others.
- We are constantly reminded to think like Jesus thought—to have the same mind that he had about people, issues and things.
- We are exhorted to forgive as Jesus has forgiven us.
- We are to remain pure because we belong to Jesus.
- The Bible says we live and move and have our being in Jesus.²

The whole of life revolves around Jesus—He is the Good news! Don't miss it! Real Christianity is not just about getting people to convert to a different religion or philosophy than the one they have. It is not ultimately about convincing them of the truthfulness of certain principles or historical facts. It is not like getting people to

subscribe to the philosophical tenets of Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. Don't miss it—Christianity is about Jesus: people meeting and trusting Jesus. I'm afraid some of us in conservative evangelicalism have so long been concerned about the facts of the Bible and the correct doctrines of the Bible that we have the tendency to come across as just convincing people of a creed rather than being friends bringing other friends to the person of Jesus.

But who is this Jesus? In verses 3 and 4 Paul very precisely identifies Him: Jesus the Son of God, who is fully human, descended from David and is the Messiah promised throughout the Old Testament. And by His resurrection He is declared, appointed, recognized to be the sovereign (Lord), saving (Jesus), Messiah (Christ). Paul was convinced that Jesus was and is God who became man—Jesus, the saving God.

Christianity is about Jesus; it all connects to Him or it isn't Christianity.

Ultimately, Paul lived for one thing—to serve Jesus. That purpose dictated every decision Paul made. You never get the impression Paul was ever confused about his purpose in life. Now remember, like us, Paul had to make a living; he had to sleep, eat, work, travel, and engage people like any other human being. He had obligations that required his attention but he never, never lost sight of the one central controlling relationship in the midst of all that “stuff” of life—he was a servant of Jesus Christ.

I want you to see this singleness of purpose further in how Paul describes what motivates him to obey Jesus. Look first at verse 14 where Paul says, *“I am obligated to the Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish”* or in

other words Paul knew himself to be obligated to all non-Christians. The text clearly says Paul is obligated to non-Christians but how is Paul obligated? In what way is he obligated to them? Does Paul owe them something?

You can be obligated to someone in two different ways. The first way, for example, is if I loan you something then you are required to repay—you are indebted or obligated to me. The other way to be obligated is if I give you something that I want someone else to have, expecting you to give it to them for me. You are obligated to the someone else but not because of the someone else but because of me. Paul had been given something by Jesus that belonged to those who had not heard of Jesus. Paul was obligated to give it to them. It isn't that they deserved to hear about Jesus but that Jesus deserves for them to hear. Paul's motivation was not the unbeliever, Paul's motivation was Jesus—Jesus who is the focus of his life.

Why did Paul desire to bring people from all nations to Jesus Christ? It was to honor Jesus.

That becomes even clearer when we look at verse 5, *"Through him and for his name's sake we"* are commissioned to proclaim the good news. Why did Paul desire to bring people from all nations to Jesus Christ? It was to honor Jesus. Pastor and author John Stott wrote, "We should be troubled when Jesus' name remains unknown. We should be hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed, and all the time anxious and determined that it shall be given the honor and glory which are due to it. The highest of all missionary motives is NEITHER obedience to the great commission (important as that is) NOR love for sinners who are alienated and

perishing (strong as that incentive is...) BUT RATHER zeal—burning passionate zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ."³

It's all about Jesus! If tomorrow morning when we awaken we are clear that our unambiguous purpose is to use whatever opportunities and means we have to simply serve Jesus, we will not lack for a purpose worth our lives. Paul's purpose is Jesus—to live as a servant of Jesus. Paul's motivation is Jesus—to see Jesus receive glory. But notice also that Paul's confidence is Jesus. Paul speaks to this in Romans 1:16-17: *"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'."*

When thinking of these verses remember first that Paul has already defined the gospel. The gospel, the good news is Jesus. Therefore, it is just as correct to read this verse as, "I am not ashamed of Jesus." Why? "Because the gospel, Jesus, is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Paul depends completely on Jesus to make this present life worthwhile and to guarantee his eternal life. It all hinges on whether what Paul believes is actually true. How is Jesus the power of salvation? Paul answers it in Romans 1:17 *"For in the gospel (in Jesus) a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith."* Paul will flesh this out in chapters 3, 4 and 5 but here, in introductory fashion, he gives us the essence of the whole letter.

Can we know God? In spite of the atheism that is pushed on us in the public square, most of the world for most of history has wanted desperately to know how to relate to that which is obviously outside of us and larger than us.

Every religion and most philosophies are attempts at explaining how to relate to their idea of God. Paul comes saying it is possible to have a relationship with the Living God.

But that relationship doesn't come about in the way we usually think. As you know, every other religion in the history of the world requires its adherents to somehow earn the right of access to their idea of God. Even many who call themselves Christians fall prey to the same faulty thinking. So did Martin Luther and many who preceded and followed him. Luther wrote of how for a long time he hated these words in Romans 1:16-17, specifically the words, "*the righteousness of God*." He had been taught that this "righteousness" was God's holiness and hence God's anger toward the unrighteous sinner. Luther tried so hard to qualify himself for God but in suicidal misery knew that he fell far short.

Then as he says it, "by the mercy of God" he awoke to what Paul was actually saying. God grants His righteousness, His holiness, to us through faith. And how does a holy God do that? Verse 17 answers it, "*For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith...*" Remembering, as we saw earlier, that the "gospel" is Jesus, we can read verse 17 this way: For in Jesus a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith..." Jesus is the good news. When we trust Jesus, when we receive Jesus, we receive the righteousness of God; the perfect holiness of Jesus is imputed to us. Or as Paul wrote of it elsewhere, "*God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God.*" (2 Corinthians 5:21) Paul's confidence is in Jesus—that by his relationship with Jesus who is God, Paul is safely and eternally connected to God.

Others may ridicule the gospel as fanciful, simplistic, childish, or worse. But Paul says he is convinced of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done on the cross and in the resurrection. To Timothy he said in 2 Timothy 1:12, *"Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."*

One of our staff missionaries works in a repressive Islamic country. For several years one of the nationals who is a Christian has been talking to his friend about Jesus. The Christian was recently abducted, threatened and beaten severely because of his relationship to Christianity. The Muslim friend learned of all this and as a result obviously was at a decision point. Would he renounce the Christian or would he truly believe? That Muslim friend recently announced his desire to be baptized as a Christian. Can you imagine the conviction and confidence he must have to make such a decision? How firmly must he believe, Romans 1:16 that says, *"I am not ashamed of (Jesus, because he) is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."* Do you truly believe that?

- Paul's whole life is centered in Jesus.
- His purpose is Jesus—to be Jesus' servant.
- His motivation is Jesus—to bring Jesus glory.
- His confidence is Jesus—Jesus is truer than anything else.

Life would be a lot simpler if our purpose was as singular. There would be no more cynicism about life. We would have a confident optimism based on God's power and God's description of the future. We would see each day for the opportunities it holds for knowing Jesus and serving him. Life would not be judged successful or unsuccessful based on education, or job, or salary, or things necessary or luxurious, or vacations or diversions but it would be judged successful simply by service to Jesus.

Can we say with Paul, as in Philippians 1:21, "*For to me to live is Christ?*"

End Notes

¹ "*Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*" Jerry Mander

² Robert Huldane, *Romans*, p. 20-21

³ John Stott, *Romans*, p. 53

Chapter Two

The Bad News Romans 1:18-32

Assume for a minute you hear of a 19-year-old mother of two in Indonesia who has never been outside of her remote rural village. She is one of the wives of a domineering Muslim man who allows her no access to learning or outside information. And her father did the same when she lived in his home. She has never so much as heard that there is a Jesus. Does the Bible actually teach that she will go to hell when she dies if she has not trusted in Jesus as her Savior?

Our biblical text begins to evoke and respond to some very large questions, like the one I've just asked and others:

- Is God truly angry with people?
- How does the love of God fit with His wrath?
- How can God be angry with people who've never even heard of Jesus?
- And aren't all religions people's attempt to know and respond to God and won't God honor that?

Romans 1:18-32 begins to answer these and other related questions.

What do you think the following means? The Apostle Paul in Romans 3:10-12, quoting from the Old Testament, writes:

"As it is written, there is none 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."

Just generally what do you think it means? It's fairly simple isn't it: not anyone, on his or her own, measures up the holy standard of God. In fact, everyone turns away from

God. Everyone? That young Indonesian woman? Your non-Christian grandmother? You and me?

From the first 17 verses of this 1st chapter of Romans we see that Paul's mission in life was to be a servant of Jesus Christ. He calls Jesus the "good news" by which we can have a relationship with the eternal God. In the section of the letter that begins at 1:18, Paul interrupts what he started in the first 17 verses. If we were to outline the first chapters of Romans it would look like this:

1. Romans 1:1-17 - Introduction of the good news. That introduction, ends with verse 17: *"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'."*

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them."

2. Now if you look ahead to 3:21 and following you will see that Paul resumes the same subject he introduced in verse 17: *"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."* (Romans 3:21-22) This is essentially the same as 17. Beginning in 3:21, Paul will flesh out what he began in the introduction—the good news.

3. But in 1:18 all the way through 3:20, in a long parenthesis, Paul spells out the bad news. Look at Romans 1:18: *"The wrath of God is being revealed!"* It is not that Paul delights in talking about such a dark subject, but to

not speak of it would be the most despicable thing he could do. If, for example, you had treatable cancer and your doctor didn't tell you that would not be gracious but malevolent.

Now we look at the first of three parts of this bad news.
Romans 1:18-32:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

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

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them

over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 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."

Paul actually begins the "bad news" by giving the conclusion of the matter—the proverbial "bottom line." Look at 1:18 again, *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."* God is angry. Now, I didn't make that up. I know we want to think of God only as loving and forgiving but God says He is pouring out His wrath on the sin of people.

How can we speak of God as angry!? We must remember that God's anger is not like so much of our anger. It is not that God has a temper and He flies into irrational rages wherein He maliciously and spitefully vents His frustration. God's wrath is His "holy hostility to evil, his refusal to condone it...it is his just judgment upon it."¹ God abhors sin. One man wrote, "As long as God is God he cannot look with indifference as his creation is destroyed and his holy will is trodden underfoot. Therefore he must meet sin with his mighty and annihilating reaction."²

How do we reconcile our concept of a loving God with God's wrath? In fact, it is not difficult at all. God could not be a loving God if He didn't react to sin. What kind of a person would see the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery or child abuse and not express anger at the wickedness of it -

in fact a lack of anger would show a lack of love. God's wrath is very consistent with his love.³

And how is the wrath of God being revealed? In chapter 2 Paul will talk about the future judgment of God on sin: *"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed."* (2:5) And it is true that, in the past, on the cross God revealed His wrath against sin when God the Son died. In 3:25 we will read, *"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement"* meaning that, for us, God's wrath was poured out on Jesus. Those are two powerful ways that God's wrath has been and will yet be poured out on sin.

One man wrote, "As long as God is God he cannot look with indifference as his creation is destroyed and his holy will is trodden underfoot. Therefore he must meet sin with his mighty and annihilating reaction."

But here in verse 18 Paul is writing of something more immediate. The word "revealed" is in the present, passive, indicative—God's judgment on sin is being revealed all the time. 250 years ago Friedrich Schiller wrote, "The history of the world is the judgment of the world."⁴ Every day we all reap the consequences of a world steeped in sin. We see it in the actions of governments, in the attitudes and actions of others and in our own thoughts and actions. Here in Romans 1, three times, Paul also says it this way, *"God gave them over..."* God lets sin have its way in people. I think there can be no doubt that the Bible says God is angry and He pours out His anger.

But on whom? On whom does God say He will pour out His wrath? Romans 1:18 says, on *"men who suppress the truth"* To "suppress the truth" means to not allow the truth to have the appropriate impact on the way they think and act.

It is to know the truth but to intentionally ignore it. And how do they suppress the truth? They suppress the truth by their wickedness. But before Paul describes this in more detail, he describes what truth they suppress, reject and ignore. Look at verses 19-20: *"since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."*

What truth do people suppress? What does verse 19 say? It says there is something very specific about God that is plain to all people because God has made it plain to them. This information is not accidental. This is an important truth being taught here: This truth about God, which people suppress, is very specific and God very intentionally gives it. No one can legitimately later say God was unfair because He didn't let them know. God made it plain.

But what is it about God that they know? Verse 20 says, *"God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature,"* Interesting play on words; what is invisible is plainly seen. According to this verse, every person knows two things about God:

- They know His "divine nature" - that He is God and He is there.
- And they know His "eternal power" - that He is all-powerful. They know there is a God and that He is the powerful creator of creation.

This is sometimes called "natural revelation" or "general revelation."

It is natural because it is seen in the natural order around us. It is general in that it is available to everyone.⁵ How is this truth about God revealed? Look at the end of verse 20: These truths about God *"are clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."* That's right, this knowledge of God comes from just living in this world, from seeing what God has created.

And again, notice that the world around us gives us this very specific information about God. The Psalmist wrote, *"The heavens declare the glory of God."* In Acts 14 Paul

Every person knows two things about God: His "divine nature and His "eternal power"

speaking to the Gentiles in Lystra said, *"God has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their season; he provides you with food..."* Through these verses God declares that much is known about Him before one word of the Bible was written or any missionary ever sent. The fact that there is a sovereign, eternal, kind, powerful God is declared, is revealed by the very physical world around us.

But let's answer another question: How clear is this information about God? Does everyone understand the information about God? Yes! Why? Because God made it plain! God says, *"They are clearly seen."* (1:19) And He says they are "understood." And verse 21 says, *"They knew God."*

In verse 32 Paul says everyone knows something else about God. *"They know God's righteous decree that those*

who do such things deserve death." How is that possible without a Bible? In 2:14-15 it says, *"when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."*

I'll speak to that more later but look back at 1:32: Everyone knows something of right and wrong just from human conscience, as seared by sin as that conscience may be. Again I ask, is this specific information about God clear? Absolutely. It's amazing: from nature and conscience we know the true God is there, we know that He is all-powerful, that He is kind, that He has expectations of people and to violate those expectations is to deserve death. What is Paul and God's point?

Accurate knowledge of God is supplied (by God) every day and all day to every human being and they see and understand what is being said—it is plain to them. Here is the way the Psalmist wrote of it:

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

But again, what do people do with that truth about God? They "suppress it"—they intentionally ignore it, confuse it, and put it out of their minds. The John Templeton Foundation says it is dedicated to supporting science as it investigates the big questions of life. The current issue of *The Atlantic* (not even remotely a religious periodical) has a

piece by the Templeton Foundation asking the following question of several experts: "Does the Universe have a Purpose?"

Lawrence Krauss, professor of physics and astronomy at Case Western Reserve University responds: Does the universe have a purpose? Unlikely. Tomorrow night if we look up at the stars and they have been rearranged into a pattern that reads, "I am here," I think even the most hard-nosed scientific skeptic would have to suspect something

Accurate knowledge of God is supplied (by God) every day and all day to every human being and they see and understand what is being said—it is plain to them.

was up. But no such unambiguous signs have been uncovered... This is why a scientist can conclude that it is very unlikely that there is any divine purpose. If a creator had such a purpose, she could choose to demonstrate it a little more clearly to the inhabitants of her creation."⁶ God says Krauss looks at the same sky you do and he chooses to suppress what is plainly revealed.

Even a professor of Christian philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary wrote, "From looking at the natural world alone...We can know next to nothing about the creator's qualities—(whether) one deity or a team; alive or dead, a young or (incapacitated) deity."⁷ This Fuller Seminary professor looks at the same Bible I do and says we can't know anything about God from the created order. Francis Crick, one who discovered DNA said, "Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved."⁸ Even Richard Dawkins wrote, "Biology is the study of complicated things that give

the appearance of having been designed for a purpose."⁹ Odd, isn't it? They even remind themselves to suppress what is so apparent.

Romans 1:21 tells us exactly what everyone does with the truth about God. *"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."*

There was more than enough knowledge for them to know it was God and thus they should have honored (glorified) Him as God. And also there was enough knowledge of God as the source of all the good things of life that they should have thanked Him. But instead of honoring Him and

To sin and then attempt to make up for that sin by doing penance or just doing more good to make up for it, is idolatry.

thanking Him, mankind thanks either himself, or his "lucky stars" or something else—anything else. Imagine the wickedness of knowing God gave something and then deliberately acknowledging someone or something else as the giver. The gratitude some people have for "mother earth" for "mother nature," the honor they show for a natural selection process, for evolution—as if in awe of the wisdom and power of evolution—and neglecting the God who is behind it - what ingratitude!! One author I read said he is so awed by the universe around us that he sometimes feels like bowing down and thanking "Big Bang."¹⁰

In centuries past and in other cultures today, others worshipped the sun or the moon. And in our culture, we worship the process. Yes, "worship"—we give it credit, we ascribe worth to it—credit and worth that belong to God

alone. That is idolatry. We have ability to work and make money and we ascribe honor to ourselves for having the intellect and energy and health to do it instead of being humbly grateful to God for breath itself. That is idolatry— ascribing honor to the creature rather than to the creator.

To ascribe to any other deceased saint any place of honor that belongs to Christ alone is idolatry. To attempt to access God's grace by not going directly to Him and instead going some other way, through a medium such as some dead Christian, is to depreciate the tender love and concern of God. It depreciates God and places another in a place that belongs to God alone. It is idolatry! To sin and then attempt to make up for that sin by doing penance or just doing more good to make up for it, is idolatry. We are saying that we are capable of atoning for our own sin when the truth is that only God accomplishes atonement. We are idolizing ourselves—ascribing to ourselves an ability that belongs to God alone. It is idolatry. In verse 21 we are told that instead of praising and thanking God, people perverted the knowledge of God and turned to serving someone or something other than God. Being the recipient of God's common grace, they should have at least recognized Him as God, worthy of honor and gratitude.

But instead of thinking correctly about God their thinking became futile—they disconnected from the reality that is so obvious and imagined other explanations for what they were seeing. Now, I know there are many people who see creation and claim they don't see God in it at all. But that is precisely God's point: they have the evidence but they refuse it.

Let's summarize what we've seen thus far: God is pouring out His wrath on people now because they have suppressed the truth about Him, which He has made so

obvious in nature. They have rejected God, as He is knowable from creation. Now what is God's conclusion back at the end of verse 20? So that all people are what?

"Without excuse." Gone is the excuse that they just didn't know it was God. They can't say, "If only I had known it was you, I would have served you." Or "I didn't think there was sufficient evidence to affirm that you existed. I didn't think there was sufficient evidence for me to build my life around you. So I did the best I could." What does God say? "You are without excuse!"

And what is God justly, and lovingly, obligated to do with such a patently false intentionally obstinate excuse? *"The wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth..."*

Do you remember the 19-year-old Indonesian mother of two I mentioned at the beginning? It's hard for us usually to imagine that such an "innocent" person would be condemned by God. What if I told you that God appeared to her and told her that He is the God and that He alone is the all-powerful creator of the world (obviously indicating her need to honor Him alone—to worship and obey Him alone—after all He is God). But what if you learned that instead of honoring Him as God, she rejected Him and worshipped an idea of God she made up or was handed to her by others.

Now remember, in my illustration, God came to her and told her who He was but she rejected it and worships a god of her own making instead. Furthermore she allows herself to do things that she knows are contrary to the law of God. She serves herself. Yes, she serves others as well but she serves herself rather than God. She indulges in thoughts and actions that are contrary to what she knows are right. (2:14-15) And it is not that God came to her once but He came to her every day and reminded her of who He was

and she heard Him but she refused to believe Him; she intentionally exchanged what she heard from God for her own ideas or those handed to her by others.

Now, I ask you—is she innocent? What does God say in Romans 1? But we want to argue with God and so we say, “What about her belief in a god? What about her faithful devotion to her religion? Surely, she’s trying—doesn’t that count?” We are all tempted to think that religion is man’s

They have rejected God, as He is knowable from creation. What does God say? "You are without excuse!"

attempt to find God. We are led to believe that all religions, or at least most of them, and particularly the religions that believe in one God, are a good first step to the truth, and that if people are just true to their faith, surely God will accept that effort. What you are going to see in the next verses is that religion is not mankind’s attempt to find God but mankind’s attempt to avoid the true God. You see, God has a very different view of world religions than do many of the professors of the Survey of Religions courses in our universities and very different than many anthropologists.

Look at 1:22-23: What is the first thing people tend to do in their rejection of the God they see clearly in nature?

"Claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man, birds, animals and reptiles." They build a religion that rejects God and instead worships something God has made. The first sin of suppressing truth of God and refusing to acknowledge God, leads to the next sin of creating an alternative.

All over the world this is still being done today. Go most

anywhere and you can find the strangest concoctions of religions and philosophies—a worship and service of the most bizarre idols and man-made gods. And in our own culture we have simply replaced the wooden idols with our own egos. We have become the gods of our lives.

And what is the result? *"God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another."* (1:24-25) Do you see that phrase?—"God gave them over." If you look at verse 26 you'll see it again. If you look at verse 28 you'll see it a third time. The verb "gave them over" indicates both God letting them go in their desired direction and also God actively pushing them along that path to get them to see the futility of it—to experience the consequences of their choices. Their idolatry leads to sexual impurity. Exactly why, I don't know, but that it does is evident all over the world. Like India's Hinduism, so Bhutan's Buddhism worships the phallus. It is Bhutan's most celebrated symbol. Homes are painted with 10-foot-tall images of male genitals. Monastery entrances are adorned with carved wooden erections.

But it is not just other religions; America has an obsession with sex. Whenever people reject God it seems that inevitably it results eventually in sexual immorality and every other form of evil mentioned in the latter verses of this chapter. No, it is not that every person openly becomes a pervert, but that individually and collectively everything tends to run downhill morally. And the final nail in the coffin of condemnation is verse 32: *"Although they know God's righteous decrees 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."* Much of the sense of right and wrong becomes twisted. We find our entertainment in perversion.

So back to our original questions: How can God send an “innocent” Indonesian woman to hell? Could God be so unfair when she has never even heard of Jesus?” But hear God’s word, if that Indonesian woman goes to hell it will not first be because she has rejected Jesus but because she has rejected the knowledge of God she already has. Assume for a minute that a man kidnaps and murders the president’s daughter. The man is found guilty and sentenced to the electric chair. The President offers the man a pardon, which the man refuses. Why is the man going to die in the electric chair? Because he rejected the President’s pardon or because he murdered the President’s daughter? Clearly, it is because he has murdered.

No one is going to hell because they have rejected Jesus. We are all condemned to God’s wrath because we have rejected the knowledge of God available to everyone. Everyone deserves to spend eternity in hell. That’s why we all need a Savior. That’s why we need “good news”! Not just the young Indonesian mother but also some here need to come to the Savior. The bad news is that we are under God’s wrath. The good news is that Jesus made Himself available to forgive and restore those who will come to Him and trust in Him as Saving Lord.

Maybe you are done with excuses because you now see there is no excuse—You need the Savior. Will you come to Him today?

End Notes

¹ John Stott, *Romans*, p.72

² Nygren in Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p.100

³ CEB Cranfield, *Romans*, p.29

⁴ Friedrich von Schiller, source unknown

⁵ Stott, *Ibid*, p.73

⁶ *The Atlantic*, October 2007, p.22

⁷ *The Atlantic*, October 2007, p.23

⁸ William Dembski, "*Science and Design*," *First Things*, Oct. 1998, No. 86, p. 25, 21. See Piper sermon, Sept 27, 1998

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Stott, Ibid, p. 74*

¹¹ *The Atlantic*, Oct 2007

Additional Notes:

"Here is the truth: there are two great demands of God on the lives of all humans—1) that we exult in God's bounty to us (that's thankfulness), and 2) that we reflect or display his glory. Don't miss this. It is right there in verse 21: "Even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks." It means that God has created a universe in which we get the blessings and he gets the glory. And the way God gets the glory is by our exulting in him as the all-sufficient Giver of all things.

"So here is the great lesson to be learned: the reason the mind evades, twists, distorts, manipulates and suppresses the truth of God is not mainly that we are mentally deficient, but because we are morally deficient. We suppress the Light of God's glory and power because we love the darkness of our own independence. We love our sins, our self-determination, and therefore we suppress the Truth that God is God and that we are to depend on him and live for his glory." (Piper, Sept 13, 1998)

Even believers suppress the truth when they engage in known sin, which weakens the conscience.

The issue of homosexuality was addressed in a message on August 26, 2007 by Dr. Jerry Nelson—www.soundliving.org

As to verse 27 some have said that here is biblical justification to say that AIDS is the God-directed penalty for homosexuality. But the NASB, more closely following the Greek text says, "receiving in their own persons the due

penalty of their error.” “Error” is a better translation than “perversion” because the “error” is expressed in verses 21-25 and the penalty is sexual perversion.

Yes, sin carries its own consequences and yes, sexual immorality of all kinds has devastating consequences but that is not the point here. Some suggest that it is perfectly “natural” for a homosexual to desire someone of the same gender; what Paul is here condemning is a heterosexual engaging in homosexual activity—that would be unnatural to that person. But Richard Hays has thoroughly refuted such exegesis providing ample evidence from that period to show that “natural” and “unnatural” are “very frequently used...as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behavior.”
(Hays cited in Stott, *Romans*, 77-78)

Chapter Three

In Name Only

Romans 2:1-29

Jesus spoke some very frightening words in the Sermon on the Mount. For example, from Matthew 7:22 *"Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* How many who attend churches are fooling themselves? They want to believe that everything is basically okay between God and them when in fact they are in trouble with Him.

The section of the Bible we call *Romans* is a letter from the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. It is a letter in which Paul, at God's direction, lays out the great "good news"—the Gospel. Paul begins by stating it simply in 1:16: *"The gospel...is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."* But in order to demonstrate how "good" the good news is Paul first of all must tell how "bad" the bad news is. As we saw earlier, chapter 1:18-3:20 is a long parenthetical section in the letter. At 3:21 Paul once again picks up the theme of the "good news" where he left off in 1:17. But in 1:18-3:20 Paul will demonstrate the "bad news" that everyone, bar none, is in desperate need of God's salvation by grace through faith.

In the first part of that long section, (1:18-32) God declares, through Paul, His judgment on people who reject the knowledge of God made available to everyone through nature. In their rejection of God they turned to worship other things—created things or themselves—and in doing so they generally degenerated into false religions, sexual perversion and others sins against one another, examples

of which are mentioned in the latter part of chapter 1. Among those who call themselves Christians, a certain moral smugness can creep into their thinking when they see people in other religions cut themselves, perform all sorts of strange rituals, bow down before stone images, dance themselves into frenzies, and do many other bizarre things in the name of their religion. We feel somewhat self-righteous when we consider that we have not stooped to the empty rituals and immoral practices of so many around us. "Not us," we think to ourselves, "I'm so glad we have the truth!"

And so in chapter 2 God through the Apostle Paul addresses Himself directly to those who consider themselves just a cut above the rest of the world. It is written to those who consider themselves religiously and morally well off. It is written to those who assume that because they have a better religion and because they don't stoop to the degrading practices of many around them, they are therefore free of God's indictment; surely we are okay with God. This chapter aims squarely at us who attend church; we are asked not to look at those around us who sin in outrageous ways but we are asked to look at ourselves. It is with prayerful caution that I teach this passage. As you will see, we are in danger of self-delusion any time we are pointing out someone else's faults because we are least able to see clearly our own need when we are focused on another.

God starts with a very pointed indictment. Just as he did in the earlier section, so here in chapter 2, Paul starts with the conclusion of the matter: people who are religious without a relationship with Jesus are in trouble with God. Paul's words are somewhat like the opening statement in a criminal trial in our country, when the prosecutor lays out the charges against the accused.

Hear the indictment in God's words through Paul: *"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. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed."* (Romans 2:1-5)

Verse 2 states what most everyone would agree with: God's judgment ought to fall on those who do evil things. But verse one says that when you agree with that statement you are condemning yourselves because you do the same things. Our first reaction is to say we don't do those same things. But later Paul will show that in fact we do. For now, hear the rest of his opening argument: So, verse 3, when you do those things, do you think you will escape God's wrath? Clearly the implied answer is "No, we won't escape God's wrath!" In fact, verse says, don't misunderstand God's patience as approval of your way of life. Don't base your sense of security on how things are going. You may not have experienced God's wrath yet, not because you don't deserve it but because God is giving you time to repent, to turn around.

Another fact comes in verse 5: You must understand that unless you do repent, unless you turn around and begin to live differently, you are simply storing up wrath for yourself. Every day you go without truly following Jesus you only

make matters worse. Do you remember as a child when you did something wrong, then you compounded it by lying and then assuming that because you hadn't been caught, you were okay? When the truth is you were digging yourself in deeper and deeper, unaware that with every action you were just making the consequences more severe. We sometimes assume that because life is going rather okay—God must be basically pleased with us. Paul writes in essence, don't misunderstand; God's apparent inaction right now is not evidence of God's unconcern or disregard but is indication that you are heaping more and more fuel on the blaze that God will eventually ignite in his judgment on you. What an opening statement by the prosecutor!

In Romans 1 Paul discussed those people who are pagan, those who don't know anything about the Old Testament or the New Testament, and those who have made false religions and have stooped to all sorts of immoral behavior.

Those who live holy lives will have eternal life and those who live unholy lives will receive the wrath of God.

It's easy to imagine that as the Jews, with their religious background, read Paul's indictment of the pagans around them, they would all agree that God surely ought to pour out His wrath on those wicked people. But now in Chapter 2 Paul begins to indict the Jews. What must they be thinking at that point?

"Wait a minute. Don't you know who you're talking to?"

"We are the chosen people of God."

"What audacity to think, and worse yet to say, that we deserve the same wrath that those pagans around us deserve."

In our context we respond similarly: "Wait a minute, preacher. What are you talking about? We're here aren't we? We are the good guys, the ones who go to church. How dare you put me in the same camp with some of those people who work in my office, who live in my neighborhood, and we read about in the papers? How dare you suggest we are under the same condemnation as those pagans around the world?"

In our text, it is as if Paul anticipates their objections and answers them very carefully. In verses 6-16 Paul sets forth two biblical principles that give him the right to say what he has said. Then in verses 17-24 he applies the principles to those who are outwardly religious but inwardly unchanged. And finally in the rest of the chapter he answers yet one more objection that religious people raise. Troubling as it is, let's not forget the charge being made here: Many religiously-oriented people are heading right into the wrath of God in spite of their presumed connection with God.

Principle One

So what are the two biblical principles on which this indictment is based? Principle One is in verses 6-11: In the end God will judge impartially on a very definite standard. You'll find it in the sixth verse and again in the eleventh:

- 2:6—*"God will give to each person according to what he has done."*
- 2:11—*"For God does not show favoritism."*

In verses 7-10, Paul spells it out: Those who live holy lives will have eternal life and those who live unholy lives will receive the wrath of God. Romans 2:7-10 says, *"To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew,*

then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Now if you know the Gospel, that we are saved by grace through faith, something about those verses will bother you. But here it plainly says:

"To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life." And, "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." Now as much as that might bother my understanding of the Gospel those words do seem consistent with what God's word says elsewhere:

- Galatians 6:7-8 says, *"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."*
- Romans 8:13 says, *"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..."*
- And this is what Jesus taught in Matthew 25 in the metaphor of sheep and goats—it was those who did the will of the Father who entered eternal life at the last judgment.

Now that ought to make a lot of outwardly religious people nervous. I know that it might sound to some of you as if I'm saying that we become Christians by our works, by doing the right things. But that is not the subject here. Paul is not yet describing how one becomes a Christian; he will do that later. He is here describing the method God will use in judging all people in the end. Verses 7 and 10 describe the person whose life reflects a true conversion to Jesus Christ, a faith that works, a faith that makes a difference. Verses 8 and 9 describe a person whose life reflects the rejection of God's grace and will in their lives; they "reject

the truth and follow evil.”

In the Evangelical rush to make certain no one trusts in their works to make them right with God, we have too often separated faith and works so completely that we leave the impression that how we live our lives doesn't ultimately matter. But God's Word will have none of that kind of thinking. When God saves a man or a woman, it changes them. The gospel is the power of God for

The gospel begins to remake a man or woman or it isn't the gospel. In the final judgment the evidence of genuine faith will be shown in the life that was lived.

salvation—full salvation. It's not just a ticket to be turned in at the “pearly gate.” The gospel begins to remake a man or woman or it isn't the gospel. In the final judgment the evidence of genuine faith will be shown in the life that was lived.

We tend to focus on conversion as a past experience with a future reward and forget that real salvation results in a present life change. We like to focus on God's saving us from the eternal consequences of our sins—eternal punishment, separation from God. But even the word “convert” indicates a new direction, an active outworking of that new direction—true conversion. We tend to ignore the present on-going consequences of God's saving power which are to release us from the power of sin to control our lives now and to empower us by His Spirit to become more and more like Jesus—fit for God's presence and fit for heaven.

The salvation the Bible speaks of is not only past and future but also present! It begins with God's convicting and

convincing work to bring us to trust in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and a commitment of our lives to Christ's Lordship. It continues with God's Spirit changing us, transforming us, and conforming us to the likeness of Jesus. It culminates in His judgment at the end of the age, where He deems us fit for His eternal presence.

"When it comes to God's final judgment of a person it is not what he or she knows but what they've done."

Paul is not here describing the basis of salvation. The basis of salvation is grace through faith which he will explain that later. Here he is describing the basis of judgment, all people will be judged on the same criteria—the genuineness of their faith as evidenced in their lives.

Principle Two

Now on that same theme, I want you to see Principle Two as found in Romans 2:12-16: *"All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 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. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."* Verse 13 is the heart of it: *"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."* Here's the principle

said differently: "When it comes to God's final judgment of a person it is not what he or she knows but what they've done."

In verses 14-15 Paul makes a parenthetical statement referring back to the non-Jews that he indicted in chapter 1. Even pagans know something of God's laws, God's requirements of people. In addition to having some specific knowledge of God from creation as we saw in chapter 1 (knowledge which they suppress) here we learn that all people have an intuitive sense of at least some of God's laws. They have an instinctual sense of right and wrong that is God-given. And Paul will soon point out that everyone violates that knowledge as well.

And so back to verse 12, whether it is a person who has had access to God's Word or not, all will be judged by how they have lived in response to the will of God. And verse 16 declares that judgment will take place on the day when God will judge everything, including people's secrets, when Jesus comes again. So here again are the two principles:

- #1 - With no place for favoritism for the religious person, God will judge everyone by the same standard—do their lives reflect real faith in Jesus?
- #2 - Again with no favoritism for the religious person, God will judge everyone not according to what they know but according to what they do.

Now beginning at verse 17, Paul is going to apply these principles to the Jews, the religious people. Romans 2:17-24 says, *"Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark,*

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'."

- You consider yourself appropriately religious.
- You are Protestant or Catholic not a member of some cult.
- You attend an evangelical church that teaches the right things.
- You believe the Bible is God's Word.
- You take some pride in the fact that you are a Christian not a Hindu or a Buddhist or something else.
- You think you have the right religion and others are wrong.
- You think the Bible is the guide to the right kind of life.

All of that, but what? You're hypocrites! Your lives don't conform to what you profess. You say certain things are wrong but you wind up doing them yourselves. I'm not describing true Christians who care about living holy lives but oftentimes fail. I'm talking about those mentioned in verse 4—they show contempt for God's judgment by not caring that their lives are out of sync with their purported belief in Jesus. They've been part of the church and hanging around God's Word and God's people for years, but they have no interest in following Jesus. They are what are known as "nominal" Christians. The word "nominal" means "in name only."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his challenging book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, wrote, "Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner... The world goes on in the same old way, and we are still sinners... (We) let the "Christian" live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, (rather than) aspiring to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin."¹ "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son....There is trust in God, but no following of Christ."²

They've been part of the church and hanging around God's Word and God's people for years, but they have no interest in following Jesus.

These are the men and women who for some reason want to be known as Christian but whose lifestyles are incompatible with an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ and the values of His kingdom. These are the people who like the false security of knowing the truth without taking responsibility for living it. These people would argue vehemently that they believe, but they don't care enough about what they believe to consider how it applies to their lives. They claim the Bible is the inspired word of God but they don't consider that belief significant enough that they want to read it carefully and live their lives by it. In fact when the Gallup organization does polls of church-goers in general compared to those who don't go to church at all, there isn't much, if any, difference between the two groups in terms of what they know, what they believe, the values they hold and what they do. The lifestyles are nearly indistinguishable. (That is not true however when the

“highly committed” or “born again” Christian is compared to the one who doesn’t go to church—the differences then are striking.)

In fact according to verse 24, God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of these “in name only” religious people. Because of the lives of these “in name only” Christians,” God is considered irrelevant at best or foolish at worst by those who see the hypocrisy of the “nominal” Christian. I struggle when I am asked to do the funeral of someone whom everyone knew had no real time

If you are not living for the Kingdom of God you have no right to think all is well between you and God no matter how long you have been in the church.

for God, for His Church, or His kingdom work and yet I am asked to pretend that this person was a Christian and is now in “a better place.” What a mockery of God and His grace to change our lives!

The Jew in Paul’s day and the nominal Christian in our day assume they are okay with God because they have the right religious connections. But on the basis of two principles—God judges impartially and by a definite standard AND God judges not on what people say they know but on what they do—on those bases those religious people were under the same condemnation as the pagan idol-worshippers and moral perverts. If you are not living for the Kingdom of God you have no right to think all is well between you and God no matter how long you have been in the church, no matter how many times you have prayed a prayer of repentance, or no matter how long your family has been part of the Christian church.

But in verse 25 we can hear the “in name only” religious person raising yet one more objection to the indictment: Wait a minute, I’m a Jew! I’m one of the chosen people of God. I’ve been circumcised. I did the right ceremonial thing. I’m part of the “in-group.” Or else, “My grandfather was a Baptist minister, I’ve been baptized, dedicated, confirmed, and prayed for. I prayed a sinner’s prayer at a Bible camp when I was a kid; I talked to a counselor at youth camp one winter. I’ve joined the church, served on a committee and sung in the choir.”

But listen again to Paul: *"Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."* (2:25-29) The truth is that a pedigree is of no value when it comes to judgment. To go back to where the indictment began, in verse 1 *"you therefore have no excuse,"* you are under God's wrath. That's the “bad” news.

It will be a little while before Paul gets to the “good” news but right here at the end of this chapter, he gives a glimpse of it. Look at verse 29 again: *"No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."* A man is not a Christian if he is a Christian “in name only”—only outwardly. But a man

or a woman is a true Christian if they are one inwardly—if their religious experience is not just external but if it is a change of the heart by God’s grace that results in a change of life.

The Spirit of God brings about that change of heart and life, not just by saying we believe certain things. Do you realize you are a Christian “in name only”? Do you realize that according to God’s own word you stand just as condemned as any immoral pagan in some idol-worshipping village?

Do you now know that no religious affiliation, no ceremonial rituals of the past, or no amount of religious pedigree mean anything with God? Do you realize you need a change of heart so there can be a true change of life?

God, by His Spirit, will circumcise your heart; He will change it. Will you come to Him, seeking His forgiveness, ready to turn from your old ways and ready to follow Him, truly follow Him as the Lord of your life?

End Notes

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 46

² Ibid, p. 64

Chapter Four

The Verdict

Romans 3:9-20

Ponder this carefully: We exist for the glory of God! God said in Isaiah 43:7, *"Everyone who is called by my name...I created for my glory."* And in 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul says, *"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*

All other purposes in life must be subservient to that overarching purpose or those other purposes are idolatrous—they have usurped the place that belongs to God alone. We easily become very human-centered in our thinking, as if humanity and earth were the center of the universe. But before humanity or any other thing existed God had always been. And in the future, after all that we know is gone, only God and those He chooses will exist.

Yes, there are some who theorize that matter is eternal—that it has always been and always will be. But when Jesus rose from the dead He created credibility for Himself that makes the theories of all others irrelevant. And with that resurrection credibility Jesus corroborated a worldview that places God at the center of all. So again I ask you to consider this carefully: We exist for the glory of God; humanity's reason for existence is the glory of God!

A thousand years before Jesus was on earth, Isaiah reports God's declaration: *"I will send some (of my people) to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem..."* (Isaiah 66:19-20) A thousand years later the Apostle John wrote what God

revealed to him about a New Jerusalem that will appear at the end of time: *"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light..."* (Revelation 21:22-23) The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:5, *"Through Jesus and for his name's sake (for his glory), we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."* Called to live for the glory of God. The Westminster catechism reflects this biblical worldview: The chief end of man, man's primary purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

In the book of Romans the Apostle Paul begins by setting forth the central theme of his letter to the church in Rome: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because (the Gospel) is*

They have violated the very person of God and have perverted the very purpose of God.

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..." (Romans 1:16-17) Given that Paul has a worldview based on the Bible, it is no wonder then that he turns his attention quickly to why it is that salvation is needed. In 1:18 Paul begins a long section explaining the human condition. *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."* (Romans 1:18-20) Paul declares

that everyone, whether they have ever seen a Bible or not, whether they have ever heard of Jesus or not, has some knowledge of the glory, the worthiness, of God.

But what do all people do with that knowledge of God's glory? Romans 1:21-23 tells us, *"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."* Now, as then, they may worship stone images as in some cultures, or as in our culture they may worship and serve themselves. But in all cases they don't live for the glory of God; they live for their own glory.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen." (Romans 1:25) The point is that they have violated the very person of God and have perverted the very purpose of God. Although created in the image of God for the purpose of reflecting the glory of God and *"Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do (what ought not to be done) deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."* (verse 32) In chapter 2 God's indictment extends beyond those who have never had the Scriptures to those who have. In those verses Paul in essence says that not only is the glory of God not reflected in your lives but worse yet, *"God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* (Romans 2:24)

Is it any wonder that *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men..."*? A fatal malignancy pervades the human race and God must and will change it. That's why Paul wrote in

Romans 1:16-17, *"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..."* God is in the business of restoring His creation so that His glory may be reflected. *"We, who...reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord..."* (2 Corinthians 3:18)

But before telling us how that is possible, Paul summarizes God's indictment of all people: Jew, Gentile, Pagan or religious. *"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 (God's) sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."* (Romans 3:9-20) The indictment is here summarized in three English words: "all under sin." The verses that follow (10-18) are Scriptural corroboration of this indictment.

But here in verse 9 the human condition is stated so succinctly: "all under sin." In Galatians 3:22 Paul said it this way, *"But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a*

prisoner of sin... "The Bible says that all people are under the influence of sin, they are captive to it, they are controlled by it and they operate in the sphere of sin. We all want to believe that people are free not to sin, that they can do what is worthy of merit with God. But remember anything or anyone is only as free as they are capable. A fish is free but not free to fly. You would, I'm certain, agree that God is completely free to act but yet you would quickly admit He is not free to sin. In fact, He is unable to sin and yet we say He is free. Conversely, humans, being "under sin" are able only to sin. Later God will say through Paul, *"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."* (Romans 8:7-8)

"We, who...reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord..."

Quoting from the Old Testament Paul will make that point this way: *"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.'"* (Romans 3:10-12) We read those words and something inside of us says, "That's not true! I know people who do good." Martin Luther correctly stated that this entire passage must be understood from God's perspective rather than our own. This passage describes how God see us, not how we see ourselves or others.¹ We compare ourselves to each other and declare ourselves good or bad. God compares even our best deeds to Himself and declares us guilty. Isaiah 64:6 says, *"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*

The late James Boice, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia, tells the apocryphal story of soldiers in a prison camp who barter for food and other things. One day a package arrives with a Monopoly game in it. The prisoners take the Monopoly money and dole it out and begin to use it in dealing with one another. One shrewd soldier manages to collect most of the money. When he is finally set free and returns home he takes the money to his American bank to deposit it.² Foolish, right? His "money" may have had relative value among the prisoners, but it has no absolute value. Likewise our "good deeds" may have relative value among us but they have no absolute or real value with God.

Why not? Look at Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 14:23: *"Without faith it is impossible to please God..."* and *"Everything that does not come from faith is sin."* This is where my introduction comes back into focus. Do you remember when I said, "We exist for the glory of God"? Or as Paul said it in 1 Corinthians 10:31 *"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* Jesus said in Matthew 22:37,

That which is truly good in God's sight is good done out of a love for God, good done with gratitude for the resources given by God and good done for the glory of God.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. The Reformers called the good people naturally do, "civic virtue." Jonathan Edwards said such good was motivated by enlightened self-interest. We do good to gain approval, to feel better about ourselves, or to avoid negative consequences. That may in fact produce a relative good. But unless they are done for the glory of

God they are sin—they fall short of the glory of God.

John Piper wrote, “Fix this firmly in your mind, sin is mainly a condition of rebellion against God, not mainly a condition of doing bad things to other people. This is why it is so sad and so pointless when people argue that they are pretty good people, and so don't need the Gospel. What they mean is that they treat other people decently: they don't steal, kill, lie much, or swear much, and they give to some charities. But that is not the main question. The main question is: Do you love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength? Do you love his Son, Jesus Christ? God is the most important person in the universe. It is not a mark of virtue to do nice things for people while having no love or reverence or passion for God.”³ That which is truly good in God's sight is good done out of a love for God, good done with gratitude for the resources given by God and good done for the glory of God. The Bible says the natural man is unable to please God. This is not because God is “picky” but because our good deeds are self-centered. That is what God is going to change! As John Hendryx put it, “Regeneration (enables) us, for the first time, to be pleasing to God on the basis of Christ's work. And, from this, the work of the Holy Spirit (is) renewing our affections for God, giving us understanding of and a delight in spiritual things and turning our heart of stone to a heart of flesh.”⁴

In these verses Paul shows us the essence of sin—self-deification. God is for us, at best, an after thought, not the guiding person in our lives. We love ourselves more than God. It is our comfort, satisfaction and safety that dominate our motivations rather than God's glory. No one is righteous and no one does good. That's the essence of sin but I want to also show you what John Stott calls the pervasiveness of sin.⁵ For hundreds of years it has been known as “total

depravity.” “Total depravity” does not mean that every person is as bad as they could be but it does mean every motive and every action is tainted by sin. I remember reading once that if sin were a blue dye, every human being would simply be a different shade of blue.

In Romans 3:13-17 Paul illustrates how pervasive sin is: *“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.’* “From our heads to our feet, every part of our being is affected by sin.

- Deceit speaks of our motives.
- The mouth, tongue and lips indicate our words.
- The feet indicate our actions.

Their words create death. They mislead others into thinking all is okay with God when it isn’t. Their cursing (the opposite of blessing) deals death. “Bitterness” is envy, whether it is expressed or not. They “practice deceit;” a flattery which uses and abuses the hearer. And their actions deal death whether physical or relational. They destroy relationships and they don’t have any desire to bring real peace. That’s the pervasiveness of sin—it has affected every motive, word and action. And we all know it. We sometimes refer to ourselves as having “mixed motives” as if that lessens the guilt.

And in verse 18 the essence of sin is referred to again: *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* (Romans 3:18)

In May of this year the Gallup organization polled Americans and discovered that at least 86% of Americans believe in God (another 8% think there might be a God). 77% believe there is or might be a hell. 77% believe the Bible is the Word of God.⁶

Over 200 years ago Robert Haldane wrote, "It is astonishing that men, while they acknowledge that there is a God, should act without any fear of his displeasure. Yet, this is their character. They fear (other people), but disregard the Most High...They are more afraid of man than of God – (afraid of man's) anger, his contempt, his ridicule. The fear of man prevents them from doing many things from which they are not restrained by the fear of God... They don't love (God's) character, they don't give to him the honor that is due; they don't respect His authority. Such is the state of human nature (so long as) the heart is unchanged."⁷

1600 years ago, Augustine prayed, "O Lord, what evil have we not done? Or if there is evil that we have not done, what evil is there that we have not spoken? If there is any that we have not spoken, what evil is there that we have

"Total depravity" does not mean that every person is as bad as they could be but it does mean every motive and every action is tainted by sin.

not thought to do? But you, O Lord, are good. You are merciful. You saw how deep we were sunk in death, and it was your power that drained dry the well of corruption in the depths of our hearts. All that You have asked of us was to deny our own wills and accept yours. Forgive us for every failure to do so and help us to follow You in every way and always, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."⁸ The essence of sin is our failure to live for the glory of God. The pervasiveness of sin is seen in how tainted with "self" every thought, word and deed truly is.

And now we see the universality of sin.⁹ Just as back in chapter 1 where Paul makes a point of the fact that every

person has knowledge of God that they dismiss, so here Paul uses repetition to make his point. *"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."* (Romans 3:10-12) We want to think there are truly righteous people out there but our own experience ought to confirm to us there is none righteous, not even one. Or as Paul will say it later, *"all... have fallen short of the glory of God."*

Human nature—is it basically good or evil? Are we basically good and deserving of God's reward with maybe a little mercy for our minor failings or are we all sinners deserving of God's wrath? The Bible is abundantly clear on that point: *"All have turned away, they have together become*

We want to compare ourselves to others but at the end of the age, when God judges, there will be only one standard of comparison—God's holiness and glory.

worthless." Paul ends his description of the human predicament with these words: *"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 3:19-20)

One summer Donald Barnhouse was traveling by ship across the Atlantic and had occasion to preach on a Sunday.¹⁰ One young woman, a professor of languages in an eastern college, was taken with what he said and came

to talk to him. Barnhouse asked this question: "If this ship should suddenly suffer some great catastrophe and sink to the bottom of the sea and we died, and if, when you appeared before God, he should ask you, 'What right do you have to come into my heaven?' what would you say?" The woman said, "I wouldn't have a thing to say." Barnhouse told her she was quoting Romans 3:19. It is true; she would have nothing to say to God. In that moment, everyone will know they are guilty before a holy God because "every mouth (will) be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."

We want to compare ourselves to others but at the end of the age, when God judges, there will be only one standard of comparison—God's holiness and glory. Imagine that at that moment you were singled out to stand before God and He would begin to read from His law, His description of what brings Him glory:

I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me. Nothing else in your life shall have priority over God. If God read that command aloud and you knew that He knew everything about you, knew every act you have ever done, every thought you have ever had, would you want to stand accountable for reflecting the glory of God?

You shall not bow down to any idol. Nothing, not you, not another human, not any thing, nothing other than God shall have your worship. Would you want to stand accountable for that?

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. You shall not thoughtlessly use God's name in expressing your emotions; God's name stands for all God is and it shall not be lightly or carelessly used. Would you want to stand accountable?

You shall remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, not working on that day. One day in seven is to be reserved in your life to give to the worship of God. Don't violate that with your own interests. Do you want to stand before God and make excuses?

Honor your father and your mother. Do you want to be held accountable?

You shall not murder Jesus said, *"I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."* Do you want to try your excuses?

You shall not commit adultery. Jesus said, *"I tell you anyone who looks at a person of the opposite sex with lust has already committed adultery with that person in their heart—stop it for it is better that you take drastic measures to stop it than that you go to hell."* Do you want to stand before God accountable for that reflection of the glory of God?

You shall not steal.
You shall not speak maliciously of your neighbor.
You shall not covet what does not belong to you.

You have heard it said, love your neighbors and hate your enemies but I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Do you want to stand accountable to God?

Barnhouse said if any words are spoken on that day they will not be excuses but they will be an acknowledgment of

God's justice. "It was all true, God. I was wrong. I knew I was wrong when I made my excuses. But I hated and still hate the principle of righteousness by the blood of Christ. I must admit that those despised Christians were right who bowed before you and acknowledged their dependence on you. I hated their songs of faith then, and I hate them now. They were right, and I hated them because they were right and because they belonged to you.

"I wanted my own way. I want heaven with myself on the throne. That is what I want and I do not want anything else and never, never will want anything other than heaven with myself on the throne. I want my own way. And now I am going to the place of desire without fulfillment, of lust without satisfactions, or wanting without having, of wishing but never getting, of looking but never seeing, and I hate, I hate, I hate because I want my own way. I hate, I hate..." And then there will be silence. Every mouth will be silenced—the whole world accountable to God.

The testimony of Scripture is that, on their own, every human being is hopeless and helpless. Romans 3:20-22 says, *"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now 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."*

A man lived near the church that Donald Barnhouse pastored and Barnhouse often tried to speak to him of the gospel but the man always resisted saying that he didn't need the church; he had his lodge and they were involved in doing all sorts of good things.¹¹ The man would always tell Barnhouse that if he ever met God he would be all right because of his moral principles and the good things he had

done.

One day word came to Barnhouse that the man was very sick with a fatal disease. Members of the lodge were taking turns staying by his bedside because lodge rules said no man should die alone. Barnhouse came to visit just as one member was leaving and another coming. Realizing the situation was desperate Barnhouse decided to get right to the point. He sat down by the man and said, "You don't mind my staying here and watching you for a few minutes do you? I have often wondered what it would be like for a person to die without Jesus Christ. I have known you for quite a few years, and you have always said that you do not need Christ and that your lodge obligations are enough. I would like to observe a person end his life with those beliefs and see what it is like."

The man was marvelously convicted and looking at Barnhouse with fear said, "You wouldn't mock a dying man would you?" Barnhouse then said, "You are going to appear before God in a very short while. Suppose he asks you, What right do you have to come into my heaven? What will you say?" At that great tears welled up in the man's eyes. And while the man listened carefully Barnhouse told him how he could stand before God not in his own merit but in the merit, the righteousness, of Jesus Christ. In the next moments the man turned from trusting in his own relative goodness to trusting in Christ's absolute goodness. Have you? Will you?

End Notes

- ¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 86
- ² Donald Barnhouse, *Romans Vol.1*, 292-3
- ³ John Piper, Sermon on Romans 3:9-18
- ⁴ From John Hendryx "The Apparent Good in Natural Man."
<http://www.reformationtheology.com>
- ⁵ John Stott, *Romans*, p. 101
- ⁶ May 10-13 Gallup Poll, 2007. N=1,003 adults nationwide. MoE \pm 3
<http://www.pollingreport.com/religion.htm>
- ⁷ Edited from Robert Huldane, *Exposition of Romans*, p.121
- ⁸ Adapted from Augustine's Confessions (9.10)
- ⁹ Stott, *Ibid*, p.101
- ¹⁰ Barnhouse, *Ibid*, p.270ff
- ¹¹ Barnhouse, *Ibid*, p.266ff

Additional Notes

Total Depravity (Inability) Verse List

<http://www.traviscarden.com/writing/total-depravity-verse-list/>

The doctrine of total depravity (or total inability) says that all men, as a consequence of the Fall, are born morally corrupt, enslaved to sin, and unable to please God or even of themselves to turn to Christ for salvation. Is it biblical? Is man basically good or basically evil?

- Ecclesiastes 7:29 *"Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."*
- Mark 10:18/Luke 18:19 *"And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."*
- Romans 5:12,19 *"through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned... through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners"*

C.f. Ecclesiastes 9:3

All men? Are there any exceptions?

- Romans 3:23 *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*
- Isaiah 53:6 *"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;"*
- Romans 3:9-12 *"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."*
- 1 John 1:8,10 *"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar and His word is not in us."*

c.f. 1 Kings 8:46; Psalm 53:1-3, 116:11, 130:3, 143:2; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Jeremiah 2:29; Micah 7:2-4, Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; James 3:2

Are people good deep down?

- Mark 7:21-23 *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."*
- Psalm 5:9 *"There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue."*

Are men *totally* depraved? Is any faculty of the person yet uncorrupted? Heart/Thoughts (Deceitful)

- Jeremiah 17:9 *"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"*
- Ecclesiastes 9:3 *"the hearts of the sons of men are **full of evil and insanity is in their hearts** throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead."*
- Genesis 6:5 and 8:21 *"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that **every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... from youth.**"*
- Psalm 36:1-2 *"Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. For it flatters him in his own eyes concerning the discovery of his iniquity and the hatred of it."*
- Proverbs 28:26 *"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool "*

C.f. Ecclesiastes 8:11; Psalm 94:11; Mark 7:21-23

Mind/Understanding (Depraved)

- Romans 1:28-31 *"And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being... without understanding"*
- Titus 1:15-16 *"to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled"*
- Ephesians 4:17-18 *"So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;"*

- Jeremiah 10:7-8,14 *"For among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You. But they are altogether stupid and foolish. Every man is stupid, devoid of knowledge"*

Will/Choosing (Enslaved)

- John 8:34 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."*
- 2 Timothy 2:25-26 *"if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."*
- Titus 3:3 *"For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."*
- Romans 6:6 *"our old self was crucified with Him... so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient... and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."*
- Romans 6:20 *"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."*
- Romans 7:14 *"For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin."*

c.f. John 8:31-32,36; Galatians 4:9; 2 Peter 2:19

Affections/Desires (Perverted)

- Romans 1:24-27 *"Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who*

is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

- 2 Timothy 3:2-4 *"For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."*
- Proverbs 21:10 *"The soul of the wicked desires evil"*
- John 3:19 *"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."*

c.f. Genesis 3:16; Psalm 4:2, 140:8; Proverbs 10:23; 2 Peter 2:13

et al (Utter Ruin)

- Titus 1:15-16 *"to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled"*
- Romans 7:18 *"I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh"*
- Isaiah 1:5-6 *"The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil."*

Are they just misdirected? Do men "not know better?"

- Romans 1:18 *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."*
- Romans 1:21 *"For even though they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."*
- Romans 1:32 *"and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."*

c.f. Romans 2:14-15

Can men still do good when they want to?

- Matthew 7:18 *"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."*
- Romans 8:7 *"the mind set on the flesh... does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so"*
- Jeremiah 13:23 *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil."*
- Genesis 6:5 and 8:21 *"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... from youth."*
- Titus 1:15-16 *"to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed."*

c.f. 1 Samuel 24:13; Job 14:4; Matthew 12:34; Romans 14:23

Are men at least born pure? What about the "tabula rasa?"

- Psalm 51:5 *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."*
- Psalm 58:3 *"The wicked are estranged from the womb; those who speak lies go astray from birth."*

C.f. Proverbs 22:15; Isaiah 48:8

What *is* the natural disposition of man toward God?

- John 3:20 *"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*
- Romans 8:7-8 *"the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*
- Colossians 1:21 *"you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds"*
- James 4:4 *"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."*

C.f. Romans 1:28-30

What is man's relationship *to* God?

- Psalm 58:3 *"The wicked are estranged from the womb; those who speak lies go astray from birth."*
- Ephesians 2:12-13 *"Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without*

God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

- Ephesians 2:3 *"Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."*

C.f. Isaiah 59:2

Can man then do anything to please God?

- Proverbs 15:9 *"The **way** of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord"*
- Proverbs 15:8/21:27 *"The **sacrifice** of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord"*
- Proverbs 28:9 *"He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his **prayer** is an abomination."*
- Isaiah 64:6 *"For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our **righteous deeds** are like a filthy garment;"*
- Romans 8:7-8 *"the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for **it is not even able to do so**, and those who are in the flesh **cannot please God**."*
- Hebrews 11:6 *"And without faith it is **impossible to please [God]** "*

C.f. Psalm 50:16; Proverbs 21:4; Isaiah 1:10-15; Amos 5:21-24

Are men at least seeking God?

- John 3:20 *"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and **does not come to the Light** for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*
- Isaiah 65:1 *"I permitted Myself to be sought by those*

who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me."

- Isaiah 64:7 "***There is no one who calls on Your name***, who arouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities."
- Romans 3:10-12 "***there is none who seeks for God***"

C.f. Romans 10:20

Can the natural man comprehend the gospel or come to saving knowledge of God on his own?

- 1 Corinthians 2:14 "*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and **he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised.*"
- 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 "***our gospel is veiled... to those who are perishing***, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
- 1 Corinthians 1:18, 21-24 "*For the word of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom **did not come to know God**, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, **to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness***"
- Matthew 11:27 "*no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal*

Him."

C.f. Psalm 119:18; Proverbs 4:19; Ephesians 4:17-19; 2 Corinthians 2:15-16; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

Can men of themselves accept God's gift of salvation? Do men choose God or come to Him on their own?

- John 3:27 *"John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven'."*
- John 14:16 *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, **whom the world cannot receive**, because it does not see Him or know Him"*
- John 1:12-13 *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood **nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**"*
- John 6:44 & 64 *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;" And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."*
- Romans 9:16 *"So then **it does not depend on the man who wills** or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."*
- Romans 11:35-36 *"Or who has first given to [the Lord] that it might be paid back to him again? **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.**"*
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 *"But **by His doing** you are in Christ Jesus"*
- Philippians 2:13 *"for it is God who is at work in you,*

both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

C.f. Jonah 2:9; Zephaniah 3:9; John 15:16; 1 Corinthians 15:10; Philippians 1:6; James 1:18

Who supplies faith/belief/repentance?

- Romans 12:3 ***"God has allotted to each a measure of faith."***
- Acts 5:31 *"He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to **grant repentance** to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."*
- Acts 11:18 *"When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has **granted** to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."*
- Philippians 1:29 *"For to you it has been **granted** for Christ's sake... to believe in Him"*
- Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; **and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God**; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."*
- 2 Timothy 2:25 *"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, [etc.]... if perhaps God may **grant them repentance** leading to the knowledge of the truth"*
- 1 Corinthians 12:3 *"no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit"*
- 2 Peter 1:3 *"His divine power has **granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence"*
- John 3:6 & 6:63 *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit... It is the Spirit who gives life; **the flesh profits nothing.**"*

C.f. John 5:44; Ephesians 6:23; 1 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Peter 1:1

Can men do anything to help themselves?

- Romans 5:6 "*For while we were still **helpless**, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*"
- Ephesians 2:5 "*even when we were **dead in our transgressions**, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)*"
- c.f. Psalm 49:7-9; Jeremiah 2:22

Who then can be saved?!

- Matthew 19:26 "*Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

C.f. Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27

Chapter Five

The Good News

Romans 3:21-26

There about 50 pages of additional notes included for further study in Appendix B

In this sermon, you are going to hear a message that has been preached here many times before. It may not be in the same words, but it is the same message. And in truth even some of the words will be the same. The message is the “gospel,” the good news!

For most of the first three chapters of his letter to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul gave very bad news. Basically the bad news is that there is a holy and just God who is incapable of tolerating sin and we are sinners. In chapter 1 Paul writes that even those who have never heard of Christ, those who have no access to the Bible, are condemned by a holy God because they have refused the truth about God they do have—truth that comes from their own consciences and from what God has created.

Then in Chapter 2 Paul writes that a holy God condemns even the Jewish people, who have had access to more truth, because they too have refused the truth they have about God. And then in chapter 3:9-20, Paul summarizes all he had written thus far by pointing out in repeated terms that no one can stand before a holy God. Why? Because God is righteous and we are unrighteous. God is holy and we are unholy. God is sinless and we are sinners. Chapter 3:10 says, *“There is no one righteous, not even one.”* No one has the righteousness necessary to stand before the holy God. When God judges people at the end of time—everyone, without Christ, will be found to have sinned and

fallen short of the glory, the righteousness, the holiness, which is the standard of perfection of God. No one will measure up!

I've told this story before, even as recently as in our course called "Basics," but it bears repeating: At the close of WWI tens of thousands of soldiers were stationed in Europe waiting for orders that would allow them to go home. Conditions were relaxed and the men were taking every opportunity to see as much of Europe as possible before they left. Near a village about a hundred miles from Paris

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known..."

was a group of American soldiers—about 40 of them with a lieutenant in charge. The Lieutenant received permission to take a two-day leave and turned over leadership to his sergeant.

While the Lieutenant was gone a motorcycle messenger brought news that General Pershing was seeking 2700 men who would march in victory parades in London, Paris, Brussels and Rome. That possibility excited most of the men—what a way to see Europe. But there were two conditions to qualify: You had to have a clean record - no courts marshal. None of the men had been even indicted. They all qualified. You had to be at least a certain height and the regulation height was given in metric measure. The sergeant and another soldier looked at each other as they read the orders and then they asked each other, "Do you know how tall that is?" "No, how about you?" "No, but at least I'm taller than you." When the news spread through the camp about the possibility of being in the victory parades the same discussion broke out everywhere, "How tall do you have to be?" "At least I'm taller than you."

There they were standing back to back all over the camp and soon every man knew his height relative to every other man. And there was a tall man named Slim telling a shorter man named Shorty how he'd send him a postcard from Rome and how he'd greet all the English girls for those too short to make the trip. These men did what comes naturally, because they didn't know the true standard, they set up an artificial standard and compared themselves to themselves.

But the Lieutenant came back and when he saw the orders he, knowing some French, went into the village to get a meter stick. With it he made a mark on the wall and made the men stand up to it to see who qualified. No longer could they measure themselves against themselves. Now they had an unchangeable standard. Some didn't even try, knowing they were too short. But to everyone's surprise not even Slim, standing as tall as he could, could measure up to the mark. Not one of those soldiers qualified for General Pershing's parade army. Though there was a relative difference between Slim and Shorty they both failed to measure up.¹ Bishop Moule wrote: "The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of God's glory; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an Alp but you are just as little able to touch the stars as they."² That's the bad news.

But look at Romans 3:21: *"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known..."* The late English preacher, D. Martin Lloyd-Jones called the first two words of this verse the most wonderful words in the Bible: "But now!" We were condemned—"but now." We were under the wrath of God—"but now." We were helpless and without hope—"But now a righteousness from God has been revealed." The thing we most need, righteousness, is now available!

What we are going to see from the Bible next are possibly the most important words in the Bible and the very foundation of the Christian faith. If all of Christianity were boiled down to its essence, this would be it. This is the "Good news" the "Gospel." Learn these six verses and you will know the Gospel. We are going to study this passage by answering five questions:

- What is "the righteousness of God?"
- What does this righteousness from God do for us?
- Where does it come from?
- How is it possible for us to have this righteousness?
- And how does it become ours?

Look at Romans 3:21-26:

"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."

What is God's Righteousness?

And so we start with what this "righteousness from God" is. Have you ever gone to a place that charges an entrance fee and discovered that you didn't have any money? The next thing you notice is they don't take Visa or MasterCard. And then you fish around in your wallet and find an old Mexican five-peso bill—"Sorry, you have the wrong currency." The "currency" of heaven is righteousness. Access to a holy God requires holiness. God the Son, became a human being and lived a perfect life. He obeyed

the will of God in every detail. God the Son was perfectly righteous and He offers that righteousness, God's righteousness, to us. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, *"Christ has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."* The "righteousness from God" is God's own holiness—God's moral perfection.

What Does Righteousness Accomplish?

What does this "righteousness from God" do for us? Verse 24 gives the answer. By it we "are justified." If you are following the text carefully, and I hope you are, you will notice that I skipped right over verse 23. Actually I didn't skip over it, I illustrated it in the story of "Slim and Shorty." Verse 23 is like a parenthetical statement, reminding us of

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.

the major point Paul has emphasized in chapters 1 and 2: everyone stands condemned before God. There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles or the religious and the heathen—all have sinned and fall short of the glory, the holy standard of God.

So again, what does the "righteousness from God" do for us? Again, the answer is that by it we are justified. How that happens we will look at in a minute but for now we see that God's righteousness, God's holiness, justifies us. But what does it mean to be justified? There are at least two aspects to being justified: When God justifies us, He takes something away and He gives something.

First of all He takes something away. In chapters 1 and 2 God said that because of our sin we are condemned, guilty and sentenced to the wrath of God. To be justified means to be declared free of the guilt and consequences of sin. Romans 4:7-8 says, *"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."* The guilt is removed. That is why the term "justified" is sometimes cleverly defined as "Just as if I'd never sinned." To be justified means that we stand acquitted before God.

But to be justified is not just to have our guiltiness taken away. God doesn't just put us back in some neutral position with Him so that we can try again to get it right. To be justified also means we are given something. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 the Bible says, *"God made him (Jesus)*

When the "righteousness from God" is given to you, you are justified, declared by God to be "not guilty"

who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Just as our sins with their guilt and penalty are removed, are no longer charged against us, so now marvelously Christ's righteousness, Christ's moral perfection is credited to us.

Theologian Charles Hodge wrote, "There is probably no passage in the Scriptures in which the doctrine of justification is more concisely or clearly stated than [this]. Our sins were imputed to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed to us. He bore our sins; we are clothed in his righteousness... (But keep in mind) Christ bearing our sins did not make him morally a sinner... nor does Christ's righteousness become subjectively ours, it is not the moral quality of our souls... (But it is still true) Our sins were the

judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that (his death) was a satisfaction of justice; and his righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God.³ So again I say to be justified means both something taken away and something given.

Someone wrote, "The voice that gives forgiveness will say: 'You may go; you have been relieved of the penalty which your sins deserve.' But the same voice also says 'You may come; you are welcome to all my love and my presence' because you stand before me credited with the righteousness of Jesus."⁴ May we never become inured, accustomed, unmoved by the significance of this act of God in justifying us.

When the "righteousness from God" is given to you, you are justified, declared by God to be "not guilty"—no longer under the wrath of God and you are declared "righteous"—the goodness, holiness and righteousness of God has been credited to you so you may come into the very presence of a holy God. There's a marvelous word picture of this in the Old Testament: *"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD...Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Take off his filthy clothes.' Then he said to Joshua, 'See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.' Then I said, 'Put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by."* (Zechariah 3:1-5) When God justifies us He does two things: He takes away our guilt and He credits us with the righteousness, the perfect obedience, of Jesus.

Origin of Righteousness

Where does this "righteousness" come from? Now the obvious answer is "it comes from God." But I am getting at something deeper. Look at verse 24 again: *"and are justified freely by his (God's) grace."* The word "freely" is the adverbial form of the word "gift"—we are justified as a gift. This righteousness from God comes not as a reward or payment but solely because of God's choice. In Ephesians chapter 1 we are told that the basis of the gift is God's choice based on something in Him not based on anything in us.

Ephesians 1:5,7,9 says, *"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure..."*

That same concept is repeated back in Romans 3:24 when Paul writes we are justified freely by God's grace. "Grace" is God's joyful, delighted, favor toward us—God's totally free, unmerited by us, choice of us. The source of our salvation is pure grace. Paul is especially intent on nailing this idea down tightly. We are not made right with God by our efforts because our efforts fall short of the glory of God as I pointed out earlier. In light of this clear teaching from the Bible it is distressing to hear so many people, even in the church, still want to add something to grace. They insist on stating something they have done that would give God cause to grant His grace. I try. I want to do right. I have always believed in God. I will do better. No, it is either all of grace or it is not of grace at all.

Listen to this from the largest Christian religion in our country: They wrote that Martin Luther had come to the mistaken idea that human nature was so ruined by Adam's

sin that humans were powerless to do anything that would earn God's favor. In place of any works, Luther would substitute faith—a blind confidence that Christ's good works were enough for mankind's salvation. He said Christians need only believe that Christ had saved them.⁵ Luther is wrong they claim. That religion goes on to say (and I

"Grace" is God's joyful, delighted, favor toward us—God's totally free, unmerited by us, choice of us. The source of our salvation is pure grace.

quote) "it is necessary to make reparation for our sins. This means that we must somehow try to make up for the disorder in our lives and the harm we have done to others by our sin."⁶ Again, "No. No, a thousand times no." The Bible says, *"By grace we are saved through faith, not of works..."* Paul said it so clearly in Romans 3:20, *"no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law."* Our "righteousness from God" is by grace and grace alone.

How Do I Attain This Righteousness?

But now fourthly, how is this possible? How can the "righteousness from God" be given to us? How can God justify us freely? Where is justice if God simply acquits the guilty? All through the Bible God says an innocent person must be declared innocent and a guilty person guilty—to do other than that is to pervert justice and make a mockery of God! So how can God do what He says others must not do? A number of years ago an organization promoting atheism published a pamphlet in which they had rather sinister portrait sketches of several of the principle people of the Bible. Under each picture was the name of the person being referred to and a description of the person. Under Abraham was the word "coward" for being willing to

sacrifice the honor of his wife Sarah to save his own hide. Under Jacob's name were the words "liar and cheat." Under Moses' name was "hypocrite"—the man who killed another said 'thou shalt not kill.'" Under David's name were "adulterer and murderer." The thing that is noteworthy about all these charges is that they are absolutely true. And when the Atheist asks how a good and just God could forgive such evil actions, they are asking an excellent question.

So how can God declare us not guilty? How can God justify us who are guilty of everything from blasphemy to murder to immorality to selfishness, and of any and all of the evil

What we see here is that because of His grace God chose to give Himself as a sacrifice for our sin. God presents Himself, in the person of His Son Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement.

things we do to God and each other? The answer is found in verse 24 with added explanation in verse 25. Verse 24 says we are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

Redemption simply means to set free through the paying of a price. In our culture we can redeem an item we have placed in "hock" at a "hock shop" or "Pawn Shop." The pawnshop owner will keep the item we have placed there until we bring the specified price and "redeem" it. In a similar fashion we are "in hock" because of our sin. We are slaves to sin and its consequence—the wrath of God. But God comes and redeems us, buys us out of the situation we are in.

Now that becomes clearer to us when we put the next verse with it and see exactly what it is that God does. Look at 3:25: "*God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.*" (The New American Standard Bible reads, "*God displayed him publicly as a propitiation.*") Now quite obviously here, Paul is describing what happened when Christ was crucified. These words "sacrifice of atonement" or "propitiation" come from one Greek word, so what does it mean? If I offend you and you are justly angry with me because of my offense, we will be "at odds" with one another unless justice is done. Unless the offense is atoned for, satisfied, made up for, righteous anger is still appropriate. But when I sincerely confess my wrong and make whatever reparation is possible, when justice is done—you forgive me, lay down your anger, and we are reconciled.

Under the Old Testament, at God's direction, the Jewish priests would offer certain kinds of sacrifices to make atonement for the sins of the people. By offering the sacrifice the people could avert the wrath of God against them for their sin. By their sacrifice of atonement God would become propitious, favorably disposed, toward the people—He would be a friend rather than an enemy. Now Paul has already made it clear in Romans 1 and 2 that God has every right to be intensely angry with us. We are under His wrath because of our sin. This is true not because God is picky and holds a grudge but because He is holy. What we see here is that because of His grace God chose to give Himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

- Notice who takes the initiative to bring about reconciliation—not us but God.
- Notice who offers the sacrifice—not us but God.

God presents Himself, in the person of His Son Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement—a "propitiation"—a "wrath-

quencher” as J.I. Packer calls it.⁷ God chose to direct against Himself the full fury of His wrath that was to have been directed at us.

Jesus was not a victim—not of the Romans, the Jews, or even of you and me. He was not a martyr for a cause. Jesus died because, He, God, gave His life. He was the self-offered sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people. Jesus, Himself, said it this way in John 10:17-18: *“I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”* Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:6, *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom...”*

Who killed Jesus? God did! Today there are professing Evangelicals like Steve Chalke and Brian McLaren who are suggesting that this understanding of Christ’s death is something akin to “cosmic child abuse”—the Father abusing his Son.⁸ But J.I. Packer responds correctly: “Since (the death of Christ) was planned by the holy Three in their eternal solidarity of mutual love, and since the Father’s central purpose in it all was and is to glorify and exalt the Son as Saviour and Head of a new humanity, smartypants notions like ‘divine child abuse,’ as a comment on the cross, are supremely silly, and as irrelevant and wrong as they could possibly be.”⁹ No, Jesus was not the victim of God the Father. John Stott said it this way: “God gave himself to save us from himself.”¹⁰

Now why did God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) have to do this? Why couldn’t God just declare us “forgiven,” “justified”? A couple of years ago *TIME* magazine ran a cover story entitled, “Why Did Jesus Have to Die?” The article describes six men having a Bible study in a living room in Geneva, Illinois. They were imagining Christ’s

death and discussing why it had to happen. One of the men, David Gray asks, "What if God's plan were that Jesus comes to earth and he does these teachings and he talks nice. You know, 'Love your enemy ...' And then he is taken away and not killed. Why in God's plan did he have to suffer like this?" The other members of the men's Bible study contemplated the question. One suggested: "God's plan probably has to be more dramatic?" "Right," says another, briefly imagining God's thinking. "You folks don't get it. We've gotta make something dramatic here." And a third man says, "One word I would add to this discussion, obedience. [Jesus] was totally obedient."¹¹

The Bible answers their speculation: "*He did it (what? God in Christ died) to demonstrate (God's) justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*" (Romans 3:26) God is just and He must act in accordance with His nature. If God overlooked sin He would cease to be God. God must punish sin. The

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom..."

problem is that God loves us, and we are destined for wrath and eternal destruction. We were helpless; we couldn't make up for our own sin. And so God used the only way possible to justify us, to acquit us, and still remain a just God who punishes sin—He poured out His just wrath on Himself, "*for God so loved the world that he gave his only unique Son...*" And so God remains "just" (He dealt fully with our sin) and He justifies us.

Why would He do it? Because He loves us. Why does He love us? Because of His unmerited grace. Hymn writers of the past have captured well this heart of the Gospel. Phillip

Bliss wrote, "Man of Sorrows!" what a name-for the Son of God, who came Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah, what a Savior!

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood, Sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

"Guilty, vile and helpless we, Spotless Lamb of God was He. Full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

"God justifies the believer not because of the worthiness of his belief, but because of the worthiness of the one who is believed—Christ."

And, Charles Wesley penned, "No Condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him is mine! Alive in him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine; Bold I approach the eternal throne And claim the crown thro' Christ my own."

How Can God's Righteousness Be Mine?

Lastly we ask the question: "How does God's righteousness become ours?" How does this "righteousness from God" that I so desperately need in order to stand in the presence of a holy God, become mine? Most of you know the answer but I want you to see that Paul pours that answer all over his words:

- *"This righteousness...comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."*(verse 22)
- *"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith"*(verse 25)
- *"the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."*(verse 26)

Faith in Jesus is placing your trust in Him and what He did on the cross as your way to God.

Faith in Jesus means placing no confidence whatsoever in you, your goodness, your efforts, or your standing in the church or community but instead placing full confidence only in Jesus and what He did.

Faith in Jesus is acknowledging that apart from Jesus you have no hope, none whatsoever!

Faith in Jesus is acknowledging that with Jesus you have complete hope—the assurance of life with God now and forever.

Faith in Jesus is not faith in your faith: One theologian wrote: "God justifies the believer not because of the worthiness of his belief, but because of the worthiness of the one who is believed—Christ."¹²

Faith's only function is to receive the grace offered by God. We are justified, we receive the "righteousness from God," by grace alone through faith alone. Hear Paul again from later in his letter: "

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'" (Romans 10:9-11) I ask you, have you, from your very heart, placed your trust in Jesus alone for your salvation? And have you declared with your own mouth your allegiance to Him as Lord?

End Notes

- ¹ Story paraphrased from Barnhouse, *Romans*, Vol. 2 p. 72ff
- ² Bishop Moule in John Stott, *Romans*, p. 109
- ³ Charles Hodge *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, pp. 150-151
- ⁴ John Stott, *Romans*, p. 110 - paraphrased
- ⁵ Pamphlet 39, Catholic Information Service
- ⁶ Pamphlet "To Sin is to Die" Knights of Columbus and pamphlet 91, Knights of Columbus
- ⁷ J.I. Packer, "Penal Substitution Revisited"
- ⁸ Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, p. 182-183; Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, p. 105
- ⁹ Packer, *Ibid*
- ¹⁰ Stott, *Ibid*, p. 115
- ¹¹ April 12, 2004 *TIME* Cover Story
- ¹² Stott, *Ibid*, p. 118 – paraphrased

Chapter Six

By Faith

Romans 4

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

"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.'

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

"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

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

"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.' The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (Romans 4)

I've asked you this question before, but the text before us leads me to ask it again: Does God love you? I don't mean does God love the human race. The old Peanuts comic strip

character Charlie Brown said, "I love mankind; it's people I can't stand!" Is that how God feels?

Does God love you? I mean does He truly care about you personally? Does He desire your welfare? Does He sovereignly work to bring about the best for you? Does He delight in you? Does God love you? Most people don't think so! Many Christians don't think so. Many Christians have, at best, a kind of bargain with God. They expect God to keep up His end of the bargain as long as they keep up theirs. They assume God won't punish them too severely for sin and He will take them to heaven when they die as long as they don't do anything too sinful and they do a reasonably good job of living like a Christian. At root most people are convinced that their relationship with God is dependent on them; they have to get that relationship and they have to keep it.

Does God love you? I mean does He truly care about you personally? Does He delight in you?

What arrangement do you have with God? Let me ask the question this way? Why would God have anything to do with you? Why would He want to bless you and make the best happen for you? Why would God want to answer your prayers? Why would He care about what happens in your life? Why would He love you? If I had the opportunity to press you privately for an answer to that question, many of you in this place this morning would tell me in various ways that God loves you because God is love and because you are at least trying to not "mess up." I'm increasingly convinced that most people are afraid of God. They are afraid of God because they only know the truth that "God is love" abstractly not personally and they know that far too often they aren't trying all that hard to be Christian. They

are afraid God may not actually love them because they don't deserve His love.

Again, even many Christians misunderstand grace and faith. When they do something they know is contrary to God's law, especially if it is a "big" sin (according to their own standard), or if it is a sin they have repeated many times, they wonder if God can forgive them. And with that question comes the follow-up question: "Am I even a Christian?"

That very question on the mind of a true Christian along with the fear and logic that drive it, places in doubt our understanding of the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. How many people keep themselves from experiencing the unconditional love of God because they insist on finding something in themselves that would account for God's loving them or not loving them? How many people live in the fear of God because they don't know the basis of the love of God?

I want you to hear again the basis of a relationship with God. And for some of you who are not yet Christians, it will be a radically new way of thinking about it. And for some of you who are already Christians it will be a radically new way of thinking about it because since you became a Christian you have once again slipped back into living by law rather than grace. You are living in fear instead of faith. At the end of chapter 3 of the book of Romans Paul stated a fundamental and all-important principle of Christianity. Miss this principle and you miss it all. On this principle hangs the difference between experiencing the love of God and experiencing the wrath of God. Chapter 3:28 says, *"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."* Now it is that principle that Paul will expound in chapter 4.

So, I challenge you again. Even though the words are familiar to many of you, the concept may have been forgotten because you have spent years assuming that your relationship to God, while of grace, is still somehow based on what you do and you live in fear not freedom; you live by law not faith. Now let's see how Paul unpacks this principle of justification through faith in chapter 4. In the first 21 verses Paul gives the principle again and then

How many people keep themselves from experiencing the unconditional love of God because they insist on finding something in themselves that would account for God's loving them or not loving them?

specifically cites and illustrates how who we are and what we do, do not result in a right relationship with God and how faith does result in that right relationship with God. In verse 22 he reiterates the principle once more, and in verses 23-25 he applies it to us.

Let's go back to the beginning of the chapter where Paul describes the principle in detail. Verse 1 says, *"What then shall we say that Abraham our forefather discovered in this matter?"* What matter? The matter of justification by faith not works (3:28) And, verse 3 says, *"What does the Scripture say?"* Here Paul states the positive side of the principle—"Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness." By what means was Abraham declared righteous? In verse 2 Paul said that if Abraham had been justified, if he had received a right relationship with God by works then he would have had reason to boast or to take personal credit—but by what means was Abraham declared righteous? "Abraham believed God"—he trusted God by faith.

That flew right in the face of what many of the Jews taught in Paul's day. Jewish rabbis said "Abraham was perfect in all deeds...all the days of his life."¹ And that "Abraham's faithfulness was (credited) unto him for righteousness."² Note the crucial difference—Paul said "Abraham believed God and it, that is Abraham's faith, was credited to him for righteousness." The Jews were saying "Abraham's faithfulness was (credited) unto him for righteousness." In other words, they said Abraham earned his right standing with God by being a faithful, obedient to God, man.

In the next two verses Paul says they are wrong. If you work and get wages, the wages are not a gift; they are owed to you, an obligation. If it is earned (then by definition) it is not a gift. And if it's a gift, then by definition, it is not earned. No, he says, you can't earn a gift. Paul is declaring something that most human beings

Every Old Testament saint was saved by exactly the same means by which we are saved—by grace through faith not works.

find hard to believe—to the person who simply trusts God to justify him (to forgive him and declare him righteous) to that person God gives the gift of righteousness, a right standing with God. In verses 6-8 we see this very same righteousness by faith principle. Paul reminds us that David is an example of a man who had a right relationship with God not based at all on what he has done but solely on grace through faith.

Quoting from Psalm 51 in verse 8 David said, "*Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.*" God does the unusual. What the person deserved didn't happen. Instead something entirely different happened—forgiveness, all of grace, by faith not by works. David had

broken three of the commandments (Coveting, adultery and murder) there was no sacrificial provision for such premeditated sin. See David's cry in 51:16,17: *"You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* One Bible scholar writes: "And if we examine the remainder of Psalm 51 to discover the ground (basis) on which David is acquitted, it appears that he simply acknowledged his guilt and cast himself in faith upon the mercy of God."³ David didn't do a thing to try to make up for his sin.

Every Old Testament saint was saved by exactly the same means by which we are saved—by grace through faith not works. And every Old Testament saint was forgiven for his sins committed after he became a believer, by exactly the same means by which we are forgiven—by grace through faith. By contrast, we are so often inclined to what I have before called "evangelical penance." Even as believers we are still convinced that we have to do something to find God's favor, so we say to ourselves, "I have sinned and now I must make up for it somehow." We live in misery for a while until we feel that now maybe we can trust God to have forgiven us because we punished ourselves long enough. Or we say, "I will live better from now on." The promise becomes my offering to God—a premise on which God can base His forgiveness. We think God will forgive because I will do better next time. All of these actions are based on the thinking that I must somehow do something to earn the forgiveness—to regain God's favor.

But what does God say to that? *"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."* (Romans 4:5) God doesn't justify good people. As Jesus said, the righteous

don't need it. But of course that must have been said somewhat tongue in cheek since none are righteous. God justifies the wicked, the sinner. This is a most amazing statement that runs counter to all our human understanding of justice. Paul doesn't say that God justifies the sinner after the sinner has dealt with his own sin by making up for it. No, God justifies him while he is still a sinner. How? We have already seen that Christ dies in our stead and gives us His righteousness. So on what basis is forgiveness and Christ's righteousness credited to us? Again, look at Romans 4:5: *"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."*

Now for the next couple of paragraphs Paul camps on the idea that justification, a right relationship with God, is not by works. He wants to drive that point home. In Romans 4:9-12 Paul will argue that a right relationship with God does not come about through attention to the proper religious exercises. Specifically he mentions circumcision, that sine qua non of Judaism. "Of course I'm one of God's chosen people, I've been circumcised." To refute that assumption, the question is asked (in verse 10) about when Abraham's faith was credited to him for righteousness—was it before or after his circumcision. If you look at the Genesis passage, it was clearly before.

And so, Paul writes in Romans 4:11, circumcision was the sign he received after he was granted *"the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."* Just as clearly then, it wasn't his obedient act of circumcision that was credited to him for righteousness, but it was his faith. Yes, Abraham obeyed God, but his obedience came after his faith—it came after God granted Christ's righteousness to Abraham. Abraham was saved through faith alone, not through his religious rituals.

When people are asked on what basis they think God will accept them, it is most often answered:

- “Well, if I’m a good Christian”
- “If I try to live a good life, go to church, serve my fellow man, am baptized, and take communion.”
- “If I live in relative conformity to the rules and rituals of my religion, I think God will accept me. After all, God is fair.”

But as we’ve said so many times before, “You don’t want God to be fair.” If He were fair He’d annihilate every one of us, for we have all sinned against Him.

The whole point Paul makes is that you don’t want to come into the presence of God in your own righteousness because you don’t have any; you need God’s righteousness and that comes through faith alone—not through the proper religious affiliation or activities. The other major

Abraham obeyed God, but his obedience came after his faith—it came after God granted Christ’s righteousness to Abraham.

point Paul makes in verses 9-12, that he carries into the next verses, is that everyone comes to God the same way, whether they are Jew or Gentile—it is by faith not by religious affiliation or ritual.

Now in verse 13-17 Paul will tell a second way by which a right relationship to God does not come: “*It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise*” (verse 13). It is not through keeping the law of God that we are given a right relationship with God. In verse 14 Paul writes that if we get the promise of God—the righteousness of God, a right relationship with God—by

keeping the law then faith and grace are of no value. It can't be both—it is either by grace through faith or it is earned.

And in verse 15 he reminds us why keeping the law won't work: "law brings wrath." The law shows us how wrong we are and condemned we are, but it gives us no help in obeying it—we are unable to obey it. Remember once again the point is that a right relationship with God can only be gained and kept by faith not works. That second part is where many Christians get it wrong. Many assume they become a Christian by grace through faith alone but that they remain a Christian by what they do. Soon after they become a Christian they start trying to keep the law of God in order to stay in God's favor.

If they were asked what is the basis of their on-going relationship to God they would say obedience—"As long as I obey." And as I mentioned earlier, they live in fear. But on what is our right relationship with God truly based? It is not based at all on our efforts to be a good Christian. It is

***Faith has no power; faith accesses power.
Real faith trusts in something or someone.***

based solely on God's grace through faith. When Paul wrote in Romans 6:14, "*We are not under law but under grace*" some immediately thought it can't be as simple as faith. Their response was: "*Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?*" That's how we who live under law still think: If we don't have to obey then we won't. If there is no threat then we will sin willfully and often.

I know that it is not until chapter 6 that we will hear this argument, but Paul is convinced that if we truly understood that we have been made right with God wholly of grace

and that our actions had nothing to do with it and if we knew how unconditionally we are loved, our hearts would rise up to want to obey God not because of threat but because of love. And when saved by grace through faith, the Holy Spirit of God indwells us and He gives us both the desire and the ability to begin to truly obey the Lord for His glory rather than ours.

And now in verses 17-21 Paul turns from writing about what doesn't result in the righteousness of God to what does! If works, if religious rituals, if law-keeping, can't give us a right relationship with God then what can? Faith! And in these next verses Paul describes that faith. And he describes it in terms of faith's object and faith's action.

Faith's Object

The kind of faith Paul describes is faith in something. Some people believe that faith is what makes things happen, as if faith, in itself, had the power to do things. Faith has no power; faith accesses power. Real faith trusts in something or someone. Abraham, who is the example in much of this chapter, is also the example here in verses 17-21. Again, he is the example of saving faith. And the first thing to notice is that his faith is in God. *"(Abraham) is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead..."* (Verse 17) That's explained in verse 19: God had promised Abraham that Abraham would have a child and that in particular he would have a son by his wife Sarah. Most of you know that the promise was made when Abraham and Sarah were nearing 100 years of age. When it comes to having children, they were as good as dead but God caused barren old Sarah to conceive by her old husband Abraham. Abraham believed in the God who gives life to the dead.

And again, in whom has Abraham placed his faith? Romans 4:21 says, Abraham was *"fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."* Abraham had had experience with this God—God was trustworthy. If God said it would happen then Abraham would believe him even if there were no other evidence to support it.

Faith's Action

So saving faith's object is Jesus. But I said earlier, Paul here describes not only faith's object but also faith's action. Faith's action is simply trusting Jesus to do what He says He will do. Abraham's faith fought against and overcame the temptation to doubt or deny God's promises. All the physical circumstances demanded a different conclusion but Abraham believed God. One author wrote: "Faith is being enabled to rest on the promise alone, refusing to demand visible or tangible signs."⁴

One of the greatest hindrances to the good news is our misunderstanding of grace. We cling so desperately to the idea that we must somehow deserve God's favor. We have an equally difficult time with the idea of faith. Many times I have had people say to me, "It just can't be that simple. Do you mean all I have to do is believe Jesus and He makes it all happen—He declares me forgiven and also righteous in God's sight?" Yes! "But how can I know he will do what he says." That's faith. If you abandon all your ways of saving yourself and trust Him to do so, He will. It is truly that simple. That's the good news. What we can't possibly do, God does by simply trusting Him.

About 8 years ago, I read to you a children's book that I think illustrates faith's action very well. *Billy and the Attic Adventure*. The illustrations add much to the impact of this story.

There once was a little boy named Billy.
Billy loved to explore things
One day, when Billy's father came down from the attic,
Billy got an idea.
Billy climbed up the ladder
And found all sorts of fun things to explore.
One thing was a leather aviator cap,
too big, but fun.
But when Bill tried to go down the ladder his foot slipped.
Billy could barely hang on.
Mom, Dad! Billy screamed as the cap covered his eyes.
"I'm right here, Billy," said his father. "Just let go and I'll
catch you."
"But I can't SEE you!" cried Billy.
"You don't need to," said his father. "I can see you."
So Billy let go...
...and fell...
...right into his father's arms.⁵

Will you simply trust Jesus? He is your righteousness; He alone is your access to a holy God! Verse 22 then reiterates the results of such faith: *"This is why it (faith) was credited to him for righteousness."* (Romans 4:22) Abraham came to God not seeking to earn his relationship with God but rather he simply came in faith believing God would do what God had said. And God responds to that faith with the free gift of God's own righteousness.

Paul then ends the matter by bringing the whole issue up in time to his own day and to those Roman readers. And in so doing he sends it forward 2000 more years to our day and to us. It is said so well in verses 23-25: *"The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to*

life for our justification.”

Let me ask again the questions I began with: Does God love you? Why would God have anything to do with you? What is the basis of your relationship with God? God says it is by grace alone through faith alone. Will you simply trust Him? Will you just believe Him when He says your relationship with God is established by faith alone? Will you believe Him that when you attempt to bring anything else you pervert the relationship, for you turn it from grace to works and you turn it from God’s mercy to your efforts. Will you just trust Him? Believe Him? Cease trying to earn His favor? Bask in His unconditional love? Victor Hugo wrote, “The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved... in spite of ourselves.” Rest in the security of His love based not on your actions but solely in His grace.

End Notes

¹ Book of Jubilee 23.10

² 1 Maccabees 2:52 in Stott, *Romans 123*; See also Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 84

³ FF Bruce, *Romans* p. 111

⁴ CEB. Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 95

⁵ Daryl Worley/John Daah, 1989 Tyke Corp.

Chapter Seven

Peace with God

Romans 5:1-11

My brother was in senior high school and I was in junior high. My parents, after years of scraping to make ends meet, finally had enough that they dared to take a two-week vacation to California from Wisconsin. My brother and I were left to take care of the farm. Because it was winter the major tasks were feeding and milking the 60 or more cows that were the family's source of income. Milking meant every morning from 5:00 - 7:00 and every evening the same hours.

Well, Mike and I were busy young men, busy in school and in our social lives. Cows were clearly a hindrance, a barrier to our preferred activities. We may have started those two weeks well but within days we were totally off schedule, cows were getting milked at 4 in the afternoon to allow us to get away for the evening and they were getting milked at 8 or later, in the morning, because we would sleep in after a late night out. As I remember it, it was actually my brother who was so irresponsible. None-the-less, when my father returned from vacation he found quite a mess—barns that weren't cleaned, cattle uncared for, and milk production way down. The proof of our undisciplined lives was revealed in the milk-check from the dairy.

For good reason my father was angry. And for many days we walked on "egg shells" around him. There was an "air" of disapproval that could be cut with a knife. The last thing you wanted to do in that situation was cross him. We were very careful to do the right thing and say as little as possible.

We lived with the fear that the consequences of any current mistake would be more severe because of our past conduct. There was great relief when the morning chores were over and we could get on a bus and out from under the apparent watchful and seemingly frowning eyes of our father. I'm certain I remember it far worse than it was and I'm equally certain my father wasn't nearly as angry as I, in my guilt, made him out to be. But in a lot of the relationships of life, especially with those in positions of authority, we live with a certain uneasiness, maybe even a fear, that if we don't get it right, we'll lose.

As I asked earlier, how are things between you and God? What is God's basic disposition toward you? What is His attitude toward you right now? Many of us assume that if we've been doing fairly well lately, if we've been acting like a Christian, God is probably basically pleased with us. While

If there is a God, and most people are convinced there is, then what that God thinks about us is important now and important forever.

others of us who have blown it recently or just haven't been paying attention, assume that God is probably disappointed in us and maybe even slightly angry. Is God "sore" at you right now? Is He peeved? Disgusted? Fed up? Is He disappointed with you? Do you kind of "walk on egg shells" around God? Maybe you just kind of ignore God—you just do your best and hope it will be good enough?

If there is a God, and most people are convinced there is, then what that God thinks about us is important now and important forever. Even those who claim to have no religion spend a lot of energy trying to believe there is no God so they won't have to deal with Him. The result? Most people are afraid of God. Many times, in Calcutta, India, I and

others of you have visited the temple of Kali, the Hindu god of death and destruction. There blood sacrifices are offered each day in the midst of incredible filth, animals killed to assuage the anger of the gods—to keep them from inflicting more harm on the people. In China, a woman writes “of finding shelter one night in a village temple because there was nowhere else to sleep. In the night she woke and the moonlight was slanting in through the window on to the faces of the images of the gods, and on every face there was a snarl and a sneer, as of those who hated people.”¹

Why are even many Christians so afraid of God? Do you remember the children’s song: “Be careful little hands what you do; be careful little hands what you do; for the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful little hands what you do.” Is that our impression of God? We sing the “looking down in love” part but we most remember the “be careful” part. Does God have a hidden video camera that watches everything we do to see if we “mess up” so He can pounce on us?

The Apostle Paul, in the first 2½ chapters of Romans has painted quite a word picture of our relationship to God. Describing all people, he used words and phrases such as:

- godless and wicked
- unthankful to God
- refusing to give glory to God
- exchanging the truth of God for a lie
- considering God as unworthy
- stubborn, unrepentant

And then he described God’s relationship to us as:

- “God gave them over”—God let people reap the consequences of their sin.
- The “wrath of God” is being revealed against them.
- And there is a day when God’s righteous judgment

will be fully poured out on unrepentant humanity.
People will perish forever.

According to the Bible that is an accurate picture of people's relationship to God apart from Christ. We are in trouble with God.

What does it mean to stand under the wrath of someone? Recently we heard about the man who videotaped himself molesting a three-year-old little girl. Imagine the parent's righteous anger. Fortunately the little girl is safe and will probably have no memory of the incidents. But imagine the gulf of hostility between the parents and that man. Such is the gulf that exists between a perfectly holy God and us. The greater problem is not that we are angry with God but that God is rightfully angry with us. And it is not simply that we have failed to live up to some arbitrary law but that we have spurned the very person of God. Like the man recently arrested, we have not simply violated a code, we have deeply offended God, Himself.

The Scripture does not present God as impassive and insensitive but as emotionally moved by the actions of His creatures. So it is no wonder that the Bible also reveals God as angry about some things. As I said earlier, God's anger is not personal pique or wounded pride; it is a righteous anger at how His creation is being destroyed and how His holy character is being defied and defiled. Again the worse problem is not that we see God as our enemy (we can't harm an infinite God by our anger); the worst problem is that God sees us as His enemy.

But in the last half of chapters 3 and 4, as we have seen, Paul makes it clear that while wrath is our deserved destiny, God in grace has poured out His wrath on the person of His Son instead of on us. Christ paid the penalty for our sin so that we might be granted the righteousness

of God—a righteousness we must have if we are to have a right relationship with a holy God. And so we saw in 3:21 that instead of the wrath of God, *"but now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, apart from works has been made known."* And we see in verse 22 that this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Then Paul spends all of chapter 4 making the point that in no way can we earn that relationship with God—it is a gift of grace through faith alone. Now in chapter 5, Martin Luther says, the Apostle Paul "speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy."² Everything has changed between you and God!!

In reading the first two verses of this chapter, I want you to notice the three specific things that have changed for you because of justification by grace through faith: *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Christ paid the penalty for our sin so that we might be granted the righteousness of God.

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) *"Therefore since we have been justified through faith..."* What have we already learned about justification? What does it mean? To be "justified" means to be declared "not guilty" by God. Now Paul writes in 5:1-2, "Since" justification is true for those of you who trust in Jesus alone, what dramatic changes have taken place in your relationship with God? So what changed?

- "We have peace with God!"
- "We have gained access into this grace in which we now stand."
- "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

First, what does it mean to have "Peace with God"? Look again at Romans 5:1: *"Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* This is not the "peace of God." This is not simply a feeling of serenity some people speak of after a particularly difficult decision. That is not what we are talking about here. This is "peace with God," which has to do with our relationship with God.

This "peace" is describing the actual relationship between you and God; how God feels about you and how you feel about your relationship with Him. I think Colossians 1:21 helps us understand this: *"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil*

God will never withdraw His love contingent on my actions. By God's grace I am at peace with God. Our relationship is one of unhindered friendship.

behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

What was our relationship with God before faith in Christ? Enemies. The Bible says we were alienated, separated, at odds, no positive relationship, in fact, God was rightfully angry. But what action did God take? Christ died for us. In Romans 3:25 Paul called it a "sacrifice of atonement" or in another translation, a "propitiation," the means by which God's anger is turned aside; or as Paul says it here in Romans 5:1 *"We have peace with God."* What resulted from God's action in Christ's death for us? Paul calls it "peace" and later he will describe it as reconciliation. And we are brought into a positive relationship with God by God's gracious action of forgiveness through Christ.

On April 14th of 2007, the Boston Globe carried the story of 3-year-old Kai Leigh who was paralyzed from the waist down because of a gunshot wound received while she played on her third floor balcony. 29-year-old Anthony Warren came into the neighborhood carrying a gun because he was angry with a man. Firing warning shots into the air, one of his bullets hit and shattered the body of little Kai Leigh. Two years later, Anthony Warren had pleaded guilty to the appropriate charges.

At Warren's sentencing, Kai Leigh, now 5, took the stand to testify. She sobbed as she explained what the last two years of her life had been like. Then she totally surprised all in the courtroom except her mother when she ended her statement with these words: "I forgive you Anthony Warren. What you did to me was wrong, but I still forgive you." The gravity of the situation, punctuated by those words, brought even veteran court officers to tears. Even Anthony Warren was deeply affected. He rose to say to the child, "I'm sorry!" Warren was sentenced to 13 years in state prison. But the scene in that story, to which I most draw your attention, happened as Warren was being led out. Kai Leigh's mother reached out taking Warren's shackled hands and pulled him to herself in an embrace.³ That and so much more is what God does to us.

When I wake up each morning my negative history does not cloud God's attitude toward me. God has no memory of my sins. God will not even hold any future sins against me. He will never withdraw His love contingent on my actions. By God's grace I am at peace with God. Our relationship is one of unhindered friendship. And best of all, nothing I could do, would change God's attitude, because God's attitude toward me is not based on me but on Him. *"Having been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

But there is another dramatic result of having been declared righteous through faith: The second thing that changes is found in verse 2: *"through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."* By God's grace we have been moved into a whole new sphere of reality. Something is now true that wasn't true before. Think of the circumstances under which we lived before! The Bible speaks of all the forces arrayed against us without Christ—our own fleshly sinfulness, the world, and the Devil. Our own sinfulness works against us like a cancer destroying everything it touches. Our greed destroys our dreams because even when we get what we want it isn't enough. Our selfishness destroys our relationships because sooner or later the others realize it isn't friendship or love, it is opportunism.

And a sinful world is against us: the dog-eat-dog world wherein we fight a zero-sum game where I must lose for you to win. And the Bible teaches there is a very real person called Satan, the devil, the destroyer who has the will and power to exploit every one of our weaknesses and more and to destroy. And not only were these forces against us but worst of all we lived in the place where God's wrath was upon us. But now we live in a situation where God's grace is continually upon us. In Christ we have been moved, as it were, to a whole new house: before we were in the prison-house awaiting execution. But now we are in the house of the king sitting on our Father's lap in the family room. We are surrounded by grace.

I've told some of you before, but many years ago my brother and sister-in-law flew to Brazil and there they met five young children, brothers and sisters, who had literally lived on the streets, scavenging for food, abandoned by their parents. Mike and Natalie paid the necessary fees and costs to adopt those five children (in addition to the three

children they already had). They flew with them on their laps to Minneapolis, Minnesota where for the past many years they have fed them, clothed them, sat up with them when they were sick, schooled them, and most of all loved them. Can you imagine the difference? Children who had nothing and no future were given access into this grace in which they now stand. They live in a wholly different world, not most importantly materially but relationally.

In Christ, we are in the house of the king sitting on our Father's lap in the family room. We are surrounded by grace.

Please note that we have gained "access...into this grace." We have been given the privilege of living in the environment of grace. Listen to just some of what is now ours by grace:

- Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*
- Romans 8:28 *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*
- 1 Corinthians 10:13 *"God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*
- 1 John 5:14-15 *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."*
- Matthew 6:8 *"In fact, your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

But what is the third thing that has so dramatically changed in our relationship with God? Look please at the last part of verse 2: *"And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."* Again I remind you that "hope" does not mean uncertain wishful thinking. Usually when the Bible uses the word "hope" it means just the opposite—it means a confident certainty that something will take place. We can now live in the joyful, confident expectation of the future! And what can we be certain will take place? The glory of God. There is coming a day, when Jesus comes again, that the glory of God will be seen in all its fullness. In that day we also will reflect that glory of God in ways we cannot even now imagine.

Our great hope is the return of Jesus and the restoration of all things to their created glory, which reflects the glory of God.

Living historically on this side of the Fall of mankind in Adam, we have little understanding of what God originally created. And we have little appreciation of what it will all be like when creation is restored. We were created in the image of God but sin marred that image. We sinned and fell short of the glory of God. But when we are justified and granted the righteousness of Jesus, God begins to re-form in us His image, His likeness. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, *"And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory..."*

And a day is coming when we shall be fully transformed. 1 John 3:2 says, *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* And Paul will later tell us that the whole creation looks forward to that day when the creation,

including God's children, will be restored to that glory: *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed."* (Romans 8:18-19) Our great hope is the return of Jesus and the restoration of all things to their created glory, which reflects the glory of God. That is our future.

I suppose Paul could have ended this section of his letter on that positive note. But when Paul talks about the future he knows that present circumstances could make us doubt. And so he speaks to the relationship of hope and suffering. Romans 5:3-5 says, *"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."* As we saw in 1 Peter, usually when the Bible speaks of "sufferings," they are not the physical maladies that we all experience sooner or later in life. The "sufferings" spoken of here are the opposition to our faith that we experience by those opposed to the gospel.

It's the ridicule a student experiences in the classroom when he/she defends the faith. It is the discrimination an employee experiences when it is known that he or she is a Christian. It is the isolation a family member experiences when the rest of the family shuts them out for being a Christian. As a general rule the statement that suffering produces something good, would prove untrue. Calvin pointed out that suffering usually "provokes a great part of mankind to murmur against God, and even to curse him."⁴ But when suffering is understood as God's loving discipline and when it is met with God sustaining faith, it produces endurance.⁵ Paul is saying that suffering doesn't contradict

our confidence but actually builds stronger confidence. Just as an infection produces the antibodies the human body needs to fight the infection so suffering produces the very perseverance the human spirit needs to fight the ill-effects of suffering.

In brief, here's Paul's argument: Suffering, discrimination, hostility, and injustice of all kinds, because of our faith, are used by God to build our perseverance, our endurance. And perseverance builds proven character. Character is a mature perspective that knows God is sufficient for every situation. And such character only builds greater hope or confidence. I see it in the lives of so many of you. That describes Rick Bolunchuk's story. It is Lou Stoen's story. Suffering has not brought despair. To the contrary, it brought greater and greater confidence in the hope of the glory of God. And so Paul gives us three ways our relationship with God dramatically changes because we have been declared righteous by God's grace through faith:

- We have "peace" with God.
- We now live in the sphere of God's grace.
- We have the great hope of sharing in the glory of God for eternity.

At this point in Paul's letter I think he responds to an unspoken doubt. Paul spoke so confidently of the great results of justification but as I said earlier, our experience may make us question all of this. In Romans 5:5 Paul wrote, *"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."* I've had times when I have been almost viscerally aware of the reality of God so that I could say I can "feel" it. There have been times when His presence and His love were so obvious that I could say that I experienced it. Some describe a sense of being overwhelmed by the love of God. John Wesley spoke of his

heart being strangely warmed. But there are times when I experience none of those feelings and my faith must fall back on truth alone. How can we be certain God loves us?

Here's the convincing argument: *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."* (Romans 5:6) The cross of Christ is the greatest proof of God's love for you! Paul says let me compare God's love to the way humans love. Romans 5:7-8 says it's rare that someone would die for a person who has done good or who is a friend, someone whose life is worthy of dying to save. But I suppose there have been times when someone has died for such a person—like when a parent dies for a child, a husband for his wife or a soldier for his comrade. But, Paul says in verse 8, see the contrast in this: *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us."*

Our great hope is the return of Jesus and the restoration of all things to their created glory, which reflects the glory of God.

Two things about us: We are "sinners" or as it says it in verse 6 "ungodly," "wicked." Those words don't speak of neutrality toward God but a definite disregard for God and hostility toward God's laws. And secondly, back in verse 6, it also said we were "powerless," weak, and incapable. So, when we were still ungodly, powerless, sinners God demonstrated His love for us.

Do we not realize that God already knows the worst about us? Do we not understand that God knows every sin we have done or thought or will do or will think and still He died for us and He loves us. His love for us is not built on our ability to be worthy of it. His love for us does not

continue dependent on our ability to be worthy of it. He has chosen to love us in spite of us and because of Him. How can we be certain of peace with God, certain of living in His grace, and certain of a future with God? Because God in Christ, demonstrated His love for us already. The cross of Christ is the greatest proof of God's love for you!

In our text, it is as if Paul anticipates another question: How can I know God will continue to love me and for eternity? Here is but one of many times that Paul wishes to give great assurance of our eternal relationship with God. Paul uses a logic that argues from the greater to the lesser. If God can do the greater thing, surely He can do the lesser. Paul says it twice. In verse 9 he says, since you have been justified by Christ's blood, since He willingly gave His life for you so that you could be forgiven you can certainly count on Him to save you from the wrath of God that is to come. If He would do the greater thing, give His life for you, you can depend on Him to do the easier thing—love you to the end. He says it again, in verse 10: If he reconciled you to Himself when you were His enemy, certainly now, as His reconciled friend, He will save you by His life. The risen Lord is the one who guarantees our future with Him.

Christian, if you trust in Jesus, God is at peace with you. Secondly, you live in the place of His grace; He wants nothing but what is good for you—He loves you. And thirdly, He loves you without fail right through to the end. You are not under His wrath you are under His love. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your saving-Lord, realize your whole relationship with God is totally different than before. Don't live in fear—live in trust. That's why Paul concludes with verse 11: *"Not only is this so, but we also REJOICE in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have received reconciliation."*

End Notes

¹ Barclay, *Romans*, p.72

² Martin Luther in Moo, *Romans*, p. 297

³ *Boston Globe*, April 14, 2006

⁴ John Calvin, in Cranfield, *Romans*, p.104

⁵ Cranfield, *Ibid*, p. 104

Chapter Eight

Death through Birth and Birth through Death!

Romans 5:12-21

(Editor's Note: Appendix C contains additional notes and resources on the subjects of original sin, the imputation of righteousness, the fate of the infants, "universalism," etc.)

Many of us have wondered at one time or another: "What do Jesus and an event 2000 years ago have to do with me and my life today?" Here's another and more involved way of asking the same question: The Bible declares that all human beings are lacking the one thing they need to have a relationship with a holy God—righteousness. The very nature of a holy God, by definition, demands that all unholiness be banished from His presence or as the Bible says it, *"Without holiness, no man will see the Lord."* The Bible further says that every person has sinned and "falls short of the glory of God"—we lack the righteousness required to be with God.

After making that "bad news" point over and over again in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul finally gets to the "good news": *"But now a righteousness from God has been made known...this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ."* (Romans 3:21) He goes on to say in verse 24 that we are made right with God, through what Jesus Christ did on the cross; His death makes it possible for us to be credited with God's righteousness. That is well-known theology to many of you but it does raise that same important question: "How can the death and resurrection of a man who lived 2000 years ago personally affect me?" More specifically, "How can His righteousness be credited to me?" Please understand that your relationship with God hangs on the answer to that question!

Look at Romans chapter 5 beginning at verse 12. In these next verses Paul is going to respond to those implied questions.

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of

Those who belong to Adam are sinners under the sentence of death. Those who belong to Christ are righteous and have life.

the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death,

so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."
(Romans 5:12-21)

To describe how Christ's righteousness can be credited to us, Paul uses an analogy. The analogy Paul uses is Adam's relationship to people compared and contrasted with Christ's relationship to people. So how can what Christ did 2000 years ago be relevant to me? In Romans 5, the Bible declares that all other people stand in relationship to one of two people: either Adam or Christ. Furthermore the actions of those two people determine the eternal destiny of everyone who belongs to each of them. And, as I said, everyone in the history of the world belongs either to Adam or to Christ.

It is still true today that what Adam did thousands of years ago determines what his people are. And it is equally true that what Christ did two thousand years ago still determines what His people are. Those who belong to Adam are sinners under the sentence of death. Those who belong to Christ are righteous and have life. This passage will be hard work. This is a very theologically and logically technical passage. Not everything about the Christian faith is simple. I think you have a right to understand some of the more complex issues of our faith as well. So look at your Bible and see how Paul constructed his comments.

Notice first of all that what he starts in verse 12 he doesn't finish right away. Romans 5:12-13 *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned..."* At this point we would have expected a "so also" to complement the "just as" at the beginning of the sentence. But instead we have verse 13: *"for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken*

into account when there is no law." Verse 13 doesn't finish the thought of verse 12.

Skip down to verse 18 and notice that the thought of verse 12 is repeated: *"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, (but this time the thought is completed) so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men."* (Romans 5:18) And verse 19 rephrases the same complete idea. Here you see Paul's use of the analogy of Adam: *"For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Christ) the many will be made righteous."* (Romans 5:19) We'll come back to these verses later, but to understand their significance, we must first understand the analogy Paul uses.

In verse 12 Paul starts his analogy with a simple statement of the facts:

- First, sin came into the world through one man, Adam (He is named in verse 14). Paul is not here dealing with the ultimate origin of sin, how sin was even possible; he is simply describing how it came into our human existence. "Sin came into the world through one man."
- Secondly, the text says, "Death came through sin." We know from the Genesis account that Adam did sin and the penalty of death was introduced into the human experience. That death was complete, physical corruption and death and spiritual corruption and death.
- Thirdly, the passage says, "and in this way death came to all men..." "In this way," means through Adam—through Adam, death came to all men.
- Fourthly, death came to all, "because all sinned."

What does Paul mean when he says, "because all sinned?"

Does Paul simply mean that we all imitate Adam by also sinning and therefore we all likewise receive the penalty of death? Now that is certainly true as we saw in Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* and as we will see in Romans 6:23 where it says, *"The wages of sin is death."* But that is not Paul's point here. In this part of the text Paul is talking about two devastating consequences of Adam's sin, for Adam and for us.

The first consequence is quite obvious—everyone dies as a result of Adam's sin; the mortality rate is 100%. Both physical and spiritual death were thrust on the human race as a result of Adam's sin. This consequence is sometimes called "original sin." "Original sin" is not only a reference to the first sin committed by a human being. Much more

Sin came into the world through one man and death came through sin and in this way death came to all men because all sinned.

importantly it denotes the condition resulting from Adam's sin; it speaks of the corrupted nature of all human beings because of Adam's sin.

This corruption of our very human nature explains what Paul said earlier in Romans 3:10-12: *"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."* The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah says the problem goes deeper than actions. *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9) And the Psalmist David touches on this subject when he writes, *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* (Psalm 51:5) "Original sin" speaks to our fallen, sinful,

condition.

"Total depravity" is another concept that relates to this idea of original sin. "Total depravity" does not mean a person is as bad as they could possibly be as when someone says so-and-so is totally depraved. No, "total depravity" means that every aspect of our human nature is affected by original sin. I refer you to Paul's earlier description of the human condition where in chapter 3 he spoke of our thoughts, our words and our actions as all affected by sin. There is no part of our nature that is not corrupted by the results of

The truth of God is revealed in creation, the unwritten law of the conscience and the written law of God.

original sin and hence it affects every motive, thought, word and action. Death is one way to describe that condition. From conception, the seeds of death are planted and working in us.

The first devastating consequence of Adam's sin is "original sin," a fallen, corrupted human nature, "total depravity;" it is death, physical and spiritual. This is an issue of our character, of our very nature. God addresses this consequence through what we call sanctification. Over our lifetime, by His Holy Spirit, He corrects the damage done and restores the image of God, the image of Christ, in us. In chapters 6-8 Paul deals with this important issue.

But the second devastating consequence of Adam's sin is a legal one; it has to do with our standing before God. We are guilty and condemned before God. It is this issue that Paul most wishes to point out in his analogy here in Romans 5. And the point is that when Adam sinned something changed in us. We weren't even born yet but

when Adam sinned, we sinned—we became guilty. I didn't say that after Adam sinned, we were born and also sinned. That is true, as we have already seen, one devastating result of Adam's sin is what we know as "original sin"—we now have that sinful nature. But this second consequence of Adam's sin is different: I said that when Adam sinned, we actually sinned.

Watch Paul's logic here very carefully or you miss a very important point; This is the point Paul uses later to describe how the righteousness of Jesus becomes ours. So again look at verse 12: *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned..."* Before going on with his comparison of Adam and Christ, Paul wishes to drive home his point that we all sinned in Adam. So in verses 13-14 he answers an implied question: "Paul, you just said that death came into the world as a result of sin but what about those who haven't sinned by breaking the law?" First of all, in verse 13, Paul answers that by saying, we all know sin was in the world before the Law was given through Moses. Cain murdered his brother, the rampant sinfulness prior to the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah in the time of Abraham, and so much more illustrate the universality of sin prior to Moses and the Law.

Paul knows that you might then think that death is simply the result of everyone sinning on his or her own and not the result of everyone having sinned in Adam. "Wait a minute," Paul says, "It is true that even before the Mosaic Law, people sinned against the 'law,' the 'law' written on their hearts." But remember this, "sin is not taken into account when there is no law." But wait a minute; the truth of God is revealed in creation (chapter 1), there is also the unwritten law of the conscience (chapter 2) and there is the written law of God (chapter 3). Paul already made it

clear that the whole world stands accountable to God.

So, who has not broken the law and sinned in one of those ways? I think Paul has in mind infants and by inference, the mentally incompetent. They are the only ones of whom it can be correctly said that they have no law to which they can be held accountable. And yet, to prove Paul's point that we all sinned in Adam, Paul writes, in verse 14,

"Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam." Only of infants can it be said that they did not willfully sin against the laws of God.

"Nevertheless" and watch this carefully, they too received the sentence of death. How is that possible? How can that be fair? Only because all, everyone, infants included, were in Adam and so when Adam sinned, we all sinned.

(See Appendix C for discussion on the salvation of infants)

Romans 5:12 says that when Adam sinned, death passed to all humans, "because all sinned." The only way for that sentence to make sense, as difficult as it is to comprehend, is that all humanity was somehow in Adam so when he sinned we sinned. Everyone suffers death, physical and spiritual, because everyone has sinned in Adam—his sin is ours! It is not just that Adam sinned and we pay the consequences. No, death is not a natural consequence—death is a divine consequence, a punishment. God does not say "your brother stole something so I'll cut your hand off." The only way we are held accountable for sin is if we sin. The Bible here teaches that we did sin, everyone did, in Adam.

Let me demonstrate further that this is what Paul is here teaching. In the following verses, even though he makes additional points, Paul emphasizes this point. And again I remind you it is not just that we all eventually sin on our

own but that we all sinned in Adam.

- Verse 15: *"any died by the trespass of the one man."*
- Verse 16: *"the result of the one man's sin"*
- Verse 16: *"the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation."*
- Verse 17: *"by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man."*

Think Paul wants to make a point?

- Verse 18: *"just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men"*
- Verse 19: *"just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners."*

In every verse he reiterates it.

Death is the result of a single, solitary sin—Adam's sin. Adam's sin was credited to us; Adam's sin was imputed to us because we were in Adam, so when he sinned, we sinned. We find that difficult to accept because our culture

The Bible here teaches that we did sin, everyone did, in Adam.

has so emphasized individualism. We see ourselves as related to other people but not connected. Asians and Africans, I am told, don't have as much trouble with this concept.

The Jews didn't either. Look at Heb. 7:9ff : *"Levi, who was born 500 years later was in Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizadek."* He was *"still in the loins of his ancestor..."* The Israelites were judged for the sin of Achan; when Achan sinned, the Bible says the *"Israelites acted unfaithfully."* It was not just Achan's sin but also Israel's sin.

Our connectedness to Adam and to all other human beings is a concept difficult for us but nonetheless biblical and

true. The poet John Donne spoke to the concept when he wrote: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a (house) of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." Regarding human solidarity "in Adam," one author writes, "Perhaps...we should ...be content with the conclusion that Paul affirms the reality of a solidarity of all humanity with Adam in his sin without (our) being able to explain the exact nature of that union."¹

Paul's point is that by our connection to Adam we are not born neutral. We are not just born with a propensity to sin, which is also true. But more devastating is the fact that we have already sinned in Adam. His sin is imputed or credited to us so that his sin is also ours. But remember that Adam's sin credited to us is the analogy. And so having made his point that we are condemnably connected to Adam, Paul turns to the positive side—our connection to Jesus. Both

***Adam's sin resulted in the death of everyone
but Jesus brought the gift of life.***

Adam and Christ bring something to the people connected to them. In verses 15-17 Paul contrasts that connection. First of all in verse 15 we read, "*The gift is not like the trespass.*" In other words: "Jesus' gracious act yields a very different result than our sin in Adam does." Adam's sin (and our sin in him) resulted in the death of many. Yes, the text says "many." "Many" simply means a great number and so the context must determine how many "many" means. And if we look at verse 12 we see it means "all people." Adam's sin resulted in the death of everyone but Jesus brought the gift of life. His point? Connection to Adam means death.

But just as surely, connection to Jesus means life.

Next, look at verse 16: Again the gift from Jesus is not like the result of Adam's sin. Adam's sin resulted in condemnation, everlasting separation from God, but Jesus brought justification—no longer guilty for our sin in Adam or the sins committed on our own. But notice also in verse 16 that the work of Christ is far more powerful than Adam's. Adam's one sin brought death but Christ's death covered not only one sin but also many sins—our sin in Adam and our every other sin.

If one sin brings condemnation, what should many sins bring? Of course, it should bring greater condemnation. But grace has a different arithmetic!² CEB Cranfield wrote, "That one single misdeed should be answered by judgment is perfectly understandable: that the accumulated sins and guilt of all the ages should be answered by God's free gift, this is miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension."³

In verse 17 Paul declares another contrast between what happens to those connected to Adam compared with those connected to Jesus: Through Adam, death reigns. How true that is! But through Christ, those connected to Him will reign in life. What reigns, what controls in your experience? Death or life? Do you live as one under death's sentence and control or do you live as one who is alive and knows that even if you suffer the temporary consequence of physical death, you will reign in life following the resurrection? If your perspective truly covers only the here and now, then death reigns, death controls you. We look around and see death everywhere. Death seems so final. You see pictures of people who lived hundreds of years ago and you wonder about their thoughts—what did they imagine about their future? Did they see themselves as

important, just as we do? Look at them now—we don't even know their names. They are the nobodies of history. Are we the future nobodies of history? Is death all there is? If there is no life after this life then one person grabs at life, another lives depressed, and another just passes time but all are living under the shadow of death—dominated by it. Death reigns!

But oh, miraculous reality, this is not all there is! Look again at verse 17: "Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through Jesus Christ." I think John Stott of Great Britain sums it up marvelously with these words: "Grace forgives sins through the cross, and bestows on the sinner both righteousness and eternal life. Grace satisfies the thirsty soul and fills the hungry with good things. Grace sanctifies sinners, shaping them into the image of Christ. Grace perseveres even with the recalcitrant, determining to complete what it has begun. And one day grace will destroy death and consummate the kingdom. So when we are convinced that grace reigns, we will remember that god's throne is the throne of grace, and (we) will come to it boldly to receive mercy and to find grace for every need. And all this is through Jesus Christ our Lord."⁴

And so coming back to where he left off at the end of verse 12, Paul sums it up in Romans 5:18-19: *"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."* Now to what I believe is the major point of the passage. Back in chapter 4 Paul wrote, *"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."* (4:3) And again in verse 5 he wrote,

"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."

Earlier I asked the questions I think this text is answering, "How can the death and resurrection of a man who lived 2000 years ago personally affect me?" More specifically, "How can His righteousness be credited to me?" And here's the answer: Just as Adam's sin was credited to us, because we sinned in Adam, so Christ's righteousness is credited to us, because we were in Him when He died and rose again. The first verses of chapter 6 will specifically say that we were united with Christ in His death and resurrection. *"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* (Romans 6:4)

Yes, in Adam we all sinned and the consequences are devastating—we are born in sin and we continue to sin. But now, by amazing grace, in Christ we are justified, the guilt and penalty of sin are removed, and we are credited with Jesus' righteousness. Remember this, you were not in trouble with God merely because you have sinned since you were born. No, you were in trouble with God before you were born, because you sinned in Adam, before you did one other thing wrong on your own.

But hear this, and this is the truth Paul has been trying to drive home since the middle of chapter 3: You are God's friend now, not because you have straightened up and are trying to do it right. No, you are God's friend now because, by God's grace, you were "in" Christ when He died and rose again and you are credited with His righteousness. If you are trusting in Jesus, then of what can you be certain? You are "in Him" and being "in Him," His righteousness has

been credited to you.

And if you are questioning whether you have received God's free gift of forgiveness, justification, righteousness and life, please hear me carefully. As a part of Adam's helpless race you are sinful and condemned to death—eternal separation from God; God sees you as His enemy. But God in Christ offers you forgiveness on the basis of Christ's death for your sin and He offers you His righteousness, His very life. Just as surely as you are now "in Adam," so by trusting Jesus, you prove that you are "in Christ."

End Notes

¹ Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p. 328 – footnotes

² John Stott, *Romans*, p. 155

³ CEB Cranfield, *Romans*, Vol. 1, p. 286

⁴ Stott, *Ibid*, p. 158

Chapter Nine

Free to Serve

Romans 6:1-23

Thomas Watson: "Suck not poison out of the sweet flower of God's mercy...To sin because mercy abounds is the devil's logic."¹

What does it mean that we are saved by grace? Among the many ways of explaining it, one way is to say that it is only possible to have a right relationship with the holy God of the universe by His grace, as a gift, not by anything we do. We can't earn a right relationship with God by the good things we do. Whether I am good or bad, better or worse, doesn't make the difference; what makes the difference is whether I trust in what Christ has done on the cross for me. It is what He provided for me, freely, that makes the difference. The grace of forgiveness and life are based not on what I have done but on what He did for me by dying for my sins and offering me life. I am saved solely by God's grace.

I can imagine someone saying to that: "Wait a minute! Are you saying that it doesn't matter how bad I've been?" That's right! A right relationship with God is not based on what you have done but on what Christ has done for you. So my imaginary person goes on to ask, "Does that mean that if I sin again, even after I'm a Christian, that won't matter?" I won't say it doesn't matter (as I will show you in a minute) but I will say it won't mean you are no longer a Christian because becoming a Christian is not based on what you have done or will do, good or bad, but on God's grace received by faith alone.

"Let me see if I understand you. Whether I have been good or bad has nothing to do with whether God accepts me?" That's right. It is all a gift, not based on whether you deserve it or not. Because the truth is, none of us deserves it.

"Are you saying that even the worst of people can receive this gift just by believing, trusting in Christ?" Yes, that's what God says. In fact He said, "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more."

"Well, if that's the case, why should I break my neck to try to live a Christian life? If whether I sin or not makes no difference, I think I'll just go ahead and do what I please in my life. I'm young, there are a lot of things I would like to try, things I've been told are wrong but it won't matter—I'm saved by grace. I know that I can always come back to

Righteous is what we must be if we are going to have a relationship with a holy God but righteousness is what we lack.

doing things the right way later if I want to. And in the mean time I can rest assured that my eternal destiny is secure because you said it is by grace—it was gift from God based not on what I do but on what Christ did. That's pretty good. How do they say it? 'I can have my cake and eat it to.' The theology of grace gives me freedom to live as I choose. Now that's freedom!"

I can easily imagine someone listening in on this conversation having a conniption. And they would say to me, "You can't say that. You can't say it's all of grace, a gift not based on what people do. Look where that leads; you heard it, it leads to more sin. People won't take God seriously; who knows what they'll do. The world will

descend into anarchy. There will be no controls. Do you hear what you just said? You gave people permission to sin as much as they want without penalty. You can't teach that! You have to teach responsibility, obedience to God, the law of God. People need to know right from wrong and do it. You've taken this grace thing too far. Surely you can't mean it's all of grace."

How do you think the Apostle Paul would have responded to these conversations? I might surprise you by saying I think he would have been somewhat pleased? Why? He would be pleased because both people got his major point. The first person abused it and the second person disagreed with it but at least they both understood him. It is almost every week that I hear, first-hand, of either a disagreement with the doctrine of grace or an abuse of it. I hear it from people who refuse to accept the gift of God's grace because they are convinced it's too easy; it doesn't require something from them and they won't accept it if they can't earn it. Furthermore they are convinced if you make grace this free, people will abuse it. And I hear the abuse of grace from people who excuse their sinful behavior saying it doesn't matter because they are saved by grace.

Well, what do you think? Doesn't salvation by grace alone through faith alone leave the door wide open to sin? If our conduct is not the basis of our relationship with God then why not sin? In the first five chapters of Romans, God through Paul declared that every human being is a sinner and every human being has sinned. Furthermore no human being is even capable of being righteous, holy.

Furthermore no one can become righteous by obeying the law, by doing good. Righteous is what we must be if we are going to have a relationship with a holy God but righteousness is what we lack. But God made it possible for

us to have His righteousness. And that righteousness comes to us, not through our efforts but by grace through trusting Jesus Christ.

In the 5th chapter of Romans Paul makes it clear that it is not our actions that make us right with God but Christ's action of dying for us and rising from the dead.

Forgiveness, justification, new life, eternal life, a right relationship with God, and righteousness are all given to us as an unearned gift by the grace of God. Paul knew full well that such an announcement would lead to objections—people ready to take the precious gift of grace and turn it into either legalism or a license to sin.

Look at Romans 6. When you listen to the 1st and 15th verses, think about the conversation I mentioned at the beginning of this message.

- 6:1 *"What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning that grace might increase?"*
- 6:15 *"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?"*

Both times, what response does Paul give to the questions? "By no means," may it never be, God forbid, you can't be serious, you couldn't possibly draw such a conclusion if you had a real understanding of salvation by grace! What we have in Chapter 6 are Paul's fuller responses to the potential abuse of the doctrine of grace.

His first response is in verses 2-14 and his second in verses 16-23. Please notice that both times he says, (verse 3 and 16) "Don't you know?" In both cases Paul is saying, I am going to remind you of truths that are basic to becoming and being a Christian. In fact, if you remember these basics you won't ask if sin is okay, because the answer would be so obvious. If salvation is fully and only of grace, if we can't earn it or un-earn it because it is a gift. Why wouldn't that

lead us to conclude that we can go on sinning and it won't make any difference? Paul gives us two reasons why the doctrine of grace doesn't lead to more sin but to holiness instead:

1. Because we are connected to Christ. (Verses 2-14)
2. Because we are slaves to God. (Verses 16-23)

If you truly became a Christian, something happened that makes continuing in a lifestyle of sin totally incompatible.

The last part of verse 2 really summarizes Paul's first reason: Why does the doctrine of grace not lead to sin?

Paul says, "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

In what way is that statement true and how does it answer our question of "why not sin since we are saved by grace"? "How have we died to sin so that we won't live in it any longer?" Remember that in chapter 5 Paul made a major point in comparing what was formerly true of us with what

Forgiveness, justification, new life, eternal life, a right relationship with God, and righteousness are all given to us as an unearned gift by the grace of God.

is true of us now that we are Christians. Before we were "in Adam." By virtue of being a human being descended from Adam, we all are guilty of sin because, God said, we all, in a mysterious but definite sense were "in Adam" when he sinned. We are connected to him so that what he did, we did. His point being that just as the guilt of Adam was attributed to us because we were somehow there and we somehow sinned when Adam sinned, so also when Jesus died on the cross and rose again, we who by faith are connected to Jesus, were there so that His death was also our death.

So I asked, "How could the act of one man nearly 2000 years ago possibly have any significant and personal affect on me today?" We saw that it could and does because by faith we are "in Christ." In a sense His actions became our actions. Here in chapter 6 Paul is going to build on that concept. How have we died to sin? *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"* (6:3) When we were converted to Christ, when we were born again, when we became Christians, when we were saved, (as evidenced by our baptism) we became connected to Jesus. And if we were connected to Him we were also connected to His death. (Just as we were "in Adam" when he sinned so we were "in Christ" when He died for us.)

Death once had authority over Christ because He took our sin on Himself. But once Christ died (and then rose again) He broke that linkage between sin and death.

When we trusted in Jesus as saving Lord, we were, by God's doing, placed into Christ so that what was true of Him is now true of us. "A Christian is not merely a justified believer. He is someone who has entered into a vital personal union with Jesus Christ."² When we were placed into Him (as evidenced by our water baptism) we were also placed or baptized into His actions. What He did, we did. What happened to Him, happened to us. Since we are in Christ, we were also there in His death. And in these next verses (3-8) Paul says therefore there are two things that are true of us who are Christians. Please notice he does not say these things ought to be true but that they are true of us.

Here are the two things that are true of real Christians:

- In Christ Jesus we died to sin and
- In Christ Jesus we rose to a new life.

The logic of the passage goes like this: Christ died to sin. We died in Christ because we are connected to Him.

Therefore we died to sin.³ So to understand in what way we have “died to sin” we must understand in what way Christ died to sin. Verses 9-10 explain that to us.

Notice verse 10 first of all: *“the death he died, he died to sin once for all”*—it is a “never-to-be-repeated” act.

Something decisive happened in Christ’s death/resurrection experience. The last part of verse 9 tells us what that was: “death no longer has mastery over him.” Death once had authority over Christ because He took our sin on Himself. Sin leads unalterably to death. But once Christ died (and then rose again) He broke that linkage between sin and death.

Christ broke the rule of sin that was operating in Him (because of our sin) and He was freed from its control leading to death. He broke the power of sin. As we will see in the next section, sin is not just something we do that is wrong, sin becomes a master—it rules us. Christ took our very real sin on Himself and it ruled Him (now I understand that Jesus put Himself in that position willingly but having done so, having taken our sin on Himself, it took Him to death). But when Jesus rose from the grave, He broke sin’s power. Jesus was no longer controlled by sin.

Again, what is Paul’s point? When we trust in Jesus Christ as Saving-Lord we are placed “in Christ,” we are connected to Him in a way that what has happened to Him has happened to us. Look at verse 6: *“For we know that our old self, our old way of life, was crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin, our old sin-prone way of thinking and*

acting would be done away with (no longer able to control us). *"That we should no longer be slaves to sin."* Before you became a Christian, while it was possible for you to do certain things that we would call "good," it was impossible for you to anything that God would call "good" or "righteous" or deserving of God's favor. God said it this way *"Even our so-called righteousnesses are as filthy rags."* (Isaiah 64:6)

We were controlled by sin and unable not to sin. We could do nothing right by God's standards because every action was corrupted in some way either by our actions themselves or by our motives. It was impossible for us not to sin by God's definition of sin. But here is what happened: when we died "in Christ" that power of sin to control us was broken. Christ broke it and we are "in Christ." It is now possible for us not to sin. It is now possible for us to do real "good" by God's definition. As we will see from the verses that follow it is not that it is now impossible for us to sin but that it is now possible for us not to sin—sin's power to control has been broken. So when Paul says we have died to sin, it is not that I cannot sin but that now I can choose not to sin. Before I could do nothing pleasing to God; I now can! The Holy Spirit within us isn't mentioned until chapter 8 but that is what Paul is leading up to here. By God's grace and His Spirit within us it is now possible for us, for the first time, to actually live in a righteous way, to please our God.

Now back to the original questions:

- Shall we go on sinning that grace might increase?
- Shall we sin because we are under grace?

Is sin insignificant because I am saved by grace not based on what I do? Paul says, "by no means!" Don't let it be said! How can you even imagine going back to that old way of life of sinning against God when you have been freed

from sin's control? Paul never speaks of the impossibility of Christians sinning but only of the incongruity of Christians choosing a lifestyle of sin. You have died with Christ to that old way of life—that is a fact. Sin no longer is able to ultimately control your life. In Christ, you have been freed. We now have possibilities that never existed before. We can follow Christ; we can please Him.

So Paul writes in verses 11-13 we must take responsibility for what is true: You now have the ability by God's grace to obey God. So take action; offer your body to do good instead of evil. Since you have been freed from sin's control it makes no sense to go back to that lifestyle. But someone might still say, "Since I'm saved by grace and secure in that grace, I have decided that I will just do some of the things I want to do for a while. I'll just live my way and later come back to God."

***When Paul says we have died to sin,
it is not that I cannot sin but that now
I can choose not to sin.***

In the next section of the chapter, Paul says you need to understand something else that happened when you became a Christian. Look please at verses 17 and 18: *"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."* You used to be enslaved to sin (even though it may not have seemed like it) but at conversion you accepted the teaching of God and you trusted in Christ and therefore "in Christ" you were set free from sin's control. And in that same act of becoming a Christian you turned around to serve Christ, to become a slave to righteousness.

Now catch this: becoming a Christian is not just getting a “get out of jail free” card. Becoming a Christian means being “in Christ,” becoming a Christ-follower. If you did not turn to Christ then you are not a Christian. But, Paul says, you did turn to Christ. Now, he said all this in the context of a principle he stated in 6:16: *“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”* We like to think we are free, that we can choose to sin or not sin anytime we want to and that we are in control of our destinies. But God says that when we offer ourselves to sin, living in a lifestyle of sin, it proves one thing—we are slaves to sin.

We thought we were free to take it or leave it but we too soon find out we are caught in it—we are slaves to it. We don’t control it; it controls us. And that lifestyle eventually proves we weren’t Christians at all. Likewise, Paul says, when you give yourself to obedience you soon find out you are a slave to it; God truly is your master.

There is a warning here: Don’t think you can just go off and sin more because you are saved by grace. You will not prove that you are free; you will only prove that you don’t even belong to Christ, that you aren’t connected to Him and that you haven’t died to sin. You’ll prove you are still a slave to sin. And Paul writes, don’t you remember that sin leads to more sin, which leads to death. It is a principle to remember: *“The wages of sin is death!”* With that in mind, how could you even imagine using grace an excuse to sin? The very act of becoming a Christian by God’s grace means you have moved from the realm of sin and death to the realm of obedience and life. It’s inconceivable to Paul that you would want to go back to death.

In the early 1860's Abraham Lincoln, with the full authority of the United States government, wrote the "emancipation proclamation" declaring that all slaves were henceforth free. Robert Sadler was born in 1911 (50 years after the emancipation proclamation) and he was a United States Citizen. He was born in Anderson, South Carolina, the next to the youngest of eleven children. There was no school for the children because sharecroppers' children had to work on the farm. Robert's father was a sharecropper and an abusive drunk. That man abused Robert's mother and all the children. Due to abuse and neglect Robert watched his mother and his littlest sister die.

The father moved in with another woman who did not want Robert or the other children still at home. One night in 1916 when Robert was only 5 years of age his father took him and two of his sisters age 12 and 13 and literally sold them to a white man as slaves. Within two years, Pearl, who was the prettiest of the girls, was tortured and disfigured by the owner and his friends. She was sent then to work the fields where she never recovered and died at age 15. Robert was kept in the "big house" (as they called it). Fed scraps and forced to serve the white family, Robert was beaten for the slightest mistake or just for the fun of the children or their friends.

One day in Robert's hearing, one of the owner's children asked why Robert was black and he was white. The master answered that Robert was created to be their slave. God was punishing black people for their sin. He said the only niggers in heaven are there to serve the whites because niggers don't have souls. Robert said that as he listened his heart caved within him. If his mama and baby sister were in heaven their situation was no better than his. Robert was never allowed to leave the "big house."

Folks, this happened within the lifetime of our grandparents. That little boy and his sisters (and many people on that plantation) had no idea what had happened 50 years earlier—the slaves had been set free! Every day Robert got up and did exactly what his slave-master told him to do, with no idea it could be different. At 14 years of age, with no idea of where to go and a fear of being caught and killed, Robert ran away. Life didn't get better for Robert for a long time but finally someone told him he was free. Even at that it took a long time for Robert to begin to feel and act free.

Fifty years before his birth he was declared free. At fourteen years of age he became free. But not until age 18 did he begin to live free. If you would ask Robert if he wanted to go back to the old way of life, you can imagine his answer. Even when he was without a job and without food and shelter he knew that as secure as life could sometimes be on the plantation, it was still slavery and it led to death. Paul says you have died to sin's ultimate control over you; you died to it when Jesus died for you. You are free to not sin. And how could you possibly want to be a slave to sin and death again when you have been set free.

Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know? You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness

End Notes

¹ Alan P.F. Sell, *God our Father*, p. 21

² John Stott, *Men Made New*, p. 34

³ Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p. 354

Chapter Ten

The Real Me!

Romans 7:14-25

(Romans 7:1-13 was not preached but additional notes are available in Appendix D. See also "The Law of God in the Life of the Christian from Exodus 19-20 at www.Soundliving.org)

Dick Exley wrote, "As he stepped into my office I couldn't help noticing the stylish cut of his suit, his monogrammed shirt and his expensive shoes. He was a man familiar with success, well respected both by his family and colleagues. But nothing could totally mask the misery eating at his soul. He is a friend of mine, a good man, a respected leader in his church, and a husband and a father. Yet this is only part of the story; there is another side, a dark side.

"The other side started innocently enough with stopping off for coffee at a nearby convenience store. One morning as he was drinking his coffee he was browsing through the pornographic magazines on the stand. Over the next several months the insatiable desire for more lured him to "R" and "X" rated videos, adult theaters and more.

"With each step he told himself he would go no further but he seemed powerless to stop. Soon he was living in a self-made hell. There were moments of lustful pleasure followed by hours of shame and days and weeks of regret. Yet even in his shame he was (powerfully) drawn toward the very thing he hated."¹

The illustration may seem extreme to you, but have you ever struggled against sin? Have you ever fallen to a strong temptation? Maybe for you it is not lust; maybe it is greed, or anger, or envy, or selfish ambition. Maybe for you it is

fear or despair. Have you ever known the feeling of being drawn to the very thing you hate? Have you ever wondered, "How could I do this?" "How can I go on doing this, or thinking this way; I'm a Christian?!" Have you ever experienced, not once but again and again, the deep disappointment of not doing the very thing you knew you should do?

If ever there was a man we hold up as a man of God, it is the Apostle Paul. When we think of how the Christian life ought to be lived, surely he would be an example. We most often think of Paul as a giant in the faith—a man who loved God and served God more than most. I want you to watch

"I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."

a text that lets us in on some of Paul's personal experience. I want you to read as this man expresses in words, with which many of us can identify, the struggle that is part of the Christian life.

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I

see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." (Romans 7:14-25)

Do you hear that? Doesn't that sound much like the man with whom I introduced this sermon? It is not the same issue but it is the same struggle. Doesn't that sound like what some of you have experienced—I know I have and still do? I don't want you to pass over this text too quickly. I don't want us to miss the point of these verses.

Listen to Paul's heartache: "What a wretched man I am!" Is Paul describing some past experience of his? Is Paul saying this is the way it used to be until he learned the secret of living the Christian life? No. Paul is describing his present experience. Here is this spiritual giant describing the struggle with sin in his own life. I realize that this interpretation is debated but I believe the context and the grammar push us to this conclusion. Paul is here describing the struggle as he was experiencing it right then; this was a frequent struggle in his life.

To put this in context, we need to go back. In the first 2 ½ chapters of Romans Paul describes the definite need every person on earth has to become a Christian. In that section of his letter Paul demonstrates how everyone on earth is sinful, lacking the very righteousness necessary to have a relationship with a holy God. Mid-way through the 3rd chapter Paul begins to describe how that fatal deficiency can be corrected—it is only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Because of who Christ is and what He has done on the cross, it is possible for the righteousness of God to be credited to us through faith in Jesus. In chapter 4 Paul uses the illustration of the Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, to prove that it has always been true that righteousness is credited by faith not earned by being good enough. Then, at chapter 5 Paul begins to describe the great benefits of being a Christian. The first result he mentions is that we are no longer enemies of God's but now we have peace with God—we have become God's friends. That section ends with these words in 5:11 *"...We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*

Reading through Romans carefully it would seem likely that we should arrive next at the subject of chapter 8. That subject is how we live this new life in Christ. Romans 8 begins with 8:1-2, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."* Paul then goes on to describe this new life controlled by the Spirit in contrast to life controlled by sin.

But there are 2½ chapters between the first part of chapter 5 and chapter 8. In these chapters Paul digresses with some very important clarifications. We have already looked at the first two clarifications in the last half of chapter 5 and then, last week, in chapter 6. In the latter part of chapter 5 Paul describes how it is possible for the righteousness of Jesus to be credited to us. You might recall that he does it by using the analogy of our relationship with Adam. Just as we were "in Adam" when he sinned so that his sin is credited to us, so also we who trust in Christ were "in Christ" when He died and rose again so that His righteousness is credited to us. In chapter 6 Paul deals

head on with an erroneous assumption. Paul had previously so emphasized the fact that we are not saved by what we do, that it was possible for people to assume that it therefore doesn't matter how we live—after all we are saved by grace not by works. In two different ways Paul demonstrates how that kind of thinking is absolutely false.

Now in chapter 7 Paul clarifies a couple of other issues, one of which we will look at today. But first, in verses 1-6 Paul describes in part the believer's changed relationship to the law now that we are "in Christ." And in verses 7-13 Paul discusses the unbeliever's relationship to the law using Paul himself, before conversion, as an example. In both

We are no longer enemies of God's but now we have peace with God—we have become God's friends.

paragraphs Paul is defending the law of God as good even though sin makes bad use of it. Look at verse 7: "*What shall we say then? Is the law sin?*" And in the next few verses Paul says, "*Certainly not.*" Verse 12 says, "*The law is holy, and righteous and good.*" You see, the purpose of the law was not to save us but to show us how much we need to be saved. The law shows us how sinful we are and our need for salvation by grace.

In verses 7-13 Paul has been writing in the first person but in the past tense. He said this used to be my relationship to the law. Before I became a Christian, the law's purpose was to show me my need for Jesus. At verse 14 Paul switches verb tenses; from verse 14 on Paul writes in the present tense—he describes his relationship to the law even as he writes. Paul describes his relationship to the law as a Christian. In part, the law still does for Paul, as a Christian, what it did for him before he became a Christian; it shows

him his sinfulness and his need daily for the intervention of the Spirit of God.

If we don't realize how powerful, how pervasive and how pernicious sin truly is in our lives, then we will live vulnerable to its every destructive influence. Many of us keep failing in our Christian experience because we don't take sin seriously and because we don't take sin seriously we don't take seriously our need for the daily, even moment by moment, salvation of the Lord Jesus. I will count it a success if we come to one overwhelming conviction: "I need Jesus today! I need Him as much today

There are two powerful influences or principles at work within Paul and within every Christian.

as I did before I became a Christian. In fact if I don't have His intervention in my life today I am helpless and hopeless against the power of my sinful nature." I am not giving more time to the first 13 verses of chapter 7 now because I addressed the issue of the Christian's relationship to the law as recently as 2005 in our study of Exodus. That sermon was titled, "The Law of God in the Life of the Christian" from Exodus 19-20 and is available at www.soundliving.org. There are also other notes in Appendix D that deal with the first 13 verses of this chapter.

So now, please look with me again at how Paul describes one aspect of his present experience as a Christian. Romans 7:14 says, "*We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.*" Let's let Paul describe what he means by that. He does it twice in almost parallel fashion: Verses 15-17 and again in verses 18-20. Look at verse 15 beginning at the second sentence: "*What*

I want to do, I don't do, and what I hate, I do." Compare that to the last part of verse 18: *"I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out."* Look at verse 17: *"it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."* Compare that to verse 20: *"Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is not longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."*

Do you see it; verses 18-20 say, in slightly different language, the same thing that verses 15-17 say. There is a struggle within Paul. As God's child, he wants to do what is right but it is like there is something in him that fights against that. In Verses 21-23 Paul defines that struggle. There are two powerful influences or principles (Paul calls them "laws") at work within Paul and within every Christian.

The first is in verse 22: *"In my inner being I delight in God's law."* I want to do what is right. God placed in Paul, as he places in every Christian, a new heart, a new desire to love and serve God. God said through Jeremiah, *"This is the covenant I will make with my people after that time, I will put my law in their minds and will write it on their hearts."* "But," Paul writes in verse 23, *"I see another law or powerful influence at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind."* This second powerful influence is his sinful nature.

In the last part of verse 25 Paul summarizes these two principles that are both at work in him at the same time: *"In my mind I am a slave to God's law."* He desires to love and serve God but *"in the sinful nature I am a slave to the law of sin."* He still finds that too often he does the very things he ought not to do. What is this? Is Paul so weak that he can't act the way he is supposed to? What is Paul saying in these verses? That he can't help himself? The

Devil makes him do it? Come on Paul, where's your backbone? If someone other than the Apostle Paul said the things written here, some of us might be tempted to look on them with a certain amount of contempt. If someone else was struggling with sin in his life and came saying he couldn't help it, we might be tempted to say, "Come on! That's no excuse. Straighten up and fly right!" But to say that, or even think that, is to demonstrate a lack of understanding of the power and pervasiveness of the sin within us. We ought not to be fooled.

Just because we become Christians doesn't mean that sin is any less powerful in our lives. If anything, when you become a Christ-follower, the battle with sin intensifies. Remember Paul's description of his struggle with sin is a present-tense struggle; it is what he was experiencing as a mature Apostle of Christ Jesus. The battle is real. How powerful is sin in the life of the believer? *"I don't do what I ought to do and I do what I ought not to do."* Paul said it felt like he was a prisoner, a slave to sin.

Sin is anything we think, do or say or do not think, do, or say that is not in perfect conformity with God's Word and will. The slightest departure from exactly what God wills is sin. That means it is not only possible to sin by doing the wrong thing but it is possible to sin by not doing the right thing. Furthermore, it is possible to sin greatly against God without even knowing it; the Bible makes it clear that ignorance of the will of God doesn't mean we are guiltless in not doing it. And when I see my sin for the evil that it is, then I will cry out with Paul, "What a wretched man I am—who will rescue me from this body of death—from this body that keeps on sinning against a holy God."

In the 24th and 25th verses Paul is looking forward to his resurrection when he will have a body that is finally freed

from the sin nature described in Romans 5. And he knows that it is Jesus who will do that at His second coming. Paul talks more about that in Romans 8. But for now Paul is disgusted with himself. His sin is not just a matter of what he does but it is part of his very nature. That's part of what is so unsettling about this. I have commiserated with other men who, like me, have been Christians for decades. By God's grace we have grown a measure in discipline and fruitfulness. And yet, without warning, sin will attack in areas we long ago assumed were conquered. And we realize afresh that the sinful nature we inherited from Adam is still very powerful—that we are still capable of great sin.

***Just because we become Christians
doesn't mean that sin is any less powerful in
our lives.***

And so, it is not that I'm good at root and just do a few wrong things. It is not that a child is born basically good and then learns some bad things from bad companions or bad teachers. Yes, it is tempting to look at our little babies and say, "Such sweet angels!" "What little innocents" J. C. Ryle wrote, "Alas, as that baby lies smiling and cooing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness."² It is not true what some people say: "Under it all my son has a good heart." The Bible says, "*We are by nature, children of wrath.*" We are born sinful and it is only a matter of time, not much time, before we begin to live out that sinfulness in our actions. No one has to teach a child to deceive, to be self-willed, selfish, and greedy. The root is there from conception; it is only time before the fruit appears.

Not only does the fruit of our natural sinfulness appear early in life but it soon becomes apparent that sinfulness

has infected every part of our being. It is not only that our conduct is evil at times but also when we search our own hearts we discover that even our best intentions are scarred by the marks of sin. Our motives, at best, are mixed. It seems that even the best things we do are often turned in such a way as to serve our own interests. I do a particularly good deed secretly but then can't let it go unnoticed.

Even when we become Christians this propensity to sin is still powerful as witnessed by Paul's words here in Romans 7 and by our own experience. Dr. J.I. Packer wrote, "The (person) in Christ serves the law of God with his mind, in the sense that he wants and wills to keep it perfectly, but

I see in Paul a man who learned how utterly dependent on Jesus he is.

with the flesh he serves the law of sin, as appears from the fact that he never is able to keep the (will) of God as perfectly as he wishes to do. The emphatic, 'I, even I,' expresses Paul's sense of how painfully paradoxical it is that a Christian, like himself, who desires so heartily to keep God's law and do only good, should find himself under the constant necessity of breaking the law and doing what in effect is evil. But such is the state of the Christian till his body is redeemed."³

There is one other thing about the sinfulness still within us that may be its most pernicious characteristic: that is its deceitfulness. We are deceived into believing that sin, at least OUR sin, is a little thing. We want to call our actions anything but sin: We call them errors, mistakes, or oversights as in we didn't mean anything by it. "No one got hurt by it," we say.

We buy the lie that somehow our actions or thoughts are not so bad after all. We want to believe they are less sinful than they are and less dangerous than they are. And as long as we aren't murdering, or doing the things that really bad people do, then we assume we can handle it. And we assume now that we are Christians, sin can't really get us; we can indulge in the little stuff and just stay away from the really bad stuff. And the most deceitful of all is the sin of self-righteousness that says, "I don't have a problem with sin!"

What does Paul say? On our own, we are just as helpless now as we were as non-Christians. Someone may say, "Wait a minute, I thought that when we became Christians we won that battle. I thought that if we did it right we would live victorious lives? Aren't we supposed to be happy, positive, spiritually successful, and godly Christ-followers? If Paul's a Christian in these verses, he sounds like a failure." Is that it, or has Paul learned something we must learn?

When I read Romans 7:14-25 I see in Paul a man who learned how utterly dependent on Jesus he is. Only when a man sees himself as near dead does he see how much he needs a doctor. Only when his debt is too great to count does he welcome someone to pay the debt. Only when he is hungry to starving does the bread someone offers become most precious. Only when we come to recognize that we will fail miserably without the direct intervention of Jesus do we see ourselves as we really are.

CEB Cranfield wrote, "The farther men advance in the Christian life, and the more mature their discipleship, the clearer becomes their perception of the heights to which God calls them, and the more painfully sharp their consciousness of the distance between what they ought, and want, to be, and what they are."⁴ Peter started out

with self-confidence and ended up poor in spirit. Do you remember when he said, "*Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.*" (Lk. 22:33) and Peter believed he could follow through on that promise? His love was great and his confidence was in himself. But when temptation came, Peter failed miserably.

If Peter could speak again (knowing what he came to know later) what might he say as a mature Christian? "As much as I want to follow you and even fight for you Jesus, I know I am totally incapable apart from your power enabling me. I need your prayer Lord Jesus; I need your power. I want to do what is right but I will fail most every time without your immediate intervention." This is a matter of coming to the end of myself, even as a Christian, and falling down at the feet of Jesus, asking Him and Him alone to pick me up and set me to walking right; asking Him to hold me in that upright position and putting my feet one foot in front of the other. This doesn't mean I'm passively unresponsive or lazy but it does mean I'm utterly dependent.

The Puritans, hundreds of years ago, knew these truths: "O Lord, no day of my life has passed that has not proved me guilty in your sight. Prayers have been uttered from a prayer-less heart; Praise has been often praise-less sound; My best services are filthy rags...Though my sins rise to the heaven, your merit soars above them; though my unrighteousness weighs me down to hell, your righteousness exalts me to your throne...I am guilty but pardoned, lost, but saved, wandering, but found, sinning, but cleansed. Give me perpetual broken-heartedness, keep me always clinging to your cross, flood me every moment with descending grace..."⁵ Paul wants us to understand very clearly and personally that we will never live the way God has called us to live until we recognize two things:

- We are sinful through and through and as long as we live we are in a battle, a battle against our own sinfulness.
- We are utterly and always fully dependent on Jesus.

Christianity is not a matter of believing the right things and then getting a sticker that says you pass hell and go to heaven. It doesn't work that way. Christianity is coming to a person, Jesus, and belonging to Him. It is living each day in relationship with Him. It is recognizing that I not only need Him to save me from the consequences of my sin (eternal damnation) but that I need Him to save me today from that sinful nature that so powerfully works in me. I need Him in my struggle today. We don't want to live in struggle.

We want to have victory and have it now. We begin to believe that in the Christian life we deserve to be successful, victorious, living on a level of peace, effectiveness, free of moral struggle. Examples are set before us of "spiritually successful people." And our desire is to emulate them, to have what they have, and to learn their secret of success. We have come to believe that if we are struggling then there is something wrong. But God's word says our victory is not in the absence of a struggle; our victory is in our relationship with Jesus in the midst of the struggle.

Some of you are struggling even now—struggling desperately with sin. One of my concerns for you is that you not lose heart in the struggle. Please don't assume that because you seem to fail so often, you are not a Christian. Look how Paul describes himself (and you?)

- I hate sin (7:15)
- I don't want to do what is wrong (7:20)
- I want to do good (7:21)

- I delight in God's law (7:22)

No, the struggle doesn't mean you are not a Christian; if anything, the struggle is indication that you belong to God and He is at work in you, painful as that may be.

But at the same time I have concern for others of you. I don't want you to give up and call yourself just a "carnal Christian." Chapter 6 should have dispelled that kind of thinking. I don't want you to think that since sin is so powerful, the best you can hope for us a fruitless life marked by a series of spiritual defeats. Chapter 8 dispels that kind of thinking.

Do you see it? You and I need Jesus. We need Him today; we need to be in relationship with Him today. We need to come to Him—always coming to Him, always dependent on Him. Over a hundred years ago the songwriter Annie Hawks wrote:

"Oh I need Thee,
every hour I need thee.
Teach me blessed Savior
to come to thee."

End Notes

¹ Richard Exley, "New Man," Nov/Dec 1996

² J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, p. 4

³ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 269

⁴ CEB Cranfield, *Romans A Shorter Commentary*, p. 169

⁵ *Valley of Vision*, p. 83

Chapter Eleven

Real Change

Romans 8:1-13

The story of the book of Romans, like the story of the human race from very early on, is the story of a sin and death problem and God's remedy. Paul delivers a sustained and convincing case that everyone (without exception) is both sinful (chapter 5) and sins (chapters 1-3) and stands liable to the wrath of God. Romans 1:18 says, *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men..."* It doesn't take an historian, a sociologist or a psychologist to be familiar with the devastating personal, relational, international and even ecological consequences of that sin in our lives and our world.

To us, sometimes it looks like life but it is death. Whether it is mind-altering alcohol or other drugs, whether it is sensuality and lust, whether it is pride and greed, whether it is anger and hostility, whether it is fear and despair or a host of other alluring or driving passions, it leads to destruction and death. Proverbs 14:12 reminds us, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."* Every day I see it in myself. And nearly every day I see it in the lives of others. I see the effects of it as it moves to destroy marriages, families, and the very souls of those who refuse to put it to death, who refuse to check it early, to nip it in the bud. Romans 6:23 and 8:6 say, *"For the wages of sin is death"* and *"The mind of sinful man is death."*

The good news, the gospel, is the story of God's remedy for our sin problem. But God's goal is not just to free us

from the eternal consequences of sin; His goal is a people who live differently.

God's objective is not only justification but also reclamation—reclaiming what is rightfully His and restoring us to the true life He intended when He created us. This life is in relationship with Him and each other. Listen to God describe it:

- 1 Peter 2:9—*"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*
- Ephesians 5:25—*"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy..."*
- Matthew 1:2—Jesus came *"because he will save his people from their sins."*
- Galatians 4:19—*"I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."*

Even on our best days any goodness we think or do is tainted.

But "how?" we ask. "How can I live the way Jesus wants me to live? I know myself, and I know the struggle with sin that I fight so often. And it seems that too often, I fail." I'm writing to the person who wants to follow Jesus: the person who is a Christian. Some of you may call yourselves Christians but if there is no desire to follow Jesus, no heart for God, no concern about sin, then it is a different sermon you need; it is the sermon from chapter 2 of Romans or from the last half of chapter 6.

Step by step in Romans, Paul leads up to this 8th chapter. In the first 2½ chapters he makes the case that everyone is sinful and separated from a righteous God. In chapters 3 and 4 he demonstrates that a relationship with a holy God is by grace alone through faith alone in the person and

cross-work of God's Son, Jesus. In Christ alone, the righteousness of God, that righteousness which we must have, is credited to us. In chapter 5 Paul begins to describe the new life that is ours in Christ. Then in chapters 6, 7 and 8, among other issues, Paul describes the "why" and the "how" of living out that new life in Christ.

You do not have to be a Christian very long before you realize that becoming a Christian doesn't end the struggle with sin. As we saw from Romans 7, even the Apostle Paul struggled with it. Look at Romans 7:15: *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."* In that chapter Paul went on to give us insight into this struggle: *"For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind..."* (Romans 7:22-23)

Two "laws," two powerful influences are at work in us. First is the new life given to us by Christ wherein we desire to love and serve God. Second is our old sinful nature inherited from Adam whereby we still desire to serve ourselves. Chapter 7 provides a big dose of realism to our thinking. As I said, becoming a Christian doesn't end the struggle with sin. And we all know it. And the truth is that even on our best days any goodness we think or do is tainted. Until the day you die, sin will never give up trying to destroy you.

But understand that Paul's realism is not meant to discourage. Chapter 7 is sandwiched between chapters 6 and 8. All three chapters must be understood together. And together they describe a great expectancy, yes, an expectancy tempered by realism, but expectancy nonetheless.¹ And so now we go back to the original question, "If sin is still so powerful around me and even in

me, how can I live the way Jesus wants me to?"

Chapter 8 will pull the pieces together to show us the way.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

"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.

"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." (Romans 8:1-13)

I believe it is the 13th verse that summarizes the thesis of

this section of Paul's letter: *"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."* As I have already said, this issue of Christian living is no incidental matter. Just as elsewhere in the Bible, so here Paul shows the great and eternal consequences of two ways of living. One leads to death, the other to life. Listen to God through Moses, centuries earlier: *"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live...But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient,*

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed." (Deuteronomy 30:15-18) Or as the New Testament puts it in Hebrews 12:14, *"Without holiness, no one will see the Lord."* In Romans 6, among other important points, Paul made a clear declaration that if there is no fruit it means there is no root. You fatally deceive yourself if you think you are a Christian and there is no evidence of it.

What Romans 8 is describing is "sanctification." According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.35):

"Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole (person) after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." Consistent with the rest of the Bible, Romans 8 teaches that sanctification, growth in holiness, is just that, it is growth; it is progressive. Yes, we have our ups and downs, as Paul described in Romans 7 but over

time God works His gracious sanctifying influence in us so that we grow to be more like Jesus. To understand how that happens, I want you to consider 5 ideas with me:

- the basis of sanctification, of holy living,
- the motivation,
- the power,
- the responsibility and
- the result of holy living.

The Basis of Holy Living is Justification

First, the basis of holy living is justification. It is no accident that chapter 8 begins with the words *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..."* I might have thought we moved beyond that idea back in chapter 3:

- 3:24: *"Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*
- 3:26: *"Justifies those who have faith in Jesus."*
- 3:28: *"Justified by faith apart from observing the law."*

But here in the context of living the Christian life, Paul brings it back. Why? Because before I take one step in trying to be obedient to Jesus, I must remember that I never could and never will be able to earn my relationship to Him by my efforts.

I remember that I am saved by grace not by my efforts. I did not gain God's favor by my goodness and I will not retain His favor by my goodness. He loves me and frees me from sin's condemnation solely because of His choice and grace. Holiness is not the source of my relationship with God; it is the result. I am no longer under condemnation. I must always remember that!

But there is another way in which justification is the basis

of our sanctification, our holy living. In Romans 8:2 we read, *"because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."* That's what the early part of chapter 6 was about. And, Romans 6:3,5-6 says, *"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin..."*

When Jesus died, those who would belong to Him, were in Him. When He died, we died. When He conquered sin and death on the cross and resurrection, we conquered it because we were connected to Him. As surely as Jesus is freed from sin's ultimate power, I am freed from sin's power to completely dominate me so that I can, not simply "may" but "can," live an increasingly holy life. Or as Paul

***God loves me and frees me from sin's
condemnation solely because
of His choice and grace.***

says it in Romans 8:4, *"In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us..."* Now Paul says in Romans 8:9, *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit..."* Charles Wesley helps us sing this truth with these words: "He breaks the power of cancelled sin; He sets the prisoner free." When I died in Christ, something changed; before I became a Christian, I could not, not sin. Anything I did, even my best efforts, my most generous deeds, were not for God's glory. Now, by God's grace, I can choose to not sin; I can serve God. Not yet perfectly, but I can. "In Jesus" that is now possible.

One man wrote, When God draws us to himself, he "implants desires that were not there before: desire for God, for holiness, and for the hallowing and glorifying of God's name in this world; desire to pray, worship, love, serve, honor, and please God; desire to show love and bring benefit to others."² Those desires weren't there before. Mark it down Christian, you are no longer under condemnation and the power that your old sinful nature had to utterly control you has been broken. Those aren't just possibilities; they are facts! And they were accomplished at the cross. The basis of holy living is justification in Christ.

The Motivation

Now look at the motivation for holy living. Romans 8:5 says, *"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."* Holy living comes from a mind set on what the Spirit of God desires. The motivation for holy living is God's love: I am motivated by the love of God and love for God.

Holy living is not about sin-management. It is not about keeping myself from doing what I really most want to do. No, when I stop long enough to think, I realize this thing that is so tempting me, is not what I most want to do. God placed within me a new set of desires—a mind set on the Spirit. Or as God said it years before: *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."* (Jeremiah 31:33) I have a new nature now, a new predisposition; it is a heart that wants to love and serve God. What I now most want to do is please God.

Let me give you an example: When you are sorely tempted to sin against your own child, or you do sin against them, what often comes to mind? I love this child; I want the best for them. What is it that motivates you to stop and to do what is right? It is not just some abstract idea of right and wrong but your heart—you love them. This is, to me, a powerful motivation in holy living. When sin tempts, whether from within or without, whether from the world, the flesh or the devil (and I often can't discern the difference), I have the opportunity to ask myself, "How will this make my God and others feel?" I love Him.

***The basis of holy living is
justification in Christ.***

Holiness is not merely the absence of sin but holiness is, positively, a devotion to God and, negatively, it is a resistance movement. A resistance against any sin that wars against my love for God and others. I need to be constantly reminded of two truths: I am no longer under condemnation: I have been set free from the absolute controlling power of sin. And I am loved by God and desire more than anything else to love Him in return.

Over 200 years ago Thomas Chalmers of the Free Church of Scotland wrote a book which title is instructive in itself: *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*. In further explanation he wrote, "There are two ways in which (we) may attempt to displace from the human heart its love of (some sin) - either by (proudly prevailing upon the heart to) simply...withdraw its regards from an object that is not worthy of it; or, by setting forth another object, even God, as more worthy of its attachment, so as that the heart shall be prevailed upon not to resign an old affection, which shall have nothing to succeed it, but to exchange an old

affection for a new one...The former method is altogether incompetent and ineffectual and the latter method alone will suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart from the wrong affection that domineers over it."³

Only a new heart for God will truly make us able to change. When I think of many of our attempts at changing our behavior, it seems that too often it is simply a sin-management issue—a behavior modification program. What if, instead of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, we were to consider the love of God and our love for God

The Holy Spirit of God dwells within me, predisposing me and empowering me to holiness.

and allow the "expulsive power of a new affection" to motivate us to truly desire to change. The basis of holy living is justification. The motivation for holy living is the love of God and for God.

The Power

The power for holy living is the Holy Spirit. At least 10 times in these 13 verses Paul refers to the Holy Spirit of God. He anchors his teaching about holy living in the person and power of the Spirit. In verses 7-8 Paul spoke of those who are not Christians. He wrote, *"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."* And he adds in the latter part of verse 9, *"And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."* Now Paul's point is that you are not like that! Romans 8:9 says, *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit..."*

In Romans 5 Paul then describes some of the benefits of

this new relationship with God. The most significant one he notes is in Romans 5:5: *"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."* God gave us His Holy Spirit. So here in Romans 8:9, Paul is not challenging you to question whether you are a Christian—you are a Christian by grace through faith. He is here asserting that one who is a Christian has the Holy Spirit and conversely one who does not have the Holy Spirit doesn't belong to Christ and by inference in this context, doesn't have the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit to live for Christ. But you do have the Spirit and thus you do not have to live any longer under the absolute control of sin because you have the powerful influence of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit of God dwells within me, predisposing me and empowering me to holiness. Romans 8:4 says, *"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."* Here is the truth you may claim: The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that is now available and working in you. Again, this isn't just a possibility; it is a fact. The next time we face temptation, we must realize that we are not being asked to take the temptation on in our own strength but we are asked to believe, to place our faith in the Spirit of God, trusting He will enable us.

The Responsibility

Having said that the power, to refuse wrong and live right, comes from the Holy Spirit, I must quickly add, fourthly, that the responsibility for holy living is ours. Romans 8:12-13 says, *"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..."* Does this sound like a contradiction to what I said

about the power belonging to the Holy Spirit? It is not. The same dependent action is being called for here that is being called for when you initially trust in Christ for salvation. The Spirit of God grants us faith to believe but we must believe. So here the Spirit plants within us new desires, a mind set on the Spirit, and the Spirit empowers us, but we must respond, we must act.

This is so consistent with the rest of Scripture:

- Hebrews 12:1 says, *"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."*
- Ephesians 4:22-24 says, *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

What we see is that the Spirit works, but He works in us to act. We want the Spirit to take away any desire to sin. We want the Spirit to remove all temptation. We want the Spirit to pick us up and turn us around when we are tempted. But according to the Bible, the Spirit of God works through means and He calls on us to respond to the means by the ability He gives us. Earlier and at other times I have called it "dependent action."

Listen to the Bible describe the means God uses to enable us. First, Jesus gives us His Spirit. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."* When temptation first strikes, God's Spirit is there to remind us of His provision and call us to obedience. Yes, it

is true that at that point we have a decision to make—do we want His help or do we want more what is tempting us. He provides a way out, but we must take it.

Second, Jesus gives us prayer. He taught us to pray: *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."* (Matthew 6:13) Do we realize each day the danger we are in and do we call out to the Lord to protect and deliver us? And do we pray this prayer not after the fact but long before?

Third, Jesus gives us His Word. King David declared in Psalm 119:11, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* Hear God's promise in Isaiah 55:11: *"My word that goes out from my mouth...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."* In God's description of our warfare against temptation, the only

***The Spirit of God grants us faith to believe
but we must believe.***

offensive weapons He mentions are prayer and the Word of God, which He calls "The Sword of the Spirit." Are you filling your mind with the Word of God.

And lastly I mention that Jesus gives us His church. Colossians 3:16 says, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom..."* God never expected us to make it on our own. We must have Christian friends (true friends) who come alongside to talk, pray, ask questions, expecting success and challenging failure. We all need people who are fighting for our souls.

Holiness does not come automatically or by praying a prayer to receive a “second work of grace,” in the baptism of the Spirit, or even by praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Holiness comes through dependent action—a choice to use the means of grace that God has given us as we depend on the Spirit to build our resistance to sin and our love for holiness. J.I. Packer wrote, “Holiness teaching that skips over disciplined persistence in the well-doing that forms holy habits is thus weak; habit forming is the Spirit’s ordinary way of leading us on to holiness.”⁴

A critical activity in this “dependent action” is to “put to death the misdeeds of the body.” Old John Owen summed it up accurately and pointedly: “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” We cannot be passive about sin in our lives. When it rears its ugly head we must act early and ruthlessly. John Piper has done his usual good job at describing this activity of “killing sin.” I refer you to the notes in Appendix E.

The Result

Lastly, I mention that the result of holy living is conflict, increasing Christlikeness and eventual glory. First of all, living the Christian life will bring conflict. That old sinful nature inherited from Adam will be with us until we die. *“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law...”* (Romans 8:7) Be realistic about it; holiness is a life-long battle.

But secondly and at the same time realize that by the power of the Spirit, we can increasingly become like Christ. Galatians 6:22-23 says, *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...”* That’s God’s promise to you. You may struggle deeply with some particular sin but know that God is at work in you. I offer this tentatively: Don’t let defeat in one area keep you from attending to the means

of grace that may build the very resistance you need in that troubling area. Certainly do not allow the enemy of your soul to convince you that you are under condemnation when you are not, that you are hopeless when you are not, and that you are powerless when you are not.

Now thirdly realize that the result of holy living is eventual glory. Romans 8:10-11 says, *"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you."* There is coming a day when the battle with sin will be over, victory will be complete—that day is when Jesus comes again and with resurrected bodies we will live with Him and His people forever. Revelation 21:4 offers hope: *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."* The old sin nature, the world, and the devil that caused those centuries of devastation in humanity and the rest of the world will together be finished.

Read again Romans 8:1-4: *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."*

End Notes

¹ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 130-131

² J.I. Packer from article on "Sanctification" in *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*

³ Thomas Chalmers "The expulsive power of a new Affection" (19th C. Free Church of Scotland preacher) http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Sanctification/

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 109

Chapter Twelve

Adoption—A Child of God

Romans 8:13-17

Imagine it is 1854 and you are five years of age. You live on the streets of New York, homeless and alone. No one wants you, no one cares for you; you are an orphan! Your world is a slum. Everywhere there are people jammed together in misery. Your clothes are rags, not quite able to keep you warm. Your friends are children like yourself: they teach you to steal bread from unattended windows, to peddle flowers, and to snatch purses from elderly ladies. Your life is merely survival; you wander the streets as an urban nomad. Then one day a man comes to you and tells you there is a way out of these slums and off these streets. You can go to a place where you will have warm clothing and food (all the food you can eat) and most of all, you will belong!

This scenario is not fiction. In the latter 1800s hundreds of thousands of immigrants poured into New York City. Families broke apart as some parents never reached America alive. Armies of young orphans roamed the city streets alone. Then a young minister, named Charles Brice, appalled at the desperate plight of these youngsters, hit upon a daring strategy to help them. Brice, with the help of others began to write to town leaders, pastors of churches, and other individuals all along the railroad that ran west from New York. Stops were arranged, the train was advertised, and children were placed on the train with no specific destination in mind. For each child there was simply a nearly blind hope that some compassionate person, at some point along the way, would adopt him or her. At each stop children were whisked into the waiting arms of men

and women who wanted to adopt them. Children were given a new name, made part of a new family, and in many cases showered with all the things they had never known before: love, acceptance and security. In American history, we know it as the Orphan Train. And for nearly 100,000 children the hope of a family became a reality.

Every one of us comes into this world in worse shape than those orphans. Because of our sin “in Adam” we are born into the kingdom of darkness as illegitimate children. But when we become Christians we are adopted into God’s own family. Christianity is not just joining a religion; it is to receive a new name, a new family, a new identity, and a new Father—it is to be adopted by God!¹

Barbara and I did not conceive him. His biological father is unknown, even to his birth mother, and his birth mother didn’t want him. His genetic family included thieves, drug addicts, pushers and prostitutes. His inheritance included

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

poverty, abuse, abandonment, prison and death. But then he was adopted. He didn’t earn it, he didn’t choose it and he didn’t even know it, but he was—he was adopted. His adopted family included godly grandparents, godly siblings, godly aunts and uncles, and Christ-following cousins. His inheritance included safety, acceptance, love, family, freedom and life. Paris Michael Nelson is my adopted son. The only “before and after” contrast greater than his is yours and mine.

As the Bible says, *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you*

followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” (Ephesians 2:1-3) And, John 8:43 says, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire.” But now:

- *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)*
- *“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14)*
- *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1)*
- *“For (God) chose us in (Christ) 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)*

And now to our text in Romans 8:14-17: “those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship (“adoption”). And by him we cry (exclaim), ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with

Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

In the first four chapters of the book of Romans the Apostle Paul clearly establishes how it is that we become Christians—it is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Romans 3:21-22 says, *"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."* In chapter 5 Paul begins to describe the benefits of this new relationship we now have with God by His grace. And, in chapters 6-8 Paul goes on to describe how we can live the Christian life—how we can live increasingly holy lives following Jesus.

As we saw earlier, it is in the early part of chapter 8 that Paul connects holy living with the Holy Spirit of God. In verse 12 he says you are no longer indebted or obligated to live the way you used to. Earlier he said that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you now can live differently. Then in verses 14-17 he draws our attention to a truth that changes everything. *"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* (Romans 8:14) Coincident with what we might call "being saved" or becoming a Christian is this huge matter of being adopted by God.

- Justification focuses on the issue of our sins and forgiveness.
- Redemption focuses on release from slavery to sin.
- Reconciliation focuses on the change from God's hostility toward us to God's favor toward us.

But adoption takes it a step further. Adoption is about becoming a member of the family, becoming a child of the Father.

I want to speak more to that new relationship but before I do I want you to see that Paul is still writing about living as a Christian—holy living. Every one of the verses I quoted earlier about us becoming a child of God includes the issue of holy living.

- 1 Peter 2:10 talks about being the new “people of God.” He goes on to say, *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*
- (1 Peter 2:11-12)
- 1 John 3:1 says we are “children of God.” And John goes on to say: *“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”* (1 John 3:3)
- Ephesians says he “adopted us as sons” and then in Ephesians 1:12, *“in order that we...might be for the praise of his glory.”*

And here in Romans 8 we have received the “Spirit of adoption,” followed by Romans 8:13: *“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.”*

Adoption is about becoming a member of the family, becoming a child of the Father.

And so I repeat, Paul sees a connection between our being adopted by God and living an increasingly holy life. I think Paul dwells on that connection in verses Romans 8:14-17. The point is similar to Paul’s words to the Corinthians: *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial ? What does a believer*

have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."
(2 Corinthians 6:14 –7:1)

I am part of a new family: I have a new Father. God adopted me.

Earlier I showed you that the motivation for holy living is a new relationship with God. It is specifically this new relationship of being adopted, of belonging to God in this way that is the major motivation to follow Jesus. Why do I want to love and serve God? It is when we realize what our relationship with God now is, by His grace that we begin to truly live differently. We no longer relate to God out of fear but out of affection.

Notice from the text, how God leads us: "*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'.*" (Romans 8:15) One author has said it so well: "The Spirit does not lead by stirring up slavish fear. He leads by stirring up family affection. He does not get you to kill sin by making you a slave who acts out of fear. But by making you a son who acts out of faith and affection."² Earlier we made the same point by citing the title of Thomas Chalmers' book from 150 ago: *The*

Expulsive Power of a New Affection. It doesn't mean that now we never sin but now sin is inconsistent, illogical, unreasonable, and unconscionable because I am part of a new family: I have a new Father. God adopted me.

On this subject, The Westminster Confession of Faith reads as follows: "All those that are justified, God (grants), in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have His name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation."³

Adopted by The Father! This idea of the *fatherhood* of God is not just theological semantics. Someone wrote, "If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all."⁴ Too many of us have made of Christianity only a doctrine to be believed rather than also a relationship to be lived. God is for us the One who is there but not *the Father who is here*. To be sure, having our sins forgiven, having the guilt removed and the sentence of hell lifted are of foundational importance. As Paul said it in this context in Romans 8:1, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" That is a great truth and it is fundamental "gospel."

But it is not the end of the story. We aren't just freed from eternal punishment. We aren't just saved from something. We are saved to something, something so good.

Christianity is not just a legal issue but also a relational issue. J.I. Packer wrote, "To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater."⁵ Listen to the Bible: *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"* (1 John 3:1) The NIV translation leaves out the first word of the Greek sentence—it is the word "behold," or "look!" "Look or stand in awe" of the great love the Father has lavished on us. This is your relationship with God by virtue of being adopted by Him. Jesus said in John 16:27, *"The Father Himself loves you..."* This is not generic love; this is not the love so often thought of when people say, "God loves the whole world." No, instead this for you is the kind of love the Father has for the Son, Jesus. That's the point: we are individually loved by the Father the way Jesus is loved by the Father. Consider that! The Father, God, loves you the way He loves Jesus. That's how personal His love is for you.

But there is a dimension of His love for us that is even more incredible than His love for Jesus. Romans 5:8,10 says, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."* We have a hard time not thinking that we must earn God's love. We look at our deficiencies and failures and assume God looks on us with disfavor. You remember the story of the prodigal son that Jesus told. When the younger son finally decided to go home, do you remember what he planned to say? *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you."* (That far, his statement

was true.) *I am no longer worthy to be called your son* (that part was false)." (Luke 15:18-19) He assumed his father's actions would be based on his own actions. The jealous *older* brother made the same assumption about the father but not because of failure but because of merit. The older brother said in Luke 15:29, *"Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours."*

In the context he is saying, I deserve your love. Sinclair Ferguson nailed it: "The guilt-ridden (prodigal son) was calculating on the basis of his *sin*, rather than on his

We aren't just saved from something. We are saved to something, something so good.

father's character."⁶ And I would add that the pride-ridden older brother was calculating on the basis of *merit* rather than on his father's character.

But our heavenly Father gives His love to us based on His choice and not based on merit. "There is no reason to be given for love but love."⁷ Ephesians 1:3-5 says, *"Long ago, before God made the world, God chose us to be his very own, through what Christ would do for us; he decided then to make us holy in his eyes, without a single fault we who stand before him covered in his love. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And he did this because he wanted to."* (TLB paraphrase) Not because we were attractive or worthy but solely for "his good pleasure." We don't readily accept that, because we know that among ourselves there is no free lunch, there is always a price, an expectation, that if we don't meet, it's over.

We must come to understand that God is our Father even when we are doing poorly, even when we have failed miserably. One author wrote, "When I seek to fashion a self-image from the adulation of others and the inner voice whispers, 'You've arrived; you're a player...' there is no truth in that self-concept. (Or) when I sink into despondency and the inner voice whispers, 'You are no good, a fraud, a hypocrite, and dilettante,' there is no truth in any image shaped from that message either. My dignity (comes from being) Abba's child...."⁸ I know that every stage of life has its unique challenges but as we grow older we look at childhood as such an idyllic time. "Look at that kid," we say of our own child, "not a care in the world." He doesn't have to worry about where food will come from, whether he will have a bed tonight and if anything frightens

***"Does God like you?"
"Yes, He does!" He delights in you.***

or hurts him, he comes running to me with no doubt I can save him. I'd like him to say 'please' and 'thank you' but they are superfluous formalities to him because he fully expects to be cared for whether he says those things or not because, after all, I'm his father. He may choose to disobey me and grieve the loss of a privilege or the threat of a spanking but it never even enters his mind that I would cease to love him or care for him—he knows I'm his father. In fact if put my own life at risk to save his, if he were even aware of it, he would expect it—it would seem perfectly congruent with the relationship. After all, I'm his father.

Do you know that is your relationship with our heavenly Father? Many Christians live with a quiet fear that they are alone and even if there is a God out there, they live with the quiet fear that they don't measure up or they live with the proud assumption that they do. But that is not the way

with our Father. He asks for nothing but our trust. We should stand amazed as in 1 John 3:1: "*(Look, behold) How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*" And that is what we are!

But I don't want you to only think of the Father's love for you as great because it is undeserved. We might be tempted to see the Father's love as only a kind of hard, calculated, committed choice. Instead we must see it for what it also is—deep affection. I've asked the question other times: "Does God like you?" The answer is "Yes, He does!" He delights in you. (Jeremiah 31:20 among other passages) Brennan Manning tells the story of Edward Farrell a pastor in Detroit who went to visit his 80 year-old uncle in Ireland. On his uncle's birthday, the two of them went for an early morning walk. After walking in silence for some time, and then standing side by side watching the rising sun, the uncle suddenly turned with a great smile and began skipping down the path. The pastor followed and said, "Uncle Seamus, you look so happy, can you tell me why?" "Yes", said the eighty-year-old man, "You see my Abba is very fond of me."⁹ Hear that please!

We weren't created to be God's little robots to get God's work done. We were created to live in relationship with the Father and the Son and one another. 1 John 1:3 says, "*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*" Look at Romans 8:15: "*you received the Spirit of sonship* ("adoption"). *And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'.*" Martin Luther said of this word "Abba," "This is a very little word, and yet in spite of that, it encompasses everything. It is not so much the mouth here speaking, but the heart. Therefore this little word 'Abba Father,' conceived in the heart, passes all the eloquence of the great philosophers of the ages."¹⁰

The word "abba" is a word used by little children when calling their father; it is a word that many of you know is as intimate as the word "Daddy." The Jews could not have imagined addressing God as "Daddy"—it would have been inappropriate, irreverent. But Jesus used it. And here we are told that our relationship with God is so intimate that we may call Him "daddy," not out of disrespect but out of tenderness.

A family lived in another country when they adopted a preschool child from that country. The father spoke of the months that passed after the child was adopted when he, the father, longed for a relationship with the child but she was doubtful and reserved. But one day she appeared beside where he was sitting and she held out a shoe and said, "Daddy, I need another shoelace." They were the sweetest words he had ever heard from her lips.¹¹ Imagine *our* Father's delight when we finally understand how much He loves us! 130 years ago the hymn writer James Robinson captured the emotion of it: "Loved with everlasting love. Led by grace that love to know... In a love that cannot cease, I am his and he is mine."

Not only is our adoption by God personal and intimate but also according to verse 16, *"the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."* I believe this is very subjective but nonetheless real. Those of you who are God's children have had experiences when it was evident that the Spirit of God was working in you. When some passage from Scripture became especially clear to you and precious to you, you knew it was God giving that insight to you. When you first understood your need for Jesus and you saw in Him the one who could forgive you and make you right with God, you knew God was at work in you. When you felt close to God in a time of crisis or a time of

reflection, you knew it was God drawing you to Himself. Haven't you had such experiences? That is the Holy Spirit witnessing to your spirit that you are part of the family—you belong to God.

Lastly, I want you to look at the first part of verse 17: *"Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-(or joint)heirs with Christ..."*

Paul writes, I want you to know something; I want you to count on it. Since you have been adopted into God's family, since you are one of God's children, by faith in Jesus Christ, you are an heir to all God's promises. That inheritance is spelled out, at least in part, in the following verses, which

Imagine our Father's delight when we finally understand how much He loves us!

we will look at next. But suffice it for now to say that our inheritance is eternal life, in the presence of God and in the fellowship of those who love Him. And that inheritance of life everlasting with God is as sure for you as it is for Jesus Himself because you are a co-heir with Jesus. What He inherits, we inherit!

There is popular talk of mansions of material splendor, of all the material things we lack here being a large part of what we will inherit in the next life, but to dwell on those things is to miss the major point. Jesus said, *"I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also."* We've been adopted; we belong to God. Adoption is not mainly about things. Adoption is about relationship, about belonging. Our inheritance is the immediate presence of almighty God forever.

Everett Fullam was a missionary to a tribe of people in the interior of Nigeria. These people had never heard the word Africa much less the word America. When the chief heard one day of two Americans walking on the moon, he said it was impossible because one only has to look to see that the moon is too small to hold two people. But in spite of their naïve view of the world when they became Christians their understanding of things eternal was deep. Fullam explained it this way after he baptized three of them:

"There were two men and one woman. We stood on the banks of a muddy river, wet and happy. I had never seen three more joyful people. What is the best thing about this experience? I asked. All three continued to smile...but only one spoke, in clear, deliberate English: 'Behind this universe stands one God, not a great number of warring spirits, as we had always believed, but one God. And that God loves me.'"¹²

God loves us and has adopted us into His family. We have His presence with us now (His Spirit witnesses to our spirits) and we will be with Him forever (we are co-heirs with Christ) in His glory. Could there be any greater motivation to holy living?

End Notes

- ¹ Much is quoted or paraphrased from Steve Lawhead in the preface to a short Campus Life book or booklet. The title is lost.
- ² John Piper, *Romans 8:14-17*, 2002
- ³ XII 1 Of Adoption
- ⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 201
- ⁵ Packer, *Ibid*, p. 207
- ⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, p. 48
- ⁷ Paraphrasing Ralph Venning
- ⁸ Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*, p. 63
- ⁹ Manning, *Ibid*, p. 64
- ¹⁰ Source Unknown
- ¹¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, p. 90
- ¹² Everett Fullam, *Living the Lord's Prayer*, p. 27,28

Chapter Thirteen

The Best is Yet to Be

Romans 8:18-25

Most people only purchase an automobile on credit because they believe that in the future they will have sufficient income to make all the payments. College students will go thousands of dollars in debt because they believe that in the future they will earn the incomes necessary to repay the loans. My point is that what you believe about the future controls what you do in the present.

When I say “controls,” I mean that what you believe about the future so powerfully influences you that nearly every intentional action now is consistent with it. A positive illustration of this is to watch a young man set his mind on winning the heart of a young woman. He pictures himself with her in the future and that vision controls his every thought and action. A negative illustration is to watch a man or woman in a disintegrating marriage become so convinced that the future will be no different than the present that they give up. Listen to a man who sees no future: “We’re here to die, just live and die. I live driving a cab. I do some fishing, take my girl out, pay taxes, do a little reading, and then get ready to drop dead. You’ve got to be strong about it. Life is a big fake. Nobody cares. You’re rich or you’re poor. You’re here; you’re gone. You’re like the wind... Life is nothing.”¹ Is he right or is there more?

Christ calls people to a very different perspective on the future and therefore a very different perspective on life now. What comes after this life, I think, has an all-important bearing on how we live this life. Notice, I didn’t

say that how we live *this life* has a bearing on the *life to come*, though that is certainly true, but I said whether there is a life to come has a bearing on how we live this life. As I have already said it, your belief about your future controls your present.

Repeatedly in Paul's letter to the church in Rome he speaks of "life." Instead of death and damnation, he says, those who trust Christ will have life, life with an eternal quality. In chapter 5 Paul said we have peace with God; we have access to His grace, and we have the hope of a future in the glory of God. Paul then goes on to write about how we live Christianly in the mean time. Actually it is the "mean time" that troubles us. The "mean time" is where we live. And Paul, like Jesus, knows the "mean time" is difficult.

You have an inheritance, a future, which overwhelmingly surpasses the present and makes the present worth it, no matter what the present may hold.

God calls us out of a value system and a lifestyle to one that is radically different than the world's.

- We have a different master than the rest of the world.
- We play by different rules than the rest of the world.
- We have different objectives than the rest of the world.

We respond to Christ's call to trust and obey Him and what do we get? He tells us that our new values and lifestyle will be opposed both from within ourselves and outside ourselves. From within we know the struggle we have with sin—Paul describes it in chapters 6 and 7. And then add to that, when we look around at others, it appears that the

unrighteous prosper and the immoral have the fun.

Jeremiah 12:1 says, *"You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?"* The issue is as old as Job. The question is, "Is following God worth it?" There are several positive answers to that question and Paul is going to give one of them.

Before looking at that specifically I want you to remember that Romans 8 has rightly been called a chapter of great assurance—assuring the believer that what he believes is true: that following Christ is worth it, and that God both now is and in the future will do what He has promised. As we saw earlier, and will see coming up, this chapter is meant to assure us of our relationship with God.

In this lengthy chapter are a number of truths you can count on as a Christian.

- First, mark it down, you are no longer under condemnation because Christ has done for us what the law could not do. This summarizes justification by grace through faith. (8:1-3)
- Secondly, you are no longer enslaved to that sin nature you inherited from Adam, but now, because the Spirit of God is in you, you have the Spirit-empowered ability to live for Christ, to live Christianly. (8:4-13)
- Thirdly, you have the closest possible relationship with God; you have been adopted into God's family as His child. (8:14-17)
- Fourthly, you have an inheritance, a future, which overwhelmingly surpasses the present and makes the present worth it, no matter what the present may hold. (8:17-25)

- Fifthly, even now, in every circumstance of life, the Spirit of God is interceding for us and God is controlling every circumstance of life, even the hardest things of life and using them for our good. (8:26-28)
- And lastly, always remember, what God starts, He finishes, guaranteed! (8:29-30)

It is that fourth issue that I want us to better understand.

Look at Romans 8:16-25:

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

"For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

In verse 16 Paul completes his declaration that God has adopted us; we are God's Children. In verse 17 he says that since we are children of God then we are heirs—we look forward to an inheritance. But in that verse he also reminds us of the present reality of suffering laying along

the path to that inheritance.

But it is in verse 18 that we find the main point of this section: *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* Paul says I want you to know something about the future that is so positive that it will powerfully change your perspective on the here and now. In fact if you understand what is yet to come, it will make your present sufferings seem insignificant by comparison.

<i>What God starts, He finishes, guaranteed!</i>

What is this future he's talking about? Here he calls it *"the glory that will be revealed in us."* In verse 17 he said we would *"share in (Christ's) glory."* I want to come back to that in a few minutes and see how Paul gives it further definition. But for now I want you to see that in verses 19-23 Paul gives us a very short history of the world. However, notice he doesn't give that history in chronological order.

- Verse 19 is about the present: *"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed."*
- Verse 20 is about the past: *"For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,"*
- Verse 21 is largely about the future: *"in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."*
- Verse 22 is about the past right up to the present: *"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."*
- Verse 23 is the about the present looking forward to

the future: *"Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

Now, I want to put those thoughts into chronological order.

First the past: *"For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it..."* (Verse 20) The "creation" here is the equivalent of Genesis 1:1: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* Paul is talking about the universe of stars and planets around us; he is talking about the oceans, mountains, prairies, lakes and hills of this

Sin has consequences and the judicial consequence of Adam's sin was that the whole creation suffered.

earth, and he talking about plants, fish, birds and animals—all creation except humanity. And he says that in the past something happened to that creation: *"it was subjected to frustration..."* Frustration is not being able to be and do what you want or ought to be able to be and do.

God created the heavens and earth as an expression of His glory. As Paul said it in Romans 1, creation manifests something about God: *"God's eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen from what has been made."* But creation is frustrated in no longer having the full beauty and function it was designed for. This takes us back to Genesis 3 when Adam sinned: *"To Adam (God) said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, "You must not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of*

the field.” (Genesis 3:17-18) Yes it is still true that the heavens declare the glory of God but imagine what that declaration would have been had the creation not been warped by sin.

But notice the creation didn't bring this frustration on itself. It was the result of Satan's temptation, Adam's sin and God's judgment. Sin has consequences and the judicial consequence of Adam's sin was that the whole creation suffered. That may seem unreasonable to us but that is only because we don't have an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of sin. Because of sin the whole of creation is now in "bondage to decay." The cycle of conception, birth, and growth is followed by decline, death, and decomposition.² The earth is not as friendly as we like to think. We like to dwell on beautiful sunsets and swelling oceans. But if we just watch an episode of "Wild Kingdom" or look at the devastation of animals in a forest fire, or the suffering caused in Bangladesh by a cyclone we realize something is dreadfully wrong.

The "frustration" of the creation, due to sin, is certainly felt by humanity. We were made in the image of God and yet we have had 6-10,000 years or more of human history and can't seem to get it right. Look at how many times new utopian ideas have been suggested as the answer to humanity's propensity to selfishness, hostility and war with none succeeding—frustrating. As necessary as they are, there is a certain frustration with all the "peace agreements" made year after year and then savagely broken. Recently world leaders met in Annapolis to consider yet another attempt at peace in the Middle East.

Closer to home, we celebrate a family converted from generations of sin and pain only to watch in frustration as members of that same family return to the same sin and

misery within two generations. Or within ourselves, we see some progress in our spiritual maturity but are so frustrated by our private sins that we wonder if there is any hope for us. Frustration? Oh yes, all creation was subjected to frustration!

But the past is not the end of the story. Paul writes that he wants us to understand what is happening even now in the present. Look at verse 19: *"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed."* And verse 22 says, *"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."* To make his point, Paul personifies creation; he gives it emotion and thought. It is as if creation is eagerly expecting something. The word translated "eager expectation" is one of someone craning his neck to see something very good. And in verse 22 it is called a groaning.

But Paul is not only describing the rest of creation; he is talking about us in the present as well. Verse 23 says, *"Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly..."* Now groaning is because of pain. This is speaking again to the idea of the consequences of sin in the world, the frustration of it. But this kind of groaning is important as we saw in verse 22—it is a "groaning as in the pains of childbirth..." It's painful but it's worth it. Jesus said it this way in John 16:20b-22: *"You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."* One man wrote that when you hear a woman groaning in a hospital it makes all the difference if you are not in the oncology

ward but in the maternity ward.³

So what's the baby? What makes it worth it? What is all creation anticipating? What do we wait eagerly for? We looked briefly at the past and the present; now we see the future: Paul says creation waits *"for the sons of God to be revealed"* and *"we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."* (Verses 19 and 23)
We are already sons and daughters of God, adopted into

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed."

His family, but we don't fully reflect Him yet. We not only still struggle with our old sin nature but even our bodies are still subject to decay and death. Many years ago Isaac Watts wrote in a hymn:

"Behold th' amazing gift of love
The Father hath bestowed
On us, the sinful sons of men,
To call us sons of God!
Concealed as yet this honor lies,
By this dark world unknown."

But that day is coming when the fullness of what it means to be sons of God will be fully actualized, revealed. 1 Corinthians 15:50 states, *"I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."* Our present mortal bodies, corrupted by sin, must be transformed. When Jesus comes again, Paul said to another church, *"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (die), 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... When*

the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory'." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52,54)

Paul is talking about the resurrection of our bodies. In Romans 8:23 he calls it *"the redemption of our bodies."* He raised this issue earlier in verse 11, *"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."* To the Philippians Paul said, *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything*

***The glory of God is His character revealed—
His beauty, power, truth and love.***

under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:20-21) And, the Apostle John wrote, *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* (1 John 3:2) As I have said so many times, everlasting life is not our disembodied spirits floating forever in some God-consciousness. Everlasting life includes a real body, a resurrected body.

But verse 21 brings our resurrected bodies and the creation back together: *"the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."* (Romans 8:21) When Jesus comes again and when the bodies of the children of God are resurrected and reunited with their spirits that is when the rest of creation will also be transformed. Look at 2 Peter

3:10-13: *"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."* And Revelation 21:1: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."* In some way, whether by literal fire and destruction or otherwise, God is going to renovate, transform or recreate this present heavens and earth into a new heavens and earth.

What will that new earth be like? Do you remember that the Bible says that Jesus' resurrected body was the same but different? Do you remember that the Bible says our resurrected bodies will be the same but different; they will be our bodies but new, recognizable but transformed? Likewise, I believe the new earth will be this earth but new, the same but transformed, physical and recognizable. Most importantly, God will refashion this world into what He originally intended it to be before sin entered it and warped it.

But why, why a new heavens and earth? Why not just "heaven?" Because God intends for us to enjoy our inheritance and the heaven, to which believers now go when they die, is not that inheritance. And what is that inheritance? It is to live in real bodies and with all the rest of creation live in and reflect the glory of God. The glory of God is His character revealed—His beauty, power, truth and love.

Even now we love beauty—a glowing sunset or a dew-covered rose. The best stories of humanity are not the stories of avarice, lust and revenge of much of television, motions pictures and pulp fiction. Our best stories are of true greatness, sacrificial love, real peace, and tender mercy. We revel in genuine grace and truth. Though now we only see those perfections dimly, we nonetheless know them when we see them and they are the subjects of our best stories and pictures. That's why Jesus was so stunning

Our inheritance is to fully live in and reflect the glory of God without the distortion of sin and decay.

to those around Him: "*We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14)

God's love, mercy, goodness, holiness, and all His other perfections need to be seen and experienced. It is not a matter of God proudly needing the worship and admiration of others.

- For love to be love it must be expressed.
- The glory of grace is when it is experienced.
- The glory of beauty is when it is seen or heard.
- The glory of power is when it is displayed.
- The glory of truth is when it's known.

Somewhat of an aside, this is to me another evidence for the Trinity—the perfections of God would be deprived of significance without a multiplicity of persons to enjoy them. God's love would mean nothing if there was no one to love. But there is: the Father loves the Son and the Spirit and the Spirit and the Son love the Father. And wonder of wonders the Triune God chose to let us in on that.

All of creation including the animate and inanimate world and especially humanity, made in the image of God, exist to reflect, manifest, exhibit, declare, and delight in the glory of God. The chief purpose of all creation is to glorify God. Our chief end, our fulfillment, is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. That was God's intention from the beginning. Genesis 1:28 says, *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"* As we see, sin interrupted, distorted, and corrupted.

But Jesus said in Revelation 21:5 *"Behold, I am making all things new."* Speaking of the new heavens and earth God said in Revelation 21:7, *"He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."* Our inheritance is to fully live in and reflect the glory of God without the distortion of sin and decay. And part of our inheritance is to participate with all the rest of creation in that same glory.

If the heavens and earth simply cease to exist, who will join us in declaring the glory of God? Don't we believe that what Isaiah said will be true? *"The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD'S renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."* (Isaiah 55:12-13) The future Paul describes is the future God planned for us all along.

It's a long text, but how long since you've read Isaiah 65:17-25:

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come

to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD."

So, is it worth it? Look at Romans 8:18 again: *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* And 2 Corinthians 4:17-18: *"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

End Notes

¹ From *Can Man Live Without God*, by Ravi Zacharias

² John Stott, *Romans*, p. 239

³ John Piper Romans 8:18-25 Part 2

Chapter Fourteen

Grace for Waiting

Romans 8:26-28

Is God involved in your life? Is he personally and actively working for your good? It was about 15 years ago. Ken had just begun attending our church but my first conversation with him was when he called me one evening. Ken told me he was struggling and wanted to know if I would meet with him. I set an appointment for a couple of days later and then prayed for him on the phone.

When he sat down in my office the next week, I had no idea of the story he was about to tell me. Years earlier Ken had developed a serious drinking problem and it was ruining his life. His family was in shambles, his ability to work was compromised, and he seemed helpless to control his habit. Talking to a friend a couple of weeks earlier Ken was encouraged to attend Southern Gables and to call me. The friend wrote my phone number on a piece of paper and handed it to Ken. After that conversation, Ken laid the phone number on the table and forgot all about it.

Then two weeks later Ken hit bottom emotionally. After years of struggle, failure, and the discouragement of his life, he reached the conclusion that he couldn't go on. Sometime earlier he had purchased a handgun. That night he got it out and loaded it. Earlier that evening he had purchased a bottle of alcohol. He got the bottle and a glass and with the handgun he walked to the table. His intention was to drink himself into sufficient courage to commit suicide. As he laid the gun on the table he noticed the piece of paper, with the phone number that he had laid their two weeks earlier.

Instead of picking up the glass, he picked up the phone and called me.

When I received his phone call that evening, I had no idea a bottle of alcohol and a loaded revolver were both waiting to be used. After we prayed, Ken threw the alcohol out and returned the pistol to its place.

- Did chance have a friend give Ken my phone number weeks earlier?
- Was it chance that had Ken lay the phone number on the table instead of throwing it away?
- Was it chance that had Ken lay the gun by the piece of paper?
- Was it chance that had me immediately available to speak to Ken when he called?

Was it chance or was it God?

Is God personally active in your life? When everything is going well in our lives, it is very easy for us to say, "God is good." It is easy to believe that God is personally smiling

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

down on us. But what about when we encounter the truly hard times of life? Are we then so certain that God is acting on our behalf? I remember a young woman looking at me with tears filling her eyes as she said, "I don't know if I can stand it anymore." In her case it was physical suffering—she was afraid that she'd finally crack and that she'd join Job's wife, desiring to finally curse God and die.

"I don't know if I can stand it anymore" is a statement that is made in the minds of many Christians. A wife in a painful marriage; a child or young person after years of insecurity

in a breaking or broken home; or a man or woman without work and losing confidence in him or herself. The Christians in Rome, to whom the Apostle Paul was writing, apparently had it very rough. Their suffering, like ours, was not only suffering for their faith but also suffering for just being part of the human race. Suffering job losses, physical illness, and families that self-destruct, and the ever-present suffering that comes from being sinful people, deeply disappointed even in ourselves, was common even then.

In the 8th chapter of Romans, Paul writes to encourage those Christians:

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In 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. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. 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 8:15-30)

In these verses Paul writes:

- (15-16) By grace through faith in Christ we have been adopted into God's family; we are His children.
- (17) As God's children we are co-heirs with Christ of a future of experiencing and reflecting the glory of God.
- (21) That future will be lived in resurrected bodies on the new earth.
- (25) Because that is our certain future, we are called to wait patiently for it.

But waiting is not our strong suit. Especially when the present overwhelms us. These are Christians who look forward to that promised future but don't know how they can manage in the mean time.

In Romans 8, we see what God is doing right now that encourages us and even enables us live patiently and fruitfully. As we read earlier, in Romans 8:26-28, *"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. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. 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. "The phrase, "in the same way," is a word that can also be translated "so also," "likewise," or "similarly." Not only, as we saw earlier, does God give us a certain hope of the future, but "so also," or "likewise," or "similarly," or "in the same way" He gives us further encouragement.

Remember the question with which I began? Is God personally and actively involved in your life? Paul says, "Let me tell you what God is doing in our lives right now!" To help us look at these verses. I want to look at them in two parts:

1. Our problem
2. God's provision

First, our problem. Paul describes the problem in two ways: As "our weakness and that "We do not know what we ought to pray for." (Verse 26) The word "weakness" is the opposite of "strength" and refers to our inability. I love the

As God's children we are co-heirs with Christ of a future of experiencing and reflecting the glory of God.

story Jim Dobson told years ago about his then three-year-old son Ryan. Ryan was hanging helplessly off the back of a truck muttering to himself "Somebody help the boy—won't somebody help the boy?" He recognized his inability, his weakness.

Spiritually speaking, we are little children in a strong man's world. Ephesians 6 says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil..." And these forces are far superior to any of us, and all of us. Martin Luther got it right in his famous hymn:

"This world with devils filled is threatening to undo us, were not the right Man on our side our striving would be losing."

But not only are we weak compared to forces outside of ourselves, we also know our internal weaknesses. Romans 7 struck a chord with all of us: we recognize that we struggle with ourselves and we often seem weak in the face of our sinful tendencies. When attack comes, when the enemy strikes against our souls, when we face temptations, when severe difficulties come into our lives, the truth is we are weak.

But notice how Paul also describes our problem: *"We do not know what we ought to pray for."* Our weakness affects even our prayers. Life can be so confusing that we don't even know what to ask of God. Or we are so discouraged that we don't even pray; we're just emotionally out of gas. And even when we do pray, our prayers need correcting to

So how does the Spirit help? "The Spirit intercedes for us."

be what they ought to be. We ask too often out of mixed motives, or worse, wrong motives. James 4:3 says, *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."*

But look at God's solution to our weakness and ignorant prayers. In verse 26 it states it in general terms as simply *"The Spirit helps us..."* The word "help" means in the Bible just what it means to us: To take part in someone's burden, to take hold of something with someone. We have the problem, we are carrying the burden and the Spirit comes alongside and takes hold of it with us. He shares the weight, the burden, or the pain. When our weakness and

inability leaves us in jeopardy, the Spirit helps. When I was very young I followed my brother to the swimming hole in the river. Because I couldn't yet swim, I was in the shallow part and he went to the deep end. When I wanted to leave I went to the deep part to get him and one of the other boys pushed me in. Just as my brother was running to dive into the water, out of the corner of his eye, he thought he saw me falling into the deep water. He swam to me and pulled me out. That may be a homely illustration but it certainly describes weakness, inability and help. When we are weak, when we are unable, the Spirit's promise is that He helps us.

So how does the Spirit help? "*The Spirit intercedes for us.*" Again this word meant to the Romans what it means to us: It means to ask on someone else's behalf. To go in their place and make requests for them. But there are some very special aspects of this intercession. First of all He intercedes for us in a way "*that words cannot express.*" This doesn't mean a private language; it means no language. It is not words of a peculiar kind but non-verbal communication between the Spirit and the Father. Secondly, He "*intercedes for us with groans...*" God, the Holy Spirit, is not a mechanical robot, an unfeeling, spiritual machine. He intercedes with "groans." In His intercession for us, He feels what we feel.

In his book entitled *A Tearful Celebration*, Dr. Jim Means of our church, described the ordeal of his first wife Norma's cancer. He wrote, "There is the vivid image of hospital corridor. A year and a half after the first surgery, the cancer had spread to the spine and Norma was having trouble walking because of the pain. One day when I was leaving her room she insisted on walking me part way to the elevator. After she turned to head back to her room, I went on but then turned to see her leaning against the wall

for support as she limped in agony back to that room." Then Jim writes, "I ached for her." The Holy Spirit of God aches for us no less.

We hear God's compassion in these examples:

- In Hebrews 4:15: We have a high priest who is able to *"sympathize with our weaknesses."*
- In Luke 23:34 Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

We see his compassion again in Matthew 23:37: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."*

It is in our weakness that the Holy Spirit of God tenderly, with groans, with sympathetic care, begins to intercede for us.

However, not only does the Holy Spirit tenderly intercede for us, but He also asks on our behalf for exactly what we need. When you are in your weakness, when you are too far down emotionally to even know what to pray, know this: The Holy Spirit is praying for you, asking for exactly what you need. Look at Verse 27: *"And he (God the Father) who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."* The God who knows even our thoughts and intentions surely knows the mind of His own Spirit, especially when you consider that the Spirit intercedes in ways wholly consistent with the will of God. One commentator expressed it this way: "Our failure to know God's will and consequent inability to petition God specifically and assuredly is met by God's Spirit, who himself expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God."¹ The Spirit of God, with immediate awareness of our situations, and with deep

compassion, is personally interceding for us every day in the specific ways that fit God's will for us precisely. Christian, even when it is darkest, know that you never walk alone!

And what is the result of that personal intervention by the Spirit of God? Romans 8:28 says, *"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."* That may be one of the most well-known promises in all of Scripture. We love it, but what does it mean? First of all what are the "all things?" "All things" certainly includes the "sufferings" already spoken of earlier in the chapter, but it also includes every circumstance of life. These are not just the good things but also the hard things, even the bad things.

When you are in your weakness the Holy Spirit is praying for you, asking for exactly what you need.

The late English journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained. In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumbo...the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal or trivial to be endurable. This of course is what the cross [of Christ] signifies, and it is the cross more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ."²

Secondly, what or who is working? Is it chance or is it God? If we read only the King James Version of the Bible we might think that it is just a natural outcome of all things working together. *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* (KJV) While that is a perfectly acceptable translation, it is more helpful to see the NIV or NASB translations where it is more explicitly God who is making or causing all things to do what he intends.

- NIV: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good"*
- NASB: *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good..."*

Thirdly, what is the "good" that God works through all things? In all translations the idea is not that everything that happens is good, we know that is not true, but that God uses all things to bring good. One man wrote, "All things work together for good for the saints because God presses them into His service. God uses every event of our lives for the express good of his people. Paul is not talking about some sort of general principle of the universe. You

Christians are those who have turned to Christ, and in trust and obedience desire Him more than anything this life has to offer.

know, when our football coaches tell us it takes the hard times to make the good times, no pain, no gain; that's not what Paul is saying. He is not saying, 'You know, going through suffering makes you a better person.' It's far grander than that. It's far more purposeful. This is not just a mechanistic principle in the universe. This is a specific activity of the sovereign God on behalf of His children whom He has drawn into a saving relationship.³ This is

about the providence of God. "The providence of God is his completely holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing every creature and every action."⁴ God's promise is that right now He is using every circumstance of life to accomplish His good purposes in us and for us.

Fourthly, I want you to notice that this promise is for specific people. Romans 8:28 says, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to **his** purpose."* There are those who say, "Oh, it will all work out in the end." For many people that is not true! In the end, for many, it won't work out. Hebrews 5:27 reminds us, *"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment..."* The stupendous promise of Romans 8:28 is for God's people!

And who are God's people? Remember the old Negro spiritual "Going to Shout All over God's Heaven?" One line in it captures an important truth: "Ev'rybody talkin' 'bout Heav'n ain't goin' there." Not everyone who claims to be a Christian is a Christian. Christians are those who have turned to Christ, and in trust and obedience desire Him more than anything this life has to offer. One man grasped this well when he wrote, "Love for God is *valuing* God and *prizing* God and *revering* God and *admiring* God beyond his gifts. All these words are grasping for that essential response of the heart to the revelation of the glory of God, especially in Christ through the gospel. It is a glad reflex of the heart to all that God is for us in Christ."⁵

But our text further defines the person for whom this is a promise: it is those *"who have been called according to his purpose."* Verse 29 helps us understand this: *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son..."* (Romans 8:29) God brought us into a relationship with Himself for the express purpose of us

reflecting and experiencing the glorious perfections of God. The promise of verse 28 is for all true Christians who do love God, though not yet perfectly, and who are called to be more like Jesus.

I want to give you a biblical example of the kind of “behind the scenes” working of God in our lives. In the opening of the book of Exodus, Moses condenses 500 or more years of history into one short chapter to demonstrate what becomes so easily obscured by our shortsightedness.

- In Canaan, a much-loved son, Joseph, is separated from his father and sold to slave traders by his own brothers.
- Joseph’s slavery turns to a privileged place in Egypt, but then prison, and then privilege once again.
- A famine threatens the lives of his family back in Canaan.
- But then the family is saved by Joseph’s position in Egypt.
- It is then that we read Joseph’s prescient understanding of Romans 8:28: *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done.”*
- Over a period of 400 years the now huge family’s privileged place in Egypt turned to slavery.
- And then the cruelest time of all—the slaughter of their newborn sons.

But what was happening through it all? God has been in charge all the time, working His plan for the salvation of the world. The very river that was supposed to kill the Israelite babies became the river that floated their deliverer, Moses, right into the Pharaoh’s own house. And the rest is, as we say, “history.”

I suppose we could misunderstand and conclude that we are nothing or that we are mere pawns on a great

chessboard controlled by God. But what we see is that God is in control of every detail of life because of His love for us. God sees far beyond the 15 minutes that someone might live, or the years of suffering someone else might experience. God controls the immediate circumstances and sets things up for the future. Oh the matchless wisdom of a God who can work “all things together for good” for His glory and therefore the welfare of His people forever.

God brought us into a relationship with Himself for the express purpose of us reflecting and experiencing the glorious perfections of God.

Christian, you are not on your own. God’s Spirit, who knows your smallest and greatest needs, is interceding for you with requests that perfectly match God’s good will for you. And God is working in every detail of life to bring about His purposes, which in His grace includes us.

Tony Dungy is the coach of the Superbowl champion Indianapolis Colts. On Wednesday, I received a copy of his book entitled *Quiet Strength*. I have read many times that Dungy is a faithful Christian and so I was interested in his story. Having forgotten about his teenaged son’s death, I expected the book to be another rags to riches, obscurity to fame, story like so many others. But as I read, I realized that in spite of his high profile position, here was a man who faced and faces what we all face—the loss of a job, separation from his family, deep disappointments, betrayals, and great loss.

In the midst of a high-pressure job, his mother died and then his father died in 2004. But the worst was when he received a phone call in the middle of the night less than a year ago, on December 22. It took a few minutes before

the nurse's words sunk in that his seventeen-year-old son Jamie was dead. Dungy wrote, "It wasn't until days later, when I was standing over Jamie's casket and preparing for the visitation, that it really started to sink in and become real. (In this life), I'm never going to see him again."⁶

Two years earlier, Dungy's quarterback, Trent Dilfer, lost his five-year-old son. At that time Dungy told Dilfer that he didn't know if he could handle such a tragedy, Dilfer told him, "You could Coach, if you had to. The Lord will give you the strength at that time, because you can't do it alone. Dungy then writes, "Now facing my own tragedy, I knew I needed to accept the truth that God's love and power were sufficient. If I really believed it, I needed to use this personal and painful time to validate that belief. God would work for the good of those who love him, even if we didn't understand how he was going to do it...Why do bad things happen? I don't know. Why did Jamie die? I don't know. But I do know that God has the answers, I know that he loves me and I know he has a plan—whether it makes sense to me or not."⁷ At the funeral service, Tony Dungy stood before a crowd of people and said, "What's kept our family going these last couple of days is what we believe, and we believe God when He says that he works all things for good for those who love the Lord. It's hard to accept because we can't see it, but we have to believe it."⁸

I began with a story today wherein the "good" unfolded in a few weeks. I told another from Exodus that unfolded over 500 years. I could tell you other stories that demonstrate God's use of myriad circumstances over a long period of time to bring about a "good" end. We love those stories, as well we should. But I have also told you briefly the story of Tony Dungy, whose son is dead. I could tell you of John the Baptist, who was beheaded, the story of Jeremiah who died in exile, or of Peter who was crucified upside down.

And I could tell you stories of the faithful saints through the ages who lived out their lives on earth in seeming obscurity, afflicted with many of the miseries of this life but faithful to God. As difficult as our lives may be or as incidental as they may seem, they are planned by a sovereign, benevolent God. We are the objects of His love but we must see that love from the perspective of eternity, not just from the perspective of our present circumstances. God says He is at work even now, in your life and mine.

"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. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. 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." (Romans 8:26-28)

End Notes

¹ Douglas Moo, *NICNT*, p. 526

² Malcolm Muggeridge, *Homemade*, July, 1990

³ By Max Forsyth <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/romans/romansvol3to4/28bRomans8.28to30.htm>

⁴ Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English)

⁵ John Piper, "All things for Good" Part 1

⁶ Tony Dungy, *Quite Strength*, p. 249

⁷ Ibid, p. 261

⁸ Ibid, p. 254

Additional Thoughts:

Linda Dillow - *Calm My Anxious Heart*

"We say we want more faith but really what we want is sight. Sight says I see that it's good for me, so God must have sent it. But, faith says God sent it so it must be good for me."

What is the "good" of Romans 8:28?

The Christian understands the word "good" in another sense. By "good," he understands *spiritual good*. "Ah!" saith he, "I do not call gold good, but I call faith good! I do not think it always for my good to increase in treasure, but I know it is good to grow in grace. I do not know that it is for my good that I should be respectable and walk in good society; but I know that it is for my good that I should walk humbly with my God. I do not know that it is for my good that my children should be about me, like olive branches round my table, but I know that it is for my good that I should flourish in the courts of my God, and that I should be the means of winning souls from going down into the pit. I am not certain that it is altogether for my good to have kind and generous friends, with whom I may hold fellowship; but I know that it is for my good that I should hold fellowship with Christ, that I should have communion with him, even though it should be in his sufferings. I know it is good for me that my faith, my love, my every grace should grow and increase, and that I should be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ my blessed Lord and Master." Well, Christian, thou hast got upon the meaning of the text, then. "All things work together," for that kind of good to God's people. "Well!" says one, "I don't think anything of that, then." No, perhaps thou dost not; it is not very likely swine should ever lift their heads from their troughs to think aught of stars. I do not much wonder that thou shouldst despise spiritual good, for thou art yet "in the gall

of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity;" a stranger to spiritual things, and let thy despising of spiritual things teach thee that thou art not spiritual, and therefore thou canst not understand the spiritual, because it must be spiritually discerned. To the Christian, however, the highest good he can receive on earth is to grow in grace. "There!" he says, "I had rather be a bankrupt in business than I would be a bankrupt in grace; let my fortune be decreased—better that, than that I should backslide; there! let thy waves and thy billows roll over me—better an ocean of trouble than a drop of sin, I would rather have thy rod a thousand times upon my shoulders, O my God, than I would once put out my hand to touch that which is forbidden, or allow my foot to run in the way of gainsayers." The highest good a Christian has here is spiritual good.

Spurgeon, October 18, 1857 "The True Christian's Blessedness" <http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0159.htm>

Chapter Fifteen

The Preservation of the Saints

Romans 8:29-30 (also 31-39)

Ruth Calkin, a poet who lives in Claremont, California wrote a poem entitled "At Such Times," capturing the very response I think God wants us to have from our study of Romans 8.

At Such Times

Ruth Harms Calkin

God, there are times
In the midst of heartache and heartbreak
When there is no comfort, no solace
Anywhere at all.
There are times
When in my crumbling state of mind
I feel I can no longer endure –
Not for a day, not even an hour.
It is at such times, O God
That I draw heavily
Upon Your unfathomable love.
At such times I implore
Your transforming peace.
At such times I live
By the power and promises
Of a Father who cares infinitely more
Than I can begin to grasp or comprehend.
Today, dear God, is a "such time."¹

Life can be so haphazard. Yes, there are good times, even great times. But there are also times when it feels that everything is out of control. How do we keep our bearings in the midst of life rushing at us? And how do we keep from discouragement when it appears that everything is coming undone. We know we are Christians but there are times when we wonder about God, we wonder about ourselves, and we wonder about the purpose and future of it all. If we were able to find and read the personal journals of the

We know we are Christians but there are times when we wonder about God and the purpose and future of it all.

Christians who lived in Rome in the Apostle Paul's day, I think we would read of the same joys, fears, questions and concerns that face us today.

Romans chapter 8, probably more than any other passage in the Bible, is meant to strengthen our faith; to build our confidence in the preserving power of God. Paul would say it this way elsewhere:

- To the Philippians: *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Philippians 1:6
- To Timothy: *"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."* 2 Timothy 1:12

But here, to the Roman Christians and to us, he spends more time making that same point, saying it in several ways, and desiring that it becomes part of our fabric of our faith.

Look at Romans 8:28-39:

"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. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Can anyone doubt that Romans 8 is meant to encourage those who are truly Christian? Paul begins the chapter with *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:1,2) He develops those thoughts and then he adds: *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed*

we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”(Romans 8:16-17)

And then, as we saw earlier, he adds that in the meantime, while waiting for that glory that will be ours when Christ comes again, God helps us: *“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. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. 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.”(Romans 8:26-28)*

And what is God’s purpose for us? Verses 29-30 answer the question for us: *“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)*

- Should I go to college?
- What should be my major?
- Should I get married?
- Where should we live?
- What kind of job should I take?
- Which church should we commit to?
- How do we raise our kids to be faithful Christians and responsible citizens?

All of these questions and many more are questions we need to answer. But we’ll get off track, we’ll get lost in the weeds of the particulars, if we don’t have an idea of our overarching purpose to which all of these decisions lead. God’s ultimate purpose for me is not to be a college graduate, or a parent, or a stock analyst, or to be a good

church member.

Paul wants us to step back and remember what God ultimately has in mind. He describes it in verse 29 as being predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His son and in verse 30 as being glorified. We've thought about this in previous sermons in this series, so I just want to summarize it here. From before the beginning, God intended to call out a people whom He would rescue from sin's damaging and damning control and would reshape into the likeness of His Son, Jesus.

- We were made to enjoy God.
- We were made to experience the perfect character of God—His love, joy, peace, gentleness, mercy and grace.
- We were made to have and reflect that character to each other.

That's God's purpose for us. He is working out that purpose in us now and He completes it when Jesus comes again. That purpose points us in the right direction for all the intermediate questions of life.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...

But in verses 28-39, Paul's point is not so much to dwell on what God's purpose is for us as to show us how certain we may be that God will in fact accomplish His purpose. Paul is not here trying to convince people to become Christians. He is not even here trying to convince Christians to live holy lives. He is here showing us how confident we may be that God will do what He purposed to do. We can count on it. We can know that nothing can keep God from accomplishing in our lives what He intended from before the creation of the world.

Listen again to the way Paul declares this great truth. I'm going to remove that "purpose" clause so you can see more clearly the main point. Paul here uses a literary device called a sorites. This is when the predicate of the first line becomes the subject of the next line:

"For those God foreknew he also predestined...And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30) On the lighter side, one man I read gave another example of a sorites:

"I have quit playing golf.

The reason for that is simple.

I needed a ball and I went to the store and purchased one.

And that which was purchased was struck.

And that which was struck flew.

And that which flew landed.

And that which landed splashed.

So I quit."²

***My relationship with Him must be anchored
in Him for it to be worth anything.***

Paul's point in using this device is to show that the end result (we are glorified) was assured right from the beginning (when God "foreknew" us). Paul shows that these acts of God toward us are linked in such a way that nothing can break the chain. We need to look at each of the links briefly to see how comprehensive God's plan is and most importantly, how certain the outcome is.

Foreknew

First, Paul writes, "For those God foreknew..." This is an important word. Some suggest that because God knows everything, He knew ahead of time who would respond to His offer of life and He predestined, called, justified and will glorify them. That is the Arminian view held by some. But if

we found out that the word "foreknew" meant nothing more than knowing ahead of time, it would defeat the very purpose of this whole chapter. If our salvation is ultimately based on us, on our ability to choose God, then we ought to know that we have no hope. A relationship with God that is anchored in something as helpless and fickle as my choice of God gives me no confidence at all. My relationship with Him must be anchored in Him for it to be worth anything.

The word "foreknew" is used two ways in the New Testament: it does indeed twice mean simply to know ahead of time.

- Acts 26:5: *"They have known me for a long time..."*
- 2 Peter 3:17: *"since you already know this..."*

But the other four uses of the word, including the one here, refer not to knowing ahead of time but to a special choice ahead of time.

- 1 Peter 1:20 says, *"He (Jesus) was chosen (foreknown) before the creation of the world..."* Does this merely mean that the Father knew the Son before or does this mean that the triune God determined before time what the Son would do? Clearly the latter, his being foreknown is a particular kind of foreknowing.
- Acts 2:23 says, Jesus *"was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge..."* Does this mean Jesus died merely because God foresaw that the Romans would kill Jesus or that before time, the triune God made a special choice? Again, clearly the latter.
- Romans 11:2 *"God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew."* Here, speaking of Israel (Abraham and Jacob and their spiritual descendants), it is so clear that God chose them for a relationship with God. It wasn't just that God knew ahead of time that they

would choose God. This “foreknew” is much stronger than that.

Here’s the way the Old Testament declared it: *“The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you.”* (Deuteronomy 7:7,8) God’s foreknowing is not reaction but action—God chose to love them. When the word “foreknew” is used to describe this unique relationship we have with God, it goes far beyond mere knowledge before hand.

As in the Old Testament, it stresses relationship, even intimacy as in Adam “knew” his wife. In Genesis 18:19 God speaking of Abraham said, *“For I have chosen (known) him...”* And Jeremiah 1:5 says, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.”* This “knowing” includes loving choice. As theologian John Murray put it, “This is not the foresight that recognizes a difference but the foresight that makes a difference to exist, not the foresight that recognizes existence, but the foresight that determines existence.”³

I am camping on this first word, “foreknew” because as any building is only as strong as its foundation, so this assurance by Paul is only as strong as this first word. And so I want you to see the word Paul uses when he gives the same assurance to the Ephesian Christians. First of all notice that, as in Romans 8, he is describing God’s salvation of us from beginning to end:

“For he chose (elected) 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...We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins...In him we were also chosen...in order

that we...might be for the praise of his glory...And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession..."(Ephesians 1:4-14)

When Paul describes the origin of our salvation in Ephesians 1:3 he uses the word "chosen/elect." When he describes it in Romans 8:29 he uses the word "foreknew."

***"Before I formed you in the womb,
I knew you."***

They are the same truth but "foreknew" is a more intimate word. The basis of God's choice of us is His foreknowing, choosing, electing love—not for what He sees in us but who He is.

Then God does something with that intimate choice to love us, that foreknowing—He predestined us. Romans 8:29 says, *"For those God foreknew he also predestined."* To predestine is to decide ahead of time to make something happen. This word predestined is used a number of times in the Bible.

- Acts 4:28: *"They did what your power and will had decided beforehand (predestined) should happen."*
- Ephesians 1:5: *"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons..."*
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13: *"from the beginning God chose (predestined) you to be saved..."*
- 2 Timothy 1:9: *"God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose (predestining) and grace..."*(See also 1 Corinthians 2:7)

J.I. Packer points out that some say they don't believe in "predestination" but in fact all Christians actually do. First of all, every Christian gives thanks to God for their salvation. Why? Because we all know that if we are saved it is by God's grace, not our merit. And secondly, all Christians ask God to save others. Why? Because we know that if God doesn't do that saving work, no one would be saved. As he concludes it, "On our feet we may have arguments about it, but on our knees we are all agreed."⁴

Because of nothing in us, God set His affection on us (He foreknew us) and then determined (predestined) to make us like Jesus. One man wrote, "Everyone who is eventually saved can only ascribe his salvation, from the first step to

When God calls us out, we respond, we trust Him. It is called irresistible grace.

the last, to God's favor and act. Human merit must be excluded: and this can only be by tracing back the work far beyond the obedience which evidences (salvation), or even the faith which appropriates salvation; (tracing it back) to the act of spontaneous favor on the part of that God who foresees and foreordains from eternity all his works."⁵

Called

But God does not leave it with predestination: "*And those he predestined, he also called...*" (Romans 8:30) Every use of this word "called" in the New Testament when God is doing the "calling" means God's effective summoning. "Effective" means that the ones who are called, come! It is not that God calls out and some respond; no, when God calls, the hearer responds because God ensures it. 1 Corinthians 1:23-24 says, "*We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ*

the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (See also: Jude 1: *“To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ...”* and Revelation 17:14)

Jesus said in John 6:37, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me...”* When Jesus called out to dead Lazarus, what happened? Did Lazarus lie in the grave wondering whether he would come out? Of course not, when God granted him life, he acted. So it is with us. When God calls us out, we respond, we trust Him. It is called irresistible grace. It is the effectual call described in the Westminster Catechism: *“Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he both persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.”* (See also 1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

Justified

Romans 8:29-30 goes on to say, *“For those God foreknew he also predestined...And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”* And those God called He also justified. Our extensive study of this theme of justification through the first five chapters of Romans leads us to believe that those God calls do in fact respond in faith and are declared righteous in God’s sight through the sacrificial death and resurrection of God the Son.

Glorified

And so Paul concludes, *“those he justified, he also glorified.”* With this word “glorified,” Paul is back to the main theme of this chapter. Glorified is a reference to our new bodies on the new earth forever experiencing and reflecting the glory of God. And Paul is so certain of the

outcome for Christians that he puts the word “glorified” in the past tense, as if it had already happened. Do you see it? What God starts He finishes! Listen to Jesus describe the certainty of the true Christian’s future: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” (John 6:37-39; See also John 10:27-29)

I titled this message “The Preservation of the Saints.” I meant for that title to be a bit of a play on words. We often speak of “The Perseverance of the Saints” meaning that those whom God saves He truly saves and transforms; real Christians do persevere in the faith and evidence in their lives the transforming power of God. Now however I am speaking to the “preserving” power of God behind our “perseverance.” It is because God preserves, keeps, and protects us that we can persevere. Christian, this you can know: your relationship with God is secure because, before the creation of the world, God determined to preserve His children to the very end.

Paul goes on to conclude this chapter by saying that because we are so secure in God’s determined love, nothing can separate us from him. Paul first communicates this by asking a number of rhetorical questions: “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 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.”

I want to give you an illustration of the effect of these words. John Wesley, the famous preacher of the 1700s, was a life-long opponent of slavery and particularly the slave trade. He was therefore a strong supporter of the English abolitionist, William Wilberforce. Wesley neared death during a time when it appeared that all of Wilberforce's efforts would be for nothing. The last letter Wesley wrote was to Wilberforce and in it he said, "My dear sir, unless the Divine Power has raised you up, I see not how you can go (on) with your glorious enterprise... Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition from men and devils. But if God is for us, who can be against us? Are all of them together stronger than He? Go on in the name of God." Soon after

Glorified is a reference to our new bodies on the new earth forever experiencing and reflecting the glory of God. What God starts He finishes

this a visitor came to Wesley's bedside but, in dying weakness, Wesley could not easily make himself heard. Then with great effort he called out his final words. With an arm raised in token of victory, he spoke in labored but triumphant tones, "The best of all is, God is with us."⁶

In words of even greater confidence, words carried along by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul closes this section of his letter with some of the most triumphant words ever penned:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than

conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Bud Kratzer, of our church, was an elder here for several years. 4 ½ years ago Bud was diagnosed with a life-threatening cancer. They told him he'd be fortunate to live 5 years. His battle has been long and hard and sadly, the latest test numbers were not good. Bud truly takes each day at a time. In the moments of greatest temptation to despair, Bud can lay hold of this great truth, "Nothing, not death itself, can separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord."

She's young, she has children, and her husband left, providing no support. How do you manage financially, how do you parent sufficiently, and how do you keep on when the future looks so bleak? She lays hold of this great truth, "Nothing, not even life at its worst, can separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord."

It was April 1945, eleven days before the Allied forces liberated the prison where Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was being held. In a last fit of evil the Nazis sentenced him to death. Ten years later a military doctor reported witnessing Bonhoeffer's kneeling in prayer before his execution. The doctor said, "In the almost 50 years I have worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God." Bonhoeffer's last words were: "This is the end, for me the beginning of life." Remember "Nothing, not even evil, can separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord."⁷

Tiffany Johnson was one of two killed at the YWAM school in Arvada recently. Rich Peterson received an e-mail on Wednesday in which a man described what he heard at the funeral. Speaking of the young woman who died, someone said, "She was lying in a pool of blood while the gunman fled. A friend was holding her head and Tiffany asked, 'Is it serious?' Her friend responded, 'Yes, I think it is.' Tiffany then said with her last breath, 'Well then, that's what it's all about. It's all about Jesus.'"⁸ To Tiffany, to her friend and to her family we cry out with Paul, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord."

Listen to this poem, describing so well our emotions as we reflect on God's steadfast love and hold on our lives:

"Twixt gleams of joy and clouds of doubt

Our feelings come and go;

Our best estate is tossed about

In ceaseless ebb and flow.

"No mood of feeling, form of thought,

Is constant for a day;

But thou, O Lord, thou changest not:

The same thou art always.

"I grasp thy strength, make it mine own,

My heart with peace is blest;

I lose my hold, and then comes down

Darkness, and cold unrest.

Let me no more my comfort draw

From my frail grasp of thee,

In this alone rejoice with awe

Thy mighty grasp of me.

"Thy purpose of eternal good

Let me but surely know;

On this I'll lean—let changing mood

And feeling come or go

Glad when thy sunshine fills my soul,
Not lorn when clouds o'ercast
since thou within thy sure control
Of love dost hold me fast."

"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

End Notes

¹ <http://www.tagnet.org/lewistonsda/Poems.htm>

² From Tom Browning's sermon on Romans 8:29-39 http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/mp3/romans_browningpdf.html

³ Douglas Moo, *NICNT*, Romans, p. 533

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p. 12

⁵ C.J. Vaugn in Stott, p. 250

⁶ Frank Boreham, *A Casket of Cameos*, p. 99

⁷ Source Unknown

⁸ From Dean Cowles in e-mail dated 12/12/07

Please see Appendix F for additional notes on the subject of "Foreknowledge."

Chapter Sixteen

God is for Us!

Romans 8:31-39

Christians are taught to be people who live expectantly, who rise above their present circumstances and see a better future, who trust God even in the darkest experiences of life and who have a faith in God even when the evidence seems to contradict it. But some experiences get in the way of that confidence. Christians are taught that by God's grace all is well between them and God, that their lives are under His control and that their futures are secure. But we are sometimes tempted to think otherwise. Is God truly in control of my present circumstances and my future? Is it really well with my soul? And will I always remain faithful to God and belong to Him?

Several years ago *TIME* magazine reported a poll, which stated that 81% of Americans believe in heaven as a place where people live forever when they die. And most of those people believe they will go to that heaven when they die. But I wonder how certain of that they are. How certain are you that when you die you will go to heaven? But the future is not the only issue. What about right now? How certain are you that your life is actually under control? When life is going along "swimmingly" we don't wonder. But when plans begin to fall apart, when all our efforts and expertise can't get life back on track, when it finally become too obvious to miss that life isn't going to get back on track, there is a growing suspicion that maybe no one is in control. Maybe life is simply a series of random circumstances with no purpose and no end but death.

Have you ever thought those thoughts? Though you may not admit it to another living soul, do you ever have serious doubts about life, about God? I said earlier that a lot of things conspire against our sense of confidence in our relationship with God. Not only thoughts of death, and not only the circumstances of life over which we have no control but even our own conduct conspires against a firm confidence in our relationship to God. We know our own failings so well we sometimes wonder if we know God at all.

Given the way we act, we wonder if we have any relationship with God except just being under His condemnation. Altogether it is rather easy to fall into some frightening doubts about our relationship with God. A lot of people will say "God is love" but they aren't so certain He loves them particularly and unfailingly.

If God is for us, who can be against us?

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul was writing to people who lived, as we do, in a "real" world. They lived in a culture that feared death and had all sorts of uninformed ideas about it. They lived in a world where financial and physical security were fleeting at best. And since they had become Christians they had the added pressure of being social outcasts and worse yet being perceived as threats to society. Becoming Christians, they had put everything on the line. All their doubts inspired by death and thoughts of life after death, all their doubts inspired by the darkest circumstances of life, all their doubts inspired by their own continuing sinfulness could be expressed in one central question: Could and would God pull off what He promised? If you have become a Christ-follower, you too have put everything on the line. You committed your eternal future

to Him. You committed your present, sometimes seemingly out of control, circumstances to Him. You even committed your inadequacies, your sinfulness, and your faithlessness to Him. You have placed your life, now and forever, in the hands of God. The question is, will God come through?

We are about to look at one of the most positive and affirming passage in the entire Bible. Christian, if ever again you doubt your relationship to God, this text is medicine for the mind, salve for the soul, and a healing balm for the heart. Look at Romans 8:28-39. These are familiar words, but I want you to read them again:

"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.

"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to

separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If I were to place a caption over these words or if I were to hang a banner capturing the idea of these words I would write: "God's Unfailing Love." If God by His grace has called you to Himself and you have by faith received Christ's righteousness as your own, then you belong to God, and nothing, I repeat nothing, can separate you from His love. You can depend on it; you can trust God.

- Is God stronger than your death?
- Is God greater than your circumstances?
- Is God's grace larger than your sin? Yes!

"What then shall we say in response to this?" (8:31a) Paul said he's going to give a response, but a response to what? A response probably to all he's written thus far, but at least to what he's just written:

- God has declared you not guilty (8:1-4)
- God's Spirit dwells in you (8:9-11)
- God has adopted you into His family (8:16)
- Your future makes the present worth it (8:18)
- The Spirit of God prays for you (8:26)
- God takes even the hardest things of life and uses them for our good (8:28)
- What God starts, He finishes (8:29-30)

"Now", Paul says, "what can we conclude from these things: *"What then shall we say in response to this?"* (Romans 8:31) Paul says you can count on God for several reasons.

First of all, you can count on Him because in verse 31 we read, "If God is for us who can be against us?" That rhetorical question has an obvious answer—"Nobody." "If God is for us (nobody) can be against us." Now it doesn't mean we have no adversaries or difficulties. But it does

mean that if God is for us, by comparison, the adversaries don't count.

The schoolhouse to which my brother and sisters and I walked, when I was a child, was about a mile from our farm home. There was one boy in particular, with whom I had trouble for a few weeks. He was stronger and faster than me. And when school was out in the afternoon he would hide in the bushes by the road to my home and literally attack me. After a couple of such attacks, I remember asking my older and much larger and stronger brother to walk with me to our home. When my brother was with me I would whistle and laugh as I walked past the

***If God by His grace has called you to Himself
and you have by faith received Christ's
righteousness as your own, then you belong
to God.***

place where I knew that boy was lying in wait. If my brother was for me, nobody could be against me! The supreme, eternal, sovereign, creator, Lord of all is on your side. If God is for you who can be against you? There are four words in that verse that are a summary and affirmation of the Gospel: God is for us. We who deserve God's wrath because of our sin have been granted His grace. Now it is true: He is no longer against us, He is for us. And if God is for me, life's difficulties and even death itself cannot defeat me.

The second reason Paul gives why you can count on God is in verse 32: *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. Meaning, certainly if God did the

greater thing, that is gave His own Son, He will do the lesser thing—give us whatever we need. Several years ago a friend of ours volunteered for surgery to have one of his kidneys removed to give to his daughter. The man was old enough and knew enough about the risks to his own health that he had some fear about his own future. But his love for his daughter was so great that he risked his own life. Now can you imagine months later that father refusing to drive his daughter to the doctor's office for a check up. If he would do the greater, risk his life, then surely he would do the lesser.

Rom 5:10 says it this way, *"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life."* God loves you so much that the curse of God against your sin fell on Jesus—nothing was

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

held back. The severity of the sentence against sin was not mitigated; Jesus bore all our punishment. If God would, for your sake, pour out His wrath on His own son (if God in Christ would suffer damnation in your place), then no longer wonder if He will continue to love you, keep you, sustain you, and finally take you to be with Himself.

Linda Anderson of Georgia has a 19-year-old daughter named B.J. For 17 years B.J. has been mentally impaired. So severe is her disability that she has constant headaches, convulsions and strokes. She has never walked or talked and since the strokes, she never will. Linda has been with her daughter B.J. every minute, changing her, bathing her and taking hours to feed her liquid with a spoon so she

won't choke. The daughter, B.J.'s, many convulsions each day end with her body as limp as if she were dead. The mother, Linda, writes of her fear, of her frustrations and of her tiredness.¹ What motivates her to go on? There is no pay-off visible here; Linda gets nothing except more tired and older. What motivates her? Love! You can't test it, measure it, or even analyze it, it just is. It baffles scientists and psychologists. It is love. And greater than that is how God loves you.

The third reason why we can count on God is given in verse 33: *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies."* The words "charge" and "justifies" are legal terms. In order to understand what is being said here, imagine the following scene: God is in His courtroom. He is judge, jury and executioner. As in the book of Job, Satan approaches the judge and says, "See your so-called servant there? Yes, that one, Jerry." Satan continues, "God, I know you are holy, and that sin is a violation of your holiness, a rebellion against your sovereignty and I know you are just and so sin must be punished." "Certainly, God, it has not escaped your notice that Jerry sinned today. He knows how you feel about those things and yet he rebelliously went ahead. What about it God, aren't you going to punish him? He deserves hell."

In the Old Testament book of Zechariah there is a scene similar to what I'm describing here. A man named Joshua was standing before the Lord. He was standing there in filthy clothes symbolic of his sinfulness. Standing at his side, to accuse him before God, was Satan. The Lord turns to Satan and rebukes him and dismisses him and his accusations. The Lord goes on to say that Joshua is a man that the Lord has chosen. And then the Lord directs that his filthy clothes be removed and that clean, rich garments be

placed on him. The symbolism is apparent; Satan's accusations are dismissed because God has chosen to forgive Joshua's sins and grant him God's own holiness. If God has forgiven him, there is no charge against him. Since God has forgiven you for all your sin, past, present and future, there is now no case against you and there never will be one against you. Christ paid for your sin. God justified you and in spite of the accusations, there is no valid charge against you. You can count on God because He provided for your forgiveness.

The fourth reason why you can count on God is given in verse 34: *"Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."* Condemn means to judge as guilty, to pass sentence. Who is the only one who has the right to judge and pass sentence? God. But rather than sentencing us to death, what did He do? He declared us not guilty on the basis of His death for us. Who can condemn you? Only Jesus and He won't because He died for you. But more than that is said here. Not only did He die in our place, He was raised from the dead, proving His power over death and sin. And following His resurrection, He ascended to heaven and is in the exalted position of supreme authority. And from that position does He condemn us—no! He "intercedes for us." Not only does He not condemn us, He aggressively acts on our behalf.

The fifth reason we are to believe in God's unfailing love is given in verses 35-37: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* When are we most likely to doubt God's love and keeping power?

It is when we hurt or when we are in trouble. In 2 Corinthians 11:26-27 we are told Paul went through all of the hardships mentioned here in Romans 8. And in the midst of it, he personally experienced the faithfulness of God, that is, he knew from his own experience that God would not fail him, because God loved him.

You can count on God because He provided for your forgiveness.

There are many of you here who have gone through life's deepest valleys. We look at what you have experienced and are experiencing and wonder if we could make it; we are actually wondering if our God is big enough to see us through. From first-hand experience you can say, "Yes, He is!" The Apostle Paul also could speak from experience:

- He had known tribulation—physical suffering.
- He had known distress—emotional suffering.
- He had known persecution, attacks against him because of his relationship to Jesus.
- He had known famine—hunger
- He had known nakedness—lack of proper clothing and shelter.
- He had known peril—being in constant danger.
- And he had faced death itself.

In fact, according to Romans 8:36, quoting from the Old Testament, we can expect such times of difficulty. Are these things signs of God's anger at us? Are these indications God has abandoned us? No. Verse 37 hearkens back to verse 28. What the world around us sees and means for our harm, what Satan would use to bring us down, God uses for our good. When we are most discouraged, most doubting, and most faithless, even in the circumstances when we are tempted to forsake God, God is

keeping, guarding, loving. “More than conquerors” means that not only do we cope, but God actually takes what was intended for evil and uses it to make good! If the very things we think are most likely to separate us from God not only cannot separate us but actually work together for our good, then surely nothing can separate us from the love of God.

***God has sovereignly fixed His love on you
and nothing can break His hold .***

Some Christians live in the fear that even though God has called them to Himself and has begun a good work in them, they might one day choose to leave God—they might in great temptation choose to abandon God and lose everything. Fear not! God will not let you go. Your relationship to God is not built on your love for Him but on His love for you. Years ago John Shairp wrote these words in old English style but they still speak eloquently of this issue:

“Twixt gleams of joy and clouds of doubt
Our feelings come and go;
Our best estate is tossed about
In ceaseless ebb and flow.
No mood of feeling, form of thought,
Is constant for a day;
But thou, O Lord, thou changest not:
The same thou are alway.

“I grasp thy strength, make it mine own,
My heart with peace is blest;
I lose my hold, and then comes down
Darkness, and cold unrest.
Let me no more my comfort draw

From my frail grasp of thee,
In this alone rejoice with awe -
Thy mighty grasp of me.

"Thy purpose of eternal good
Let me but surely know;
On this I'll lean - let changing mood
And feeling come or go -
Glad when thy sunshine fills my soul,
Not lorn when clouds o'ercast
since thou within thy sure control
Of love dost hold me fast."²

God has sovereignly fixed His love on you and nothing can break His hold because God is greater than all else. Paul's grand conclusion of the whole matter is given to us in verses 38-39: "*For I am convinced that neither*

- *death nor life* (no experience be it of death or the hardships of life)
- *neither angels nor demons* (no person be it human or supernatural)
- *neither the present nor the future* (no time, be it present situations or future ones)
- *neither height nor depth* (no place on earth or in heaven)
- *nor any other thing in all creation* (nothing that has ever been created)
- *Absolutely* nothing can ever separate us from the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I was 9 or 10 years of age and for some reason I was the only one home on the farm as my parents drove into town in the evening to get something. A fierce storm arose; it shook the house. I hid under the covers terrified. Out of the din of the storm I heard a voice, "Jerry, Jerry!" It was my father's voice. I jumped from that bed and ran and threw

myself into his arms. Amazingly the storm had not stopped, the windows still rattled and the wind still howled but I was secure in my father's love and protection. And so are you!

End Notes

¹ Source lost

² Sinclair Ferguson, *Know your Christian Life*, p. 158

Chapter Seventeen

God's Sovereign Choice

Romans 9

Romans 9:1-24:

"I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

"It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.'

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

"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?

"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his

***Paul declares that those whom God chooses
He keeps; He will never fail them.***

mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?"

God promises in Romans 8 that those who are in Christ Jesus can never be separated from the love of God. In fact, in Romans 8 the Apostle Paul articulates some of the grandest truths of the Scriptures:

"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." (Verse 28) And, "For those God foreknew he also predestined... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Verses 29-30) So certain is Paul that those God justifies will be glorified, will spend eternity with God, that

he puts it in the past tense as if already completed. What God starts, God finishes. And then in verses 38-39, the Apostle Paul writes, *"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."* In many ways, Paul declares that those whom God chooses He keeps; He will never fail them.

Now in chapters 9-11 Paul is going to raise an apparent problem with that confidence in God's keeping power—"The problem is the Jews?" Isn't the Old Testament filled with promises to the Jews? But how many Jews do you see in the church? In Romans 9:2-5 Paul acknowledges his own distress over the condition of his fellow-Jews. He feels this so deeply that he says he wishes he could be cursed and cut off rather than his brothers, the Jews. Most Jews weren't responding to the gospel. The question this raises is this: "If God's word, God's promises, to the Jews weren't kept, (if most of the Jews aren't part of God's family) how much confidence can I place in God's choice and keeping of me." Didn't God start something with the Jews that He didn't finish? Didn't the Jews expect unfailing love? If it didn't work out for them, how can I know it will work out for me? Someone might quickly point out that the reason it didn't work out for the Jews is that they didn't believe and follow Jesus. Is that it? Is that what it all boils down to? It all depends on the individual?

If final salvation depended on the Jews and likewise it depends on us, then why all that talk in chapter 8 about God's unfailing love? If in fact we determine the outcome, then the last part of Romans 8 makes little sense. But Paul's whole point was not our ability to remain faithful to God but God's ability to keep us faithful. So that raises the

question: if it all depends on God, didn't God fail with the Jews? And if He did, how can I know He will not fail with me?

There are three questions in this text that Paul answers to ensure us that we are fully secured in God's love and keeping. The three questions form the structure of this part of the letter.

- *"Has God's word failed?"* (9:6)
- *"Is God (therefore) unjust?"* (9:14)
- *"Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?"* (9:19)

The answer to each question then forces the next question.

As I've already indicated, the first of those questions you find implied in verse 6. The statement of verse 6 is, *"It is not as though God's word had failed."* Again, what question is implied? "Has God's word, God's promise, to the Jews, failed?" Paul knew that few Jews were responding to the gospel. And according to verses 4 and 5 that was in spite of the fact that they had so many advantages: God adopted them, God was with them in the tabernacle and Temple, they had the covenants (the promises were given to them), they received God's word (the law)—they had it all. But many of them, maybe most of them, didn't end up trusting in God's Messiah, Jesus.

What happened, "Did God's promise, God's word, fail?" Paul says, "No, God's promise didn't fail!" Paul then goes on to prove that. He begins by noting that most Jews, and even we, have a wrong understanding of who actually has been chosen by God. Many people have the impression that if someone is a Jew by racial lineage, by biological fact, then they are automatically a Jew in the sense of being one of God's chosen, God's elect, God's promised people. But what does Paul say? *"For not all who are descended from Israel*

are Israel. (Israel, you will remember was the name of the father of the 12 tribes of Israel— the grandson of Abraham) *Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.*" (Romans 9:6b-7) In other words, just because they are Abraham's descendants doesn't mean they are Abraham's spiritual children.

Paul already declared this fact. Look back to Romans 2:28, *"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly...No a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly...by the Spirit..."* Corrie Ten Boom's father said it this way, "Just because a mouse is in the cookie jar doesn't mean he's a cookie." So who are the true children of Israel? Who are the true children of God? Now as we answer that, keep in mind the fundamental question: Did God fail? If God chose all Jews and few of

Paul ensures us that we are fully secured in God's love and keeping.

them respond, then God failed. But God did not choose all the descendants of Abraham or Isaac. Instead, as we will see, God chose specific people, one by one, to be His own, to be the recipients of His promises.

In the last part of verse 7 and 8, Paul quotes from the Old Testament. It is not merely because you are a descendant of Abraham that you are one of His children, *"On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."* In other words, it is not merely the natural children of Abraham who are God's children, but God's children are chosen on a different basis. Verse 8 says, *"It is the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."* Abraham fathered two sons—Ishmael first and then Isaac. They were both natural descendants of Abraham. But whom did God choose? Isaac, and not the

firstborn Ishmael.

Now this is very important: when was Isaac chosen? *"For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.'"* (9:9) Before Isaac was born and even before Sarah was pregnant, God promised she would have a son who would be the chosen one. We respond, "That may be true, but surely God's choice of Isaac was because of what God foresaw Isaac would do; He knew Isaac would trust God and be faithful to God so that is why God chose him." Reasoning that way, we conclude that God keeps those who keep themselves in God's love.

Anticipating that reasoning Paul uses another illustration. Skipping to the next generation, Paul reminds his readers of Isaac's and Rebekah's children, Jacob and Esau. They were conceived at the same time: twins. So Paul says in verses 10-12: *"Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in*

God chooses a person strictly of His own free will, not caused by anything He sees in the ones He chooses.

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.'" God's choice of Jacob was not based on parentage or birth order. More importantly notice what he says in verse 11: God chose Jacob over Esau, *"Before they had done anything good or bad."* He intentionally points out that any choice of one over the other was not based on what they would ever do.

What does he say at the beginning of verse 12: *"not by works but by him who calls..."* The choice was not based on works; it was not based on what God foresaw Jacob would do. God's choice of someone is not based on God seeing into the future and choosing the one who would eventually respond correctly. I can hear someone objecting at this point and saying, "You are right, we all agree that God's choice is not based on works, but God foresaw who would have faith and He chose him. In other words, God chooses those who eventually believe." But if verse 11 doesn't sufficiently contradict that kind of thinking look at verse 16: *"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."* (9:16) That our effort, our works, are not the basis of God's choice of who to save has already been stated and granted.

But notice what else God's choice doesn't depend on: *"It does not depend on man's desire."* "Desire" is a word that can be translated as a man's want, a man's wish, a man's decision. Could it be said stronger? God's initial choice of us does not depend on God foreseeing our works or even God foreseeing our faith, our desire. I think these verses make it Biblically untenable for us to still claim that God chooses based on who He foresees will believe. The Bible says it does not depend on man's desire or his effort.

Then what is the basis of God's choice according to verse 11? How God chooses a person is very different from the way we would do it. God chooses them strictly of His own free will, not caused by anything He sees in the ones He chooses. Race and works do not determine God's children. God's children are not determined even by foreseen faith. Then on what basis does God choose? *"In order that God's purpose in election might stand."* (verse 11) The word "purpose" is largely equivalent to the words "plan" or "design." "In order that God's 'design or plan' in election

might stand." Ephesians 1:11-12 says basically the same thing: *"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, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."*

The bases of God's choices are not found in the chosen but in God—His plan and His glory. Again looking at verse 11, God's choices are made in accordance with *"God's purpose in election..."* The word "election" is used much in the Bible in reference to God's choice and means God's choice that is uncaused by anything outside of Himself. But don't think God's choices are arbitrary; no, they are according to His purpose, plan, and for His glory.

So Paul concludes with God's statement to Rebekah: *"The older will serve the younger."* (9:12b-13) God's decision, uninfluenced by anything in Jacob or Esau, was to choose Jacob and not Esau. Paul supports this by quoting from the Old Testament: *"Just as it is written, 'God said, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"* We struggle with that word "hate" on the lips of God. To understand those words we must understand that God is not here describing His emotions; rather He is describing His actions. He loved Jacob, or to say it differently, He chose Jacob but He hated Esau, or to say it differently, He did not choose Esau. Jesus used the word "hate" in somewhat the same way when He said, *"If you don't hate your mother and father, wife and children, and yes, even your own life you cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:26) Jesus was not speaking of an emotion but of a decision about who you would unquestionably choose to put first. So here, God chose Jacob and did not choose Esau.

Remember the main point Paul was making? Did God's word fail in regard to the Jews? Absolutely not! Those whom God chose, God kept! He did not promise to choose everyone and save everyone and then fail to do so. And it is particularly important to note that the promise was not based on anything in the people who were chosen for that would jeopardize the fulfillment. If the choice were based on us then we would be in control of our destiny and any failure on our part would determine God's failure. But God won't leave His promises to sinful fallible people. Praise God that those whom He chooses are kept—God won't fail.

When we hear that God chose us, not for anything He foresaw in us but solely of His own sovereign free choice, then we can take great encouragement that God won't fail us because His choice and His keeping are dependent only on Him and not on us. But instead of being encouraged by that truth, some take exception to it. Look at verse 14,

The bases of God's choices are not found in the chosen but in God—His plan and His glory.

which also contains the second question: "*What then shall we say? Is God unjust?*" (Romans 9:14) Is God unrighteous, evil? It is as if Paul reads our minds? Some still ask that question when they are told that God chooses to give saving faith and grace to one person but not to another. And how does Paul answer the question? Not at all! No. God is not unjust!

Now here Paul has a chance to correct a misunderstanding if he wants to. Did Paul say that God chooses some and doesn't choose others not based on their works or even faith but solely based on something in God? Look at the charge people are making: "Is God unjust?" Surely they

wouldn't make that charge if Paul had said that God chooses based on what He sees we will do. So here is Paul's chance to clear up his message if we have misunderstood him. Surely, we think, it must be something God foresees in those who will be saved or else, we think, God is being arbitrary and that would be unjust or unfair.

But what does Paul do? Does he write, "No, no, you misunderstood me. God knew who would have faith, He knew who would respond, and He knew who would be faithful and those are the ones he chose"? Here's Paul's

When Paul writes about God choosing some to have life, that is not an issue of justice, as if God were being unfair, but rather it is a matter of mercy.

chance, so what does he do? Does he correct it? No! He states the truth of God's sovereign, free, unfettered choice of who would belong to Him even more strongly than before.

Paul defends God's justice differently than we expected, with two Old Testament references. The first is in verses 15 and 16: *"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."* God will have mercy and compassion on whomever He chooses. The first answer to our charge that God is unjust is that our charge itself is faulty; we aren't even focusing on the correct issue. The issue is not justice; the issue is mercy. Paul has already very powerfully made the case, earlier in this letter, that every person deserves eternal punishment and God is in no way obligated to intervene. If everyone went to hell, justice

would be served. When Paul writes about God choosing some to have life, that is not an issue of justice, as if God were being unfair, but rather it is a matter of mercy.

For example, two men deserve to spend the rest of their lives in prison because of their crimes but the governor commutes the sentence of one but not the other. Is that unjust? To be sure it is unequal, but it is not unjust. We sometimes think unequal means unjust. If you give one child a larger piece of candy than another, be ready for the charge of unfairness. But it is not necessarily unfair, in fact it could be the fairest thing based on something the child doesn't even know about; but it is unequal. But again, unequal doesn't necessarily mean unjust. The governor was under no obligation to commute the sentence of either man; both deserved to spend the rest of their lives in prison. The Governor's act wasn't unjust; it was merciful. No one can claim they deserve God's mercy. If He chooses to have mercy on some who deserve wrath, that is not about justice, it is about mercy.

We want to judge God by our standards. We think everyone deserves to be treated exactly the same way. But God operates by His standard, which is the only perfectly just standard. Commentator Doug Moo correctly reminds us: "Determining right or wrong, what is just or unjust, demands a standard for measurement. That standard is ultimately nothing less than God's own character. God, therefore, acts justly when he acts in accordance with his own person and plan."¹ As we have already seen, in verse 11, God's choices are made *"In order that God's purpose in election might stand."* I confess I don't fully understand it but God's choices are in perfect accordance with His character that is righteous, not unrighteous—just, not unjust.

Now the second way Paul responds to the charge that God is unjust, in choosing some and not others, is not very satisfying to me. Verse 17 says, *"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'."* When we come to this illustration of Pharaoh, Israel's Egyptian nemesis, I wish Paul would say that Pharaoh got exactly what he deserved and therefore justice was carried out. Paul could have so easily written that, and it would have been entirely accurate. Pharaoh, like every other human being, deserves God's wrath and if God doesn't choose to intervene God can't be rightly charged with injustice.

But Paul doesn't take that easy way out; instead he keeps beating the drum of God's sovereign freedom to choose. Look at verse 18: *"Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."* Even though Paul continues to run the risk of people charging God with unfairness, Paul wants to drive home his point: God's choice of some Jews and God's choice of you, out of all the people of the world, was a matter of awesome mercy. It was not based on your worthiness or your actions present or future—it was all of grace. And because His choice of you didn't depend on you, you can have great confidence that His keeping you won't depend on you either. I think Paul knows that his answer to the charge of God being unjust isn't as satisfactory as some would like because Paul, himself, raises yet another objection.

This is the third question: *"One of you will say to me, 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'"* (Verse 19) This question only makes sense however if verses 15-18 not only teach that God shows mercy sovereignly but also that God hardens people sovereignly.

If God was only responsible for showing mercy and not responsible for hardening people I don't think this question would be asked. And so Paul responds first in verse 20, *"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?'"* We don't like the response but Paul, I think, says: Be careful that you don't ask questions of God that are improper.

The issue is not that we can't ask honest questions but that once we have God's answer we don't blame God if we don't like the answer. You see, the very question, "Then why does God still blame us?" is stated in such a way as to find fault with God. Shall the person made say to his maker, "Why did you make me this way?" The question was, "if God sovereignly does the choosing, how then can he find

God's choices are in perfect accordance with His character that is righteous, not unrighteous—just, not unjust.

fault with anyone"? And Paul's first response was, "Be careful, you have no right to be the judge of God."

Paul's second response is given in Romans 9:21-24 *"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? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory, even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?"* I confess again, these verses push me in a direction I don't like going. The theological term for it is double predestination. I can't get

around the fact that here the Bible declares God chose some to receive mercy and He chose others to pass over. The Bible will not let me teach that God is the author of evil and it would seem evil to me to suggest that God actually created specific people to spend eternity in hell. But neither can I deny that this passage leaves God sovereignly in control of all that happens. The conclusion is that I simply remain ignorant on how God does this without being unjust.

So how God accomplishes that, we are not told; but why He does it is stated clearly in verses 22-23: God desires to *"show his wrath and make his power known."* And to *"make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy."* It is when we know "I once was lost," that we can sing "but now am found." It is when I know the "wretch" I am, that it becomes "Amazing Grace." The splendor of His undeserved mercy shines brightest against the backdrop of His deserved wrath. Please hear me: these answers by Paul don't answer every possible question about how and why God does what He does. There is a mystery to it still. But we can know that what God does He does justly and we can find no fault with God for the destruction of those who resist Him and resist Him they do.

At verse 24b Paul comes back to the issue of the Jews. Remember how he started the chapter? The Jews didn't respond to the Gospel of Jesus. In spite of all their advantages they largely rejected the Messiah. Why? Remember the first question: Did God's word fail? Paul's readers would have known the Old Testament and all the promises to Israel about being God's children forever, promises that sounded familiar from chapter 8 regarding the Romans and us. Could God be believed or had God failed in the past, leaving the door open for His failure in the future? "No" Paul writes, "God won't fail" and he

concludes his discussion by citing four Old Testament passages, two from Hosea and two from Isaiah. Through Hosea, God says, because of mercy, "*I will call them my people who are not my people.*" And through Isaiah, God says, because of mercy, God will not destroy all the Jews but will sovereignly save some. And all four quotations reiterate the dominant theme of the argument:

- God acted in mercy.
- God acted in pure mercy when He chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- God acted in pure mercy when He chose people down through the ages.
- And God acted in pure mercy when He chose you and me.

And if God chose us, based not one whit on what He saw in us or foresaw in us, then His choice was free and is not controlled by my actions or even reactions. Just as every Jew He chose and promised to keep so He chose me and promised to keep me. Just as He never failed one Jew He chose so He will never fail you or me.

End Notes

¹ Douglas Moo, *TNIVAC*, p. 310

See Appendix G to find several excellent articles explaining more fully these concepts introduced in Romans 9 such as "Election," "Double Predestination," and "Free Will."

Chapter Eighteen

Whosoever Will

Romans 9:30-10:21

Our earlier study of Romans 9 raised many interesting questions: How can God be completely sovereign in His choice of who He will save and, at the same time, we be completely free in whether we will respond or not? Does God choose us or do we choose God? The short answer is "yes," but let me come to that later.

Let's start where the apostle Paul does in Romans 8. In Romans 8 Paul declared that those God calls to Himself He will most assuredly finally and fully save: *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."* (8:29-30) Paul wants those who belong to God to have absolute confidence in God's desire and ability to truly save them and grant them life now and in the presence of God forever! He assures Christians at the end of that chapter that nothing can separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As I said earlier, there was however a problem that might cause the Romans to doubt that keeping power of God. The problem was with what happened to the Jews. God made promises to the Jews in the Old Testament and yet when the Messiah Jesus came most Jews didn't respond to Him. It could appear then that God's promises to the Jews weren't kept. And thus Christians might then doubt that God would keep His promises to them.

In Romans, chapters 9-11, Paul sets out to respond to this apparent problem. And in the process, we are taught much about who is saved and how they are saved. This becomes very practical to us because the issue is not only the Jews of Paul's day but us as well: who will be saved and how anyone is saved even today. In Romans 9 Paul gives his first explanation of how we can know that God's word did not fail the Jews and thus why we can trust Him not to fail us today. Theologians call this first explanation, "unconditional election."

God's unconditional election of us does not by itself save us. We must believe.

And also Paul points out that God's choice of who will be saved is not based on anything God sees or even foresees in the one being chosen. The choice is based somehow in God—His sovereign choice, uninfluenced by us.

In Romans 9 Paul gives his first explanation of why we can say God's word did not fail because God never promised He would save everyone. Now in chapter 10, to give us the second reason for knowing God's word has not failed, Paul describes salvation in terms of human responsibility.

What these two chapters together teach us is that God's unconditional election of us does not by itself save us. Yes, God has ordained the beginning of our salvation by sovereignly electing who He would have mercy on and choose to save as we saw in chapter 9. God also ordained the end of our salvation by promising that those He elects, those He chooses, will be His forever as we saw in chapter 8. But God not only ordained the beginning and the end, He also ordained the means by which we are saved—it is by grace through faith. We must believe. And that is what

we will see in chapter 10.

As I said earlier, just election, just God's choice of us, won't save us. To be saved, to have a relationship with a righteous, holy God, we must also be righteous. But back in Romans 3:10 we were taught: *"There is no one righteous, not even one."* So God solved our problem: *"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law (or law-keeping), has been made known, to which the (Old Testament) testifies. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."* (3:21-22) Now here Paul says the reason there aren't many Jews in the church in Paul's day is not God's fault as if He were unjust. The reason most Jews were not Christians is that they sought to gain their own righteousness, their own right standing with God, by keeping the law rather than accepting the righteousness of God freely made available to them in Christ.

And the reason why many Gentiles were in the church was because they did not try to earn their righteousness by their efforts, but they gained their righteousness by faith, that is, they received the free gift of the righteousness of Jesus as their own and were thus counted righteous by God. This is the greatest transaction in the history of mankind: Jesus paid for our sins and gave us His righteousness. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read, *"God made (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God."*

Now listen to Paul write about this beginning at Romans 9:30-10:4:

"What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they

pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone (Jesus).' As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, (but) the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." As with many people today, most of the Jews thought they would be okay with God if they had done their best. "Surely God doesn't expect us to be perfect!" But that is precisely what a holy God does expect. Habakkuk 1:13 says, God, "*your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.*"

So God had made it abundantly clear in the Old Testament that while obedience to the law was commanded of God's people, they would not be able to perfectly obey it and so God established the entire sacrificial system. Now the people knew that the sacrifices of bulls and goats could not actually clear them of their guilt for sin. They knew that somehow those sacrifices pointed to a way that God would eventually remove the guilt. They weren't to trust the sacrifices; they were to trust God to grant them righteousness.

But many of the Jews disregarded the issue of trust in God for righteousness and resorted to thinking they could earn sufficient righteousness by keeping the law. By Paul's day, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, it should have been clear to everyone, Jews included, that Jesus was the end or fulfillment of the law as verse 4 says it: The God-

man Jesus had kept the law perfectly for them and us. And because of the Old Testament prophecies, they should have known that Jesus was also the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system—those Old Testament sacrifices were pointing forward to Jesus' death atoning for the sin of His people. And therefore His righteousness is offered freely to all who will believe.

Paul then goes on in chapter 10,
"Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: 'The man who does these things will live by them.' But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the deep?"' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth

This is the greatest transaction in the history of mankind: Jesus paid for our sins and gave us His righteousness.

and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" (10:5-13)

Paul says, don't make gaining the righteousness you need so difficult as to be impossible. The righteousness of God in Christ is not a matter of going up to heaven or down to the

deep, or doing anything difficult to gain it. That righteousness you so desperately need to have a relationship with a holy God is very near. It does not require effort; it only requires faith, a trust in Jesus as the one who provided it for us.

Now, please understand, there is no magic in saying the words "Jesus is Lord" or in merely mentally agreeing that Jesus rose from the dead. The emphasis here is clearly on a heart change and a choice to trust in Jesus and be loyal to Him. And when we do embrace Jesus as saving-Lord of

When we do embrace Jesus as saving-Lord of our lives, He grants to us His own righteousness making us completely and eternally acceptable to the Father God.

our lives, He grants to us His own righteousness making us completely and eternally acceptable to the Father God. As we saw in Romans 3:22, *"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."* Or as Paul put it in verse 13, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Remember that earlier I said that God's election of us, by itself wouldn't save us? Here God says we have a responsibility; we must believe. If we don't believe we won't be saved.

Now listen to him in the latter verses of the chapter as Paul continues to lay the blame, for the Jews' condemned condition, and anyone's condemned condition, squarely at their own feet. Paul says, "don't blame God!" Romans 10:14-21 says, *"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful*

are the feet of those who bring good news!’ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: ‘(God’s word) has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.’ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, ‘I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.’ And Isaiah boldly says, ‘I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.’ But concerning Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.’” Here in chapter 10 Paul gives the second explanation why we cannot say “God’s word failed.” God’s word or promises did not fail; Israel is lost because Israel refused the message. Or as it says in verse 21, they are a disobedient and obstinate people. Or to say it of us, the reason why anyone is condemned is not God’s fault, it is their own fault—they refuse the truth about God that God has made known to them. No, God’s word did not fail the Jews and His word will not fail you. If God has saved you, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your saving-Lord, God will continue to keep you through the hardest times of life and He will definitely take you to be with Him when you die!

Now in chapter 11 we will come back to the subject of Israel, the Jews. But for the rest this chapter I want to speak to the compatibility of chapters 9 and 10, the compatibility of divine sovereignty in unconditional election with human responsibility. Earlier I asked, “How can God be completely sovereign in His choice of who He will save and, at the same time, we be completely free in whether we will respond or not?” “Does God choose us or do we choose God?” We struggle with these concepts because we want it

all to fit together perfectly in our minds.

On the one hand if we emphasize divine sovereignty, we are tempted to say that if God does the choosing, if God elects who will be saved, as we saw in Romans 9, then how can God hold anyone responsible? But clearly in Romans 10, He does hold us responsible. But we go on in our thinking, that if it is all up to God, and God is sovereign in who will be saved, why pray or why evangelize, or for that matter why do anything?

Conversely, if we emphasize human responsibility, especially as popularly conceived as "free will," how can any Christian live with him or herself. People are dying everyday without being Christians. They are going into an eternity of punishment for their sins. If God has done all He's going to do, then the fate of the world is now in our hands. If it is now only up to us to tell the good news and to unbelievers, of their own "free will," to choose Jesus, why does not every Christian quit his job and spend 24/7 convincing people to trust Jesus? Unless you have no compassion at all, how can you sit here?

But, from the Bible, we know that the apparently logical extremes of both positions are incomplete. Let's take the idea of divine sovereignty first. As I said we are tempted to suggest that God's sovereign unconditional election of who will be saved means it is all up to God and so why do anything; why pray, evangelize or even live a holy life. What we fail to take into account when we think like that is what we have already seen in Romans 9 and 10. God not only determines whom He will choose and whom He will eventually take to heaven, but He also determines the means by which He would do that: our faith and obedience. Yes, God chooses, but He also said that the way He would accomplish His purposes in those He chooses is by grace

through their faith. God planned it so that we would be involved in the process of His saving us: we would not be passive robots.

In Ephesians and elsewhere, we learn that God chose us before the foundation of the world. But that doesn't mean that God chose and then withdrew. Back in Romans 8:29-30 we saw already that God is active in every part of His plan for us: *"those God foreknew he also predestined... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."* And in Romans 10:14-15 we see that God has ordained sending,

If God has saved you, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your saving-Lord, God will continue to keep you through the hardest times of life and will take you to be with Him when you die!

preaching, hearing, believing and calling on the name of Jesus as the means by which He will accomplish His purposes in us. *"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?"*

Should we tell people about Jesus even though God has already chosen those to whom He will show His mercy? Should we expect people to hear and believe the gospel and trust in Jesus to be saved even though God has already chosen who will be saved? Yes and yes because God has prescribed the means as well as the end.

Do I pray for the lost? Yes, first of all because I am

commanded to pray. And because prayer is one of the means by which God carries out His plan. Listen to Paul in Romans 10:1 *"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved."* Do I tell the good news of Jesus? Yes, because I have been commanded to and, as we see in Romans 10:14-15, it is the means by which God carries out His plan. Human responses to God's election are not contradictions of divine sovereignty but are a part of it. I pray for the lost, and our missionaries pray for the lost, because we do believe in God's sovereign election of who will be saved. Why would

We don't have to wonder if God will save those whom He has chosen, we know He will and wonder of wonder He has called us to be part of that process.

we pray if we believed it was now only up to the individual to decide? But we do pray, because we want God to act, we want God to open their blind eyes; we want God to do something in them that only He can do. We don't leave it to "free will;" we want God to move them.

And we share the gospel with unbelievers, and our missionaries are doing so throughout the world, because we believe in God's sovereign election of who will be saved. We know that evangelism would be pointless if God didn't act. But God has said that He will effectively call those whom He has chosen. We don't have to wonder if God will save those whom He has chosen, we know He will and wonder of wonder He has called us to be part of that process.

One theologian wrote, "When God effects (brings to pass) his work of faith in us, he does not do so without us but by us. Certainly he does not simply give it to us to accomplish,

as the Jews thought. That would be to demand the impossible. But in giving it to us to accomplish, he gives us at the same time the wherewithal to accomplish it..."¹ But don't miss the point of Romans 10—we must believe.

What I find very interesting and instructive is that Paul sees no contradiction between teaching both the divine sovereignty of God in His unconditional election of those He will save in chapter 9 and the full responsibility of human beings for their own lost condition in chapter 10. He teaches them both boldly and strongly and without any embarrassment over any apparent contradiction. With a significantly lesser mind than the apostle Paul, I too must accept these two truths.

But there is something that still bothers us about this idea of God's sovereignty in unconditionally choosing who he will show mercy to. We think it violates our free will. I have already acknowledged we cannot give a fully satisfying answer to what appears to us to be something of a contradiction between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. I must simply accept that both are true because God says they are. But I think I can demonstrate that Paul's teaching of the two truths in Romans 9 and 10, even with the unanswered questions, is far more satisfying than the popular idea of "free will."

Even many Christians camp on this idea of "free will." John Piper wrote, "When I entered seminary I believed in the freedom of my will, in the sense that it was ultimately self-determining. I had not learned this from the Bible; I absorbed it from the independent, self-sufficient, self-esteeming, self-exalting air that you and I breathe every day of our lives in America. The sovereignty of God meant (to me then) that (God) can do anything with me that I give him permission to do. With this frame of mind I

entered (seminary)...

"In the class on salvation, we dealt head on with the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace... Emotions run high when you feel your man-centered world crumbling around you. I met (the professor) in the hall one day. After a few minutes of heated argument about the freedom of my will, I held a pen in front of his face and dropped it to the floor. Then I said, with not as much respect as a student ought to have, 'I [!] dropped it.' Somehow that was supposed to prove that my choice to drop the pen was not governed by anything but my sovereign self.

"But thanks be to God's mercy and patience, at the end of the semester I wrote in my blue book for the final exam, 'Romans 9 is like a tiger going about devouring free-willers like me.' That was the end of my love affair with human autonomy and the ultimate self-determination of my will. My worldview simply could not stand against the scriptures, especially Romans 9."²

The answer to the question of whether we have "free will" or not requires that we define the term. And when we do, it will reveal that the concept is a kind of fiction. For your will to be "free" it must mean that your ability to choose one thing over another is not caused, coerced or even influenced by anything. To be completely free would mean that it is not influenced in any way by any thing outside of you or, for that matter, influenced even by anything in you. Now think about that for a minute. A famous illustration of this is of the free-willed mule. The mule's owner put a pail of wheat on the left of the mule and a pail of oats on the right. If the mule were not influenced in any way by hunger, by appearance, by memory, or by anything else, it would starve.³ There would be no motivation, no desire to

choose one over the other.

You see, without some influence there can be no desire, and with no desire there can be no ability to make a choice. And if your will is influenced then by definition it is not completely “free.” That influence might be someone holding a gun to your head or it might be something as unseen as the impact your parents had on you when you were a child. But if anything is influencing you, predisposing you, then you are not actually free. And as we will see in a minute, it is impossible not to be influenced. That is why I call “free will” a kind of fiction.

So instead of “free will” maybe we should call it what it is, the ability to choose. Jonathan Edwards called it “the mind choosing.” And we do make choices every day. But don’t suggest those choices aren’t influenced. Now of course there are choices we make that have no significance. It

The sovereignty of God meant to me that (God) can do anything with me that I give him permission to do.

would be like John Piper choosing to drop the pen or not just to prove he has something he then called “free will.” I think it takes a fair amount of premeditation to choose for no reason, because most of our choices are driven by something within us or outside of us that influences our decision. But I have to admit that it is possible that we could decide to make a choice based on nothing at all—we have the freedom to drop the pen or not drop the pen. But such choices are irrelevant and have no moral significance.

So back to the important things of life, we must keep in mind that we make our choices based on what we most

desire. In fact any choice we make is determined by the strongest desire at the moment. One man illustrates it this way: We desire to lose weight because of how we have been influenced about appearance or health and so we choose to diet. We do well until hunger becomes a stronger influence than the issue of appearance or health and thus the desire to eat becomes a stronger desire than the desire to lose weight. We choose based on the strongest desire.⁴ In fact if you think about it, it is impossible for you to

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choose what you don't desire. Yes, we make choices but our choices are based on our strongest desires. So your choices are free because you make them (no one coerced you) and your choices are determined because they are driven by your desires.⁵

Now let's talk about spiritual ability. When it comes to spiritual ability, the ability to have a positive relationship with God, the problem is with my desires.⁶ We will hear it said of a non-Christian that he or she is basically good, he wants to do the right thing, she wants to do good, or they are seeking God. But what does God say? *"There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."* (Romans 3:11) Now we know that unsaved people do what we would call "good" things—people can be kind, even generous, and amazingly so. But God considers not only the action but also the motives of the heart. And even the best thing done while a person is alienated from God, is not deemed "good" by God. Isaiah 64:6 says, *"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*

God says we are sinners and nothing we do is spiritually good in the sight of our God. Genesis 6:5 says, "*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*" We still choose what we desire but our desires are for ourselves. We don't desire God. In The Fall we lost all desire for God and all ability to be pleasing to God. The Bible says in that we were "*dead in our transgressions and sins...Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*" (Ephesians 2:1-3) "By nature" means that it was our very nature to sin and we were dead, morally incapable, of desiring or doing anything acceptable to God.

Yes, the non-Christian has the freedom to choose. He is capable of choosing many things, but the Bible says that he is incapable of choosing to do anything righteous by God's standard. He has freedom to act but only within the bounds of his moral nature. The non-Christian is not free to follow God, nor does he want to. Now here is the gospel—God will supernaturally intervene by His Spirit through regeneration and effectual calling to give the non-Christian the desire and the ability to believe and follow Christ. God gives us a new desire—God changes the influences. And when God puts that desire there, a man must, by definition, follow his strongest desire, and he will then choose God. But choose him, we must.

When we pray for a non-Christian, what are we expecting God to do? We want God to tip the scales in the person's mind so that their desire for God will be greater than their desire for self and they will choose God. We don't want God to leave the person to what we in error call their "free" will. We want God to change their desire giving them a new choice. Yes, Romans 9, God chooses us, and yes, Romans 10, we must choose God and God gives us the desire and

ability to do so.

So what do we have in Romans 9 and 10? We have the clear teaching that for nothing seen or foreseen in us, neither our efforts nor even our faith, God sovereignly chooses to whom He will show His mercy and He elects them to eternal life—it is by grace we are saved! And the appropriate response: Praise God for His mercy and grace. Do you?

And secondly, we have the clear teaching that everyone who spends eternity in what Jesus called “the lake of fire,” will do so because he or she is a willful sinner, refusing the truth about God that God has made plain to them. And the appropriate response: *“if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* Will you?

End Notes

¹ A. Vanhoye In D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, p. 192

² from a sermon delivered on Nov 3, 2002 available at DesiringGod.org

³ R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, p. 53

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, p. 131

⁵ Sproul, *Chosen by God*, p. 54

⁶ Sproul, *Ibid*, p. 61

Additional notes on the passages that speak of God’s will that no one perish and that everyone be saved:

Another objection people often raise to the idea of unconditional election is that some verses in Scripture appear at first glance to contradict it. But they do not.

- 1 Timothy 2:3-4 *"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*
- 2 Peter 3:9 *"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."*

The words "wants" or "wanting" in these verses speak of the will of God—what God wants. Now again we have to define our terms and use them consistently. There are three different ways to think of God's will:

1. Do the Apostles Paul and Peter mean the sovereign will of God, the decreed will of God? Is this God's will, as when He said let there be light and there was light? The light had no choice in the matter. If that is the meaning here then this verse says more than most people want it to say—it would mean that God has decreed that no one will in fact perish and that all will be saved. But we know from the rest of Scripture that cannot be true.

2. The second way to think of the will of God is to think of His preceptive will—the commands of God. God said you shall not steal. That doesn't mean we can't steal but that we shouldn't steal. But if we apply that definition, we come up with nonsense statements. For then we would be saying that God commands no one to perish.

3. The third way to speak of God's will, is to speak of His desire, of what pleases Him. In Ezekiel 18:23 God says, *"Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?"* No! God is not sadistic or malevolent. These verses don't contradict "unconditional election;" they in fact corroborate it saying what God says in Micah 7:18: He *"delights to show mercy."* These verses are speaking of God's heart, His heart of

compassion.

Please see Appendix H for further study by the following authors:

1. "Compatibalism" by John Frame
2. "Free Will" by John W. Hendryx
3. "Freedom of the Will" by R.C. Sproul.
4. "Are There Two Wills in God?" by John Piper (*Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved.*)

Chapter Nineteen

Jesus for Jews

Romans 11

In this chapter Paul gives us a glimpse into the future. What a future it is! But when we remember that God made His promises to Abraham 4000 years ago and Christianity has been around for 2000 years, when we look around and see 2/3's of the world following other religions and philosophies of life and when we see secularism and non-Christian spiritualities pushing Christianity to the side in our own country, we can easily become very pessimistic and discouraged about the future. We can begin to doubt all the Christian talk about Christ as victor over sin and death. It surely doesn't look like God is saving the world!

Even more specifically, we Christians know that our Christianity is tied inextricably to the Jews. Jesus was a Jew, the early disciples were all Jews, the church was born in the synagogues of the Jews and Christianity itself is rooted in the teachings of the Jewish Scriptures—the Old Testament. More than two-thirds of the Bible is written in a Jewish context. 2000 years earlier than when Paul lived, when God called Abraham, God said Abraham and his descendants would be blessed forever. But even as early as Paul's day, the question arose, "What about the Jews?" It looked like the Jews were a lost cause! Did God's promises to the Jews fail?

It was natural for the Christians in Paul's day and even us today, to ask, "How about it, did God's promises to the Jews not mean much, and what about His promises in the New Testament, that Jesus would be the savior of the world, do they not mean much either?" In Romans 9-11

Paul responds to that kind of thinking. He does so by pointing out in Romans 9 and 10 that God did not fail the Jews; those whom God chose to save He saved.

Now here in Romans 11 Paul reiterates that truth but he also goes on to describe a future that ought to blow away any pessimism we may have about God's success in the world. It ought to make us realize that while we are tempted to get impatient and discouraged with the timing of God's actions, we can truly trust Him to do the great things He promised for this world. That is why I said earlier that here in Romans 11 God gives us a glimpse of the

The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you...

future and what a future it is! But He does this by answering the specific question of the future of the Jews. If God can be shown to be faithful to His 4000-year-old promises to the Jews, I should know that I can trust Him to be faithful to us.

So what about the Jews? 100 years ago a British journalist penned the doggerel: "How odd of God to choose the Jews." I don't know its original intent, but that statement is not necessarily anti-Semitic. From a world-perspective, it is rather strange that the Jews would hold such a central place in history. As a humorous aside, Leo Rosten, a Yiddishist of our own era, wrote a response to the so-called "oddness" that God should choose the Jews. Remember that the word "goyim" in Yiddish means non-Jews. So Rosten wrote his own doggerel:

How odd of God to choose the Jews?
Not odd of God. Goyim annoy'im.¹

Rosten aside, it is odd, in a way, that God should choose the Jews. When you think of one billion Chinese, and a billion Indians, and millions of Arabs, Germanic and Hispanic peoples of the world, why did God choose such a relatively small people group to be the focus of His plan for the world? God Himself answers that question in Deuteronomy 7:7-8: *"The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you..."* For reasons not in the Jews, but for reasons in God alone, God chose to set His special affection on them.

Interesting that even to this day, the Jewish people somehow still stand at the center of world attention. The people of Israel are constantly in the news. On Wednesday of this past week, I heard a State Department official speaking of how the Israel/Arab conflict is at the heart of the issues in the Middle East, including Iraq and even Afghanistan and Iran. About 100 years ago, Frederick the Great of Prussia was having a discussion with his chaplain and saying how skeptical he was of Christianity. "If the Bible is true, it ought to be capable of very easy proof. What is the proof of the inspiration of the Bible?" The chaplain said that he could in fact, in one word, give the proof that the King desired. The king was amazed and said what magic word can bear such weight of proof? The chaplain said, "Israel!"² What other people have for 4000 years been so despised and persecuted and yet don't disappear?

So, what is God doing? Paul begins by asking the question about the Jews that is understandably on the minds of his

readers: *"I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means...God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew."* (Romans 11:1-2) Remember, "foreknew," means those whom He set His love on. To show that he is correct in saying that God has not rejected the Jews and thus is a promise-keeping God, Paul begins by citing two kinds of evidence.

First of all, Paul says he is a Jew, a descendant of the very family that some suggest God has rejected. And clearly God has not rejected him and thus, he is example number 1 that God has not rejected all Jews. But Paul moves quickly to another point and one that helps us understand that God has been acting in spite of appearances. Paul reminds us that 1000 years earlier Elijah was pessimistic for the same reasons we might be. It appeared that evil had won and that God's people were so few in number as to be insignificant and powerless. So Elijah cried out in 1 Kings 19:10 quoted here in Romans 11:3, *"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me?"*

Paul goes on in Romans 11:4-5: *"And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace."* Elijah had to be told that all is not as it appears. God is at work, moving salvation history along just as He planned.

Likewise, while it appeared in Paul's day that all Jews were unresponsive to the Gospel, that was not true. God was even then saving those whom He had chosen. And while it was not a flood, there were in fact many Jews who were trusting Jesus. Being first and foremost an evangelist, Paul then, in verse 6, reiterates what he had been saying throughout chapters 9 and 10. God's choice of the Jews He

would save was not based on their works but on God's gracious will.

But more to his major point, here in verse 7 Paul again says there are two Israels: Remember earlier he had said in chapter 9:6, *"not all who are descended from Israel are Israel."* There are descendants of Israel/Jacob who are part of the "elect" and there are descendants of Israel/Jacob who are "hardened." We like the idea of God choosing to

God is at work, moving salvation history along just as He planned.

show mercy but we don't like the idea of God "hardening" people. And yet Paul quotes some very hard sayings from Deuteronomy and Isaiah (Dt 29:4; Isa 29:10) to show, just as he did in Romans 9, that God was somehow involved in the hardening of those who don't trust Him.

Back in chapter 9 Paul said in essence, don't accuse God. And remember that any suggestion that God is unjust in hardening some must be offset by knowing that if you ask any unbeliever if he wants God to soften his heart and open his eyes to the truth of the Gospel, he will tell you "no!" For you who think God unjust for hardening, do you think it better conversely that God would force Himself on those who don't want Him? I don't pretend to settle the issue of God's hardening people here but simply to note that Paul and the other New Testament writers seem to hold God's action of hardening and a person's responsibility for unbelief in balance without fully resolving, what to us appear to be contradictions. But that is not Paul's major point here in Romans 11. Here, he is trying to help us understand what God is up to with the Jews.

And so in verses 11-22 Paul gives an explanation and a warning. The explanation is that God is actually using the Jews' unbelief to accomplish His larger gracious purposes. Look at the last part of verse 11: *"because of (the Jews') transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles..."* That seems to be a common theme in the Bible—God, in His grace, uses even what is evil for good. Christianity didn't remain a parochial religion of the Jews, but when the Jews largely rejected it, the Gospel was spread to the Gentiles. God told Abraham that through him all the nations of the

"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

world would be blessed. So even when Israel refused to be that means of grace to the world in a positive way, God used their rejection to carry out His purposes to bless the whole world.

But God not only used the unbelief of the Jews to bless the rest of the world, God eventually turned it around and used the belief of the Gentiles to persuade the Jews to trust Jesus. Romans 11:11b says, *"because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious."* He says something similar in verse 14: *"in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them."* He said the same thing back in 10:19: *"I will make you (unbelieving Jews) envious by those (believing Gentiles) who are not a nation..."*

Kent Hughes tells the story of Dr. Charles Feinberg (who was obviously Jewish) was for many years a professor at Talbot Seminary, a part of BIOLA University. When he was a young man, Feinberg lived for a while in an Orthodox Jewish home. The family with whom he lived hired what

they called a "Sabbath Gentile" who would serve the family on the Sabbath when they were not supposed to work. The "Gentile" woman was a Christian, specifically taking the job to bear witness of Jesus' love. Feinberg was so attracted by her life that he asked questions. She took him to a friend who led him to Christ. Feinberg was made "jealous" of what she possessed.³ I honestly don't know how God is going to do that on a large scale in the future, but understanding it on the scale of one-to-one, we are shown what it means when Jesus says in Matthew 5:16, *"let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

Again, I don't know how God is going to use Israel's jealousy of the Gentiles' belief to bring more Jews to Jesus, but here I see that He is going to do so and, to Paul's major point, it will not be just a few Jews. Paul says in essence in verse 12, if Israel's sin of unbelief has brought the riches of the Gospel to the Gentiles, imagine what will be the outcome for the world when many Jews are saved. And in verse 15 he repeats his expectation that if the Jews rejection of Jesus brought salvation for the rest of the world then imagine what their acceptance of Jesus will mean. Paul clearly posits a future that is far different than what we see now.

Now, as I said earlier, Paul's explanation of what God is doing now with the Jews also comes with a warning. Paul's whole metaphor of an olive tree's root and branches, in verses 16-22, is meant to warn Gentiles. It is very tempting to Gentile Christians to write off the Jews as a lost cause. Even worse, as we have seen through the ages, is the idea that the Jews are somehow the enemies of God. Anti-Semitism was not reserved for the Russians or the Nazis. It is alive and well, even today, and even among Christians. One Jewish writer captured it well when, picking up on the

earlier doggerel I mentioned, wrote,
"How odd of God
To choose the Jews.
But not so odd
As those who choose
The Jewish God
And hate the Jews."⁴

Christians must not think the church is theirs, in some way exclusive of Jews. To use Paul's metaphor, there is only one olive tree, one way for being rightly related to God and that is by grace.

In the Old Testament, Judaism was God's means of bringing His salvation to the world. A right relationship with God in the Old Testament for Jew or Gentile was only by God's grace through the law and sacrifices of Israel (which pointed forward to the Messiah). That means a Gentile in the Old Testament had to become a convert to true Judaism to be part of the people of God. In the New Testament the church, through the Messiah Jesus, is God's means of bringing salvation to the world. A right relationship with God in the New Testament for Jew or Gentile is only by God's grace through the fulfilled law and sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah. That means to be part of the people of God today, anyone, Jew or Gentile, must become a convert to Christ, a part of the body of Christ, the church. Whether Jew or Gentile, whether Old Testament or New Testament, we only have a relationship with God by God's grace through faith in God's revealed provision. Jew or Gentile we are recipients of unmerited favor. Neither is superior to the other!

Furthermore the warning is not only to not act superior to the Jews, but to also remember that if we don't persevere in faith, we too can be cut off. In verse 22 Paul writes,
"Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God:

sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off." Those who believe in what they call "eternal security" don't like this verse and attempt to explain it away. But here Paul gives no comfort to the idea that a carnal Christian is still "saved and safe." Very difficult for me are funerals where a loving relative says, "I know that Johnny didn't give any evidence of being a Christian but when he was 5 he asked Jesus into his heart, so I know he's in heaven." That is not the teaching of the Bible or of this passage. The Bible consistently teaches that those who trust in Christ do persevere in trust and obedience

Whether Jew or Gentile, whether Old Testament or New Testament, we only have a relationship with God by God's grace through faith in God's revealed provision.

otherwise it is clear they never truly turned to Christ. I believe Paul is warning not to assume that just because you are not a Jew and you are a part of a church that you are somehow okay. Don't make the same mistake the Jews made.

But now in verse 24 Paul says, there is coming a day when it won't be harder for Jews to become Christ-followers, but actually easier. Exactly how it will be easier is not explained. The point I think is simply that we shouldn't assume that the Jews are counted out, but to the contrary, understand that God will do something with the Jews in the future that is very different from what we see now.

Then we come to the climax of Paul's explanation that God has not failed the Jews. Listen to these unexpected words: *"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a*

hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'" (Romans 11:25-27) Paul consistently uses the word "mystery" to mean not something mysterious but something previously unknowable but now revealed. And what God is now revealing is that a day is coming when the Jews will turn to Jesus in such great numbers, that Paul could say, *"all Israel will be saved."* Don't get hung up on the word "all" and

Paul's greatest concern is to say that God's promises to Israel, to the Jews, have not failed.

force it to mean every single Jew. Both in the Bible (e.g. Matthew 4:24) and in common usage among all peoples, the word "all" often means simply the great majority. A recent news report could well have said, "All Pakistan mourned the death of former Prime Minister Bhutto." In contrast to the few Jews who are now being saved, in the future, masses of Jews will turn to Jesus. "All Israel will be saved!"

When will this take place? The end of verse 25 reads, *"Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."* Jesus spoke of this same time when He said, *"There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."* (Luke 21:23b-24) When Jesus speaks of "the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled" and Paul speaks of "the full number of Gentiles coming in," they have in mind the same phenomenon. Both are

describing a future time and Jesus puts it in the context of His second coming. And during that time, after the great number of Gentiles are saved, those who are part of ethnic Israel, the Jews, will turn to Jesus in great number.

Some Bible students who hold to a Covenant theology say these verses have nothing to do with Jews specifically, but Paul is simply using biblical language to describe the new Israel—the church. But I think there are good reasons to believe Paul is here talking about Israel as an ethnic group, that particular people descended from Abraham and Jacob. One reason is that every usage of the word “Israel” in this passage is referring to ethnic Israel, not to the church as the new Israel. And the whole point of the passage is to show the place of ethnic Israel in God’s plans. Paul’s greatest concern in chapters 9-11 is to say that God’s promises to Israel, to the Jews, have not failed. Surely to now equate Israel with the church would be to destroy Paul’s argument.

I think Paul makes it even clearer that he is talking about ethnic Israel, the Jews, when he writes in verses 28-29: “As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” (Romans 11:28-29) As Paul explained earlier, it was when the Jews were enemies of the gospel that the Gentiles were brought into the family of God. But, to Paul’s immediate point about Israel, he says you must understand that when God elects or calls a people He doesn’t go back on His word. God promised the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) that their descendants would be God’s people, in numbers greater than the stars of the sky or the sand of the sea. *“And so all Israel will be saved.”*

But I must also add that some Bible students who hold to Dispensational theology, think these verses were partially fulfilled with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. I don't think Paul is describing either a national/political Israel or a religious Israel with a reinstituted sacrificial system, but is simply describing the Jews as those physical descendants of Abraham and Jacob. And now, and in the future that Paul describes, Jews will become part of the true people of God in the same way that anyone comes, by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. But come to Christ they will, and in great number. No, God's word has not failed the Jews and it will not fail the Jews and He has not and will not fail you.

What I want you to leave with is a confidence and an expectation. Listen to what Paul wrote just a few verses earlier: *"But if their (the Jews) transgression means riches for the world (you Gentiles), and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!"* (Romans 11:12) The great coming-to-Christ of the Jews in the future will mean even "greater riches." I think Paul has already defined the "riches" in terms of multitudes coming to faith and becoming part of the people of God. So the promise here is that even as the Jews come to faith in great numbers, in the future, so more and more Gentiles will come to faith.

This idea is not the one we usually have of only a few out of the entire world being part of God's forever family. No, the future described here is of a massive turning to Jesus in the end. It is also what we see in Revelation 5:12-13: *"In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the*

throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

The work God began in Abraham and through Jacob and Moses and David and Isaiah and through Jesus Christ and the Apostles, He continues to this very day. And there is a day coming when His plan will result in, not a river of people coming to faith, but a veritable flood. God has never failed to keep His word and He will not fail you. *"Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Is it any wonder that Paul ends with this outburst of praise?

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

End Notes

¹ Source of doggerels: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/14176>

² James Boice, *Romans*, p. 1375

³ Kent Hughes, *Romans*, p. 197

⁴ Cecil Browne

Chapter Twenty

Why Do You Live the Way You Live?

Romans 12:1-2

My father was about 30 years of age when he switched occupations and became a dairy farmer in Wisconsin. Reared in a strong Christian home, he early in life responded to God's grace and became a Christian. But like many of us the significance of that relationship grew over time. From childhood my father was taught that Sunday was a special day—a day to honor the Lord by stepping out of the routines of the rest of the week, to stop the otherwise necessary making of money, and to worship God and spend time with God's people and in ministry.

In the early years of my life, my dad was a sharecropper. That meant that in order to live on the farm, owned by someone else, he had to work the fields and pay the owner a portion, a share of the crop. In those years there were no government subsidy programs, no savings accounts to fall back on. We lived right on the edge. Our family's income, our livelihood, was dependent on the crops.

I'm certain it had happened before but I well remember one particular occasion, probably because by then I was old enough to understand the significance of my father's decision. It was early on a Sunday morning and the weather reports and the skies all said the same thing: a large crop-damaging storm was headed our way by nightfall. Our fields were ready to be harvested and the forecasted storm would likely destroy a significant percentage of the crop if they weren't taken from the field immediately. I was old enough to know that my father faced a dilemma. The decision involved our livelihood and

the decision involved the worship of our Lord. I'm certain it came down to the issue of trust—did He trust God. My father didn't speak of the decision that morning. He simply ignored the weather reports and got all of us into the car at the appointed time and we headed for church. I couldn't help but notice that every other farmer, between our home and the town in which our church was located, was out in the fields that morning. I saw farmers racing against the weather as we raced for church. My father must have felt the pressure to conform. But through the years the Spirit of God through the Word of God was transforming his mind.

Being a child, I questioned my dad's wisdom in his decision. I rationalized all kinds of scenarios besides the one he was following. But our morning and our afternoon, that day,

The disconnect, for some of us, between what we say we value and what we do, is mind-boggling.

were given to the usual Sunday activities, not to working the fields. You see, my father was not first of all a farmer; he was first of all a Christ-follower. And he valued things not seen more than those that could be seen.

How you live, is determined by what you most value; not just by what you say you value, but what you really value! Every day and all of life we make decisions based on presuppositions or assumptions we have about what is real, what is most important. We can, for example, adopt the secular philosophy around us and live as if this life is all there is. It is about pleasure and acquisition and hanging onto enough of our wealth so that we can retire early and play golf in Arizona. Or we can adopt the advertisers' propaganda and live as if life is all about us getting

whatever we want and think we “need.” It starts early in life and some of us never outgrow it. My son thinks that National Basketball Association approved shoes and jerseys are essential for his emotional survival. What is it for you? Is it a bigger house, a newer car, a trip to a more unique place? Is life ultimately about you? You worked hard and you deserve it?

Or we can adopt the Christian-in-name-only thinking of millions of Americans, who assume heaven is taken care of, by us having made a profession of faith, and that life now is for us to live as we choose, as long as we don’t hurt anybody and meet a few minimum religious expectations like attending church and giving a little of our money away to good causes. The disconnect, for some of us, between what we say we value and what we do, is mind-boggling.

Ligon Duncan, who is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MS. said a friend of his owns a store next to an abortion clinic. “One of his (friend’s) habits is to look at the bumper stickers on the cars that (drive) into the abortion clinic. (He said), you’ll see bumper stickers like this as they pull in to the abortion clinic, ‘Take your children to Sunday school next Sunday, they need and deserve it.’ ‘Prayer changes things’ or maybe even, ‘Come visit us at First Church’ or whatever church they come from. In fact, he was telling me one day, that he sat with a man outside the abortion clinic who was a minister who was reading his Bible and who had brought his granddaughter to have an abortion. Where is the disconnect here?”¹

I recently offered a little boy in our church 50 cents to purchase a soda from one of the church machines. He said he only needed a quarter because while the machine says it takes 50 cents, all the kids know how to work the machine to get soda for a quarter. Too many a professing Christian

young man or woman of our church has asked me or others on our staff to officiate at their wedding only to find out they know their fiancé is not a Christian but it doesn't matter to them.

We put \$5 down in the office football pool or a dollar a hole on the golf course, we drink to excess on New Year's Eve, we fail to declare income on our taxes or we pad the expense account at the office. In gossip we quietly destroy a person's reputation with our salacious innuendo. We rob from the poor by our rationalized greed. Isaiah 29:13 says, *"The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'"*

I know I've been rather pointed, but my only purpose is to ask if our walk matches our talk. Because in Romans 12:1-2, the Apostle Paul says, in essence, if you believe what I have told you in chapters 1-11 of Romans, then there is only one response consistent with your belief. Look at Romans 12:1-2: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

I think the Bible is very consistent in teaching there is only one kind of Christianity and that is the Christianity that follows Christ. Jesus said, *"Whoever serves me must follow me..."* (John 12:26) The only true Christianity is being sold out to Him. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, *"Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* (Luke

18:22) Genuine Christianity is putting the kingdom God first and letting all other things follow. Jesus said, *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these (other) things will be given to you as well."* (Matthew 6:33) True Christianity is so radical Paul describes it as *"offering our bodies as living sacrifices"* to God. Describing it as "offering our bodies" puts it most effectively because it is with our bodies that our intentions take action; that is how we walk the talk.

Verses 1 and 2 of Romans 12 form the bridge between the two major sections of Paul's letter to the Romans.

Everything before these two verses leads up to them and

I think the Bible is very consistent in teaching there is only one kind of Christianity and that is the Christianity that follows Christ.

everything that follows, flows from them. What will follow in chapters 12-15 are some of the practical implications of what has taught thus far. But verses 1-2 capture all that and more in a powerful summary of what we are to do and how we are to do it. The "what" we are to do is stated so succinctly in verse 1: *"offer your bodies as living sacrifices."* The "how" we are to do it is likewise stated succinctly in verse 2: *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

Looking again briefly at the "what" we are to do, the offering our bodies as sacrifices to God, Paul describes that sacrifice in three ways: "living, holy and pleasing to God."

Living Sacrifice

"Living" is as opposed to dead—this is not like the sacrifices of the Old Testament where the sacrifice is slain. Neither is

this martyrdom. This is a willful decision to offer our very lives, body and soul, to God for as long as He allows us life on this earth. It is my father who knew that he was not first of all a farmer but he was first of all a Christ-follower.

Holy Sacrifice

This sacrifice is "holy." Holy in the Bible means to be set apart for God's eternally important use as opposed to being used for things that don't really matter in the long run. Several years ago John Piper wrote an important little book entitled, *Don't Waste your Life*. In it he wrote, "I'll tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider this story from the February 1998 Reader's Digest: A couple 'took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells...' Picture them before Christ at the great Day of Judgment: 'Look, Lord. See my Shells.' That is a tragedy." As a Christian, your life is now holy—set apart for God.

Pleasing to God

Thirdly, Paul says, the sacrifice is "pleasing to God." This is a sacrifice that honors God by accomplishing God's gracious purposes in this world. The story of my father, with which I began this sermon, illustrates the practical outworking of a living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice of our bodies, our very lives, to God. Most of what that means is lived out in the common places and everyday events of life. Romans 12:1 states, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*

But how do we do this? Paul answers in verse 2: *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will*

be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." There are two sides to this—a negative and a positive. First, the negative: Don't go on being conformed to the pattern of this world. Don't put yourself in the situations where you are unnecessarily shaped by the values of the world.

Elsewhere we are taught that we are necessarily in the world, but we are not of the world. We are clearly IN the world and Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:19, *"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world... since then you would need to go out of the world..."* But at

This is a sacrifice that honors God by accomplishing God's gracious purposes in this world.

the same time we are not to be co-opted or absorbed into the world. God's Word says in 2 Corinthians 6:17, *"Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing."* But here in Romans 12:1-2, Paul doesn't give us a list of "don'ts" (though he is not afraid to do so elsewhere). Here, Paul simply tells us to, as the Phillips' translation puts it, "stop letting the world around you squeeze you into its mold."

This is a warning to be aware of what is shaping our values. Nearly everyone agrees that we are a self-centered, sex-obsessed and greedy culture. Foolish is the Christian who thinks he's not affected by that. Advertisers and others who benefit financially are betting billions of dollars every year that they can shape your values. There are probably no more powerful influences in our culture today than music and movies. And the message they send is not about

holiness.

Let me give you just one current example. "27 Dresses" is a very popular movie, grossing \$22 million last weekend alone. My concern is that many of our young people and their parents plan to watch it. PluggedinOnline describes the movie in part this way:

"It's Jane's friend, Casey, who is the movie's fount of sexual shockers. She says, for instance, that the only reason to put on one of those ghastly bridesmaid dresses is the thought that, later, a willing groomsman might 'rip it to shreds with his teeth.' When Jane receives flowers from a secret admirer, Casey says, 'I spent two days in bed with a guy and *you* get flowers. Great.' She jokingly encourages Jane to seduce her boss and have an 'accidental

***Do not conform to the pattern of this world
but be transformed.***

pregnancy, a shotgun wedding and a lifetime of bliss.' And there's more. There are two-dozen profane uses of the Lord's name, and an assortment of extremely vulgar and crude remarks. And drunkenness is treated as humorous. I believe I have read several times that 90% of sexual encounters portrayed on television are between unmarried or not-married-to-each-other people. And worse than all of this is the message of greed being perpetuated by the advertising.

What is most influencing you? Is the world around squeezing you into its mold? Are your decisions about relationships, recreation, job, money and the rest of life shaped most by world? Paul writes, "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world...*" But he goes on quickly to add, "*but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" Please notice that Paul does not simply give us

a new list of dos and don'ts. He calls for a transformation—a change of character and a change of desires. By the sinfulness of the world and our own “sinful” natures, we are pre-programmed to value what the world values.

The two primary words, “conformed” and “transformed,” are two different words but they have the same idea. So here Paul says I don't want you shaped any longer by the world, but I do want you to be shaped, I want you molded, I want you wholly influenced, but I want it done by God in the very renewing of your mind. Paul doesn't just say, “Stop sinning and start living right!” God isn't interested in us just figuring out how to manage our sin. He doesn't just want you to control yourself so that you don't do what you desire; He wants your desires to change. He wants what you value most to change.

How does that happen? It happens by the renewing of your mind. One interesting way Paul said this is with the verb he used. He doesn't say you are to renew your own mind. He says, in essence, you are to allow it to be renewed; God does the renewing. The idea here and in the rest of the Bible is that the Spirit of God actively uses the Word of God to change us. It starts with conscious, dependent prayer to God asking Him to change our mind and heart. And it continues by reading and listening to God's Word preached, taught and discussed by God's people. That is what the Spirit uses to change our minds: The Word and prayer. We are being influenced at all times. The only question is who will have most access to our souls? Don't fool yourself, thinking you are a Christian, if you aren't engaging the Spirit of God in His word.

Now I want to show you five words, used by Paul, that move us to no longer go on being conformed but being transformed. I want to go back to the beginning of these

verses where Paul writes, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices..."* As I said earlier, Paul didn't finish the first 11 chapters of his letter and then in chapter 12 say, "Alright, now I want you to go out and try harder to live like Christians." No, Paul tied his instruction to act to the greatest motivation imaginable—"in view of God's mercy."

When we look back at Romans chapters 1-11, we remember what God has done:

- Who was sinful and deserving of God's wrath?
- Who was damned and unable to help himself?
- Who was so lost he didn't even want God?
- Who did God send His own son to die for?
- Whose sins has God Himself paid for?
- Who did God send His Spirit to make alive?
- Whose spiritual eyes did God open, to see and trust Jesus?
- Who received the very righteousness of Jesus?
- Who was granted life eternal?
- Who was given the Spirit of God to encourage and enable them?
- Who was placed into the family of God with brothers and sisters in the Lord?

Listen to Paul back in Romans 5:1-2: *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."* Listen to the Apostle Peter 2 Peter 1:3-4: *"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape*

the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

"In view of God's mercy"

In the early 1800s, English preacher Thomas Chalmers wrote an outstanding article entitled, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." I referred to it on other occasions because he articulates such an important concept. Chalmers writes, "The love of the world cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness." But that is exactly what we try to do. We try to convince young people that smoking is harmful, premarital sex is hurtful, and greed is destructive. We try to persuade people that the things of the world that seem so attractive are actually empty and ruinous to their souls. But

Don't fool yourself, thinking you are a Christian, if you aren't engaging the Spirit of God in His word.

that is like telling a dog not to bark! Why? Because the desire for those things is so powerful that all our talking is in vain. Shame or fear may get a kind of compliance but never a change of desire.

But give a person a new desire and it changes everything. The boy's desire to sleep is so strong until he remembers that today he is going fishing. The young man's love of sports consumes his life until he meets that certain girl. Again from Chalmers, "the only way to dispossess (our hearts) of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one."

- It is when we know we are deserving of God's wrath but in His mercy He saved us;
- It is when we know that our relationship with God was not our doing, but solely His;
- It is when we know we are saved by grace, free

grace, and grace alone;

- It is when we hear Jesus in His mercy calling to us, willing to call us His own, willing to be with us for eternity;

It is then that we are compelled from a new desire to be done with the old ones. They no longer hold the same attraction. Once more from Chalmers, "We know of no other way by which to keep the love of the world out of our heart, than to keep in our hearts the love of God—and no other way by which to keep our hearts in the love of God, than building ourselves up on our most holy faith."

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Oh Christian, plead for the Spirit of God to change your mind as you avail yourself of the Word of God.

End Notes

¹<http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/romans/romansvol5to6/38aRomans.html>

Chapter Twenty One

Prerequisites to Transformation

Romans 12:3-8

Romans 12:1-8 says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."*

The Apostle Paul ends his instruction in this paragraph with several illustrations of what the Bible elsewhere calls "spiritual gifts." When Christians begin to learn about "spiritual gifts" one of the first questions they ask is, "What are my spiritual gifts?" To the best of my understanding of the Scriptures, "A spiritual gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby he grants to every Christian grace for effective spiritual service." We'll come back to that definition

later but notice that here Paul cites seven such gifts: prophesy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul indicated that these “gifts” are given by the Spirit of God to strengthen the church, the people of God. *“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers... there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit... Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”* (1 Corinthians 12:1-7) Paul teaches that same concept here but I get ahead of myself.

Why is Paul talking about “gifts?” Let’s go back to verses 1-2 that we looked at earlier. We saw that these two verses form the bridge between the first eleven chapters of Romans and the last five chapters. In those first eleven

Paul knows that relationships are the means and the manifestation of transformed living.

chapters Paul spelled out the great truths of salvation—how we may have a right relationship with God. Please remember this is an issue of utmost importance. If God exists and we are alienated from Him, there is no hope for us. But the Gospel, the good news, is that God reconciled us to Himself, so that now we may belong to the God of eternity by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Following that lengthy and powerful affirmation of the Gospel, Paul then sets forth what should, quite obviously, be our response: *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* (Romans 12:1-2)

The obvious and necessary response to God's awesome grace is to offer our bodies, our very lives, as living sacrifices to God. As we saw earlier, that comes, over time, by no longer being conformed to the pattern of this world but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. At that point, Paul immediately launches into two fundamental, essential ideas, that we must know and practice if our minds are going to be renewed thereby, day by day, transforming us to be more like Jesus. These two ideas are very closely related. The first, in verse 3, is about an attitude of humility. The second, in verses 4-5, is about our very necessary relationship to each other. Verses 6-8, about specific spiritual gifts, are then illustrations of those two ideas in practice.

What I will say next, is very important: Paul knows that relationships are the means and the manifestation of transformed living. Living in relationship to each other, in humility and service to each other, is a primary means God uses to bring about the transformed lives He desires and the way we live in relationship to one another is a primary manifestation of transformed lives. So first, Paul writes in Romans 12:3, *"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."* How are we to think of ourselves? Paul responds with three things:

- *"Not...more highly than you ought"*
- *"but rather...with sober judgment"*
- *And that sober judgment is "in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."*

The main point is that we are to think of ourselves with "sober judgment" or with a correct understanding of ourselves. And what is that "sober judgment," that correct

understanding? Paul says it is *"in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."* Now this is a little nuanced, but I will see if I can explain it. The word "Measure" ("metron") can mean the amount (like a lot of something or only a little of something) or it can mean the measuring device (like a yardstick or a thermometer). So we could translate it this way: "Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the 'amount' of faith God has given you" (meaning that you recognize that the faith you have is a gift from God, regardless of how much faith you have, and thus not a source of pride)., we could translate it this way: "Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the 'standard' of faith God has given you," (meaning that the faith you have is the same faith any other Christian has is the measure, the faith measure and it is from God and no reason for boasting).think the second is better; we are to judge ourselves by the grace common to all of us, meaning we have all become Christians the same way—by the faith God has given us.

But it is interesting that ends up making the same point. A prerequisite for being transformed into the likeness of Jesus is simple but true humility. Turning it around, the 18th century Englishman William Law said, "Humility is nothing else but a right judgment of ourselves." To live the Christian life we must start at the same place we did in receiving the Christian life to begin with - humbly. For you to become a Christian you had to recognize your utter dependence on God. In Romans Paul has repeatedly made clear that we have no right, we have no worth, no merit, by which we can expect God's favor. We come empty handed, deserving wrath but finding mercy. Jesus spoke of it as coming to him as a little child. A child is not only dependent but a child knows that he hasn't achieved anything that makes him worthy. In our case, God has given even our desire and ability to believe to us.

250 years ago, Augustus Toplady wrote that now historic hymn “Rock of Ages” which speaks to the same issue: “Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling...” Now to live the Christian life we must have the same attitude—sober judgment, humbly knowing that everything we have is by grace. In order for us to be transformed we must begin by letting go of the natural ideas of rights and entitlements. Imagine the difference it would make in our relationships if we fully recognized and acted on the truth that everything we have is a gift from God. We don’t deserve it, we have no right to it and we don’t “own” it. Any understanding we have of the Scriptures, any

A prerequisite for being transformed into the likeness of Jesus is simple but true humility.

relationship we have with Christ, any abilities we have even to breathe and work each day, or to serve others, is by the grace of God, to be used for the glory of God. All ground is level at the cross. No Christian is superior to another. As one person put it, “We are all beggars telling other beggars where there is bread.”

I know that flies in the face of modern psychology’s obsession with self but Paul said to think of ourselves with sober judgment, correctly. And God says though we were wonderfully made, we are deeply fallen and only by His grace are we now deeply loved. Humility is the starting point for all spiritual growth. Over 200 years ago John Wesley captured the right sense of humility when he prayed the following: “Above all, deliver me, O my God, from all idolatrous self-love. I know, O God, that this is the root of all evil. I know you made me to serve not my will but yours. I know that the very essence of the devil is having a will contrary to yours. Help me against this most

dangerous of all idols. Enable me to feel the full evil of my sin and sinfulness and then let me be fully content when all others think of me as I do of myself.

"O Lamb of God, who both by your example and teaching instructed us to be humble, give me grace this day and throughout my whole life, in every thought, word and action, to imitate your humble ways. Help me understand that I am nothing and have nothing and that I deserve nothing but misery and punishment. Grant it Lord that I may look for nothing and claim nothing and that I may go through life not seeking my own glory but only yours.

"Let me never speak any word that may tend to my own praise unless the good of my neighbor requires it; and even then let me beware, lest to heal another I wound my own soul. Let my ears and my heart be shut to the praise that

Something very unhealthy has developed in the evangelical church over the years. That unhealthy something is an excessive "individualism" and it has resulted in an "individualistic Christianity."

comes from others. Give me a dread of applause in whatever form and from whatever tongue it comes.

"O Jesus, who was despised and rejected by men, when I am slighted by my friends, disdained by my superiors, ridiculed by my peers or contemptuously treated by my inferiors, let me know that it is only then that I begin to be your disciple, following in your steps. Let me thankfully accept, and faithfully use such occasions for the improving of a humble attitude. Let me acknowledge that your goodness is letting me experience this training and let me beg for mercy for those physicians of my soul that administered your instruction to me."¹

Now with that attitude of humility we can move on to understand better what Paul is saying in verses 4-6a. The first prerequisite is "humility" and now the 2nd prerequisite is "interdependence." Romans 12:4-6a says, *"Just as each of us has one (physical) body with many members (arms, legs, eyes, etc.) and these members do not all have the same function (reaching, walking, seeing, etc), so, in Christ, we who are many form one body (the church), and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."* Here Paul uses a simile or metaphor to show that just as the human body has many members with differing functions, so the church has many members but it is one body. And just as importantly notice he also says that each one belongs to all the others.

Now this is where the humility comes into play. Pride says, I don't need anyone else; I can make it on my own. Pride says, I don't need to help anyone else; they can take care of themselves. Something very unhealthy has developed in the evangelical church over the years—something we have adopted from the culture. That unhealthy something is an excessive "individualism" and it has resulted in an "individualistic Christianity." We reduced Christianity to a private affair between God and ourselves. William Willimon has written, "American Protestantism often impresses observers as a highly individualized, privatized, psychological affair...Individual conversion experiences (in which individuals are saved from individual sins in order to have individual relationships with Jesus) are viewed by some evangelicals as the end rather than the beginning of the life of faith. The church becomes (little more than) a conglomerate of like-minded individuals who find it useful to congregate in order to keep the flame of individual religious experience alive and to foster it in others."² I think he's right. We speak and act as if getting our personal sins

forgiven and getting our own ticket to heaven is the sum of what it means to be a Christian. And furthermore we sometimes think the only reason for church is to tell others about their need for getting their sins forgiven and getting to heaven. Church gets reduced to an assembly of individuals emphasizing an individual religion. But as Willimon points out, individual, personal conversion is not the conclusion of the life of faith but simply the beginning. We are converted, saved, born again, into a community—a community of faith, the body of Christ, the church.

An Asian Indian by the name of George David, wrote an excellent little book entitled, *The Eclipse and Rediscovery of Person*. We are so intent on being individuals, having autonomy, that we have sacrificed our personhood. George David, following Paul Tournier and others, makes an important distinction between being merely an individual and also being a person. The very word “individual” speaks of number—you are one, alone, separate from. That word “individual” emphasizes autonomy, freedom, and independence. In and of itself, being an individual is not wrong but when it excludes the more important aspect of what it means to be “person” then individualism is harmful. We are not just individuals; we are, more importantly, persons. You say that just sounds like semantics. Listen, and I think you will hear a real difference in the distinction. As I just said, the word “individual” refers primarily to number, the number “one,” and by definition “individual” emphasizes our separateness from others. The word “person” speaks of relationship, and “personhood” doesn’t exist apart from relationship. Listen to David, “The ‘I’ can have no real knowledge of itself apart from others. When two selves interact mutually they develop common attitudes, interests, beliefs and goals. When the interaction is such that the individuality of each is not lost but rather respected by the other, they (each) develop a relational

self. It is (this relationship) that transforms an individual into a person...A person possesses not only an individual self, but also a relational self, which is possessed in common with another, making them persons to each other."³

Yes, God made us individually but He created us to live in relationship. Genesis 2:18 says, "*The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'*" God created human life to live in fellowship (not just alongside but in relationship)

We are converted, saved, born again, into a community—a community of faith, the body of Christ, the church.

with Him and with others. Derek Kidner writes, "A person will not live until he loves, giving himself away to another..."⁴ "Sober judgment," correct thinking, humility, means, I am not only still in need of God; I am also in need of God's people.

Several years ago a friend of mine moved away from Denver and away from this church. He wrote to me some months later saying that he wasn't in a church, because he had discovered that it felt sufficient to just read his Bible and watch religious programs on television. Ironically, in the next paragraphs he lamented his weakening spiritual condition and the battles with sin he was losing. The problem with my friend was that he had somehow been led to believe that he would grow as a Christian if he just somehow on his own did enough of the right things. But it wasn't working! What was missing? He was trying to go it alone. God didn't design us that way; it won't work. As Doug Moo wrote, "Television church is not church."⁵ Christianity is a relationship with God and with His people. You can't have one without the other. Spiritual growth takes place in

community! The crucible of Christian growth is relationships.

250 years ago John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, understood this principle better than any other for many years before him. If a man or a woman declared their faith in Jesus they were asked to join a "class meeting." The word "class" didn't denote only a teaching time but, just as importantly, a small gathering of believers (8-12 in size) "The classes normally met one evening each week for an hour or so. Each person reported on his or her spiritual progress, or on particular needs or problems, and received the support and prayers of the others. Advice or reproof

Transformed lives are built in community!

was given as need required, quarrels were made up, misunderstandings removed: and after an hour or two spent in this labor of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving."⁶ Someone, years later, commented, "the kind of (community that the believers) experienced in the class meetings had the express warrant of Holy Scripture...

- How, for example, could they exhort one another daily?
- How could they comfort and edify one another?
- How could they provoke one another to love and good deeds?
- How could they confess their faults to one another and pray for one another?
- How could they bear one another's burdens?
- How could they weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice

...all of which are commands of God to us on each other's behalf, if they never meet together for the purpose of (talking about their spiritual lives) and the state of each other's souls?"⁷

Transformed lives are built in community! Are you in community? Are you in a relationship with other people that allows for:

- the care for your soul?
- attention to your spiritual well-being?
- openness for sharing your burdens and joys?
- a trust where you can confess your faults?
- interaction about the real things of life that can allow for your growth in understanding of God's word as applied to life?

When Jesus was on earth and if you had been alive at that time, where would you have looked to learn about Jesus and how He lived? Obviously, you would have observed Him, learned from Him. If you want to see Jesus in action today, where do you need to look? Yes, at the people of the church. Imperfect as they may yet be in many cases, those who are truly Christians are nonetheless a reflection of Christ. We come together in our groups to see Jesus in each other, to learn from each other, to be loved by each other in spite of our differences, and to care for each other.

Some time ago I sat toward the back of the auditorium during a Sunday morning service. I was not expected to be here so I was not leading. As I sat there that morning I could not help but notice you from a different perspective. I saw so many of you whom I have known for years. As I sat there I realized afresh that I love you. I have been with some of you through your joys and your hurts, your victories and your failures. I have been with you through marriage and through birth; through death and through divorce. Honestly, with many tears, I said to myself, this is the church. It is not programs, or facilities, or organization (as necessary as all those things are). The church is you. And I love you not only because of who you are but also for what you have taught me. In many of you I have met Jesus.

- You have modeled love in the face of hostility.
- You have shown perseverance in the midst of pain.
- You have demonstrated forgiveness in the absence of repentance.
- You have responded to attack with gentleness.

God inhabits His people; we learn about Him in community, in each other. The change God says He will do in us, renewing our minds and transforming us to be more like Jesus, starts with humility and continues in the context of the people of God.

Now in verses 6-8 Paul illustrates how that works itself out in our life together as Christians. Romans 12:6-8 says, *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."* I clearly don't have time to develop this whole idea of the gifts of the Spirit. But I don't think that was Paul's intent here either. It is developed much more fully in 1 Corinthians 12 and I have given you additional notes on this subject in Appendix L. But to close the sermon where Paul does in the text, I remind you again, "A Spiritual Gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby he grants to every Christian grace for effective spiritual service."

A spiritual gift is a "special work of the Holy Spirit" It is not just our natural abilities, though He may use our natural abilities. The "gift of gab," for example, is not necessarily a spiritual gift though the Spirit of God may use someone's natural or learned ability to articulate well to effectively minister to others. This "special work of the Holy Spirit" is just that: it is the Spirit of God intervening supernaturally to

enable the Christian to serve effectively. Having said that, it then stands to reason that the gift is not just in what the Christian is enabled to do but in the change the Spirit brings about in the one being served. Things happen in others because of the exercise of that gift. God does a work in someone's life through you.

How do you know what your spiritual gifts are? In Appendix L I give seven thoughts you can use to help determine how God wishes to use you to effectively serve others—how to

God inhabits His people; we learn about Him in community, in each other.

use your spiritual gifts. But please don't be concerned about naming your spiritual gifts. As I studied the various passages that teach on this subject I noticed that many of the definitions of the words used to describe the gifts seem to overlap. It is most likely that God never intended to give a complete listing of all the spiritual gifts but gave us enough to show us that there are probably as many gifts as there are needs to be met. In fact I do believe that is the most significant issue when it comes to using our spiritual gifts—not so much knowing what they are as using them. I don't agree with Robert Schuler on many things, but on this I do: "Find a need and fill it; find a hurt and heal it." Do something and let God do His work through you.

"A Spiritual Gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby he grants to every Christian grace for effective spiritual service."

Helen Keller, who died 40 years ago this summer, was the first deaf/blind person to graduate from college. She wrote, "I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were

great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.”⁸ God calls each of us to use the opportunities and abilities He gives us to be the means He uses in each other to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Our life together is both the means and the manifestation of a transformed life. It starts with humility and an understanding of our need for each other. It continues with our serving each other in whatever ways God gives us opportunity.

Look at Romans 12:1-8 again: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."*

End Notes

¹ Edited from *A Collection of Forms of Prayer*, 1733

² William Willimon, *What's Right with the Church*, p. 15

³ George David, p. 43, 44

⁴ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 65

⁵ Douglas Moo, *NIVAC Romans*, p. 407

⁶ Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*, p. 55

⁷ Ibid, p. 56

⁸ http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_humility.html

Chapter Twenty Two

The Perfect Church

Romans 12:9-21

I don't know if anyone actually thinks they will ever find the "perfect" church but do you remember the deacon's counsel to the dissatisfied, resigning church member? The deacon said to the leaving member: "If you find the perfect church out there, don't you join it, for it then wouldn't be perfect any longer!" I want to talk about the perfect church. And when I say "the church" I'm not talking about the organization, the facilities, or the programming—I'm talking about the people (a group of Christians who meet together and call themselves a church) And when I say "perfect" I'm not talking about perfection, or sinlessness, or never making a mistake. When I say "perfect" I'm using it the way the Bible does—I'm talking about completeness, fulfillment, being all that God wants that group of people to be. The Perfect Church is that group of God's people who are living out God's will for them individually and collectively.

Knowing the will of God is a major quest for Christians, especially young adults. They assume that in their youth is a critical time to be thinking about God's will for their lives because they are about to select their college and/or their vocation. Those adults who have finished their training and are already involved in careers are less likely to ask questions about God's will for their lives. And many older adults don't want to even think about God's will for their lives because they think that if they missed it, it's too late to do anything about it anyway.

But God through the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1&2, talking to Christians of all ages, young and old, writes: *"Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."* God calls on us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so we may know and do God's will.

God's description of His will for us is about character and relationships—the kind of people we are and how we invest in and treat those around us.

But what is God's will? What is His will for you? What is His will for us as a church of people? It is no mistake that no sooner does Paul call us to understand and do God's will then he spells out what that means.

- 12:1-2: Be transformed so that you may do God's will.
- 12:3-8: Faithfully exercise your spiritual gift(s) for the good of others.
- 12:9ff: Love one another and even those who abuse you.

That's God's will for us! We live in a culture that judges us on what we accomplish more than on who we are. We are judged by our productivity more than our character. Several years ago when asked if they thought former President Clinton was guilty of the moral and ethical lapses with which he was charged, most said "yes." When asked if they thought that had any bearing on his being a good president, most said "no." He was judged by productivity, not character.

Even in Christianity, we judge churches far more by the programs they seem to be accomplishing than by the Christ-likeness of the people. But when we come to Romans 12 and see God's description of His will for us, it is about character and relationships—the kind of people we are and how we invest in and treat those around us. The will of God for you and for this church is not most of all about where you live and what job you have or what size this church is or what programs we offer. The will of God has much more to do with how we treat our spouses, our children, our parents, our co-workers, our neighbors, and the people we are sitting near right now. Folks this is very important; we too often want to think of the will of God as some occupation we must have or as some great task we are to complete. And when we think of the will of God that way, we too easily dismiss ourselves from serious thinking about His will for us because we think either we have missed the opportunity to pursue a particular occupation or we think the task we say is God's will, is too large for us anyway. So because we aren't a missionary or a pastor and we don't have the natural ability to lead some great evangelical enterprise we dismiss serious reflection on the will of God for our lives.

What if you knew that regardless of how young or old you are, you could yet truly become all God wants you to be. What if you knew that regardless your age you could still truly accomplish the will of God for your life? The attitudes and conduct described in Romans 12:9-21 are the very heart of the will of God for you and for me and for this church. What we read next in Romans is an excellent description of God's will, God's goal for us. But before we read it I want to warn you about something. We are about to read is a description of a "perfect" Christian and a "perfect" church. And if we don't think correctly, we can be threatened by these words rather than encouraged. If we

haven't experienced the mercy and grace of God, if we aren't truly Christians, trusting solely in Jesus and His death for us to make us right with God then we may view these words as what we have to do to be good enough for God. That's legalism. Likewise, even if we are Christians, we may misunderstand these words and assume that here is yet another list of things we must do in order to stay in God's favor. Please hear me: this is not something we have to do to be good Christians, rather this is what we can be by God's grace.

Now look at Romans 12:9-21:

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. Doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

That's quite a description isn't it? Someone might say, "I get tired just thinking about all that!" No! That's not correct thinking. Please hear me again: this is not something we have to *do* to be good Christians; rather, this is *what we*

can be by God's grace. This is a description of God's will for each of us. I want you to see something interesting. And you don't have to know Greek to find what I found. By using an interlinear Bible where each Greek word is translated into English, I found that there are actually fewer words in Greek than in our translations. The language is almost sparse.

Romans 12:9-13:

Sincere love
Shrinking from evil
Cleaving to good
In brotherly love, warmly loving one another
In honor, preferring one another
In zeal, not lazy
In spirit, burning
The Lord, serving
In hope, rejoicing
In affliction, showing endurance
In prayer, continuing steadfastly
To the needs of the saints, imparting
Hospitality, pursuing

What I found interesting was that there were no commands in it. It is simply a description, a description of God's will. And what I find is a character portrait of exactly the kind of

***Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.
Honor one another above yourselves.***

person I would like as a friend. And I find the character portrait of the kind of person I would like to be. And when I think about it that way, it is not threatening but very encouraging. It's a little like kids all over this country after the Masters' Golf Tournament who picked up sticks and began hitting balls on the ground. Because they saw Tiger

Woods they were challenged to be like him. No one considers their attempts to emulate Tiger Woods as negative but as positive, an encouragement. So here, we look at what we could be and our church could be, and we say, by God's grace, I want that to be true of our church and me. This is not a critical description of how we are falling short, but of what we can be. God has every expectation of us because He knows He empowers us. This is what God has called us to be and will enable us to be.

In verses 9-21 I see the kind of people God will help us become. Please remember, the context for this description is the grace of God to us. God enables us to respond to His desires for us. God makes it possible for us to live for Him. This is not a self-help program but a Holy Spirit generated response to the commands of God. We are now able by

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love

God's grace! As I studied this passage I tried to find an outline that Paul may have used to order the things he said. I couldn't find an outline. Some commentators attempted to give the passage different kinds of structure but it seems forced. It rather seems that Paul gives 21 rather succinct statements.

What do you suppose Paul expected the Roman Christians, the first readers of this letter, to do with this list? As I've already said, I believe it is a description of God's will for them and for us. I would expect then that those Christians would compare themselves with the kind of person described here and think about where it was by God's grace they needed to grow. Can we do the same? If this is God's will for us, what kind of progress are we making on being the kind of people He will help us become. As I go through the list very quickly, take note of those areas where God

has brought significant change in your life. Also take note of those areas where significant change yet needs to happen. Then most of all, select one or two areas, to which, with God's help, you will give some attention today and this week.

So here's the short course on relationships—God's will for us.

Love must be sincere (12:9)

God calls on us to make a decision to love each other. To pretend to love when you have no intention of actually doing so is hypocritical and it is destructive. But when we decide to love and act on that love even when we don't feel like it, that is sincere love. Have you made a decision, and do you renew that decision, to actively love the people of this church?

Hate what is evil (12:9)

I promise to develop abhorrence, an aversion to anything that would work toward the detriment of those I have chosen to love. Anything that would injure another person, I now hate. My decision to love them is so absolute that I will actively work against anything that would end up harming them.

Cling to what is good (12:9)

The word "cling" is a word that means a sticking, a bonding to, something. I have determined to be glued to whatever will help those I love. Just as I abhor evil so I will cling to good. I will find out what helps and encourages that other person and I will develop that and use it for their good.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (12:10)

"Devoted" means a natural affection for relatives particularly a parent for a child. "Brotherly love" refers to the love of brothers and sisters for each other. It means to have a warm, tender affection for each other. It has to do

with choosing to love others with that kind of love and spending the time for it to develop.

Honor one another above yourselves (12:10)

It means to have such affection for others that I place their interests ahead of my own. Further it means to out-do each other in showing honor for each other! It is shown in the use of my free time, the use of my discretionary income, and the way I speak of others—honoring others.

Never be lacking in zeal (12:11)

The word “lacking” can also be translated “lazy.” And “zeal” has to do with diligence, an enthusiastic attention to something. You do not allow yourself to lose your energy for loving others. Or as Paul said it to the Galatians: *“Do not lose heart in doing good.”* It has to do with perseverance—not allowing ourselves to let down in the pursuit of Christ and His will. Not allowing a slothful mindset toward the things of God to go unchecked.

Keep your spiritual fervor (12:11)

By the Spirit be passionate about this issue of serving the Lord in this way. Mentally fan into flames, call on God daily to help, recommit yourself to your desire you actively love people.

Serving the Lord (12:11)

Remember that your love for others is rooted in your love for the Lord. If you remember that it is Jesus you are also loving when you love others, it makes it easier to love the otherwise unlovely. Jesus said when you actively love someone you are loving Him. Chuck Colson recalled the following incident: The Anacostia section of Washington D.C. is a ghetto of hunger, crime, drugs, and hopelessness. Few of Washington’s celebrities and power brokers cross

from the Capitol to this part of town. One morning however, black limousines and television trucks lined the curb in front of an old church in the heart of Anacostia. They waited for a wisp of a woman in a muslin sari. The celebrity they wanted to interview was the elderly Albanian nun known to the world now as Mother Theresa. Since she didn't come to them, the cameras and interviewers came to her.

"What do you hope to accomplish here" someone shouted. "The joy of loving and being loved" she smiled into the camera lights.

"That takes a lot of money doesn't it" another reported queried. The more money something costs the more important it is in Washington.

Mother Theresa shook her head and said, "No, it takes a lot of sacrifice."

The press was bewildered—they are accustomed to grandiose plans and huge budgets and trumpeting it all to the press. But her message was simple: "Do something for someone else—love them." A man in her ministry came to her complaining that his boss was interfering with his ability to do his ministry. He said,

"My vocation is to work for the lepers. I want to spend myself for them." Mother Theresa stared at him and then gently said,

"Your vocation is not to work for the lepers, your vocation is to belong to Jesus."

The reminder is potent. Love for others will become less burdensome when we remember it is the way we show our love for the Lord.

Joyful in hope (12:12)

Remember what is in store for those who love God! It is God who controls your future not your present circumstances. In Romans 8 Paul wrote, *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the*

glory that will be revealed in us.” Or as he said it to the Galatians, *“in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”* I remember hearing of a retiring missionary couple who had spent 40 years in a different country. When welcomed home they responded, “We’re not home yet!” Fixing our eyes on the real goal makes all the difference.

Patient in affliction (12:12)

Having your hope fixed securely on the future that Jesus promises can allow you to be patient in affliction. Even when things get rough, your eye is so fixed on Jesus and your mind so convinced of his promises that you wait through anything. So convinced are you that you don’t question God; you patiently wait for His timing and His results.

Faithful in prayer (12:12)

We know our prayers make a difference because of the God we believe in. And when our hope is anchored in Jesus we can pray even when we don’t see the results.

Share with God's people who are in need” (12:13)

“Share” can mean empathizing with someone and giving to meet their needs. But the suffix attached to the word signifies a “generous” sharing. Acts 2 makes it clear that such “sharing” in the early church had to do with material possessions. This description then is of a Christian who generously gives to meet the needs of others. My own brother-in-law who had nothing, had a 15-year-old car that was beaten up and too small. When he was given an 8-year-old car, instead of selling the older one, he gave it to a young couple who had even less. That’s generous sharing!

Practice hospitality (12:13)

The word “hospitality” means to love strangers. The word “practice” has the added emphasis of pursuing it! We are not just to respond when some stranger seeks our help but we are to go out looking for opportunity. Looking for opportunity to express concern and care for a stranger. That may be a neighbor you don’t know well or at all, someone new in church, an international student. It has to do with opening up the circle of our relationships and letting others in.

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse (12:14)

Jesus said, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” Paul knows the human temptation to wish ill on those who dislike us and abuse us and so he calls for a sure antidote—blessing them—calling to God (pray) to truly bless them. Not just asking God to make them nicer to you or just to go away but asking God to bring good on them. Someone is out to get you and your attitude and conduct is to bless them. Wow! That is active prayer for those who like us least.

Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn (12:15)

Genuine empathy means feeling what they feel. Making yourself enter into their experience. Caring so much about the other person that you want to share in their experience to encourage them. My good friend, Larry Kimbriel who has gone to be with the Lord was a man who gave not only time but true empathy and feeling. I knew when we were together that he heard and he truly cared.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (12:16)

Pride and conceit are particularly virulent social diseases; they destroy unity and utterly hinder fellowship. We seek out the bright, the beautiful, and the apparently successful and try to spend time with them. The troubled, the apparently unsuccessful are left standing alone. It is our pride that does that. Or the reverse happens. We look at those who have more education or more possessions and we want nothing to do with them—our pride gets in the way, we feel insecure and we won't reach out to love them. But Paul says, don't let pride get in the way—reach out in all directions.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right (12:17)

You ask a child why he hit another child and you will often hear "because he hit me." Another driver cuts us off in traffic and we watch for our turn to cut him off. Someone hurts us with words or actions and we lay awake at night rehearsing exactly what we will say the next time we get an opportunity. Love says, "No. I will instead do what is right, what is good, and what is an expression of Christ's kind of love and do it as unto the Lord.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."(12:18)

We are to take the initiative even if peace is not always possible. Who are we at odds with? How long since we have taken initiative to engage them again and express our care? Do we have something against someone that we have not just forgiven or taken to them but instead we harbor animosity toward them? Will you take the initiative?

**Do not take revenge but leave room for God's wrath,
for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay,
says the Lord (12:19)**

Vengeance is God's prerogative. When we seek revenge, be it ever so slight, we are usurping God's rightful place and we make ourselves God in that situation. That becomes a greater offense than our enemy's sin against us.

**If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty,
give him something to drink. In doing this, you will
heap burning coals on his head (12:20)**

Your kindness will lead to an inward sense of shame and possibly repentance. They are coals that tend toward healing not retribution.

**Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with
good (12:21)**

If we curse (instead of bless), if we repay evil for evil (instead of living at peace) and if we seek revenge (instead of treating the evil one kindly) then we have been sucked into the same kind of action which they exhibit. We have been overcome by evil. Revenge is a major theme in much of the movie and television programming. There is much around us and in us to lead us that way—don't let it overcome you but overcome it with love. Instead, if we bless, live at peace and give to those who are evil we overcome evil with good. Nothing is so powerful as kindness. Minds can resist argument, wills can resist coercion, but hearts melt when warmed with genuine love.

That's the list. What will you do with it? Christian, do not ever again wonder what the will of God is for you. And no matter what age we are this will of God can become true of us. Can you imagine what would happen if all Christians determined to reflect this kind of love for one another and

others?

Chapter Twenty Three

God and Country

Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1-7 says, *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."*

When I was a student at the University of Minnesota I had several acquaintances who refused to register for the draft. It was during the Vietnam War and not registering was against the law. Were those men right or wrong? Many of you know of the book *Pilgrim's Progress*. You may not know that the author John Bunyan spent over 13 in prison because he refused to obey a law, which said he had to register with the government to be a preacher of the Gospel. Was he right or wrong?

In the 1960s religious conservatives were using Romans 13 to argue against those in the civil rights movement who were breaking the Jim Crow laws of the south. By the 1980s, in the early Christian school movement, religious conservatives were ignoring Romans 13 and arguing from Acts 5:29, that they must obey God rather than man. Today some would argue that it is biblically wrong to withhold taxes in opposition to the war in Iraq but biblically right to withhold taxes in opposition to federally funded abortion. We tend to cite Romans 13:1 or ignore it, depending on “whose ox is being gored.” I’m afraid there are too many Christians who are not at all unlike the general population when it comes to our attitude toward the government. We like it if it supports our views and doesn’t impose too high a tax, but we rail against it if we disagree or it costs us too much.

Humility and service to each other are how we grow to be more like Christ.

We are in the midst of the 2008 political season. The media and the politicians play on emotions; the more passionately for or against someone the better they like it. People are encouraged to not just disagree but even to dislike. Christians get caught up in hating the Clintons or George Bush. We engage in personal attacks on Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama or John McCain. But God calls us to a different attitude and a different response—*everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities; Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*”

This text of Scripture raises some serious questions but before addressing them, I want you to see why Paul

discusses our attitude toward governing authorities at this point in his letter. At the beginning of chapter 12 Paul set the agenda for the rest of his letter when he wrote, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* Beginning in verse 3 Paul then describes our relationship to each other as being both a means and the manifestation of transformed living. Humility and service to each other are how we grow to be more like Christ and they are also a demonstration that we do in fact belong to Christ.

Then beginning at verse 9, Paul spells out a number of ways that this transformed living expresses itself. First in love and devotion to one another and then, beginning in verse 17, Paul reminds us of the Christ-like response even to those who abuse us. *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* (Romans 12:17-19, 21)

In Rome, though the persecutions were not yet as severe as they would become, there were probably no groups who had more reason to fear and even hate the governing authorities than Jews and Jewish and Gentile Christians. And so speaking of evil, revenge and enemies, Paul turns his attention to the leading instigators of the abuse of the church—the government. Just as today, so then there were people who were anti-government. I don't mean the "loyal opposition," I mean those who spoke and acted as if all government were bad. And so chapter 13, verses 1-7 speak to what living a transformed life looks like in relationship to

the government, even a godless government. As I tried to illustrate earlier, this text is relevant to us both in terms of just and unjust laws but even more so in terms of our attitudes.

So what does the text teach? The basic command is very straightforward: *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities..."* (Romans 13:1) "Everyone" must mean all the Christians to whom Paul is writing in Rome and by implication, us as well. "Governing authorities" are clearly the local and national governmental officials, which in that time were not just pagan but outright anti-Christian. Now most importantly is the word "submit." This is not the word for obey. This is not a blanket command to obey every law of government whether just or unjust. Submission here, as in Ephesians 5 where Paul talks about submitting to each other and wives submitting to their husbands, is not a matter merely of outward obedience but it is a deeper matter of the heart-attitude toward each other. The idea of submitting is to put the other's interests first. Submitting to them is respecting them—in honor preferring them. It is a predisposition that says unless there is compelling reason to do otherwise, I will yield to their desires.

Let's stop for a minute and do a reality check. Have I overstated the case? When you see the word "submit" used elsewhere in the Bible, does it mean what I have said here—a predisposition to comply, putting the interests of the other first? Is it possible that Paul is indicating that this is to be our basic posture, our predisposition toward governing authorities? I think it is! Why? The first reason is found in verse 1: *"for there is no authority except that which God has established."* Authority is from God. He is the source of all authority, be it in the church, the home, or in the government. Authority is not self-derived nor even,

contrary to our Declaration of Independence, is it derived "from the consent of the governed." All authority is from and owes allegiance to God himself whether the authority recognizes it now or not. That's very important for what we're going to see later about civil disobedience.

The second reason is this: Not only is all authority from God but also, *"The authorities that exist have been established by God."* I think Paul might have expounded this idea like this: "To you Christians in Rome, I want you to know I'm not speaking hypothetically about some government, somewhere, sometime. I am talking about

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.

your government. I'm talking about the Roman authorities. I'm talking about the soldiers that you bump into on the street. I'm talking about the Caesars themselves. Your government, this government is from God." Paul says your government has been "established" by God. That means it is ordained, instituted, or appointed by God.

In Daniel (2 and 4) and Exodus (9) and numerous other places throughout the Bible, it very clearly tells us that God sets kings up and God takes them down. God brings them into being and God removes them. God, the ultimate source of authority, is the one who has established the Roman government. And God today has established our government and all governments. Granted, there are intermediary means that have brought them to power (heredity, force or vote) and they may misuse their authority but their existence is by God's permission.

Reason number three for why we should "submit to governing authorities" is found in verse 3: *"For rulers hold*

no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you."

I believe with Augustine, Calvin, and with most of the theologians down through the centuries, that man is born a sinner and that if God did not intervene in some way, man would ruin not only himself, but also all society by his sinful actions. God, in His grace, has instituted government to restrain evil and to promote good. I would hate living in Sudan, Somalia or the Congo with the anarchy that reigns. Government is for an orderly society; for that reason, you are to submit to the governing authorities.

The fourth reason to submit is given to us in verse 4: *"For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."* The governing authorities are God's

By submitting to governing authorities we are actually choosing to submit to God.

servants. The word is "deacon." Bill Ritter, Ken Salazar, maybe John McCain or Hillary Clinton are God's deacons. And God is using His deacons to carry out His purposes. In Acts 4, as an illustration, Peter was preaching and he referred to the governing authorities responsible for Jesus' death. Acts 4:27-28 says, *"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."* Those authorities were accomplishing God's purposes, even though they didn't know it. Submit to governing authorities because:

- All authority is from God.
- The authorities that exist have been established by

God.

- Governing authorities maintain a civil society.
- They are God's deacons carrying out his purposes.

Now the summary of the argument is found in verse 5:

"Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." Paul restates the command to submit but he also adds to what he has already said. Here he reiterates two reasons to submit: "because of possible punishment" and "because of conscience." Back in verse 2 Paul addressed the first of these: *"he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."* The argument is simply this: if you resist authority, you can expect judgment. When Paul uses that word "judgment," given the way he uses it elsewhere, he is probably suggesting that God himself will be involved in the judgment on those who refuse to live in submission to the governing authorities. This idea of submitting to governing authorities is not a trifling matter—it is as serious as obeying God.

The second reason Paul emphasizes in verse 5, is *"because of conscience."* "Conscience" here doesn't mean feeling guilty, it means being aware that by submitting to governing authorities we are actually choosing to submit to God. Again, back in verse 2 Paul said it this way: *"he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted."* The Apostle Peter put it this way: *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors..."* (1 Peter 2:13-14) Our submission to authority is not only because we might be punished but also because, based on conscience, we choose to honor the Lord who has ordained that authority.

The conclusion of the argument, then, is in verses 6 and 7. If we live in submission to governing authorities it will manifest itself, at least in these two ways: Pay your taxes. That's right. Support the governing authorities. They are from God. It is appropriate that they be supported. And, give them proper respect: *"if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."*

I'd like to finish with a number of applications that I think we can draw from this text and related texts.

- Our basic posture toward governing authorities is a readiness to submit to their authority. We don't assume a cynical attitude but a compliant attitude—not resistance but openness to their authority.
- Our obligation as a Christian is to honor governing authorities as from God. Not flattery, but due respect. It means that our basic attitude toward police, toward local officials, toward elected, as well as appointed officials, is to honor them—certainly not speaking of them in disparaging ways.
- Pay taxes to support them (Romans 13:6). They are ministers of God and they are to be supported as surely as ministers in the local church are to be supported. Pay your taxes.
- In 1 Peter 2:12, the Apostle Peter writes, *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."* Our obligation is to be mature, disciplined Christian Citizens. When the governing authorities

think of Christians they ought to be able to say, "Of all of the citizens, Christians are the most honorable, Christians are the ones who are most respectful, and Christians are the ones who are most supportive." By the way we act we "silence the ignorant talk of foolish men." There are a lot of "kooks" that bring reproach to the name of Christ; people who fancy themselves on some kind of crusade, battling the wrong battles, entering into things that are so foolish that they make the name of Christ look foolish. There are people who by their actions, their words, their anger, by the way

Our obligation as a Christian is to honor governing authorities as from God.

they treat civilian authorities, bring reproach on the name of Christ. Live mature, disciplined, holy lives before governing authorities.

- Pray for governing authorities. In I Timothy 2:1-2, the apostle Paul sets forth that command. As much as you pray for one another, as you are commanded to pray for God's kingdom work, it is also a command of the word of God that we are to pray for the governing authorities.
- By way of implication, one of our obligations is informed participation. I take you back to the word "submit" as it is used here and as it's used in Ephesians 5. It means caring about the governing authorities, being aware, learning about them. It means caring about what they care about. It means registering, learning about the issues, speaking out, voting. Democracy is dependent on the informed consent of its people; and Christians, more than others, ought to be involved in that process. I think the word of God, when it talks about submitting, has to do with informed participation.

- We are to bear arms on behalf of our government, if it is a just cause. I know there are Christians who are pacifists, but I don't think the Bible supports their position. Jesus did not tell the soldiers to put down their arms. He told them to be good soldiers. (Luke 3:14) I think the Bible teaches and models that when necessary evil must be restrained by force. Within our own country, we all know that it is necessary with some people, to physically restrain them. We have

That word submit is not blind compliance but a predisposition to comply as long as it does not mean disobedience to God.

prisons; we have jails. I believe it is just as possible, that there will be times in the life of a country, when it will be necessary to restrain outside influences and it will be necessary to restrain them with force. We are to bear arms on behalf of our government if it is a just cause.

- I also believe that one of the obligations of a Christian, in relationship to his government, is responsible opposition. In Mark 6:18, John the Baptist, at the cost of his head I might remind you, criticized the government. He could not allow the immorality of the king to go unchallenged. He spoke against the king and it finally cost him his life. Responsible criticism is appropriate from Christian people. It is our responsibility to help governing authorities understand that authority is from God, and as long as they live within the parameters of their authority, they are correct. But when they move outside and begin to do something that is not their authority, it is the Christian's obligation, out of respect for God's authority, to criticize and correct, if possible.

To that end I believe that one of the Christian's responsibilities toward governing authorities is disobedience when obedience to the government would mean disobedience to God.

Earlier I said the command of God is for us to submit to governing authorities. That word submit is not blind compliance but a predisposition to comply as long as it does not mean disobedience to God. Several years ago, William Bontrager, a county judge in Indiana, ruled in the case of Harry Palmer. Harry was a veteran. He returned from war, was married and had two children, but Harry committed first-degree burglary. It was a first offense and there were other mitigating circumstances, but William Bontrager, as the judge, knew the law said he had to sentence Harry to 10-20 years in prison for that burglary. But Bontrager said he couldn't do it. You see, just 18 days after Harry Palmer's arrest, the Indiana legislature had agreed that such sentencing rules were too strict and they changed the law. But because Palmer had been arrested 18 days earlier, the law still held. He had to spend 10-20 years in prison.

Bontrager said, "Before God, I cannot do that. That is unjust. I must resist it." So, instead of sentencing Harry to 20 years, Bontrager declared that law unconstitutional and sentenced Palmer to one year in prison. Palmer spent that year in prison as a model prisoner, came out, went back to work, paid back the people he had burglarized, was a model citizen and it looked like a model case of rehabilitation.

But there was a problem; the prosecuting attorneys did not like what Bontrager had done. They went to the Supreme Court and that Court ordered Bontrager to impose the 10-20 year sentence on Harry, who by then was out of prison.

Again Bontrager said he couldn't do it and, after exhausting his options, he resigned his judgeship. Palmer is serving a 10-20 year prison sentence in Indiana. And Bontrager was fined and sentenced to a year in prison. But ironically his sentence was suspended. Here was a man, and there have been many others like him who said, along with Peter in Acts 5:29, "I must obey God, rather than man."¹

When a government commands that which contradicts God's laws, the Christian has an obligation to disobey. Francis Schaeffer wrote, "If there is no place for civil disobedience, if there is no place for breaking the law, then the government has been made autonomous and, as such, has been put in the place of God." Authority is from God. And when the governing authorities usurp authority that is not theirs, they take the place of God, and it is a Christian's obligation to resist and respond. Jesus said, *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but render to God the things that are God's."* Civil disobedience is not anarchy. Anarchy is no law. Civil disobedience is appealing to a higher law—God's law.

How does one know when disobedience is called for? A Christian is not an anarchist. The Christian is one who believes that all authority comes from God and that the governing authorities are from God and that we are to submit to them. For the Christian to break the law is an extremely serious matter. Knowing when and how to exercise civil disobedience, while maintaining a submissive attitude, is a difficult matter. It would take another sermon to address this issue.

Fortunately others have provided help and I have included their words in Appendix M. I know, however, that such a decision is not arrived at easily. I believe God left us to struggle with applying the principles of the word of God to

given situations and to say “Is this the time, is this the issue? Can I be in submission to the governing authorities, but in this particular instance disobey?”

I believe in the years ahead, Christians will be called on increasingly to commit civil disobedience. I’m afraid that there are indications that the state will increasingly encroach on religion. Christians may be called upon to say,

Civil disobedience is appealing to a higher law—God’s law.

“No, I cannot obey that law. I must obey God, rather than man.” It may happen in reference to unjust economic policies that are oppressing poor countries and poor people. It may happen that we’ll be called on to be part of an unjust war. It may be about abortion. How long do we appeal, write letters and protest? How long before Christians must disobey? But as I said a moment ago, for a Christian to come to that place will be very difficult. It will stretch our minds and it ought to break our hearts if we understand Romans 13, because as a Christian Citizen we want to live in submission to the governing authorities as unto the Lord.

See Appendix M for additional notes on Civil Disobedience

End Notes

¹ From Colson’s Loving God

Chapter Twenty Four

An Unpayable Debt

Romans 13:8-10

Additional Notes:

- I. P. Quotegarden.com from various authors
- II. P. Additional notes from Dr. Jerry Nelson
- III. P. *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, by Thomas Chalmers of the Free Church of Scotland

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman 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 fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:8-10)

There is a humorous website I found recently; it was called "redneck." It was a variation on another site, "neighborsfrom(purgatory).com"—well it wasn't really called that, but you get the idea.

John, not his real name, moved in next door. It was a new subdivision with some houses still being built. I should have guessed John was a little different when I saw his furniture—well actually there was no furniture—he moved in with a fully decorated artificial Christmas tree, a stereo system, a television and some clothes. Don't misunderstand, John's not poor; he moved into a very nice new house and he drives a couple of very nice cars.

Even though it was only October, the Christmas tree was

prominently displayed in the front window—we could see it easily because there were no curtains or blinds in the house, then or ever. To add to the festive appearance, John wrapped some Christmas lights around the porch. Does anybody think “redneck?” A couple of nights later John decided it was time to build a mailbox. He backed his car up to the construction site on the other side of my house and loaded up 2X4s and bricks. At 9:00 p.m. the next night John began to build. It became quickly apparent

That word submit is not blind compliance but a predisposition to comply as long as it does not mean disobedience to God.

that John was not carpenter. None of the 2X4s were long enough so he had to nail several together to get the right height, and then to give it stability he put several more 2X4s at angles at the bottom. With the bricks he had stolen, he formed a flowerbed in the front yard and in it he put his new bamboo plants and a 10-gallon fish tank—no fish, just the tank.

In November John decided to build a fence around his yard—his front yard. Even a chain-link fence in the front is against covenant but John was building one with chicken wire. Fortunately the builder spotted it and before the concrete could dry around the posts, John had to take them all out. Not many days later a dog appeared—it was a rottweiler and he loved to jump. Finally chained to a post in the back yard, Cujo (the dog’s name) barked up a storm. His reward was that every time he barked for a while, someone came out to yell at him—he loved the attention. John was too busy to feed Cujo on a regular basis so he just threw a 50# bag of dog food on the ground and let Cujo, and the ants and the field mice, eat, at will.

In the spring we awakened one morning to a sound with which we were not familiar in the city—it sounded like chickens. Sure enough John had enclosed the back porch with chicken wire and was now raising chickens. The only problem for John was that Cujo, the dog, liked chickens. It wasn't long before they were gone but alas geese replaced them. Yes, we had community covenants but they didn't bother John.

On weekends John partied hard from midnight to 3 a.m. in his home with his stereo booming. He changed the oil of his car in the front yard and disposed of the oil in the back. Eight months after moving in John finally mowed his lawn—the only problem was it was midnight. He accidentally set his porch on fire with an unattended hibachi grill. The next fall he set his backyard grass on fire—fortunately the fire department kept it from spreading to our backyard. I came home from work one day to see John's newly purchased pool table proudly displayed dead center under his carport.

John did finally build a brick mailbox but instead of getting rid of the old rickety 2X4 one, he used it to mount his flagpole. And on his new mailbox he put a rather large statue of Jesus, apparently to protect his mail. Between numerous citations of covenant violations, several neighbor-instigated police visits in the middle of the night and too many conversations to number, it is understandable that John's relationship with his neighbors was a bit strained.¹

Have any very difficult people in your life? Over a hundred years ago preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote, "And now some one here may say, 'Sir, I can not love my neighbor, you may love yours perhaps, because they may be better than mine, but mine are such an odd set of neighbors, and I try to love them, and for all I do they (they only) return insult.'" Is there anybody in your life who just "bugs" you?

"Love your neighbor as yourself?"—Paul doesn't know my neighbor!

The text before us, Romans 13:8-10, is, I believe, a summary of all Paul has taught thus far. Back in Romans 12:1-2, Paul set the agenda for the rest of his letter:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices...Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed..."

Then in what follows he spells out what transformed living looks like:

12:3-8 – Humility and service.

12:9-21 – Love manifested in many ways.

13:1-7 – Godly conduct even toward those who offend you and/or have authority over you.

It seems that verses 8-10 of chapter 13 are a condensation, or summary, of all this instruction about transformed living. Quoting Jesus, and Moses before him, Paul describes the Christian life in one succinct statement, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Cf. Galatians 5:14)

But before focusing on that central theme, I want to deal with a possible misunderstanding of verse 8. Romans 13:8 says *"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another..."* One could interpret this to say that there is one debt we don't need to repay, the debt to love one another. But of course that would be contrary to the whole sense of the passage. So, certainly here, Paul is saying that there is one debt that we can never fully repay, as much as we may try – the debt of love.

But there is another phrase here that has sometimes been misunderstood:

The NASB translates it *"Owe nothing to anyone..."*

The KJV reads, *"Owe no man any thing..."*

A literal translation might be, "Owe no one..." Some have interpreted this to mean that a Christian can never borrow. But when we compare verse 7, we see that owing is not the problem; the problem is not repaying – "Give everyone what you owe him."

If I have rented a place to live or do my business, I have borrowed from a person. I have borrowed his place.

If I have requested the use of a neighbor's shovel, I have borrowed from him.


If I am using another's money to build my house, I have borrowed from him.



Again, the prohibition is not against borrowing but against not repaying. Paul's instruction is to repay what we owe. If respect then respect, if rent then rent, if money then interest and principle, if a shovel a shovel. Foolish and wrong is the person who borrows what he can't repay. And I have heard reports that suggest if we think there are sad stories about the defaults on sub-prime home mortgages, far more extensive and sadder still will be the stories about the credit card crisis that is coming. The NIV translation is a good one, *"Let no debt remain outstanding..."*

But that is not Paul's major point. His point is that there is one debt that we can never fully repay. Only the debt of love is left outstanding, uncompleted, unfinished because there are always new opportunities—"the continuing debt to love one another." To get my head and heart around this text, I asked what are the key words or concepts here? It seems to me three words are central: love, law and neighbor.

First I want us to think about this word “neighbor.” I won’t say anything new here, but hopefully we will see that we can’t exclude anyone from a biblical definition of this word. We are very prone to saying, “I think this idea of loving others is great except for so-and-so.” Actually, Paul uses three words to describe those we are commanded to love: In verse 8, “one another” and “fellowman” and in verse 9, “neighbor.” “One another” is used many times by Paul to refer to fellow Christians. But even if that is all he meant, it would be hard enough to think we are commanded to love



all other Christians—especially those very difficult ones in our lives. But the other word Paul uses in verse 8 is “fellowman.” That word literally means, “other” or “different.” And Paul put that word in the singular—an individual. We are tempted to say with Charles Shultz’s Linus, “I love mankind, it’s people I can’t stand.” But Paul says, no, we are to love specific, other, different, individuals.

But it is the third word Paul uses that expands the scope of who we are to love—the word “neighbor.” The idea was first expressed by Moses way back in Leviticus 19:18 and then Jesus, Paul and James quote him. It was Jesus, however, who makes it clear that “neighbor” is not just friend, a fellow Christian, and others like us, but also those who are different, even those who hate us. If the parable of the Good Samaritan didn’t make it plain enough for us, Jesus also said, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that*

you may be sons of your Father in heaven. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" (Matthew 5:44-45, 47)

So who is my neighbor? It is broader than this, but it is at least every person who crosses my path and even those who "cross me" in doing so. It is family, literal neighbors, co-workers, other drivers on the road, shoppers at the store, and the people who serve us at restaurants, drive-throughs, and the library. The one who cuts your hair, takes your money at the gas station, votes for the other political party, and makes your life miserable at work. I love what New Testament scholar CEB Cranfield wrote: "The neighbor in the New Testament sense is not someone arbitrarily chosen by us: he is given to us by God."² Every encounter is a divine appointment to demonstrate love. I balk at such a definition, but the Scripture leaves me no room to exclude those difficult people in my life, even those who hate me. It is very clear, whom God has called us to love.

But what is this love? Five years ago on American Idol one of the top songs, written over 40 years earlier by Hal David and Burt Bacharach, was that empty little song: "What the world needs now is love sweet love." We hear such hollow statements as, "Let love be your guide" or "Why can't everybody just love everybody?"

What is love? Writer, Summerset Maugham said, "Love is just a trick played on us to achieve continuation of the species."³ I went to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy to get a definition. I got more than I bargained for: Love is a robust concern for another person. Love is valuing something in another. Love is the creation of value

in another. Someone wrote, "You don't love a woman because she is beautiful, she is beautiful because you love her."⁴ Love is a positive emotion of interdependence, it an affection that transcends particulars. Blaise Pascal wrote, "The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of."⁵ Those are pretty good descriptors of love.

But I went next to how the Bible describes love (probably should have started there!):

Romans 5:8 – *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Here love is something given, not earned; It is grace not reward.

1 John 4:10 – *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

Here love is seen as costly, even sacrificial.

1 John 3:16 –18 – *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*

Here love is active, often tangible, and sincere. But Moses, Jesus and Paul made it a lot simpler to understand, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

But before saying what that does mean, let me say what it doesn't mean. Though not as prevalent any more, you can still hear the tripe that the Bible is here teaching that we have to love ourselves before we can love others.

Amazon.com has a book for sale entitled, Love Your Neighbor AND Yourself. One religious organization teaches: "Love your neighbor as yourself," (because) if you cannot love your "self," you cannot love the "self" in someone

else.”⁶ But this is not a command to love ourselves. Yes, there are mentally sick people who loathe themselves but the opposite of that is not a self-love but a sober judgment of oneself. Romans 12:3 says *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...”* Though wonderfully made and greatly loved by God, we are deeply fallen. In the Bible, self-love is the essence of sin. We already love ourselves. We are preoccupied with ourselves.

It’s a long quote but worth hearing: “What is particularly striking about this command is not just its demand to love our neighbor but the degree of love we must have toward him: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself!’ That, if you think

about it, is staggering! He does not say that we must love our neighbor more than we love ourselves; he says we must love him as or in the same ways that we love ourselves. In other words, the way we every day demonstrate our love for ourselves is precisely the way in which we are to demonstrate our love for others. It really is very easy to understand; it is much more difficult to practice! You are in love with yourself, aren't you. Face it, there is no one on earth more concerned with your happiness or your well-being than you are. There is no one more careful than you to see to it that you are not hungry! No one is more concerned with your rights or your health or your wealth—or your wardrobe for that matter. Our love for ourselves is obvious! It is evident by the fact that we go to whatever lengths necessary to care for our every whim.”⁷ Love your neighbor as yourself—not a bad way to

define love. Imagine if we actually loved others the way we love ourselves!

Earlier I said there were three key words in this text:

"neighbor," "love," and now "law."

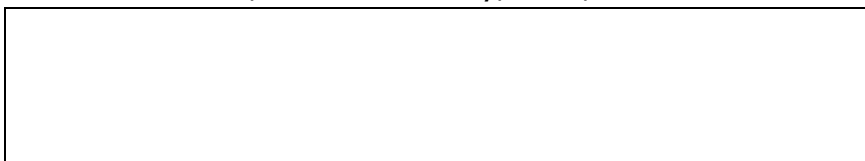
Romans 13:8 – *"he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."*

Romans 13:9 – *"The commandments...may be, summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

Romans 13:10 – *"love is the fulfillment of the law."*

When a Christian loves others as he loves himself, guess what?

He won't murder, commit adultery, steal, covet or lie—



genuine love fulfills the law. Whether you say, "obey the commandments" or "love your neighbor as yourself" you are saying the same thing. But there is something more important here. Back in Romans 7 Paul wrote, *"So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God."*

Before Christ came, people were saved by grace through faith, just as we are today. But then those believers were directly responsible for keeping the laws of God. And there was a somewhat complicated sacrificial system that atoned for their failures to keep the law. But now since Christ has come, since Christ died in our place, the Bible teaches we have a new relationship to the law. Instead of being directly responsible for obeying the law, as with Old Testament believers, the law is now mediated to us

through Jesus. Our relationship is with Christ and only in Him do we have a relationship to the law. Remember how the Bible says it, *"you have died to the law...that you might belong to another..."* The law is no longer the center of our attention; Jesus is! His love for us has become the focus and motivation for us rather than rule keeping. 1 John 4:19 says, *"We love because he first loved us."*

But don't misunderstand. We have not reduced the specifics of the will of God for our lives to some mushy, emotion called love that has no form or content. Love needs an objective moral standard by which to measure it, to judge it. Christ Himself is that standard and His law, His word, is the reflection of that standard. Law and love are not incompatible. Law without love is not God's law but legalism. Love without law is not Christian love but libertinism. Back in Romans 8 I reminded you that holiness is not merely law-keeping or sin-management. Holiness is positively a devotion to Jesus. God placed within us a new set of desires – a mind set on the Spirit. Jeremiah 31:33 says, *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."* We now have a new predisposition; a heart that wants to love and serve God. Donald Barnhouse captured it this way: "Love loves to obey."⁸

But I want to take you back to the controlling verses of these last chapters of Romans. 12:1-2 says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect*

will. "As I have already been emphasizing, we must not turn any of these words of Romans into a new form of legalism. Paul very clearly declares what is both the motivation and the power to obey when he writes, "By the mercies of God..." Those who are loved, love! But just as clearly in Romans 13:8-10 God says, those who are loved, LOVE! Jesus defined our neighbor in such a way as to leave us with no exceptions. Love is that powerful desire to promote the welfare of the other with same fervor that we use to promote our own.⁹ Again, imagine if we acted that way!

Several years ago I made up a story that is not very original, as you will soon hear. One evening Jacob Levy, a visitor in our country from Israel, was driving through a rough, industrial part of the city of Chicago when he stopped at a stop sign. Almost as if they materialized out of thin air, two men, one from each side of his car, opened the front doors, shot Jacob, pulled him from the car, stole his jacket, pants and shoes, took his car and left him for dead in the shallow ditch by the side of the road. As the car pulled away, Jacob, seriously wounded and unable to move, realized he was in trouble, for this was an isolated area of the city and it was evening. And yet he had to have help.

As he wrestled with the fear and pain for just a couple of minutes he realized that a car was coming. Even though he was too injured to wave or even yell he realized he was close enough to the road that surely he would be seen. As the car pulled to a stop at the sign the driver fortunately looked his way. Jacob saw a look of inquisitiveness give way to a look of fear in the man's eyes and as the car started up and drove away Jacob could see a clergy sticker in the back window.

Now deeply afraid Jacob thought he might die. Again he

tried to move but was completely unable.

His hopes revived when he heard another car approaching. As the car approached the stop sign, Jacob could see into the front window well enough to see that the driver spotted him. But while Jacob virtually pleaded for help with his eyes, the man pulled his car over to the other side of the street, as far from Jacob as possible and instead of stopping at the stop sign or for Jacob, speeded up and went right ahead. As the car went past Jacob could see a "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker.

Only minutes later another car approached, it was a taxicab. By this time Jacob was so weak he could barely see. However ofHowever this time the car stopped and a door opened. And when the man came close, asking if he was okay, Jacob realized the man was an Arab. But there was a kindness in the man's eyes and voice that instantly

relieved Jacob and the man gently lifted him in his arms and carried him to his car. Jacob passed out. Only later did Jacob learn that the man took him to the hospital emergency room, gave his own credit card number to the receptionist and promised to return to see how he was doing and pay any uninsured costs.

Most of you, I'm sure, recognized my story as a variation on the one Jesus told about the Good Samaritan. We remember that Jesus told the story in response to a lawyer who questioned Jesus about keeping the laws of God. The man had correctly quoted the Bible saying that the whole law could be summarized in two commands: Love God and

love your neighbor as yourself. But then the man asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor." At that, Jesus told the 1st century version of the story I just told. When he finished the story Jesus asked the lawyer a different question that we would have expected. Earlier the man had asked, *"Who is my neighbor?"* But when the story was finished, Jesus asked, *"Which of the three who came by, do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"* Do you see the difference? All through the story we are

thinking the focus is on the injured man, the one in need, who is an illustration of a "neighbor." But when Jesus finishes the story he switches the focus so he is actually asking, "Are you a neighbor?" "Do you truly love people?"

Look at Romans 13:8-10 again: *"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman 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 fulfillment of the law."* And, James 1:23-25: *"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."*

How will you respond to these words from God?

End Notes

- ¹ edited from <http://www.joespc.com/carlos/redneck>
- ² CEB Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 328
- ³ W. Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook*, p. 1949
- ⁴ Author Unknown
- ⁵ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 1670
- ⁶ www.jewishworldreview.com
- ⁷ Fred Zaspel Biblicalstudies.com "Love, Love, Love"
- ⁸ Donald Barnhouse, *Romans*, IV, p. 138
- ⁹ A.W. Pink, "True Christian Love," Monergism.com

Additional Notes:

I. From QuoteGarden.com

"Love is the condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own." ~Robert Heinlein

"You don't love a woman because she is beautiful, she is beautiful because you love her." ~Author Unknown

"There is no surprise more magical than the surprise of being loved. It is God's finger on man's shoulder." ~Charles Morgan

The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved - loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves. ~Victor Hugo

The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 1670

Love is only a dirty trick played on us to achieve continuation of the species. ~W. Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook*, 1949

"Infatuation is when you think he's as good-looking as Matthew McConaughey, as smart as Bill Gates, as noble as Ralph Nader, as funny as Woody Allen, and as athletic as Roger Clemens. Love is when you realize that he's as good-looking as Woody Allen, as smart as Roger Clemens, as funny as Ralph Nader, as athletic as Bill Gates and nothing like Matthew McConaughey—but you'll take him anyway.
~ updated by Jerry Nelson from the names used by Judith Viorst, Redbook, 1975

Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence. ~Eric Fromm

A. W. Pink "The true nature of Christian love is a righteous principle which seeks the highest good of others. It is a powerful desire to promote their welfare." From "True Christian Love" on Monergism.com

II. Additional Notes from Dr. Jerry Nelson

Please note the text does not say "love your neighbor FOR yourself"

If the love for our neighbor is largely to gain our advantage then we have missed it.

Martin Luther wrote:

"He that loves his neighbor on account of his money, position, education, favor, or power and would not love him if he were poor, lowly, ignorant, hateful, dependent, or uncouth would obviously have a hypocritical love." He went on to say, "Having our own advantage in mind, we do not love the other person as we love ourselves for we love ourselves even when we are poor, dull, and complete non-entities." (paraphrased)

No, the command is not "love your neighbor FOR yourself"

but "love your neighbor AS yourself." I immediately thought of Jesus love. Since our love is to reflect and imitate His love I thought of what His love is like. It is intentional. Jesus said that He came that we might have life. He intended from before the creation of the world to come to save us. It was no accident that brought Jesus to us. It was no quirk of fate that He was crucified for our sins. His love has been and continues to be very intentional. I believe our love must be the same kind. It does not just happen by accident. We must will to love. We must determine to do so. We must make it a priority, an intentional underlying attitude and action of our lives.

Jesus' love was also unconditional. God said that while we were yet sinners, hostile to him, and deserving hell, he loved us. *"God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* As Martin Luther has already pointed out, if we love others for what we can gain from it - that is not love. Do I love those who can't give back? Do I love those who don't deserve it?

Jesus' love is sacrificial: John wrote, *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him how can the love of God be in him?"*

It's an old story but it captures this concept so well. A young girl was seriously ill and needed a blood transfusion that only her equally young brother could supply. He consented to give the blood and as the liquid flowed from his arm into the bag his eyes grew wide and he asked the nurse, "Is this when I die?" Because of his love for his sister, even though in the explanation of the procedure he had come to believe that when he gave his blood, he would die in his sister's place, he was willing.

Is my love for others sacrificial? Let me give you a very homely illustration of which I was convicted just recently. Sometimes Barbara will ask me, "Will you do something for me?" My response often is, "Tell me what it is." Even though I do it in jest, the implication is that I need to know what it will cost me before I make a commitment. Whether in jest or not, from whose perspective am I determining the answer? Mine or hers? Mine, I'm ashamed to say. Jesus' love was truly sacrificial.

Jesus love was also unfailing. Jesus said, I have loved you with an everlasting love. As we learned from Romans 8, *"Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Do others have to wonder if my love is conditioned by their actions or can they trust that I will love them no matter what? Loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves is a powerful love.

Donald Barnhouse tells of a young woman who was very kind. She loved both people and animals. When she learned that God, in the Bible, commands kindness to animals she responded, "Isn't it wonderful that the Lord took the trouble to write in the Bible that people were to care for their animals? But it is just like him, isn't it?" (Barnhouse, *Romans IV*, p. 138)

III. Over 200 years ago Thomas Chalmers of the Free Church of Scotland wrote a book which title is instructive in itself: *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*.

In further explanation he wrote, "There are two ways in which a practical moralist may attempt to displace from the human heart its love of (some sin)—either by (proudly prevailing upon the heart to) simply... withdraw its regards from an object that is not worthy of it; or, by setting forth

another object, even God, as more worthy of its attachment, so as that the heart shall be prevailed upon not to resign an old affection, which shall have nothing to succeed it, but to exchange an old affection for a new one... The former method is altogether incompetent and ineffectual and that the latter method will alone suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart from the wrong affection that domineers over it."

Thomas Chalmers "The expulsive power of a new Affection" (19th C. Free Church of Scotland preacher)
<http://www.monergism.com>

Only a new heart for God will truly make us able to change. When I think of many of our attempts at changing our behavior, it seems that too often it is simply a sin-management issue, a behavior modification program. What if instead of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps we were to consider the love of God and our love for God and allow the "expulsive power of a new affection" to motivate us to truly desire to change.

Chapter Twenty Five

Wake Up!

Romans 13:11-14

About 10 years ago Stephen Levine wrote a book that got a fair amount of press at the time. It was titled, *A Year to Live—How to Live this Year as if it Were Your Last*. I'm not recommending the book because I think John Piper's book titled, *Don't Waste your Life* is far better. But Levine's title is intriguing and he said that from his experience even those who know they are dying often find that death catches them unawares.¹ Levine wrote that after seeing many people on their deathbeds, he noted a common regret for time wasted, unrealized dreams, and disputes between family members never resolved. Levine decided to address those issues in his own life before it was too late, to live for a year as if it were his last.²

18th Century British author, Samuel Johnson wrote, "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." On a website called "Yahoo Answers," the question was asked, "If you had one year to live, how would you spend your final time on earth?" Several people responded

- I'd travel the world and charge it all on credit cards.
- I'd spend every minute I could with my family.
- I'd do all the things that give me pleasure.
- I'd make amends with anyone I've hurt.
- I'd be depressed and spend the year in bed.³

How we live, and why we live that way, are the issues before us in our text from Romans today. The Apostle Paul wrote, "And do this, understanding the present time." God's instructions for life are given in the context of a reality far

different than what most people understand. Too many people live as if this life is all there is. The current issue of "Christianity Today" published a humorous cartoon that I think captures the surprise too many will have in the end. Two men are sitting in the midst of flames with the devil standing guard.

One man says to the other, "I was under the impression that what happened in Vegas stayed in Vegas." Reality is quite different than many imagine.

So let's read the context of Paul's statement about "understanding the present time." *"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*

When we truly understand who God is and what He has done for us in Christ, our response is gratitude and worship .

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)

From the 2nd half of the 12th verse through verse 14 Paul describes how we are to live. He contrasts "night and dark" living with "day and light" living. But before doing that he gives the reason. In verse 11 he writes, *"Wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."* Something is currently happening; something is going on in the world, which makes godly living the only reasonable response. But before looking

more closely at that, I want us to see what “this” is when Paul writes, “Do this...” “Understanding the present time” and “our salvation being nearer than before” are why we will do whatever “this” is. It seems to me “this” is all that Paul has written from chapter 12 to this present verse.

Back in Romans 12:1-2 Paul began his application of previous chapters, 1-11, this way, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices...Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* Notice the motivation he mentions in verse 1—“in view of God’s mercy.” I want you to live this way, because of God’s mercy; I want you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. When we truly understand who God is and what He has done for us in Christ, our response is gratitude and the worship of Him with our lives.

Then beginning in 12:3 all the way through to our text, Paul spells out what that response of grateful obedience looks like:

- 12:3-8 - Verse 5 - *“So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others – there he spoke of humility and service.”*
- 12:9-21 – Verse 10 - *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”*
- Verse 14 - *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*
- 13:1-7 - Verse 1 - *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.”*
- Verse 7 - *“Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”*
- 13:8-10 - Verse 9 - *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

With all those instructions in mind, we now know what the “this” of 13:11 is about.

But it’s the motivation for doing “this” that I want you to see. Back in 12:1, Paul appealed to our understanding of the mercy of God. Now in 13:11 he appeals to our “understanding the present time.” What do Christians understand that others don’t? *“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.”* (13:11b-12) Christians live in two worlds at the same time, the seen and the unseen, the obvious and that which is only spiritually discerned. There is more happening in time than meets the eye. As I said earlier, too many think we are born, we live and we die. Even if they think there is something beyond this life, it is so vague as to be largely irrelevant now. Even many if not most religious people live as this life is all there is.

But Paul says, *“Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”* He’s talking about Jesus’ Second Coming. He’s talking about when the Kingdom of God is fully actualized; when sin and death are completely defeated and done; when with resurrected bodies we live in the presence of our God on the new earth for eternity – he’s talking about the age to come. Listen to Paul elsewhere on this subject:

- Romans 8:23 - *“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”*
- 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 - *“Then the end will come, when (Jesus) hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be*

destroyed is death."

- 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 - *"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. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."*

When Paul says that our salvation is "nearer than when we first believed," he is not only saying the obvious as when we say Tuesday is nearer to Wednesday than Monday is. He is implying an immanency; the end of this age could happen at any time now.

But it is more than simply waiting for the end. Christians are to "understand the time." As I said, Christians live in two worlds, the already but not yet. The Scripture speaks of "this age" and "the age to come." What Christians understand is that those two ages overlap. Because of Jesus, the age to come has reached back in time to the

Many if not most religious people live as this life is all there is!

present, to this age. When Jesus came the first time He ushered in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is God's sovereign righteous rule over all. Listen to the Bible on this subject:

- Matthew 4:17 - *"From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (not near in time, but close in proximity). "The Kingdom of God had arrived in Jesus.*
- Matthew 4:23 - *"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom."*

The Bible teaches us in the gospel of John that when we trust in Jesus Christ we become part of that Kingdom of God (John 3); we become part of the new age, the age to come.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 - *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*
- Colossians 1:13 - *"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."*

In the believer, sin now no longer has the control it once had. Death is no longer the end. The Spirit of God takes up residence in us as the guarantee of the resurrection of our bodies. These are simply a taste now of what is to be but they are real and they are part of the age to come, experienced now.

Lacking an adequate illustration let me give you an insufficient one. A mother and father tell their young children that in three months they are all going to Disney World. The lives of the children change with that news. For the next three months the children live with the reality of that future event. They pack clothes long before they need

Christians know they are part of something far bigger than themselves, this is a God-thing with eternal consequences.

to. They tell their friends, they make plans, and they save money. They still have to go to school, do their chores around the house, put up with the bully next door and pick up after the dog but they know they are going to Disney World. Their lives now are geared around that yet future event. They are living in the time of "already but not yet." So it is with us believers, we live in both worlds but it is that world to come that shapes our thinking.

There is something else the Christian understands about the time. This Kingdom of God, the age to come that has invaded the present, is not for only a few who hang on to the bitter end. In Matthew 13:31-32 "(Jesus) told them another parable: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."* The Kingdom of God may appear to be a minority influence in the world—a movement that will flicker and sputter until the end finally arrives. But Jesus said that the Kingdom of God will grow and become the greatest on the earth. And in Matthew 24:14 Jesus said, *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

In the world today, God is doing a work that is often unseen. He called us to be part of that work that will have world-encompassing implications. Christians, "understanding the present time," know they are part of something far bigger than themselves, far bigger than all of us together—this is a God-thing with eternal consequences. Now when a person knows that, how does he live? I am about finished with my third reading of Dominique LaPierre and Larry Collins' book, *O Jerusalem*, the story of the 1948 birth of present-day Israel. It is a fascinating and instructive telling of a people with a firm vision of the future and a self-sacrificing commitment to it. Some of those people lived for years in the "already but not yet" reality of a new nation. They procured arms in Europe, raised funds in the U.S., staged ships and planes and other resources anywhere they could, all with an eye to that day when they would declare their independence and face the onslaught of their enemies. They risked their lives and in many cases gave their lives, for what they believed the future held.

Do I live now in significant anticipation of what is to come? Does “understanding the present time” drive my decisions, my life? Are we Christians living for the “already but not yet” Kingdom of God or are we simply dying to go to heaven? The believer isn’t supposed to be merely looking for relief from the difficulties of his life; his goal is the glory of God in the Kingdom of God—God’s rule over all. That’s why we pray, *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* But notice, in verse 11, Paul issues a call, or perhaps a warning? *“The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber.”* I know this is negative, but Paul speaks to a condition that may be ours. Some are asleep! Paul uses a different word for “sleep,” but I almost titled this sermon, “Somnambulant Christians.” I like words.

- Somnus, somnia—is Latin for sleep.
- Ambulant—ambulatory—is Latin for walking.

Sleep-walking Christians.

I had an uncle who lived on a farm. More than once, my uncle got up in the middle of the night, hitched complicated farm equipment to the tractor, and drove to the fields, all while completely asleep. Have you heard of sleep-driving? Once while going to school in the daytime, dating my girlfriend in the evening and working the graveyard shift, I drove one morning from Minneapolis, 70 miles past the exit to my school with no awareness at all. I woke up, completely lost and had to ask directions. How many of us Christians are living life without understanding the present time—unaware of the reality of the already but not yet Kingdom of God?

Let me suggest some characteristics of a spiritually asleep person. When a person is asleep they are largely insensitive. Have you ever known a sound sleeper? It seems that cannon could go off near them and they’d sleep through it. The Spiritually Asleep person is spiritually insensitive. Nothing rouses him anymore. God’s people sing

but it leaves him cold. He goes through the motions of prayer but it's hollow. The desire has gone out of his spiritual life. He's more excited by the purchase of a new car than the prospect of a new convert.

Secondly, the Asleep Christian is subject to illusions or dreams. They begin to dream that maybe God doesn't even exist or that maybe they don't really belong to Him. Conversely they might dream that it doesn't really matter how they live, because after all God is in His heaven and all's right with the world. They have plenty of time to sleep.

Thirdly, the Asleep Christian is inactive. Can't you see him there on the couch—mouth hanging open and one arm slung across his chest and the other hanging off the couch nearly touching the floor, barely breathing. How many Christians are like that? Once they delighted to teach Sunday School but now that's too much work. Once they yearned to help people in need, but now they're too tired.

Are we Christians living for the "already but not yet" Kingdom of God or are we simply dying to go to heaven?

They may have two-dozen irons in the fire at work but spiritually they're asleep.⁴

Paul says, "Wake up!" One reason why you need to wake up is to make certain you aren't dead! In Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus tells several parables that describe people who look like they are Christians but aren't. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "The rags of his lust are rotting under the raiment of his profession. This will never do; Christ has not come to save you in your sins but from your sins. Anger and drunkenness, and such like, must be got rid of; Christ never

came that you might christen your anger by the name of (passion), and your drunkenness with the name of liberty. I have heard of persons...who have misunderstood this doctrine of grace so grievously that they have thought of believing in Christ and continuing in their evil ways. That attempt will be their ruin."⁵

- How long have you been asleep?
- How long have you carelessly lived your life as you choose?
- How long have you been unconcerned about your relationship with God?
- How long uncaring about the kingdom of God?
- How long living a mediocre religious life while indulging in your petty sins?
- Are you really asleep or are you dead?

If God's Holy Spirit is giving you ears to hear from Him right now then listen. And if God has graciously warned you and called you to repent of that way of life, do so. Ask His forgiveness; turn to Him now! *"The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber..."*

"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

So first in these verses Paul gives us a reason, a rationale for acting—we are to understand the time. Secondly then Paul calls us to wake up. Now lastly in verses 12b-14, Paul tells us again how *"awake," "understanding the present time"* Christians act. Romans 13:12b-14 says, *"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." Paul uses the metaphors of dressing and walking. He says, be done with certain things and begin to do other things.

First, look at the negatives: there are activities that we are to put aside or be done with. In the last part of verse 12 he summarizes them all: *"Put aside the deeds of darkness."* These things are of a different world, not your new world. They are characteristics of the kingdom of darkness—the kingdom of death. I agree with others that here there are three pairs of words in the last part of verse 13 that can maybe best be understood this way:

- not in orgies or drunkenness or drunken revelries—this is a self-indulgent loss of self-control.
- not in sexual immorality and debauchery or lewd immoralities—this is an idolizing of sex and sensual pleasure that objectifies others and is a sin against our own bodies, and
- not in dissension and jealousy (envy) or envious dissensions—this is the opposite of love for one's neighbor.

But look also at the positive:

- In verse 12b - *"Put on (clothe yourself with) the armor of light."*
- In verse 13a - *"Let us behave (literally "walk") decently as in the daytime."*
- In verse 14a - *"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ."*

The best defense against the seductions of the world and the discouragements of our own sinfulness is "light"—the truth. Each new day we consciously remind ourselves of the truths of Christ and His Kingdom.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord;

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, dead and buried.

He descended into Hades;

The third day He rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty;

From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Christian church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting."

Understanding the present time (knowing the already-but-not-yet reality of the Kingdom of God) I will wake up and put off the deeds of darkness and clothe myself with the Lord Jesus Christ. I will step out each day knowing that Jesus is closer to me and more a part of my life than the clothes on my back. I will think and act with a knowledge of what is really going on in this world—what God is doing.

Look at Romans 13:11-14 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.”

End Notes

¹ from the book jacket

² <http://www.alibris.com/booksearch>

³ <http://answers.yahoo.com/question>

⁴ The three-fold description above came from old notes and thus I do not know the source

⁵ Spurgeon #1614

Additional Notes:

“On the certainty of the event (of Christ’s return), our faith is grounded; by the uncertainty of time our hope is stimulated and our watchfulness aroused.” (Alford in Moo, p. 822)

“The time which is left is time in which watching for Christ’s Second Coming with alert minds – with proper eagerness and a proper sense of urgency, and with all the active and resolute engagement in the tasks of faith and obedience and love which these involve – is the whole duty of Christians.” (Cranfield, p. 333)

John Bunyon in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Stage 9

“I then saw in my dream that they went on until they came into a certain country whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy, if he came a stranger into it. And here Hopeful began to be very dull, and heavy to sleep: wherefore he said unto Christian, I do now begin to grow so drowsy that I can scarcely hold open mine eyes; let us lie down here, and take one nap.

CHRISTIAN: By no means, said the other; lest, sleeping, we

never awake more.

HOPEFUL: Why, my brother? Sleep is sweet to the laboring man; we may be refreshed, if we take a nap.

CHRISTIAN: Do you not remember that one of the shepherds bid us beware of the Enchanted Ground? He meant by that, that we should beware of sleeping; wherefore "let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thess. 5:6.

HOPEFUL: I acknowledge myself in a fault; and had I been here alone, I had by sleeping run the danger of death. I see it is true that the wise man saith, "Two are better than one." Eccl. 4:9. Hitherto hath thy company been my mercy; and thou shalt have a good reward for thy labor.

CHRISTIAN: Now, then, said Christian, to prevent drowsiness in this place; let us fall into good discourse.

HOPEFUL: With all my heart, said the other.

CHRISTIAN: Where shall we begin?

HOPEFUL: Where God began with us. But do you begin, if you please.

CHRISTIAN: I will sing you first this song:
When saints do sleepy grow, let them come hither,
And hear how these two pilgrims talk together;
Yea, let them learn of them in any wise,
Thus to keep open their drowsy, slumb'ring eyes.
Saints' fellowship, if it be managed well,
Keeps them awake, and that in spite of hell."

Matthew 24:36-44

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.

That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Chapter Twenty Six

Why Can't They Be Like Us?

Romans 14-15

Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker were two great English preachers at the end of the 19th century. They were both godly men proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. But Spurgeon thought Parker wrong to attend the theatre and Parker thought Spurgeon wrong for smoking cigars.¹ Spurgeon on one occasion rationalized to Parker that he, Spurgeon, “didn’t smoke to excess” to which Parker asked, “What do you think is excess?” Spurgeon responded that he would never smoke two cigars at a time.² How do Christians get along when they disagree on lifestyle issues? How do you feel about Christians who smoke? Do you think of them the same as you do of those who over-eat? Or do you think of those who smoke as slightly inferior Christians?

How do you feel about those who think drinking alcoholic beverages, even in moderation is wrong? Do you think of them as legalistic or sadly fundamentalistic? How do you feel about Christians who think there is nothing wrong with drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation? You go to a church member’s home and as he opens the refrigerator to get you a soda you notice a six-pack of beer on the bottom shelf—what deductions do you draw about that man’s Christianity? What’s your attitude toward those who speak in tongues? What’s your attitude toward those who think speaking in tongues is wrong? Have you ever felt judged by other Christians because you do certain things you believe are legitimate for a Christian? Have you ever felt judged by other Christians because you wouldn’t do certain things you felt were wrong? What are Christians to do when they

disagree on issues about which they feel strongly?

The Apostle Paul has some very important instruction on the matter. When writing to the Christians in Rome, he recognized that in the congregation were both Jew and Gentile Christ-followers—Christians. They evidently brought into the church their own ideas about what a godly person does and does not do. And apparently these differences either already were causing strife or had potential for causing strife and maybe even division among these Christians.

Look at Romans 14:1-15:7:

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

"One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I

*live,' says the Lord,
'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess
to God.' So then, each of us will give an account of himself
to God.*

*"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.
Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block
or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord
Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself.
But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it
is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what
you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your
eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not
allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For
the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking,
but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,
because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to
God and approved by men.*

*"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to
peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of
God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong
for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to
stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do
anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So
whatever you believe about these things keep between
yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not
condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who
has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is
not from faith; and everything that does not come from
faith is sin.*

*"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.' For everything
that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that
through endurance and the encouragement of the*

Scriptures we might have hope. 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”.

To begin, I think it would help to define some words. The very first verse raises some interesting questions: *“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.”* (14:1) The word “faith” here is not a reference to a person’s saving-trust in Christ as if the “weak in faith” were not yet Christians; Paul refers to them all as true Christians—“brothers” and sisters in the Lord (14:4,8,10,14,15). The word “faith” here is a person’s understanding of the implications of their relationship to Jesus. Look at verse 2 to see how he uses the word “faith”: *“One man’s faith allows him to eat everything but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.”* “Faith” here is the man’s understanding or convictions of what is right and what is wrong. So we might interpret the sentence this way, “Accept him whose understanding of the implications of his faith is weak...”

But what about the word “weak”? This word does not here mean a person who is “easily overtaken” or “easily overwhelmed” by temptation. These are not weak-willed Christians who might fall prey to sin. These are not “baby” Christians. But clearly the word carries a negative connotation. These are “weak” in their faith, or as we already saw, “weak” in one aspect of understanding their faith. Particularly it has to do with being weak in their understanding of the freedom that is theirs in Christ. They have a conscience that says things are wrong when they aren’t wrong. John Stott captured it with these words: “What the weak lack is not strength of self-control but

liberty of conscience.”³ These are people whose convictions about the Christian life have sometimes been shaped more by their cultural background than by the Word of God. They are having trouble believing that certain things may now be very legitimate for Christians to do even though in their past they weren’t. Again verse 2 gives the illustration of this kind of “weakness.”

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God".

All their lives the Jewish Christians had been taught to make certain that the foods they ate were ceremonially clean—"kosher"—and that meant there were some kinds of food they didn't eat, particularly some kinds of meat. They lived in an idol-worshipping Roman culture where it would be nearly impossible to know whether the meats had been prepared properly according to Jewish tradition. So they evidently concluded to eat no meat at all to be safe. When Christ came He established a new covenant, a new way of relating to God through Him (Christ) rather than through the keeping of the many ritual laws of the Old Testament. The sacrificial ceremonies became obsolete. The dietary laws and holy days were no longer binding. Jesus had fulfilled or completed the law. But it was difficult, especially for Jewish Christians, to change. Acts 15:5 says, *"Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses'."*

Many of us can identify with that; we've grown up in cultures or sub-cultures where certain things were considered wrong, period! Paul calls it a "weakness" because these convictions are not biblically based and

because these Christians live under self-imposed restrictions. One man wrote, "These are Christians who are not able to accept for themselves the truth that their faith in Christ implies liberation from certain Old Testament/Jewish ritual requirements... (Their weakness has to do with) their convictions about what their faith allows or prohibits."⁴

What about the words "passing judgment?"

Clearly this judgment means drawing a negative conclusion about some person because of what they do or don't do. It is fault-finding; it is quickly noticing and even looking for the negative. It is to put the worst possible motive on others' actions. It is to condemn another as not a Christian or at least not a good Christian because of their participation in these disputable matters.

We should not draw a negative conclusion about another Christian's relationship to God based on disputable matters.

But please notice Paul's prohibition of judging is on "disputable matters." This is not a prohibition of all judgment. Jesus said we are to notice, to distinguish, to judge. In the very context where He said, "*Do not judge,*" He also said, "*By their fruit you will recognize them.*" (Matthew 7:16) Paul said we must be discerning/ judging in order to help someone: "*If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.*" (Galatians 6:1) This invites a judgment call about what is sin. You see, Jesus and Paul are not saying we should suspend all belief about right and wrong. We are not to be a non-discriminating, non-discerning, accepting-everything, non-thinkers! We must make judgments. But we are not to make moral judgments on "disputable

matters." We should not draw a negative conclusion about another Christian's relationship to God based on disputable matters.

So what are these "disputable matters?"

- Looking at verse 2 again we see that one of the "disputable matters" had to do with whether they, as Christians, should eat non-kosher food.
- Looking at verse 5 we see the issue is whether certain days had to be considered more holy than other days. The Jewish calendar was filled with holy days; did all Christians have to honor all those days as special?
- What about the Sabbath? Did Christians have to honor Saturday as the special day of the week or was setting Sunday aside for special worship enough? For that matter could any day serve that function?
- Looking at verse 21 we see the matter includes the drinking of wine.

These were matters over which Christians disagreed but the disagreement came from cultural differences, not from a proper understanding of Scripture.

Don't misunderstand. Paul is not hesitant to say some things are wrong when they are. The Bible rules out many activities for Christ-followers: gossip, greed, immorality and much else. Certain things are wrong! *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature."* (Galatians 5:13) Or look at 1 Peter 2:16: *"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil..."* But that is not the issue here; these are disputable matters of conscience. For example, what do you think of those who insist that women have no place in leadership in the local church? Conversely, how do you respond to those who insist the church must aggressively place women in leadership to compensate for

the way women have been treated in the past? What is your attitude toward those who raise their hands in worship? What are your thoughts about those who won't? What's your attitude about men who wear their hair long or women who wear it short? What about people who pierce their ears, noses, eyebrows, or navels? What about drums and electric guitars in the church? What about organs and hand bells? Oh my! The ways in which we can draw distinctions between others and ourselves and even separate from each other are numberless. Oh! The disputable matters, the differences of opinions!

So then what is to be our attitude toward each other on disputable matters? Paul's response is in one word: 14:1 says, "*Accept.*" You are going to see in a minute that in matters of conscience, acceptance goes both ways—between those who are freer (the strong) and those who are more restricted (the weak). But I want you to see that even in verse 1 there is an emphasis on one group, the "strong", the more liberal, the ones who feel more liberty. To the "strong," Paul says, "*accept him whose faith is weak.*" The ones with more freedom have a greater responsibility. I'll come back to that in a minute.

But look at verse 3 to see that this "acceptance" is to flow both ways: "*The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does...*" Paul says I don't want you judging and rejecting each other on the basis of these matters of opinion—these disputable matters. He says I don't want you with more liberty to "look down" on the one who thinks those things are wrong. I don't want you to take a superior attitude that smiles with condescending disdain at the poor legalistic brother who just doesn't get it. But he also says, "I don't want you who are more conservative to condemn or judge those who take

more liberty than you do." Your temptation is to shake your head in disgust and think either they may not even be Christians or at least not very good ones based on these disputable matters.

To the ones Paul calls "weak," those who live under more rules, I think the late New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce's words are apropos: "While Christ is unchanging he is nevertheless onward moving, always leading his people forth to new ventures in his cause, always calling them to go out not knowing where they are going, knowing only that it is he who is guiding them there...Every age in human history is an age of transition, but in some ages the transition is more abrupt and disconcerting than in others...

What is to be our attitude toward each other on disputable matters? "Accept."

We too live in a changing world in which the old familiar landmarks are disappearing. Those to whom we once looked for guidance are no longer available to give us the kind of help they once did; and even if they were, it is questionable if the guidance we received from them then would be relevant now. But Jesus Christ remains the same and calls his people to claim the new and unfamiliar world of today for him.

It seems at first more comfortable to construct for ourselves tight little 'camps' or enclosures and feel at home inside them, psychologically insulated from the world outside, content to see the old familiar faces, follow the old familiar ways, sing the old familiar hymns and forget what is happening outside. But this kind of insulation is a fool's paradise. The old familiar patterns of life are undergoing rapid change and dissolution, for all our attachment to

them; and the world outside, uncongenial and unfamiliar as it appears to those who long for better days that will never return, is desperately in need of the ministry of our unchanging Christ."⁵

Paul says, either way, to the "weak" or to the "strong," whether it's condemnation or contempt, stop it and accept one another! Why? Paul gives two reasons, the first beginning at the end of verse 3: *"God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."* (14:3-4) That other person may do things you wouldn't do, but since they trust Jesus Christ as saving-Lord, they belong to God; He accepts them and they are your brother or sister in the Lord. I think one of

Paul says each person is responsible for arriving at his own conviction.

the points Paul is making is that God didn't accept that other person on the basis of their agreement with you. Later, in verse 15 we see that we are accepted by God only on the basis of Christ's death for our sins and our acceptance, by faith, of that death as our access to God. And again, looking at verse 4, we notice that Paul knows that the other Christian will "stand," that is they became and remain a Christian, even a good Christian, not because they agree with you but because they belong to God in Christ.

The second reason why we must accept and not reject each other is found in verses 5-12: Jesus is Lord and we each answer to Him. Verse 5 illustrates the problem these Romans Christians faced: *"One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike."* (Romans 14:5)

These “disputable matters” have real differences.

- To baptize infants or not baptize them is a real difference.
- Whether a Christian has the liberty to purchase an expensive car or should give the money to the poor is a real difference.
- Whether you believe in spanking children or not is a real difference.
- Think of some of the other issues that matter to Christians. Recently a speaker mentioned, “global warming”—no pun intended, that generated some heat. Christians disagree and strongly.
- What about public versus private versus home schooling?
- What about Democrat or Republican?
- What about young earth or old earth—literal 24-hour days of creation or some form of evolution?

We disagree and it touches our attitudes toward the others’ Christianity or at least their spiritual maturity.

How does each Christian make a decision on those matters? The end of verse 5 tells us how: *“Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”* Paul says each person is responsible for arriving at his own conviction. But how that conviction is arrived at is important. Verse 6 tells us how by using illustrations: *“He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.”* (Romans 14:6) On matters where there is liberty, where the Scripture has given no command, each Christian is responsible for arriving at a conviction by answering two questions:

- Can I thank God for this thing? Is this thing I want to do from God?
- Can I do this thing as unto the Lord? Will He be

pleased with this action?

In “disputable matters” answer those two questions and be convinced in your own mind before the Lord. Then fully convinced in our own minds what are we to do in our relationships with those who disagree? We must accept and not reject each other because Jesus is Lord and we each answer to Him. Verses 8 and 9 both remind us that Jesus is Lord of our lives. We are not lord of each other’s lives. And since He is Lord, we will each stand before Him to account for the things we have done.

Now verse 13 is the fulcrum of the passage. The first part of the verse summarizes verses 1-12 and addresses both the “weak” and the “strong”—both those with more liberty and those whose consciences restrict them—*“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on (condemning) one another.”* (14:13) But now in the second part of the verse and in the rest of the text, Paul turns his attention to one group alone—the “strong”: those who consider themselves to have more freedom, those who are more liberal, those who see nothing wrong with certain kinds of activities that others consider wrong. And what is the command here? *“Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”* (14:13b)

What does that mean? Paul walks us through it with some principles:

Principle #1

Some lifestyle choices are truly neutral—in and of themselves they are neither good nor evil.

“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself.” (14:14) Paul uses the specific example of those who did or did not think eating meat was okay for a Christian. But he could have used any example

of “disputable matters”—matters on which the Bible doesn’t give any specific instruction. And what is he saying in this principle? Many things that some have called wrong, because of their cultural bias, are not in and of themselves wrong; they are perfectly legitimate things for believers to do. Do you remember the time the apostle Peter was told by the Lord to eat food that Peter had all his life considered inedible? Jesus was communicating that a new day had dawned. Changes had come—Peter now had freedom to eat those foods. But Peter struggled greatly with the idea. Eating the meat was not wrong but Peter struggled with his cultural heritage.

Some lifestyle choices are truly neutral.

Drinking alcoholic beverages is certainly one of those issues in our evangelical sub-culture. I grew up believing that a man could hardly be a Christian if he drank alcohol. But I became convinced that while the Bible says much against being intoxicated to any degree, it does not altogether prohibit alcohol for Christians. I personally think there are some very good reasons for being a teetotaler but I must admit it is an area of Christian freedom. I personally consider dancing, theater attendance, tattoos, body piercing and many other things to be in this category of Christian liberty. While I might think some of those things are just dumb, I have to admit there is nothing inherently spiritually negative about those actions. Principle #1: Some lifestyle choices are truly neutral—in and of themselves they are neither good nor evil. But there is a 2nd principle mentioned immediately:

Principle #2

Some things that are right may be wrong for you.

How can something be right and wrong at the same time? Listen to verse 14b: *"But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean."* What he is saying is that just because something is objectively okay doesn't mean that it feels okay for some people. If you look at the last part of verse 22 and 23 you will see that Paul is addressing the same issue when he writes: *"Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin."* (Romans 14:22-23) In other words, happy is the person who acts consistent with his/her conscience. Wrong is the person who violates his/her own conscience, even when his conscience may be ill-informed. We are not dealing here with objective right and wrong. We are dealing with people's consciences. If it's wrong for you, don't do it. Some things that are right may be wrong for you.

Principle #3

Love trumps liberty!

"Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way...If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men." (14:14-18) The Kingdom of God is not most of all about our personal liberties but about our contribution to the welfare of others. Look at verse 16 again: *"Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil."* Don't take what is okay in

and of itself and use it in a way that harms others; don't flaunt your freedom to the detriment of others. And so after stating those three principles, he restates the basic command of verse 13, but now in a positive way: *"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."* (14:19) He wants us to do what helps others grow in their relationship to Christ. And how does that work?

Principle #4

When necessary, forsake freedom for the sake of others.

"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall." (Romans 14:20-21) I may have perfect liberty to drink alcoholic beverages. But I will restrict that freedom in a heartbeat for the sake of those who don't have that freedom and whose consciences will be offended if I exercise my freedom. I have perfect liberty to see some movies. But I will restrict that freedom quickly for the sake of those who don't have that freedom and for the sake of those who may otherwise be harmed by my example. And then Paul takes us right back to the instruction he gave us in chapter 13 about loving our neighbors as ourselves, when he says in 15:1-2: *"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings (weaknesses) of those who are weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."*

And the grand conclusion of the whole passage is in 15:5-13, with verses 5-6 summarizing it so well: *"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."

I want to close with a letter I received about three months ago from a regular attendee of our church. I have changed the names to provide appropriate anonymity.

December 7, 2007

"Good morning! As we go through the book of Romans, I know we'll be approaching chapter 14 before long. I have been praying about whether to share our story with you or not, but it is a story right out of Romans 14. You may use it...as part of the sermon, if you believe it to be useful.

"Tom and I had been Christians for only a few years. We were going to church and Sunday school and developing relationships at our new church. We were saved out of a life in the world, nightclubs and partying as teens and young adults. We still went to a nightclub now and then after being married.

"But the Lord convicted me and I began to seek His guidance in what he wanted me to believe about those activities. He worked a very definite work in my heart that gave me a deep desire to live only for Him and obey His guidance. He convicted me that nightclubs and drinking, etc. belonged to my old life and didn't fit with a life seeking holiness. I submitted and had perfect peace.

"In time Tom became aware of some people at church that went to nightclubs and drank alcohol in their homes. It didn't take long before Tom's thinking started changing. I didn't realize how much until a couple years later when he informed me he was leaving us. I was shattered. I went through 2 years of 'hell on earth' as Tom would move home and then out again, and work on me the whole time trying to destroy my convictions and beliefs.

"He said he didn't understand why I changed and why I couldn't just change back! I'll spare the details, but my son

and I went through an extremely painful time. The Lord was awesome to provide prayer support for us and Christian friends that stood by (my son and me)... (By setting some very strong boundaries, Tom was finally) ready to stop and admitted to me that he had tried to break my faith.

"I only share this story because of the HUGE effects we suffered as a result of the (lives) of other believers...using their liberty in Christ...I am fully aware that we are all at different places in our walk with the Lord and I accept people as having different convictions. But studying Romans, I felt it might be a time to share our experience... (The Lord) has brought us all a long ways since those days and I praise Him for the things He taught me through the whole ordeal!"

- Some lifestyle choices are truly neutral—in and of themselves they are neither good nor evil.
- Some things that are right may be wrong for you.
- Love trumps liberty
- When necessary forsake freedom for the benefit of others.

Hear again Romans 14:13-18: *"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and*

approved by men."

End Notes

¹ Warren Wiersbe *Be Real*, p. 256

² Kent Hughes, *Romans*

³ John Stott, *Romans*, p. 355

⁴ Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p. 836

⁵ "The Kerygma of Hebrews," *Interpretation* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1969): 17-19.

Additional Notes:

Outlines of Romans 14:1-15:7

Broad Outline:

A. 14:1-13a Accept one another, not judging one another.

B. 14:13b-15:4 Nurture unity, don't cause others to stumble.

C. 15:5-7 Conclusion: Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you

Detailed Outline

A. 14:1-13a

Accept one another not judging one another.

14:1 Basic command: accept and don't judge.

14:2 First illustration of eating

14:3 the first Illustration is applied to the command of verse 1.

14:3c-4 Why judging in these disputable matters is wrong: because each of has been accepted by God, belongs to God and answers to God not each other.

14:5a an illustration of holy days

14:5b-9 Our conduct in disputable matters is between us and God and we must remember that we live and die FOR THE LORD not for ourselves. (This latter note makes it clear that the principle is not unlimited human freedom but

service to the Lord. He is Lord; our own inclinations or desires are not "lord.")

14:10-13 We must realize we all stand on level footing before God and we will each give an account for ourselves not for others. So stop passing judgment!

B. 14:13b-15:4

Nurture unity, don't cause others to stumble.

14:13b Basic command: don't be an obstacle to others.

14:14 Illustration: no food is unclean but if someone thinks it is, for him it is.

14:15 Therefore if you encounter someone like that don't harm him by your freedom but love him for whom Christ died.

14:16 Don't turn something good into something evil by abusing your freedom.

14:17 The Kingdom of God is not personal freedoms as the expense of other but is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

14:18 That is what pleases God and is approved by people.

14:19 Command restated: Therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and edification.

14:20 Restates vs. 15-16

14:21 Principle: It is better not to do what will cause your brother to fall.

14:22 You don't have to make every issue a test of fellowship.

Blessed is the man who doesn't cause a larger problem of disunity by flaunting his freedoms.

14:23 Violating your conscience is sin.

15:1 Command restated: The strong ought to be patient with the weak and live not just to please ourselves.

15:2 Command spelled out: we live for our neighbor's good—to build him up.

15:3-4 Christ is an illustration of that

C. Conclusions

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you

15:5 May God give you a spirit of unity

15:6 So that together we may glorify God

15:7 Accept one another as Christ accepted you Jews and Gentiles alike.

A Judging Spirit:

"Believe as I believe,
no more, no less;
That I am right,
And no one else, confess.

Feel as I feel,
Think only as I think;
Eat what I eat,
and drink what I drink.

Look as I look,
Do always as I do;
Then and only then,
Will I fellowship with you." (Hughes, *Romans*, 259-60)

Chapter Twenty Seven

Who Is Your Offering to God?

Romans 15:14-16:27

Additional Notes

Appendix N – *A Summary of Romans*, Dr. Jerry Nelson

Appendix O – Notes from *The Contemplative Pastor*, Eugene Peterson

In 1631 John Eliot, at 27 years of age, sailed from England to America. To give you some historical perspective, remember, that was 145 years before the Revolutionary War. After being in Boston for several years he noted there were 20 different tribes of Native Americans in the area. Eliot believed that God's name should be proclaimed among all peoples of the world. So at the age of 40 he determined to study the Algonquin language and he translated the entire Bible into that Indian tongue. By the time he was 84 he had established many Indian churches with their own Indian pastors.¹ What was Eliot's passion in life? That God would be honored.

What is yours? What gets you up in the morning? What determines how you spend yourself each day? Are you headed somewhere in life? When you arrive will it be worth the life you invested? How old are you? Assuming the average life expectancy in America, 78 years, how many years do you have left to invest? For what will you invest those years of your life?

Look with me please at Romans chapter 15. The Apostle Paul has come to the end of his long letter to the Christians in Rome. It would not have taken Paul as long to write the

letter or the Romans to read the letter as it has taken us to study it. Seven months and 26 sermons later we arrive at the end of his letter. Paul opens and closes his letter with what motivates his life. At the very beginning of chapter 1 Paul said, *"I have been set apart by God for the good news...for Christ's name's sake...to call people from among all the peoples to the obedience that comes from faith - people who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."* (Romans 1:1, 5) And Paul ends his letter on the same theme: I am *"a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by*

"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:16)

Paul in essence writes, "I live that God may be honored by people." Notice I didn't just say that people might know God. As important as that is, Paul's purpose was larger: that God may be loved and obeyed (honored) by people. That's what I want us to think about. Paul's purpose never wavered—his vision was just as clear as ever and his passion never waned. Again, I ask, what is your passion in life? Look with me at the Apostle Paul's passion and let it be to you and to me a challenge, a clarion call to consider the priorities of our lives.

We are looking at the rather long final section of Paul's letter. Romans 15:14-16:27. I printed just the beginning and the ending of this section but I will add an outline of what is between.

"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves

are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.” (Romans 15:14-19a)

In the rest of chapter 15 Paul tells of his plans to visit the Rome:

15:19b-22: I have completed my work in SE Europe.

15:23-24: I am planning to visit you on my way to Spain.

15:25-27: But first, I must take donated money to Jerusalem to help the poor Christians there.

15:28-33: Then I will visit you; pray for my safety and ministry until then.

In chapter 16:1-2, Paul makes a special appeal for a friend:

16:3-16: he gives greetings to numerous friends in the church at Rome: (The names give us insight into the diversity of people in the church—men, women, Jew, Gentile, slave, free, rich, poor, aristocracy and commoners.)

16:17-20: he gives a final warning to watch out for divisive people.

16:21-23: several who are with Paul indicate their greetings.

Then we come to the Benediction:

"Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic

writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”(16:25-27)

It is from the opening and closing of this final section of Romans that I wish to show you Paul’s purpose and our purpose in life. I want to set it before you in three parts: Paul’s mission, his methods and his motivation.

Paul’s Mission

We begin with Paul’s mission. Look at Romans 15:16: *“To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”* I’m not here to merely point out Paul’s mission in life. Clearly the intention is to demonstrate that Paul’s purpose is ours. One of the greatest lies perpetrated against the church and its mission in the world is the idea that ministry is the responsibility of the clergy. That is exactly the opposite of what the Bible says in Ephesians 4:11-13: *“It was (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* Do you see who is responsible for doing the “works of service,” the ministry? God’s people are. Paul’s purpose is every Christian’s purpose.

But notice that Paul declares his and our mission in a rather unique way as *“the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God...”* Yes, he says we are to “proclaim the gospel of God.” But to what end? For what purpose are we

to do this? It is *"so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God..."* The offering to God is people! Here is the way he said it in Colossians: *"We proclaim (Christ), admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."* (1:28-29)

Those verses grabbed hold of me 45 years ago in a dormitory room at the University of Wisconsin and have, ever since, guided me to give my life to what is most important and enduring and have guarded me when I have been tempted to respond to the siren call of lesser purposes. The very words "priestly" and "offering"

Who is responsible for doing the "works of service," the ministry? God's people are.

immediately convey ideas of the Old Testament sacrifices to God. Sacrifices fitting for a holy God had to be without blemish—they were to be perfect. Here in verse 16 they are called "acceptable." The offering had to meet God's standards. The author of Hebrews said it this way: *"without holiness no one will see the Lord."* (Hebrews 12:14) God said in 1 Peter 1:16 and elsewhere, *"Be holy, because I am holy."*

So Paul's mission was not just to get people saved but also to bring them to spiritual maturity.

- Galatians 4:19: *"My dear children... I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."*
- Ephesians 4:13: *"until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

•Or as he says it here in Romans 15:18: *"leading the Gentiles to obey God..."*

So here is Paul imagining the day when he would stand before God offering God the fruit of his life. Don't misunderstand this isn't some kind of entrance fee. This is a love offering. This is a response to God's grace in his life.

- "Jesus, here is Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Priscilla and Aquila."
- "Jesus, here is Epenitus (and quite a few others Paul mentions in chapter 16) and the people in Ephesus and Colosse."

And Paul could go on listing more and more that by the grace of God he had the privilege of influencing toward maturity in Christ.

Paul wanted to be part of offering the people groups of the world to Jesus.

Who will you offer to God? Several years ago Ray Boltz wrote a song that became quite popular for a while. It was called "Thank You for Giving to the Lord." The man in the song's story imagines himself in heaven. Someone approaches him and says,

"Friend you may not know me now," and then he said, "But wait, you used to teach my Sunday School, when I was only eight. And every week you would say a prayer before the class would start. And one day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart.

"Then another man stood before you, he said "Remember the time, A missionary came to your church, His pictures made you cry.

You didn't have much money but you gave it anyway. Jesus took that gift you gave And that's why I'm in Heaven today
"One by one they came, far as your eyes could see.
Each life somehow touched by your generosity.

Little things that you had done, sacrifices that you made,
They were unnoticed on this earth
In Heaven now proclaimed."
And the chorus said,
"Thank you for giving to the Lord, I am a life that was
changed."

Who will you offer to God? Will it include your spouse, your children, your friends, your neighbors, or co-workers? Paul's mission went beyond those immediately around him. Look at chapter 16, verse 26: "*so that all nations might believe and obey him.*" Paul wanted to be part of offering the people groups of the world to Jesus. There are Christians who make the unbiblical comment that they just aren't into missions. They don't pray for the mission work of the church and they don't give to missions. Bluntly said, I don't think that is an option for Christians. I suspect there are some truly valid reasons for not participating in the Kingdom Connection praying and giving ministry of our church but something is wrong when fewer than 300 families out of over 800 even bother to say they will pray for our missionaries, much less give. Some of us need to reevaluate our priorities. Again, who will you offer to God? Our mission in life is clear.

Paul's Methods

Now what about the methods? Romans 15:16 says, "*To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*" Paul said his priestly duty is "*proclaiming the gospel of God.*" Paul is not, here, calling himself a priest. In the sermon notes on-line **(and in Appendix N? O?)** you will find further discussion of why the New Testament doesn't call ministers "priests." But there was one duty of the Old Testament priest that carried over to

New Testament ministers—it is the duty to proclaim and teach God's Word. In 16:25 Paul says it this way, *"Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ..."*

This will sound familiar to you but I want you to hear it again loudly and clearly and realize that your lives and eternity depend on it. The Holy Spirit of God uses the Word of God as taught and lived by the people of God to grow us to be more and more like Christ. There is no substitute for the Word of God, the Scriptures. It alone is our soul food. Without it you will die. Jesus said, *"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4) God said through Isaiah *"My word that goes out from my mouth... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."* (55:11) The psalmist wrote, *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word...I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* (Psalm 119:9, 11) And, Paul wrote to Timothy, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the (Christian) may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Many creeds through the centuries as well as the recent 1996 Cambridge Declaration make it abundantly clear that the word of God is the primary means God uses to accomplish His saving and maturing work in us. Sola Scriptura says: "We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured." My method and your method for producing an offering of people acceptable to God is to proclaim and teach the Word

of God. Never stop being a church that demands of its teachers, its leaders and its pastors that they be people of the Word. Expect it of your children's teachers, of your youth workers, of your adult teachers and leaders. I urge you to allow your new pastor to be first of all a teacher of the Bible. There is great pressure on pastors to be social workers, psychologists, organizers, fund-raisers, chief-executive officers, managers, visionaries, etc. But above all else what the people of God need is one who will consistently teach the Scriptures, pointing us to Jesus, that God may change us.

Some might think I'm suggesting we will neglect the rest of our responsibilities to the world as Christians. But that is not the case. Proclaiming the Word of God is not instead of helping the poor or instead of healing the broken. Preaching the Word is the means by which those other

The Holy Spirit of God uses the Word of God as taught and lived by the people of God to grow us to be more and more like Christ.

ends are accomplished. The means that God has chosen to change the world is to change us. The means God has chosen to change us is by learning and living his Word. When John Calvin was recalled to the church in Geneva, Switzerland in 1536 "he had no money, no influence and no weapons but the word of God. But he preached from the Bible every day, and as he did, under the power of his preaching, the city began to change. As the Genevan people acquired knowledge of God's Word and allowed it to influence their behavior, their city became a model city from which the gospel spread to the rest of Europe, Great Britain, and the New World.

Geneva was cleaned up physically. Beggars were removed from the streets; a hospital and poorhouse were provided for them, and they were run well. Education was offered for all classes of people...and new industries flourished. There has probably never been a better example of extensive moral and social reform than the transformation of Geneva under John Calvin, and it was accomplished almost entirely by the preaching of God's Word."²

There is another example of this kind of radical change in a culture in Great Britain in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. And it was the direct outgrowth of the Bible teaching and application of Whitefield, Wesley, Wilberforce and countless others. The world changes when the

It takes the supernatural work of God's Spirit to change our desires as well as our behavior.

Christian's life is anchored in and grows through the living, active, sharp, penetrating, dividing, and judging Word of God. (c.f. Hebrews 4:12) Our method for offering people to God is teaching the Word of God.

There is another method I want you to see. In verse 16 Paul also says these people who are our offering to God are "*sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*" The Westminster Shorter Catechism reads, "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace by which the whole person is renewed in the image of God and we are made more and more able to become dead to sin and alive to righteousness." Think about how someone changes to be more like Christ, how they become an offering acceptable to God. It doesn't come through knowledge alone, though knowledge is essential, as we have already seen. It certainly doesn't come through self-effort alone because willpower is insufficient to change the

heart even if we could control our behavior. It takes the supernatural work of God's Spirit to change our desires as well as our behavior.

With the words "sanctified by the Holy Spirit," Paul is certainly implying that we are dependent on the Spirit of God to make the changes in us, and others, to help us be more like Jesus. When I know Paul's dependence on the Spirit, I cannot help but think of Paul's prayer life. He knew that the Spirit of God had to act and so he prayed.

- Colossians 1:9-10: *"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."*
- Ephesians 1:17: *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."*
- Ephesians 3:16: *"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being."*
- Philippians 1:9-11: *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."*

What do we pray for each other, for our children, and for those others we would offer to God as an acceptable offering? When my purpose in life changes from my health

and wealth and my purpose becomes the offering of people to God, my prayers change. I've spoken of Paul's and our life-purpose and of the methods, so lastly I want to speak to our motivation.

Paul's Motivation

When Paul began his letter he spoke to the reason for his passion.

"Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." (Romans 1:5)

Now Paul ends his letter on the same theme: *"Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ... to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."* (Romans 16:25-27)

David Brainerd, another missionary to Native Americans died in 1747 at the age of 29. He wrote these words seven days before his death: "Friday, October 2. My soul was this day, at turns, sweetly set on God: I longed to be with him that I might behold his glory...Oh that his kingdom might come in the world; that they might all love and glorify him for what he is in himself; and that the blessed Redeemer might "see (the results) of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."³

That was Paul's passion—he longed to see God honored. In contrast Andrew Murray wrote: "As we seek to find out why the real army of God that is (working) is so small, (when there are so many millions of Christians in the world), the only answer is, lack of heart. The enthusiasm of the kingdom is missing. And that is because there is so little enthusiasm for the King."⁴

Who am I living for, for God's glory? Do I have a passion to see God honored by my neighbors? Does it break my heart to have God dishonored by so many? I'm not asking does

the conduct of others offend my personal sensibilities? I'm asking, does it grieve me that God is so little known and loved? Paul saw all of life, including his most mundane activities of traveling by foot from city to city, or of spending time in prison, of the abuse and persecution he endured—all of it as necessary to make his offering to God. We think of sacrifice as what we give up for God. Paul is here thinking about what we give to God. He wanted to give God people—people who know and glorify God.

The 18th Century Moravians were a people with a zealous desire to see Jesus honored among all peoples. They became some of the most intrepid missionaries of that era. I say fearless because fearful they might have been. Between 1732 and 1768 (just 36 years), 79 of those German people died in their effort to bring the gospel to the slaves of the Caribbean Islands. But in those same years over 4500 slaves were converted and brought into the church.

The first to go to those islands were Johann Dober and David Nitschmann. As they prepared to leave the safety of Germany and home to go to those lawless, disease infested islands many reports from sea captains made it clear that they would likely die in that place. No one could survive the life of the slaves. It is reported that as their ship set sail and pulled away from the dock some were still asking “why would you do this?” While we might have expected them to speak of their compassion for the slaves of the West Indies, what they focused on was exactly what Paul focused on. The response given by the two men was, “The savior is well worth giving one's life for.”⁵ Worthy is the Lamb! They had a passion for God's glory. So did Paul. Do we?

Our mission: that others might become an offering acceptable to God

Our methods: the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God and prayer-filled dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Our motivation: to the only wise God be glory forever.

Romans 15:14-17; 16:25-27: *"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God....Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."*

End Notes

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 50-51 from Cotton Mather Vol.

1 The Great works of Christ in America 1702 Vol. 1, p. 562

² James Boice, *Romans*, p. 1859

³ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 7, p. 474

⁴ _____, "Key to the Missionary Problem," p. 133)

⁵ CGA Oldendorp, *A Caribbean Mission*, p. 275

Appendix A

Martin Luther's Account of his Salvation

The following selection is taken from the *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings*, it was written by Luther in Wittenberg, 1545. This English edition is available in Luther's Works Volume 34, Career of the Reformer IV (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1960), p. 336-337. In the first few lines of this selection, Luther writes, "during that year;" the immediate context indicates he is referring to the year of Tetzels death (July, 1519). This puts the date for Luther's conversion, in his own view, two years after the posting of the ninety-five theses.

Meanwhile, I had already during that year returned to interpret the Psalter anew. I had confidence in the fact that I was more skilful, after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews. I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously,

certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'"

There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine's *The Spirit and the Letter*, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God's righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he

justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught.

<http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/mlconversion.htm>

Appendix B

Corresponding to the Good News

Chapter 4 – Romans 3:21-26

Other Sources

I. The Atonement as Penal Substitution. Articles by J.I. Packer, D.A. Carson, et al.

See also:

A. "Justification by Faith" by Charles Spurgeon <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0126.htm>

B. *The Atonement* by John Murray

II. Alternate views of the Atonement and Al Mohler's response

III. The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Believers by John Piper

See also:

"Counted Righteous in Christ—*Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?*"

Download:

By John Piper February 1, 2003 Read this book online (663KB PDF).

REVIEW by Dr. Wayne Grudem: "Does Christ's life-long record of perfect obedience to God get 'credited' to your account when you trust in Christ and are 'justified' by God? This has been the historic Protestant understanding of the 'imputation of Christ's righteousness,' but John Piper warns that we are in danger of losing this doctrine today, because

of attacks by scholars within the evangelical camp. In response, Piper shows, in careful treatment of passage after passage, that the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers is clearly the teaching of the Bible, and if we abandon this doctrine we will also lose justification by faith alone. I am thankful to God for John Piper's defense of this crucial doctrine."

IV. Particular Redemption (limited atonement) and Unlimited Atonement

V. Article by J.I. Packer

VI. Article by John Hendryx

VII. Other articles

I. Penal Substitution Revisited

By J. I. Packer

[http://reformation21.org/Upcoming_Issues/
Packer_on_Penal_Substitution/343/](http://reformation21.org/Upcoming_Issues/Packer_on_Penal_Substitution/343/)

Jim Packer's latest response to recent criticisms of penal substitution. It appeared in NB News, the British Christian Union News magazine produced by UCCF: The Christian Unions. www.uccf.org.uk

Throughout my 63 years as an evangelical believer, the penal substitutionary understanding of the cross of Christ has been a flashpoint of controversy and division among Protestants. It was so before my time, in the bitter parting of ways between conservative and liberal evangelicals in the Church of England, and between the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now UCCF) and SCM in the student world. It remains so, as liberalism keeps reinventing itself and luring evangelicals away from their heritage. Since one's belief about the atonement is bound up with one's belief about the character of God, the terms of the gospel and the

Christian's inner life, the intensity of the debate is understandable. If one view is right, others are more or less wrong, and the definition of Christianity itself comes to be at stake.

An evangelical theologian, dying, cabled a colleague: 'I am so thankful for the active obedience (righteousness) of Christ. No hope without it.' As I grow old, I want to tell everyone who will listen: 'I am so thankful for the penal substitutionary death of Christ. No hope without it.' That is where I come from now as I attempt this brief vindication of the best part of the best news that the world has ever heard.

It is impossible to focus the atonement properly until the biblical mode of Trinitarian and incarnational thought about Jesus Christ is embraced. The Trinitarian principle is that the three distinct persons within the divine unity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, always work inseparably together, as in creation, so in providence and in every aspect of the work of redemption. The incarnational principle is that when the Son took to himself all the powers and capacities for experience that belong to human nature, and began to live through his human body, mind and identity, his sense of being the Father's Son was unaffected, and he knew and did his Father's will, aided by the Spirit, at all times. It was with his own will and his own love mirroring the Father's, therefore, that he took the place of human sinners exposed to divine judgment and laid down his life as a sacrifice for them, entering fully into the state and experience of death that was due to them. Then he rose from death to reign by the Father's appointment in the kingdom of God. From his throne he sent the Spirit to induce faith in himself and in the saving work he had done, to communicate forgiveness and pardon, justification and adoption, to the penitent, and to

unite all believers to himself to share his risen life in foretaste of the full life of heaven that is to come. Since all this was planned by the holy Three in their eternal solidarity of mutual love, and since the Father's central purpose in it all was and is to glorify and exalt the Son as Saviour and Head of a new humanity, smartypants notions like 'divine child abuse', as a comment on the cross, are supremely silly, and as irrelevant and wrong as they could possibly be.

As in all the Creator's interacting with the created order, there is here an element of transcendent mystery, comparable to fog in the distance hanging around a landscape, which the rising sun has effectively cleared for our view. What is stated above is clearly revealed in God's own witness to himself in the Bible, and so must be given the status of non-negotiable fact.

Again, the atonement cannot be focused properly where the biblical view of God's justice as one facet of his holiness, and of human willfulness as the root of our racial, communal and personal sinfulness and guilt, is not grasped. Justice, as Aristotle said long ago, is essentially giving everyone their due, and whatever more God's justice (righteousness) means in the Bible, it certainly starts here, with retribution for wrongdoing. We see this as early as Genesis 3, and as late as Revelation 22:18-19, and consistently in between. God's mercy to guilty sinners is framed by his holy hostility (wrath) against their sins.

Human nature is radically twisted into an instinctive yet deliberate and ineradicable habit of God-defying or God-denying self-service, so that God's requirement of perfect love to himself and others is permanently beyond our reach, and falling short of God's standard marks our lives every day. What is due to us from God is condemnation

and rejection.

The built-in function of the human mind that we call conscience tells everyone, uncomfortably, that when we have misbehaved we ought to suffer for it, and to that extent conscience is truly the voice of God. Both Testaments, then, confirm that judicial retribution from God awaits those whose sins are not covered by a substitutionary sacrifice: in the Old Testament, the sacrifice of an animal; in the New Testament, the sacrifice of Christ. He, the holy Son of God in sinless human flesh, has endured what Calvin called 'the pains of a condemned and lost person' so that we, trusting him as our Saviour and Lord, might receive pardon for the past and a new life in him and with him for the present and future. Tellingly, Paul, having announced 'the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation (i.e. wrath-quencher) by his blood, to be received by faith', goes on to say: 'This was...to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be *just and* the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Romans 3:2-26, my emphasis). *Just* justification—*justified* justification—through the doing of justice in penal substitution, is integral to the message of the gospel.

Penal substitution, therefore, will not be focused properly till it is recognized that God's redemptive love must not be conceived - misconceived, rather - as somehow triumphing and displacing God's retributive justice, as if the Creator-Judge simply decided to let bygones be bygones. The measure of God's holy love for us is that 'while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' and that 'he...did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Romans 5:8, 8:32). Evidently there was no alternative to paying that price if we were to be saved, so the Son, at the Father's behest 'through the eternal Spirit' (Hebrews 9:14), paid it. Thus

God 'set aside...the record of debt that stood against us...nailing it to the cross' (Colossians 2:14). Had we been among the watchers at Calvary, we should have seen, nailed to the cross, Pilate's notice of Jesus' alleged crime. But if, by faith, we look back to Calvary from where we now are, what we see is the list of our own unpaid debts of obedience to God, for which Christ paid the penalty in our place. Paul, having himself learned to do this, testified: 'the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20).

This text starts to show us how faith in Christ our penal substitute should be shaping our lives today; which will be my final point for reflection. Thirty years ago I wrote an analysis of insights basic to personal religion that faith in Christ as one's penal substitute yields. Since I cannot improve on it, I cite it as it stands.

(1) God, in Denney's phrase, 'condones nothing', but judges all sin as it deserves, which Scripture affirms, and my conscience confirms, to be right.

(2) My sins merit ultimate penal suffering and rejection from God's presence (conscience also affirms this), and nothing I do can blot them out.

(3) The penalty due to me for my sins, whatever it was, was paid for me by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in his death on the cross.

(4) Because this is so, I through faith in him am made 'the righteousness of God in him', i.e. I am justified; pardon, acceptance and sonship (to God) become mine.

(5) Christ's death for me is my sole ground of hope before God. 'If he fulfilled not justice, I must; if he underwent not wrath, I must to eternity' (John Owen).

(6) My faith in Christ is God's own gift to me, given in virtue of Christ's death for me: i.e. the cross procured it.

(7) Christ's death for me guarantees my preservation to glory.

(8) Christ's death for me is the measure and pledge of the love of the Father and Son to me.

(9) Christ's death for me calls and constrains me to trust, to worship, to love and to serve.

(Cited from *Tyndale Bulletin* 25. 1974, pp42-43)

A lawyer, having completed his argument, may declare that here he rests his case. I, having surveyed the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ afresh, now reaffirm that here I rest my hope. So, I believe, will all truly faithful believers.

In recent years, great strides in biblical theology and contemporary canonical exegesis have brought new precision to our grasp of the Bible's overall story of how God's plan to bless Israel, and through Israel the world, came to its climax in and through Christ. But I do not see how it can be denied that each New Testament book, whatever other job it may be doing, has in view, one way or another, Luther's primary question: 'How may a weak, perverse and guilty sinner find a gracious God?'; nor can it be denied that real Christianity only really starts when that discovery is made. And to the extent that modern developments, by filling our horizon with the great meta-narrative, distract us from pursuing Luther's question in personal terms, they hinder as well as help in our appreciation of the gospel.

The Church is and will always be at its healthiest when every Christian can line up with every other Christian to sing P. P. Bliss's simple words, which really say it all:

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In my place condemned he stood,
Sealed my pardon with his blood-
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!*

Why Is the Doctrine of Penal Substitution Again Coming Under Attack?

by: D. A. Carson

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/articleprint.php?a=45>

A book could usefully be written on this subject. To keep things brief, I shall list a handful of developments that have contributed to this sad state of affairs.

(1) In recent years it has become popular to sketch the Bible's story-line something like this: Ever since the fall, God has been active to reverse the effects of sin. He takes action to limit sin's damage; he calls out a new nation, the Israelites, to mediate his teaching and his grace to others; he promises that one day he will come as the promised Davidic king to overthrow sin and death and all their wretched effects. This is what Jesus does: he conquers death, inaugurates the kingdom of righteousness, and calls his followers to live out that righteousness now in prospect of the consummation still to come.

Much of this description of the Bible's story-line, of course, is true. Yet it is so painfully reductionistic that it introduces a major distortion. It collapses human rebellion, God's wrath, and assorted disasters into one construct, namely, the degradation of human life, while depersonalizing the wrath of God. It thus fails to wrestle with the fact that from the beginning, sin is an offense against God. God himself pronounces the sentence of death (Gen 2-3). This is scarcely surprising, since God is the source of all life, so if his image-bearers spit in his face and insist on going their own way and becoming their own gods, they cut themselves off from their Maker, from the One who gives life. What is there, then, but death? Moreover, when we sin in any way, God himself is invariably the most offended party (Ps 51). The God the Bible portrays as resolved to intervene and save is also the God portrayed as full of

wrath because of our sustained idolatry. As much as he intervenes to save us, he stands over against us as Judge, an offended Judge with fearsome jealousy.

Nor is this a matter of Old Testament theology alone. When Jesus announced the imminence of the dawning of the kingdom, like John the Baptist he cried, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15). Repentance is necessary, because the coming of the King promises judgment as well as blessing. The Sermon on the Mount, which encourages Jesus' disciples to turn the other cheek, repeatedly warns them to flee the condemnation to the Gehenna of fire. The sermon warns the hearers not to follow the broad road that leads to destruction, and pictures Jesus pronouncing final judgment with the words, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (7:23).

The parables are replete with warnings of final judgment; a significant percentage of them demonstrate the essential divisiveness of the dawning of the kingdom. Images of hell--outer darkness, furnace of fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth, undying worms, eternal fire--are too ghastly to contemplate long. After Jesus' resurrection, when Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost, he aims to convince his hearers that Jesus is the promised Messiah, that his death and resurrection are the fulfillment of Scripture, and that God "has made this Jesus, whom you crucified [he tells them], both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). That is every bit as much threat as promise: the hearers are "cut to the heart" and cry, "What shall we do?" (2:37). That is what elicits Peter's "Repent and believe" (3:38). When Peter preaches to Cornelius and his household, the climax of his moving address is that in fulfillment of Scripture God appointed Jesus "as judge of the living and the dead"--and thus not of Jews only. Those who believe in him receive "forgiveness of sins through his name": transparently, that is what is essential if we are to face the judge and emerge

unscathed. When he preaches to the Athenian pagan intellectuals, Paul, as we all know, fills in some of the great truths that constitute the matrix in which alone Jesus makes sense: monotheism, creation, who human beings are, God's aseity and providential sovereignty, the wretchedness and danger of idolatry. Before he is interrupted, however, Paul gets to the place in his argument where he insists that God has set a day "when he will judge the world with justice"--and his appointed judge is Jesus, whose authoritative status is established by his resurrection from the dead. When Felix invites the apostle to speak "about faith in Christ Jesus" (Acts 24:24), Paul, we are told, discourses "on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" (24:15): apparently such themes are an irreducible part of faithful gospel preaching. Small wonder, then, that Felix was terrified (24:25). The Letter to the Romans, which many rightly take to be, at very least, a core summary of the apostle's understanding of the gospel, finds Paul insisting that judgment takes place "on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares" (Rom 2:16). Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds us that Jesus "rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess 1:10). This Jesus will be "revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed" (2 Thess 1:7-10). We await "a Savior from [heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ"--and what this Savior saves us from (the context of Philippians 3:19-20 shows) is the destiny of destruction. "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath" (Eph 2:3), for we gratified "the cravings of our sinful nature . . . following its desires and thoughts" (2:3)--but

now we have been saved by grace through faith, created in Christ Jesus to do good works (Eph 2:8-10). This grace thus saves us both from sins and from their otherwise inevitable result, the wrath to come. Jesus himself is our peace (Eph 2; Acts 10:36). "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom 1:18). But God presented Christ as a propitiation in his blood" (3:25), and now "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" (5:1-2).

Time and space fail to allow reflection on how the sacrifice of Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews is what alone enables us to escape the terror of those who fall into the hands of the living God, who is a consuming fire, or on how the Apocalypse presents the Lamb as the slaughtered sacrifice, even while warning of the danger of falling under the wrath of the Lamb.

This nexus of themes--God, sin, wrath, death, judgment—is what stands behind the simple words of, say, 1 Corinthians 15:3: as a matter of first importance, Paul tells us, "Christ died for our sins." Parallel texts instantly leap to mind: "[Christ] was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom 4:25). "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). The Lord Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4). "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Pet 3:18). Or, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:2, "By this gospel you are saved." To be saved from our sins is to be saved not only from their chaining power but from their consequences--and the consequences are profoundly bound up with God's solemn sentence, with God's holy

wrath. Once you see this, you cannot fail to see that whatever else the cross does, it must rightly set aside God's sentence, it must rightly set aside God's wrath, or it achieves nothing.

(2) Some popular slogans that have been deployed to belittle the doctrine of penal substitution betray painful misconceptions of what the Bible says about our Triune God. The best known of these appalling slogans, of course, is that penal substitution is a form of "cosmic child abuse." This conjures up a wretched picture of a vengeful God taking it out on his Son, who had no choice in the matter. Instead of invoking the Triune God of the Bible, this image implicitly pictures interactions between two separable Gods, the Father and the Son. But this is a painful caricature of what the Bible actually says. In fact, I do not know of any serious treatment of the doctrine of penal substitution, undertaken by orthodox believers, that does not carefully avoid falling into such traps.

Consider Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us." This verse is coherent only if Christ himself is God. The cross is not Christ's idea alone, conjured up to satisfy his bad-tempered Father. The Triune God, our Creator and our Judge, could have, in perfect justice, consigned us all to the pit. Instead, the Father so loved us as to send his Son, himself God, to bear our sins in his own body on the tree. Moreover, the Bible speaks of this mission not only in its bearing on us lost sinners, but also in its reflection of inner-Trinitarian commitments: by this mission the Father determines that all will honor the Son, even as they honor the Father (see John 5:16-30): where does this insistence fit into crass language about cosmic child abuse?

(3) In recent years there has been a lot of chatter about

various “models” of the atonement that have appeared in the history of the church: the penal substitution model, the Christus Victor model, the exemplary model, and so forth. The impression is frequently given that today's Christians are free to pick and choose among these so-called “models.” But for any Christian committed to the final authority of Scripture, this approach is methodologically flawed. It allows historical theology to trump Scripture. Surely the right question to ask is this: Which, if any, of these so-called “models” is exegetically warranted by the Bible itself? For instance, are there passages in which biblical writers insist that Christ in his death triumphed over the powers of darkness? Are there passages in which Christ's self-sacrifice becomes a moral model for his followers? Are there passages in which Christ's death is said to be a propitiation for our sins, i.e. a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God? If the answer is “Yes” to these three options—and there are still more options I have not mentioned here—then choosing only one of them is being unfaithful to Scripture, for it is too limiting. Christians are not at liberty to pick and choose which of the Bible's teachings are to be treasured.

(4) There is another question that must be asked when people talk about “models” of the atonement. Assuming we can show that several of them are warranted by Scripture itself, the question to ask is this: How, then, do these “models” cohere? Are they merely discrete pearls on a string? Or is there logic and intelligibility to them, established by Scripture itself?

One recent work that loves to emphasize the Christus Victor “model”—Christ by his death is victor over sin and death—somewhat begrudgingly concedes that penal substitution is found in a few texts, not least Romans 8:3. But this work expends no effort to show how these two views of the

atonement should be integrated. In other words, the work in question denigrates penal substitution as a sort of minor voice, puffs the preferred "model" of Christus Victor, and attempts no integration. But I think it can be shown (though it would take a very long chapter to do it) that if one begins with the centrality of penal substitution, which is, as we have seen, grounded on a deep understanding of how sin is an offense against God, it is very easy to see how all the other so-called "models" of the atonement are related to it. The way Christ triumphs over sin and death is by becoming a curse for us, by satisfying the just demands of his heavenly Father, thereby silencing the accuser, and rising in triumph in resurrection splendor because sin has done its worst and been defeated by the One who bore its penalty. Moreover, in the light of such immeasurable love, there are inevitably exemplary moral commitments that Christ's followers must undertake. In other words, it is easy to show how various biblical emphases regarding the atonement cohere if one begins with penal substitution. It is very difficult to establish the coherence if one begins anywhere else.

(5) At least some of the current work on the atonement that is proving so scathing of penal substitution reflects discouraging ignorance of earlier theological study and reflection. Few interact any more with standard works by J. I. Packer, John Stott, and others--let alone classic works produced by earlier generations. But a new generation is rising, forcing readers to take note that historic Christian confessionalism will not roll over and play dead. I heartily commend the recent book by Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach.

II. THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT:

Current arguments against the idea of Christ taking our punishment (penal substitution theory of the atonement) and for the idea of Christ merely as example (moral influence theory of the atonement):

"Particularly appalling is the traditional view that God is responsible for Jesus' suffering and sacrifice on the cross. This depiction of "divine" or "cosmic child abuse," as some have named it, wrongly exalts suffering and paves the way for parental mistreatment. God condones and even requires suffering as essential to salvation" Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore in *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective (Families and Faith Series)* page 38

Here Chalke suggests that the traditional view of the atonement is cosmic child abuse and then he argues for a different theory: "The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement: 'God is love'. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil." (Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003], pp. 182-183)

"But God sent Jesus into the world to model for us a way of living in the rhythm of God's music of love..." (147)

"The early church (felt that Jesus) took the empire's instrument of torture and transformed it into God's symbol of the repudiation of violence—encoding a creed that love,

not violence, is the most powerful force in the universe." (153)

"Traditional readings (of the Bible), which assume Jesus has come primarily to solve the timeless problem of original sin so we can go up to a timeless heaven "by and by" after we die, do indeed account for some of Jesus' words and actions, but not with the intensity and resonance of this reading (210) *The secret message of Jesus* by Brian McLaren

How can punishing an innocent person make things better? "That sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse. You know?" 105 McLaren's theory of what happened on the cross he calls, "powerful weakness." (McLaren, 105) It works like this: by becoming vulnerable on the cross, by accepting suffering from everyone, Jews and Romans alike, rather than visiting suffering on everyone, Jesus is showing God's loving heart, which wants forgiveness, not revenge, for everyone. Jesus shows us the wisdom of God's kingdom is sacrifice, not violence. It's about accepting suffering and transforming it into reconciliation, not avenging suffering through retaliation." (McLaren, 105) (Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*)

One reviewer of Chalke's work suggested of Chalke's theory:

In other words, the cross is nothing more than Jesus identifying with our suffering, sharing in the pathos of it. It is difficult to see how this helps us anymore than my injecting myself with the HIV virus would improve the lot of a friend who has AIDS." (Sach and Ovey in D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 186)

Has the Message of Jesus Been Lost?

Al Mohler www.almohler.com (Wednesday, April 27, 2005)

Has the message of Jesus been lost? That is the claim made by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann in their now-controversial book, *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Chalke is a well-known figure among British evangelicals. He founded the Oasis Trust and Faithworks and established his reputation through his broadcast ministry and publishing. Mann is his researcher and collaborator. Together, they have produced a book that has ignited a firestorm in Great Britain that is almost certain to spread to the United States. Put simply, these authors claim that evangelicals have misunderstood, misconstrued, and misrepresented the meaning of the cross and the doctrine of atonement. The authors begin with a lament, suggesting that Christianity has lost its identity in postmodern society. "What once profoundly shaped communities and changed lives has today been sidelined in society. The radical message of Jesus is now seen as nothing more than an ancient myth containing little, if any, historical truth or contemporary relevancy. Misleading potted versions of the story of Jesus have been filtered down to us through bland civic religion, caricatured snippets from the mouth of Ned Flanders, Homer Simpson's nerdy Christian neighbor, and the sickly sweet, saccharine-flavored version of Christmas presented to us by retailers and the media each October through December." This is not a pretty picture.

Chalke, who has become the major focus of this controversy, suggests that Christian belief "for many people seems increasingly like a huge jigsaw puzzle." In his words, "We feel we have been handed loads of jumbled-up pieces and we just can't work out how they all fit together. The one thing we lack is what we need most-the lid with the picture on it. Without that big picture, all we have are the random pieces of 'theology' that we have managed to pick up along the way. And we are often at a loss to see much, if any, relevancy or relationship of the separate pieces to

one another."

Most of us can sympathize with Chalke's lament about the disconnected state of postmodern Christianity. So much of what passes for evangelicalism in this age of confusion is actually an assortment of truth claims, habits, doctrines, and practices that lack any coherent focus or overarching understanding.

Appropriately, Chalke points to God's love, preeminently demonstrated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, as the proper focus and "picture" that should frame our theology. Unfortunately, Chalke's understanding of God's love sets him at odds with any biblical notion of God's wrath and righteousness. Specifically, Chalke suggests that a focus upon God's wrath is profoundly unhelpful in this culture, and notions of hell, punishment, and judgment are simply out of step. He cites Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," as a particularly unfortunate message. "Preaching like Edwards' has been all too representative of the portrayal of the gospel by the Church over the last few hundred years, and, by implication, of any popular understanding of the message of Jesus," he argues. Edwards, you will remember, described the predicament of the sinner as similar to a spider who is held over the fire. Just as that spider faces sure destruction by fire, if he is not rescued, a sinner faces sure and certain judgment and punishment, if he or she is not redeemed. This kind of message is described by Chalke as "ferocious rhetoric" which is gladly "a thing of the past." Nevertheless, he claims that the "residue of such portrayals of the gospel" still do much damage around the world. "People still believe that the Christian God is a God of power, law, judgment, hell-fire and damnation." Where did Jonathan Edwards possibly get such an idea?

Chalke's simplistic and unfair caricature of Jonathan Edwards serves as a signal of what is to come. The Bible is very clear about God's holiness, and does not flinch from warning of His wrath poured out upon sin, and upon sinners. At the same time, God's love is demonstrated in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." [Romans 5:8] In other words, the Bible presents God's love as a *holy* love—a redeeming love that is demonstrated in the atoning sacrifice accomplished by Jesus Christ. The very point of Jonathan Edwards' sermon was to warn sinners of the wrath to come and to implore them to turn to Christ in faith.

Later in the book, Chalke and Mann critique what they call "the myth of redemptive violence." This notion is drawn from postmodern theologian Walter Wink, who calls for a radical reinterpretation of the cross and its meaning. Chalke has adopted a similar program, rejecting the doctrine of penal substitution and adopting what amounts to a moral influence theory of the atonement.

According to Chalke and Mann, the cross simply serves as a profound demonstration of the love of God. On the cross, Christ "absorbed all the pain, all the suffering caused by the breakdown in our relationship with God and in doing so demonstrated the lengths to which a God who is love will go to restore it."

The doctrine of penal substitution—the understanding that, on the cross, Christ died in our place, bearing the penalty for our sin—is described as "a form of cosmic child abuse." In their words: "The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed." They go further to suggest that "such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement 'God is love'."

The penal substitutionary understanding of the atonement--the doctrine that has stood at the very center of evangelical faith—is rejected as based on a misunderstanding of the cross, described as a “twisted version of events” that is “morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith.”

Lest their point be missed, the authors go further: “If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetuated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil.” Look at that statement closely. This audacious claim, so in keeping with postmodern sensibilities, directly rejects clear biblical passages that speak of God's wrath poured out upon sin, of the necessity of Christ's atonement, and of Christ's atonement as propitiation which demonstrates God to be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” [Romans 3:26]

As Chalke and Mann see it, “the cross is a symbol of love. It is a demonstration of just how far God as Father and Jesus as his Son are prepared to go to prove that love. The cross is a vivid statement of the powerlessness of love.” There is little new here. After all, the moral influence theory of the atonement is hardly a recent development. Nevertheless, this understanding of the cross not only falls far short of the biblical testimony, it requires a direct and unqualified rejection of the apostolic preaching.

Last year, Steve Chalke emerged as a figure of controversy among British evangelicals, and *The Lost Message of Jesus* stood at the center of that controversy. The Evangelical Alliance, the established coalition of evangelicals in Great Britain, publicly criticized the book, charging that Chalke “has tended to avoid, rather than seriously address, the key biblical texts typically cited in defense of the penal

substitutionary view.” Reaching out to Chalke in hopes of reconciliation, the Evangelical Alliance released a statement that called him to reconsider his position. “We trust that instead of dismissing penal substitution out of hand as a false teaching tantamount to ‘cosmic child abuse,’ Steve will recognize its significant place in the range of atonement theories to which Evangelicals have characteristically subscribed.”

Some openly called for Chalke to be expelled from the Evangelical Alliance. The group’s *Basis of Faith* does not use the specific terms “penal,” “penalty,” or “punishment” in its text, but the Executive Council of the Evangelical Alliance, in adopting the *Basis of Faith*, “took it as entailing and implying penal substitution.” As the statement continued, “We believe that its affirmations of universal human sin and guilt, divine wrath and condemnation, and the substitutionary, sacrificial and redemptive nature of Christ’s death, together comprise the key elements in the doctrine of penal substitution.”

Chalke later released a statement explaining that his book “isn’t specifically [a] discussion of the atonement.” Instead, he argued that his work is about “Christ’s graciousness.” Furthermore, Chalke claimed to have “no desire to become involved in a technical debate about how the cross works.” Regrettably, his book puts him right in the middle of a “technical debate” about the cross. Chalke did not merely argue evangelicals should emphasize the love of God demonstrated in Christ’s death on the cross; he explicitly condemned the historic evangelical understanding of the cross, based solidly in the Bible, as “divine child abuse.” His explanation only added fuel to the fire. “The theological problem with penal substitution is that it presents us with a God who is first and foremost concerned with retribution flowing from his wrath against sinners,” Chalke insists. “The

only way for his anger to be placated is in receiving recompense from those who have wronged him; and although his great love motivates him to send his Son, his wrath remains the driving force behind the need for the cross."

The claim that a penal understanding of the cross represents "divine child abuse" has been asserted by feminists and liberal theologians in the past. Now, Chalke presses his argument even further.

"In *The Lost Message of Jesus* I claim that penal substitution is tantamount to 'child abuse--a vengeful Father punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed.' Though the sheer bluntness of this imagery (not original to me of course) might shock some, in truth, it is only a stark 'unmasking' of the violent, pre-Christian thinking behind such a theology. And the simple truth is that if God does not relate to his only Son as a perfect Father neither can we relate to him as such."

The audacity of this statement is almost breathtaking. Rather than pointing to the cross as the love of God demonstrated in his provision of the very sacrifice he has demanded, Chalke caricatures a penal substitutionary understanding of the atonement and adds insult to injury. Furthermore, he explicitly argues that a God who would require the sacrifice of His only Son is not a "perfect Father," and cannot be trusted.

In recent weeks, the controversy has been reignited as the Evangelical Alliance announced the adoption of a new *Basis of Faith* which comes far closer to stipulating a penal substitutionary understanding of the cross. The new wording asserts belief in "The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God."

In its recent statement, the Evangelical Alliance also announced a symposium to be hosted by the London School of Theology in 2006, intended to clear the air and focus on the most important issues at stake in the controversy.

Evangelicals in the United States should watch this controversy with both interest and concern. Attacks upon the penal substitutionary understanding of the atonement are hardly new--in fact they are to be found among some who would claim to be evangelicals in the United States. Evangelical identity is at stake in this controversy. But, far beyond that, the Gospel is at stake.

III. The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Believers. What God Requires, Christ Provides

Download:

By John Piper with Justin Taylor January 1, 2004

The gospel that Paul defended in Galatians is under serious attack today, in part by some who insist that they are evangelical Protestants. In the September/October issue of Modern Reformation magazine (which we encourage you to buy and read), Piper spells out more fully exactly what God's good news in Christ is. He argues that what God requires regarding human law-keeping, Christ provides, through becoming our substitute in two senses.

If justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Gal. 2:21)

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "*Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.*"...

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. (Gal. 3:10,13)

Historically, Protestants have believed that the Bible teaches that our salvation depends on what Christ has accomplished for our pardon and our perfection. We accept by faith his substitution for us in two senses: in his final suffering and death, he was condemned and cursed so that we may be pardoned (see Gal. 3:13; Rom. 8:3); and in his whole life of righteousness culminating in his death, he learned obedience so that we may be saved (see Heb. 5:8-9). His death crowns his atoning sufferings that propitiate God's wrath against us (see Rom. 3:24-25; 5:6-9), but it also crowns his life of perfect righteousness—God's righteousness—that is then imputed to us who believe (see 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21-22; 4:6, 11; 5:18-19). God provided in Christ what God demanded from us in the law. But today this good news that Christ is not only our pardon but also our perfection is under serious attack. Here I hope to show not only that the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is biblical but why we should defend it.

The Problem of the Law

Three times in Galatians 2:16, Paul tells us that no one can be justified—no one can be made right with God—by “works of the law.” In context, this phrase refers most naturally to deeds done to obey Moses' law. (Note the parallels between “the Book of the Law” and “works of the law” in Gal. 3:10, and between “the law” in Rom. 3:19, 20 and “works of the law” in Rom. 3:20. In both Gal. 3:10 and Rom. 3:19-20, the term “law” refers to the Mosaic law; so the phrase “works of the law” naturally picks up that meaning.)

In its narrow, short-term design, the law that God gave to the Israelites through Moses demanded perfect obedience of the Pentateuch's more than 600 commandments in order for the Israelites to receive eternal life (see Lev. 18:5;

Deut. 32:45-47; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 12). In this way, it upheld an absolute standard of childlike, humble, God-reliant, God-exalting perfect obedience that is in fact due from all of us—and thus provided the moral backdrop without which the Pentateuch's sin-atoning provisions (and ultimately Christ's sacrifice) would be unintelligible. Yet the Israelites were uniformly sinful and hostile to God (see Exod. 33:1-3; Acts 7:51). They did not—and indeed could not (see Rom. 8:7)—submit to him. Consequently, the law's effect on sinful Israel, when she was confronted with its hundreds of commandments, was awareness of latent sin (see Rom. 7:7), increased sin through deliberate violation of God's holy, righteous, and good commandment (see Rom. 7:12-13), and the multiplication of transgressions (see Rom. 5:20; 4:15). All of this was part of God's design for the law: “[The law] was added for the sake of transgressions” (Gal. 3:19); “The law came in so that the transgression would increase” (Rom. 5:20). The law cannot give life (see Gal. 3:21); rather it kills by multiplying sin (see Rom. 7:5, 8-13).

The law's deadly design and effects are sufficient to warrant Paul's statement in Galatians 3:12—“The law is not of faith”—especially in view of what he says eleven verses later: “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (vv. 23, 25). This does not mean that there was no faith before Christ (see Rom. 4) but, rather, that there was no faith explicitly in Christ before Christ came. The law's function, in the long view, is to prepare God's people for Christ's work, even as its short-term function is to imprison its recipients in sin (see Gal. 3:22-23). The narrow, short-term aim of the law is to kill those who come in contact with it because it is primarily “commandments” (see Rom. 13:8-9; Eph. 2:15) that require perfect obedience but that cannot themselves

produce this obedience independently of the Spirit who “gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

What God Requires, Christ Provides

Justification cannot come through the law (see Gal. 2:21; Acts 13:38-39). Each of us—every single human being (see Rom. 3:10-12, 19-20)—has failed to do what God's law requires of us (Gal. 3:10; 6:13; cf. James 2:10). *But to understand what God requires, we must see what Christ provides.* In his mercy, God has provided his Son as a twofold substitute for us. Both facets of Christ's substitution are crucial for our becoming right with God. These facets are grounded in the twin facts that (1) we have failed to keep God's law perfectly, and so we should die; but (2) Jesus did not fail—he alone has kept God's law perfectly (see Heb. 4:15)—and so he should not have died. Yet in his mercy God has provided in Christ a great substitution—a “blessed exchange”—according to which Jesus can stand in for us with God, offering his perfect righteousness in place of our failure and his own life's blood in place of ours. When we receive the mercy God offers us in Christ by faith (see Acts 16:31; 1 Tim. 1:15-16; 1 Pet. 1:8-9), his perfection is imputed—or credited or reckoned—to us and our sinful failure is imputed—or credited or reckoned—to him. And thus Jesus' undeserved death pays for our sin (see Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Rev. 5:9); and God's demand for us to be perfectly righteous is satisfied by the imputation or crediting of Christ's perfect righteousness to us. “If justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Gal. 2:21). But “God has done what the law...could not do” (Rom. 8:3).

2 Corinthians 5:21 is one of Scripture's most powerful affirmations of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the account of those who believe in him: “For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in

him we might become the righteousness of God.” There is a great deal that can be said about this verse but, when all is said and done, perhaps Charles Hodge has summed up its import best:

There is probably no passage in the Scriptures in which the doctrine of justification is more concisely or clearly stated than [this]. Our sins were imputed to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed to us. He bore our sins; we are clothed in his righteousness... Christ bearing our sins did not make him morally a sinner... nor does Christ's righteousness become subjectively ours, it is not the moral quality of our souls... Our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that they were a satisfaction of justice; and his righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God.

All of this then means, as Hodge goes on to say, that “our pardon is an act of justice”—an act based on Jesus having borne our sins (see 1 Pet. 2:24)—and yet it “is not mere pardon, but justification alone”—that is, our forevermore standing as righteous before God because we are clothed with Christ's perfection—“that gives us peace with God.”

This Doctrine Is Under Attack

Today, this precious doctrine that Christ's perfect keeping of the law is imputed to those who have faith in him is under attack in unexpected places. I have recently written a book, entitled, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* that attempts to explain and defend it exegetically. But why would a pressured pastor with a family to care for, a flock to shepherd, weekly messages to prepare, a love for biblical counseling, a burden for racial justice, a commitment to see abortion become unthinkable, a zeal for world evangelization, a focus on local church planting, and a life goal of spreading a passion for the supremacy of God

in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ, devote time and energy to the controversy over the imputation of Christ's righteousness? And why should you—pastor, elder, schoolteacher, engineer, accountant, firefighter, computer programmer, and homemaker—take the time to work through an issue like this? In the rest of this article, I will explain why I have taken up this issue. My reasons are personal, but in fact they apply to all who wish to glorify Christ, contend for the faith, and edify the saints.

For the Sake of My Family: Marriage

I have a family to care for. My marriage must survive and thrive for the good of our children and the glory of Christ. God designed marriage to display the holy mercy of Christ and the happy submission of his church (see Eph. 5:21-25). Here the doctrine of justification by faith and the imputed righteousness of Christ can be a great marriage saver and sweetener.

Marriage seems almost impossible at times because both partners feel so self-justified in their expectations that are not being fulfilled. There is a horrible emotional dead end in the words, "But it's just plain wrong for you to act that way," followed by "That's your perfectionistic perspective" or "Do you think you do everything right?" or by hopeless, resigned silence. The cycle of self-justified self-pity and anger can seem unbreakable.

But what if one or both partners becomes overwhelmed with the truth of justification by faith alone—and especially with the truth that in Christ Jesus God credits me, for Christ's sake, as fulfilling all of his expectations? What happens if this doctrine so masters our souls that we begin to bend it from the vertical to the horizontal and apply it to our marriages? In our own imperfect efforts in this regard, there have been breakthroughs that seemed at times

impossible. It is possible, for Christ's sake, simply to say, "I will no longer think merely in terms of whether my expectations are met in practice. I will, for Christ's sake, regard you the way God regards me—complete and accepted in Christ—and thus to be helped and blessed and nurtured and cherished, even if, in practice, you fail." I know my wife treats me this way. And surely this is part of what Paul calls for when he says that we should forgive "one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). There is more healing for marriage in the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness than many of us have begun to discover.

For the Sake of My Family: Children

Then there are our children. Four sons are grown and out of our house but not out of our lives. Every week there are major personal, relational, vocational, and theological issues to deal with. In every case, the fundamental question is, what are the great biblical truths that can give stability and guidance here? Listening and loving are crucial. But if they lack biblical *substance*, my counsel is hollow. Touchy-feely affirmation will not cut it. Too much is at stake. These young men want rock under their feet. My daughter Talitha is six years old. Recently she decided that we as a family would read through Romans together. She is just learning to read and I was putting my finger on each word. At the beginning of chapter five she stopped me in mid-sentence and asked, "What does 'justified' mean?" What do you say to a six year old? Do you say, "There are more important things to think about so just trust Jesus and be a good girl?" Or do you say that it is very complex, and even adults are not able to understand it fully, so wait to deal with it when you are older? Or do you say that it simply means that Jesus died in our place so that all our sins might be forgiven? What I did was to tell a story, made up on the spot, about two accused criminals, one who

actually did the bad thing and the other who did not. The one who didn't do anything bad is shown, by all those who saw the crime, to be innocent. So the judge "justifies" him—he tells him he is a law-abiding person and so can go free. But the other accused criminal, who really did a bad thing, is shown to be guilty, because all the people who saw the crime saw him do it. But, then, guess what? The judge "justifies" him, too! He says, "I regard you as a law-abiding citizen with full rights in our country" (and not just as a forgiven criminal who may not be trusted or fully free in the country). Here Talitha looked at me, puzzled.

She couldn't put her finger on the problem, but she sensed that something was wrong. So I said, "That's a problem isn't it? How can a person who really did break the law and do something bad be told by the judge that he is a law keeper, a righteous person, with full rights to the freedoms of the country and that he doesn't have to go to jail or be punished?" She shook her head. Then I went back to Romans 4:5 and showed her that God "justifies the ungodly." Her brow furrowed. I told her that she has sinned and I have sinned and we are all like this second criminal. And when God "justifies" us he knows we are sinners who are ungodly and law breakers. And I asked her, "What did God do so that it's right for him say to us sinners: you are not guilty; you are law keepers in my eyes; you are righteous; and you are free to enjoy all that this country has to offer?"

She knew it had something to do with Jesus and his coming and dying in our place. That much she has learned. But what more did I—or would you—tell her now? How we answer that question depends on whether we believe in the imputation of Christ's righteousness. If we do, then we will tell her that Jesus was the perfect law keeper and never sinned, but did everything the judge and his country

expected of him. We will tell her that when Jesus lived and died, he was not only a punishment bearer but also a law keeper. We will say that, if she will trust Jesus, then God the Judge will let Jesus' punishment and Jesus' righteousness count for hers—Jesus will have been punished for her and he will have obeyed the law for her. So when God “justifies” her—says that she is forgiven and righteous, even though she was not punished and did not keep the law—he does it because of Jesus. Jesus is her righteousness and Jesus is her punishment. Trusting Jesus makes Jesus so much her Lord and Savior that he is her perfection as well as her pardon.

Thousands of Christian families never have conversations like this. Not at six or sixteen. We do not have to look far, then, to explain the church's weakness and the fun-oriented superficiality of many youth ministries and the stunning drop-out rate after high school. But how will parents teach their children if the weekly message they get from the pulpit is that doctrine is unimportant? So, yes, I have a family to care for. And because I do, I must understand the central doctrines of my faith—and understand them so well that they can be translated to fit children of any age. As G. K. Chesterton once wrote, “It ought to be the oldest things that are taught to the youngest people.”

And There Are Weekly Messages to Prepare

This also explains why this issue matters to me when I have weekly messages to prepare and a flock to shepherd. My messages need to be saturated with biblical truth—brimming with radical relevance for the hard things in life—and they must help my people to be able to preach the gospel to themselves and their children day and night—the full, rich, biblical gospel, as it unfolds in the New Testament, and not as it is quickly and simply summed up

in a pamphlet. My people need to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (see 2 Pet. 3:18) so that they have strong roots for radical living, sweet comfort in troubled times, and serious answers for their children.

Justification and Biblical Counseling

I love biblical counseling. There is so much brokenness and so much sin that seems intransigently woven together with forms of failing family life and distorted personal perspectives. This does not yield to quick remedies. After several decades of watching the mental health care system at work, I am less hopeful about the effectiveness of even Christian psychotherapy than I used to be. No one strategy of helping people possesses a corner on all wisdom. But more than ever I believe that the essential foundation of all healing and all Christ-exalting wholeness is a soul-penetrating grasp of the glorious truth of justification by faith, distinct from and yet grounding the battle for healthy, loving relationships. Good counseling patiently builds the “whole counsel” of God (Acts 20:27) into the heads and hearts of sinful and wounded people. At its center is Christ our righteousness.

Justification and a Passion for Evangelism

Why devote time to defending the imputation of Christ's righteousness when there are so many unreached groups and millions of individuals who have never heard the gospel? I mention two things.

First, over the past twenty years of leading a missions-mobilizing church it has become increasingly clear that “teacher-based” church planting and not just “friendship-based” church planting is crucial among people with no Christian history. In other words, doctrinal instruction is utterly crucial in planting the church.

This is unsurprising, since embedded in the Great Commission is the command to *teach* new disciples to observe all that Christ has commanded us (see Matt. 28:20), and since Paul planted the church in Ephesus by *reasoning daily* for two years in the hall of Tyrannus, “so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). Doing missions without deep doctrinal transfer through patient teaching will not only wreck on the vast reefs of ignorance, but will, at best, produce weak and ever-dependent churches. Therefore, pastors who care about building, sending, and going churches must give themselves to building sending bases that breed doctrinally deep people who are not emotionally dependent on fads but who know how to feed themselves on Christ-centered truth.

Second, Paul develops the doctrine of justification in Galatians and Romans in ways that show its absolutely universal relevance. It crosses every culture. It is not a tribal concept. In Galatians he writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles” (Gal. 3:13-14). Christ's obedience is universal in its scope and significance. It is not just for Abraham's posterity but also for Adam's posterity—in other words, for everyone. This is also the point of comparing Adam to Christ in Romans 5:12-19.

Truth-Treasuring Church Planting

If I want to see local churches planted from our church and others, why invest so much time and energy in defending and explaining this doctrine? Because there are enough churches being planted by means of music, drama, creative scheduling, sprightly narrative, and marketing savvy. And there are too few that are God-centered, truth-treasuring, Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting, cross-focused, Spirit-

dependent, prayer-soaked, soul-winning, and justice-pursuing, that have a wartime mindset that makes them ready to lay down their lives for the salvation of nations and neighborhoods. A blood-earnest joy sustains churches like these—and it comes only by embracing Christ crucified as our righteousness. As William Wilberforce said, "If we would...rejoice in [Christ] as triumphantly as the first Christians did, we must learn like them to repose our entire trust in him and to adopt the language of the apostle, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ' (Gal. 6:14), 'who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.'" (1 Cor. 1:30)

The Truth That Makes the Church Sing

Of course, the question of whether we should believe in the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness must finally be answered exegetically from biblical texts and not because of its practical value or historical precedent. That is what the major part of Counted Righteous in Christ attempts. But we would be myopic not to notice that abandoning this doctrine would massively revise Protestant theology and Christian worship. It would eliminate a great theme from our worship of Christ in song. Recognizing this at least clarifies the issue and shows its magnitude, even if it cannot settle it.

The imputed righteousness of Christ has inspired much joyful worship over the centuries and informed many hymns and worship songs. It has cut across Calvinist/Arminian, Lutheran/Reformed, and Baptist/Presbyterian divides. For example,

"And Can It Be" (Charles Wesley)
No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus and all in him, is mine!

Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown through Christ my own.

"The Solid Rock" (Edward Mote)
When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found,
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

"We Trust in You, Our Shield" (Edith Cherry)
We trust in you, O Captain of salvation--
In your dear name, all other names above:
Jesus our righteousness, our sure foundation,
Our prince of glory and our king of love.

"O Mystery of Love Divine" (Thomas Gill)
Our load of sin and misery
Didst thou, the Sinless, bear?
Thy spotless robe of purity
Do we the sinners wear?

"Thy Works Not Mine O Christ" (Isaac Watts)
Thy righteousness, O Christ,
Alone can cover me:
No righteousness avails
Save that which is of thee.
Let Christ Receive All His Glory!

My overarching life goal is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. More specifically, the older I get the more I want my life to count in the long term for the glory of Christ. In America, there is an almost universal bondage to the mindset that we can only feel loved when we are

made much of. Yet the truth is that we are loved most deeply when we are helped to be free of that bondage so that we find our joy in treasuring Christ and making much of him. I long to see our joy—and the joy of the nations—rooted in God's wonderful work of freeing us to make much of Christ forever. This was Paul's passion: "It is my eager expectation and hope that... now as always Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20).

This is my passion, and I pray it will be my passion until I die, which means that I am jealous for Christ to get all the glory he deserves in the work of justification. I am consequently concerned that recent challenges to this doctrine rob him of a great part of his glory by denying that he has become for us not only our pardon but our perfection, that he is not only our redemption from sin but our righteousness, and that he not only bears the punishment for our disobedience but also performs and provides our perfect obedience. Current challenges to justification obscure (not to put it too harshly) half of Christ's glory in the work of justification by denying the imputation of Christ's righteousness and claiming that the Bible does not teach this great doctrine. Recognizing this, Francis Turretin wrote that imputation "tends to the greater glory of Christ and to our richer consolation, which they obscure and lessen not a little who detract from the price of our salvation a part of his most perfect righteousness and obedience and thus rend his seamless tunic." Jonathan Edwards echoed this: "To suppose that all Christ does is only to make atonement for us by suffering is to make him our Savior but in part. It is to rob him of half his glory as Savior."

I do not believe for a moment that any of those who represent the challenge I am opposing aim to dishonor

Christ. I believe they love him and want to honor him and his Word. But I believe the mistake they are making will have the opposite effect. The doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ bestows on Jesus Christ the fullest honor that he deserves. He should be honored not only as the one who died to pardon us, and not only as the one who sovereignly works faith and obedience in us, but as the one who provided a perfect righteousness for us as the ground of our full acceptance and endorsement by God. I pray that these “newer” ways of understanding justification that deny the reality of the imputation of divine righteousness to sinners by faith alone will not flourish and thus that the fullest glory of Christ and the fullest pastoral helps for our souls will not be dimmed.

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Piper's quotation of Charles Hodge comes from Hodge's commentary on 2 Corinthians (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, n.d.), pp. 150-151. His quotation from William Wilberforce is from Wilberforce's *A Practical View of Christianity*, ed. Kevin Charles Belmonte (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), p. 66. His quotation from Francis Turretin is found in *Turretin's Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), Vol. 2, p. 452; and the quotation from Jonathan Edwards is found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), Vol. 1, p. 683.

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IV. Unlimited vs. Limited Atonement

It is vital for someone to understand that, unless you are a universalist you believe in a limited atonement because you don't believe everyone goes to heaven. **The question then becomes not "Is the atonement limited?" but "How is the atonement limited?"** Is the atonement limited by the free will of man or the free will of God? The answer is found in the definition of "atonement." If Christ atoned for the sins of everyone, then everyone goes to heaven. For that is the meaning of "atonement."
(from www.gotquestions.org.)

Verses apparently supporting unlimited atonement:

John 1:29b "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Notice, that if "world" here means every individual, this would mean universalism. For if Christ takes away the sins of every individual in the world, then everybody would be saved (for their sins would be gone).

1 Timothy 2:5-6 *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men"*

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 *"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."*

Like the word "world," "all" doesn't always mean "every individual without exception," but "some people from all groups." It means "both Jews and Gentiles" but not "every Jew and every Gentile." Read Mark 1:5. Does "all" in this verse mean every individual in the world?

1 Timothy 2:6 Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all classes and groups of people."

Hebrews 2:9 *"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."

If we do use the word all to mean "every individual without exception," we mean "every individual within a certain group." For example, if I say to our Bible study group "is everybody here?" I do not mean "every individual to ever walk the face of the earth." I mean everybody who is in our group. Hebrews 2:9: "Every" means "every believer."

1 John 2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

(For definition of "whole world" see Revelation 13:3; 12:9; Romans 1:8) *He prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad* (John 11:51-52). "Whole world" (1 John 2:2) therefore means "the children of God who are scattered" throughout the world (John 11:52-53).

If Jesus died for the sins of unbelievers in the same way that he died for the sins of believers then what are unbelievers in hell for? If you say "unbelief," then you are saying that Jesus died for all sins except the sin of unbelief. But the Bible says that sinners in hell pay for many sins. See Colossians 3:5-6 and other passages.

Verses supporting Limited Atonement—Definite Atonement—Particular Atonement

Acts 20:28 "Be shepherds of **the church** of God, which he bought with his own blood."

Matthew 20:28 "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as **a ransom for many.**"

John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, that he **lay down his life for his friends.**"

John 17:6, 9 "I have revealed you to those **whom you gave me out of the world.** They were yours; you gave

*them to me and they have obeyed your word. I pray for them. I am **not praying for the world**, but for those you have given me, for they are yours."*

John 10:14-16 *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and **I lay down my life for the sheep**. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."*

Ephesians 5:25-26 *"just as Christ **loved the church** and gave himself up for her..."*

Hebrews 9:28 *"so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins **of many** people"*

If you say to me, then, that at the cross Christ only accomplished for me what he accomplished for those who will suffer hell for their sins, then you strip the death of Jesus of its actual effective accomplishment on my behalf, and leave me with what?—an atonement that has lost its precious assuring power that my sins were really covered and the curse was really lifted and the wrath of God was really removed. That's a high price to pay in order to say that Christ tasted death for everyone in the same way. (John Piper in sermon: "For whom did Jesus Taste Death.")

V. INTRODUCTORY ESSAY to John Owen's The Death Of Death in the Death of Christ

By J.I. Packer

(<http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Salvation/introessay.html>)

I. *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* is a polemical work, designed to show, among other things, that the doctrine of universal redemption is unscriptural and destructive of the gospel. There are many, therefore, to whom it is not likely to be of interest. Those who see no need for doctrinal exactness and have no time for theological debates which show up divisions between so-

called Evangelicals may well regret its appearance. Some may find the very sound of Owen's thesis so shocking that they will refuse to read his book at all; so passionate a thing is prejudice, and so proud are we of our theological shibboleths. But it is hoped that this reprint will find itself readers of a different spirit. There are signs today of a new upsurge of interest in the theology of the Bible: a new readiness to test traditions, to search the Scriptures and to think through the faith. It is to those who share this readiness that Owen's treatise is offered, in the belief that it will help us in one of the most urgent tasks facing Evangelical Christendom today—the recovery of the gospel. This last remark may cause some raising of eyebrows, but it seems to be warranted by the facts. There is no doubt that Evangelicalism today is in a state of perplexity and unsettlement. In such matters as the practice of evangelism, the teaching of holiness, the building up of local church life, the pastor's dealing with souls and the exercise of discipline, there is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with things as they are and of equally widespread uncertainty as to the road ahead. This is a complex phenomenon, to which many factors have contributed; but, if we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the biblical gospel. Without realizing it, we have during the past century bartered that gospel for a substitute product which, though it looks similar enough in points of detail, is as a whole a decidedly different thing. Hence our troubles; for the substitute product does not answer the ends for which the authentic gospel has in past days proved itself so mighty. The new gospel conspicuously fails to produce deep reverence, deep repentance, deep humility, a spirit of worship, a concern for the church. Why? We would suggest that the reason lies in its own character and content. It fails to make men God-centered in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts

because this is not primarily what it is trying to do. One way of stating the difference between it and the old gospel is to say that it is too exclusively concerned to be "helpful" to man—to bring peace, comfort, happiness, satisfaction—and too little concerned to glorify God. The old gospel was "helpful," too—more so, indeed, than is the new—but (so to speak) incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God. It was always and essentially a proclamation of Divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its center of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the center of reference is man. This is just to say that the old gospel was religious in a way that the new gospel is not. Whereas the chief aim of the old was to teach men to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better. The subject of the old gospel was God and His ways with men; the subject of the new is man and the help God gives him. There is a world of difference. The whole perspective and emphasis of gospel preaching has changed.

From this change of interest has sprung a change of content, for the new gospel has in effect reformulated the biblical message in the supposed interests of "helpfulness." Accordingly, the themes of man's natural inability to believe, of God's free election being the ultimate cause of salvation, and of Christ dying specifically for His sheep, are not preached. These doctrines, it would be said, are not "helpful"; they would drive sinners to despair, by suggesting to them that it is not in their own power to be saved through Christ. (The possibility that such despair might be salutary is not considered; it is taken for granted that it cannot be, because it is so shattering to our self-esteem). However this may be (and we shall say more about it later), the result of these omissions is that part of

the biblical gospel is now preached as if it were the whole of that gospel; and a half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth. Thus, we appeal to men as if they all had the ability to receive Christ at any time; we speak of His redeeming work as if He had done no more by dying than make it possible for us to save ourselves by believing; we speak of God's love as if it were no more than a general willingness to receive any who will turn and trust; and we depict the Father and the Son, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to themselves, but as waiting in quiet impotence "at the door of our hearts" for us to let them in. It is undeniable that this is how we preach; perhaps this is what we really believe. But it needs to be said with emphasis that this set of twisted half-truths is something other than the biblical gospel. The Bible is against us when we preach in this way; and the fact that such preaching has become almost standard practice among us only shows how urgent it is that we should review this matter. To recover the old, authentic, biblical gospel, and to bring our preaching and practice back into line with it, is perhaps our most pressing present need. And it is at this point that Owen's treatise on redemption can give us help.

II. "But wait a minute," says someone, "it's all very well to talk like this about the gospel; but surely what Owen is doing is defending limited atonement—one of the five points of Calvinism? When you speak of recovering the gospel, don't you mean that you just want us all to become Calvinists?"

These questions are worth considering, for they will no doubt occur to many. At the same time, however, they are questions that reflect a great deal of prejudice and ignorance. "Defending limited atonement"—as if this was all that a Reformed theologian expounding the heart of the

gospel could ever really want to do! "You just want us all to become Calvinists"—as if Reformed theologians had no interest beyond recruiting for their party, and as if becoming a Calvinist was the last stage of theological depravity, and had nothing to do with the gospel at all. Before we answer these questions directly, we must try to remove the prejudices which underlie them by making clear what Calvinism really is; and therefore we would ask the reader to take note of the following facts, historical and theological, about Calvinism in general and the "five points" in particular.

First, it should be observed that the "five points of Calvinism," so called, are simply the Calvinistic answer to a five-point manifesto (the Remonstrance) put out by certain "Belgic semi-Pelagians [**1**]" in the early seventeenth century. The theology which it contained (known to history as Arminianism) stemmed from two philosophical principles: first, that since the Bible regards faith as a free and responsible human act, it cannot be caused by God, but is exercised independently of Him; second, that since the Bible regards faith as obligatory on the part of all who hear the gospel, ability to believe must be universal. Hence, they maintained, Scripture must be interpreted as teaching the following positions: (**A.**) Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him, nor (**B.**) is he ever so completely controlled by God that he cannot reject it. (**C.**) God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by His foreseeing that they will of their own accord believe. (**D.**) Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone (there is no such gift); what it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe. (**E.**) It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost.

Thus, Arminianism made man's salvation depend ultimately on man himself, saving faith being viewed throughout as man's own work and, because his own, not God's in him. The Synod of Dort was convened in 1618 to pronounce on this theology, and the "five points of Calvinism" represent its counter-affirmations. They stem from a very different principle--biblical principle that "salvation is of the Lord"; **[2]** and they may be summarized thus: **(A.)** Fallen man in his natural state lacks all power to believe the gospel, just as he lacks all power to believe the law, despite all external inducements that may be extended to him. **(B.)** God's election is a free, sovereign, unconditional choice of sinners, as sinners, to be redeemed by Christ, given faith and brought to glory. **(C.)** The redeeming work of Christ had as its end and goal the salvation of the elect. **(D.)** The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to faith never fails to achieve its object. **(E.)** Believers are kept in faith and grace by the unconquerable power of God till they come to glory. These five points are conveniently denoted by the mnemonic TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Preservation of the saints.

Now, here are two coherent interpretations of the biblical gospel, which stand in evident opposition to each other. The difference between them is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God Who saves; the other speaks of a God Who enables man to save himself. One view presents the three great acts of the Holy Trinity for the recovering of lost mankind—election by the Father, redemption by the Son, calling by the Spirit—as directed towards the same persons, and as securing their salvation infallibly. The other view gives each act a different reference (the objects of redemption being all mankind, of calling, those who hear the gospel, and of election, those hearers who respond), and denies that any man's salvation

is secured by any of them. The two theologies thus conceive the plan of salvation in quite different terms. One makes salvation depend on the work of God, the other on a work of man; one regards faith as part of God's gift of salvation, the other as man's own contribution to salvation; one gives all the glory of saving believers to God, the other divides the praise between God, Who, so to speak, built the machinery of salvation, and man, who by believing operated it. Plainly, these differences are important, and the permanent value of the "five points," as a summary of Calvinism, is that they make clear the points at which, and the extent to which, these two conceptions are at variance. However, it would not be correct simply to equate Calvinism with the "five points." Five points of our own will make this clear.

In the first place, Calvinism is something much broader than the "five points" indicate. Calvinism is a whole world-view, stemming from a clear vision of God as the whole world's Maker and King. Calvinism is the consistent endeavour to acknowledge the Creator as the Lord, working all things after the counsel of His will. Calvinism is a theocentric way of thinking about all life under the direction and control of God's own Word. Calvinism, in other words, is the theology of the Bible viewed from the perspective of the Bible—the God—centered outlook which sees the Creator as the source, and means, and end, of everything that is, both in nature and in grace. Calvinism is thus theism (belief in God as the ground of all things), religion (dependence on God as the giver of all things), and evangelicalism (trust in God through Christ for all things), all in their purest and most highly developed form. And Calvinism is a unified philosophy of history which sees the whole diversity of processes and events that take place in God's world as no more, and no less, than the outworking of His great preordained plan for His creatures and His

church. The five points assert no more than that God is sovereign in saving the individual, but Calvinism, as such, is concerned with the much broader assertion that He is sovereign everywhere.

Then, in the second place, the "five points" present Calvinistic soteriology in a negative and polemical form, whereas Calvinism in itself is essentially expository, pastoral and constructive. It can define its position in terms of Scripture without any reference to Arminianism, and it does not need to be forever fighting real or imaginary Arminians in order to keep itself alive. Calvinism has no interest in negatives, as such; when Calvinists fight, they fight for positive Evangelical values. The negative cast of the "five points" is misleading chiefly with regard to the third (limited atonement, or particular redemption), which is often read with stress on the adjective and taken as indicating that Calvinists have a special interest in confining the limits of divine mercy. But in fact the purpose of this phraseology, as we shall see, is to safeguard the central affirmation of the gospel--that Christ is a Redeemer Who really does redeem. Similarly, the denials of an election that is conditional and of grace that is resistible, are intended to safeguard the positive truth that it is God Who saves. The real negations are those of Arminianism, which denies that election, redemption and calling are saving acts of God. Calvinism negates these negations in order to assert the positive content of the gospel, for the positive purpose of strengthening faith and building up the church.

Thirdly, the very act of setting out Calvinistic soteriology in the form of five distinct points (a number due, as we saw, merely to the fact that there were five Arminian points for the Synod of Dort to answer) tends to obscure the organic character of Calvinistic thought on this subject. For the five points, though separately stated, are really inseparable.

They hang together; you cannot reject one without rejecting them all, at least in the sense in which the Synod meant them. For to Calvinism there is really only one point to be made in the field of soteriology the point that God saves sinners. God--the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father's will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. Saves—does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory: plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. Sinners—men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God's will or better their spiritual lot. God saves sinners—and the force of this confession may not be weakened by disrupting the unity of the work of the Trinity, or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man and making the decisive part man's own, or by soft-pedaling the sinner's inability so as to allow him to share the praise of his salvation with his Saviour. This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology which the "five points" are concerned to establish and Arminianism, in all its forms to deny: namely, that sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to Whom be glory for ever; amen.

This leads to our fourth remark, which is this: the five-point formula obscures the depth of the difference between Calvinist and Arminian soteriology. There seems no doubt that it seriously misleads many here. In the formula, the stress falls on the adjectives, and this naturally gives the impression that in regard to the three great saving acts of God the debate concerns the adjectives merely—that both sides agree as to what election, redemption, and the gift of

internal grace are, and differ only as to the position of man in relation to them: whether the first is conditional upon faith being foreseen or not; whether the second intends the salvation of every man or not; whether the third always proves invincible or not. But this is a complete misconception. The change of adjective in each case involves changing the meaning of the noun. An election that is conditional, a redemption that is universal, an internal grace that is resistible, is not the same kind of election, redemption, internal grace, as Calvinism asserts.

The real issue concerns, not the appropriateness of adjectives, but the definition of nouns. Both sides saw this clearly when the controversy first began, and it is important that we should see it too, for otherwise we cannot discuss the Calvinist–Arminian debate to any purpose at all. It is worth setting out the different definitions side by side.

(i.) God's act of election was defined by the Arminians as a resolve to receive to sonship and glory a duly qualified class of people—believers in Christ. **[3]** This becomes a resolve to receive individual persons only in virtue of God's foreseeing the contingent fact that they will of their own accord believe. There is nothing in the decree of election to ensure that the class of believers will ever have any members; God does not determine to make any man believe. But Calvinists define election as a choice of particular undeserving persons to be saved from sin and brought to glory, and to that end to be redeemed by the death of Christ and given faith by the Spirit's effectual calling. Where the Arminian says: "I owe my election to my faith," the Calvinist says: "I owe my faith to my election." Clearly, these two concepts of election are very far apart.

(ii.) Christ's work of redemption was defined by the Arminians as the removing of an obstacle (the unsatisfied claims of justice) which stood in the way of God's offering

pardon to sinners, as He desired to do, on condition that they believe. Redemption according to Arminianism, secured for God a right to make this offer, but did not of itself ensure that anyone would ever accept it; for faith, being a work of man's own, is not a gift that comes to him from Calvary. Christ's death created an opportunity for the exercise of saving faith, but that is all it did. Calvinists, however, define redemption as Christ's actual substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners, through which God was reconciled to them, their liability to punishment was forever destroyed, and a title to eternal life was secured for them. In consequence of this, they now have in God's sight a right to the gift of faith, as the means of entry into the enjoyment of their inheritance. Calvary, in other words, not merely made possible the salvation of those for whom Christ died; it ensured that they would be brought to faith and their salvation made actual. The Cross saves. Where the Arminian will only say: "I could not have gained my salvation without Calvary," the Calvinist will say: "Christ gained my salvation for me at Calvary." The former makes the Cross the *sine qua non* of salvation, the latter sees it as the actual procuring cause of salvation, and traces the source of every spirit blessing, faith included, back to the great transaction between God and His Son carried through on Calvary's hill. Clearly, these two concepts of redemption are quite at variance.

(iii.) The Spirit's gift of internal grace was defined by the Arminians as "moral suasion," the bare bestowal of an understanding of God's truth. This, they granted—indeed, insisted—does not of itself ensure that anyone will ever make the response of faith. But Calvinists define this gift as not merely an enlightening, but also a regenerating work of God in men, "taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His

almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace." [4]

Grace proves irresistible just because it destroys the disposition to resist. Where the Arminian therefore, will be content to say: "I decided for Christ," "I made up my mind to be a Christian," the Calvinist will wish to speak of his conversion in more theological fashion, to make plain whose work it really was:

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off; my heart was free:
I rose, went forth, and followed thee." [5]

Clearly, these two notions of internal grace are sharply opposed to each other.

Now, the Calvinist contends that the Arminian idea of election, redemption and calling as acts of God which do not save cuts at the very heart of their biblical meaning; that to say in the Arminian sense that God elects believers, and Christ died for all men, and the Spirit quickens those who receive the word, is really to say that in the biblical sense God elects nobody, and Christ died for nobody, and the Spirit quickens nobody. The matter at issue in this controversy, therefore, is the meaning to be given to these biblical terms, and to some others which are also soteriologically significant, such as the love of God, the covenant of grace, and the verb "save" itself, with its synonyms. Arminians gloss them all in terms of the principle that salvation does not directly depend on any decree or act of God, but on man's independent activity in believing. Calvinists maintain that this principle is itself unscriptural and irreligious, and that such glossing demonstrably perverts the sense of Scripture and

undermines the gospel at every point where it is practiced. This, and nothing less than this, is what the Arminian controversy is about.

There is a fifth way in which the five-point formula is deficient. Its very form (a series of denials of Arminian assertions) lends color to the impression that Calvinism is a modification of Arminianism; that Arminianism; has a certain primacy in order of nature, and developed Calvinism is an offshoot from it. Even when one shows this to be false as a matter of history, the suspicion remains in many minds that it is a true account of the relation of the two views themselves. For it is widely supposed that Arminianism; (which, as we now see, corresponds pretty closely to the new gospel of our own day) is the result of reading the Scripture in a "natural," unbiased unsophisticated way, and that Calvinism is an unnatural growth, the product less of the texts themselves than of unhallowed logic working on the texts, wresting their plain sense and upsetting their balance by forcing them into a systematic framework which they do not themselves provide. Whatever may have been true of individual Calvinists, as a generalization about Calvinism nothing could be further from the truth than this.

Certainly, Arminianism; is "natural" in one sense, in that it represents a characteristic perversion of biblical teaching by the fallen mind of man, who even in salvation cannot bear to renounce the delusion of being master of his fate and captain of his soul. This perversion appeared before in the Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism of the Patristic period and the later Scholasticism, and has recurred since the seventeenth century both in Roman theology and, among Protestants, in various types of rationalistic liberalism and modern Evangelical teaching; and no doubt it will always be with us. As long as the fallen human mind is what it is, the Arminian way of thinking will continue to be a natural type

of mistake. But it is not natural in any other sense. In fact, it is Calvinism that understands the Scriptures in their natural, one would have thought, inescapable meaning; Calvinism that keeps to what they actually say; Calvinism that insists on taking seriously the biblical assertions that God saves, and that He saves those whom He has chosen to save, and that He saves them by grace without works, so that no man may boast, and that Christ is given to them as a perfect Saviour, and that their whole salvation flows to them from the Cross, and that the work of redeeming them was finished on the Cross. It is Calvinism that gives due honour to the Cross. When the Calvinist sings:

*"There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all;
He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good;
That we might go at last to Heaven,
Saved by His precious blood."*

He means it. He will not gloss the italicized statements by saying that God's saving purpose in the death of His Son was a mere ineffectual wish, depending for its fulfillment on man's willingness to believe, so that for all God could do Christ might have died and none been saved at all. He insists that the Bible sees the Cross as revealing God's power to save, not His impotence. Christ did not win a hypothetical salvation for hypothetical believers, a mere possibility of salvation for any who might possibly believe, but a real salvation for His own chosen people. His precious blood really does "save us all"; the intended effects of His self-offering do in fact follow, just because the Cross was what it was. Its saving power does not depend on faith being added to it; its saving power is such that faith flows from it. The Cross secured the full salvation of all for whom

Christ died. "God forbid," therefore, "that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."**[6]**

Now the real nature of Calvinistic soteriology becomes plain. It is no artificial oddity, nor a product of over-bold logic. Its central confession, that God saves sinners, that Christ redeemed us by His blood, is the witness both of the Bible and of the believing heart. The Calvinist is the Christian who confesses before men in his theology just what he believes in his heart before God when he prays. He thinks and speaks at all times of the sovereign grace of God in the way that every Christian does when he pleads for the souls of others, or when he obeys the impulse of worship which rises unbidden within him, prompting him to deny himself all praise and to give all the glory of his salvation to his Saviour. Calvinism is the natural theology written on the heart of the new man in Christ, whereas Arminianism is an intellectual sin of infirmity, natural only in the sense in which all such sins are natural, even to the regenerate. Calvinistic thinking is the Christian being himself on the intellectual level; Arminian thinking is the Christian failing to be himself through the weakness of the flesh. Calvinism is what the Christian church has always held and taught when its mind has not been distracted by controversy and false traditions from attending to what Scripture actually says; that is the significance of the Patristic testimonies to the teaching of the "five points," which can be quoted in abundance. (Owen appends a few on redemption; a much larger collection may be seen in John Gill's *The Cause of God and Truth*.) So that really it is most misleading to call this soteriology "Calvinism" at all, for it is not a peculiarity of John Calvin and the divines of Dort, but a part of the revealed truth of God and the catholic Christian faith. "Calvinism is one of the "odious names" by which down the centuries prejudice has been raised against it. But the thing itself is just the biblical gospel.**[7]**

In the light of these facts, we can now give a direct answer to the questions with which we began.

"Surely all that Owen is doing is defending limited atonement?" Not really. He is doing much more than that. Strictly speaking, the aim of Owen's book is not defensive at all, but constructive. It is a biblical and theological enquiry; its purpose is simply to make clear what Scripture actually teaches about the central subject of the gospel—the achievement of the Saviour. As its title proclaims, it is "a treatise of the redemption and reconciliation that is in the blood of Christ: with the merit thereof, and the satisfaction wrought thereby." The question which Owen, like the Dort divines before him, is really concerned to answer is just this: what is the gospel? All agree that it is a proclamation of Christ as Redeemer, but there is a dispute as to the nature and extent of His redeeming work: well, what saith the Scripture? What aim and accomplishment does the Bible assign to the work of Christ? This is what Owen is concerned to elucidate. It is true that he tackles the subject in a directly controversial way, and shapes his book as a polemic against the "spreading persuasion . . . of a general ransom, to be paid by Christ for all; that He dies to redeem all and everyone".^[8] But his work is a systematic expository treatise, not a mere episodic wrangle. Owen treats the controversy as providing the occasion for a full display of the relevant biblical teaching in its own proper order and connection. As in Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, the polemics themselves are incidental and of secondary interest; their chief value lies in the way that the author uses them to further his own design and carry forward his own argument.

That argument is essentially very simple. Owen sees that the question which has occasioned his writing—the extent of the atonement—involves the further question of its nature, since if it was offered to save some who will finally

perish, then it cannot have been a transaction securing the actual salvation of all for whom it was designed. But, says Owen, this is precisely the kind of transaction that the Bible says it was. The first two books of his treatise are a massive demonstration of the fact that according to Scripture the Redeemer's death actually saves His people, as it was meant to do. The third book consists of a series of sixteen arguments against the hypothesis of universal redemption, all aimed to show, on the one hand, that Scripture speaks of Christ's redeeming work as effective, which precludes its having been intended for any who perish, and, on the other, that if its intended extent had been universal, then either all will be saved (which Scripture denies, and the advocates of the "general ransom" do not affirm), or else the Father and the Son have failed to do what they set out to do—"which to assert," says Owen, "seems to us blasphemously injurious to the wisdom, power and perfection of God, as likewise derogatory to the worth and value of the death of Christ." [9]

Owen's arguments ring a series of changes on this dilemma. Finally, in the fourth book, Owen shows with great cogency that the three classes of texts alleged to prove that Christ died for persons who will not be saved (those saying that He died for "the world," for "all," and those thought to envisage the perishing of those for whom He died), cannot on sound principles of exegesis be held to teach any such thing; and, further, that the theological inferences by which universal redemption is supposed to be established are really quite fallacious. The true evangelical evaluation of the claim that Christ died for every man, even those who perish, comes through at point after point in Owen's book. So far from magnifying the love and grace of God, this claim dishonors both it and Him, for it reduces God's love to an impotent wish and turns the whole

economy of "saving" grace, so-called ("saving" is really a misnomer on this view), into a monumental divine failure. Also, so far from magnifying the merit and worth of Christ's death, it cheapens it, for it makes Christ die in vain. Lastly, so far from affording faith additional encouragement, it destroys the Scriptural ground of assurance altogether, for it denies that the knowledge that Christ died for me (or did or does anything else for me) is a sufficient ground for inferring my eternal salvation; my salvation, on this view, depends not on what Christ did for me, but on what I subsequently do for myself. Thus, this view takes from God's love and Christ's redemption the glory that Scripture gives them, and introduces the anti-scriptural principle of self-salvation at the point where the Bible explicitly says: "not of works, lest any man should boast."**[10]** You cannot have it both ways: an atonement of universal extent is a depreciated atonement. It has lost its saving power; it leaves us to save ourselves. The doctrine of the general ransom must accordingly be rejected, as Owen rejects it, as a grievous mistake. By contrast, however, the doctrine which Owen sets out, as he himself shows, is both biblical and God-honoring. It exalts Christ, for it teaches Christians to glory in His Cross alone, and to draw their hope and assurance only from the death and intercession of their Saviour. It is, in other words, genuinely Evangelical. It is, indeed, the gospel of God and the catholic faith.

It is safe to say that no comparable exposition of the work of redemption as planned and executed by the Triune Jehovah has ever been done since Owen published his. None has been needed. Discussing this work, Andrew Thomson notes how Owen "makes you feel when he has reached the end of his subject, that he has also exhausted it."**[11]** That is demonstrably the case here. His interpretation of the texts is sure; his power of theological construction is superb; nothing that needs discussing is

omitted, and (so far as the writer can discover) no arguments for or against his position have been used since his day which he has not himself noted and dealt with. One searches his book in vain for the leaps and flights of logic by which Reformed theologians are supposed to establish their positions; all that one finds is solid, painstaking exegesis and a careful following through of biblical ways of thinking. Owen's work is a constructive, broad-based biblical analysis of the heart of the gospel, and must be taken seriously as such. It may not be written off as a piece of special pleading for a traditional shibboleth, for nobody has a right to dismiss the doctrine of the limitedness of atonement as a monstrosity of Calvinistic logic until he has refuted Owen's proof that it is part of the uniform biblical presentation of redemption, clearly taught in plain text after plain text. And nobody has done that yet.

"You talked about recovering the gospel," said our questioner: "don't you mean that you just want us all to become Calvinists?"

This question presumably concerns, not the word, but the thing. Whether we call ourselves Calvinists hardly matters; what matters is that we should understand the gospel biblically. But that, we think, does in fact mean understanding it as historic Calvinism does. The alternative is to misunderstand and distort it. We said earlier that modern Evangelicalism, by and large, has ceased to preach the gospel in the old way, and we frankly admit that the new gospel, insofar as it deviates from the old, seems to us a distortion of the biblical message. And we can now see what has gone wrong. Our theological currency has been debased. Our minds have been conditioned to think of the Cross as a redemption which does less than redeem, and of Christ as a Saviour who does less than save, and of God's love as a weak affection which cannot keep anyone from hell without help, and of faith as the human help which God

needs for this purpose. As a result, we are no longer free either to believe the biblical gospel or to preach it. We cannot believe it, because our thoughts are caught in the toils of synergism. We are haunted by the Arminian idea that if faith and unbelief are to be responsible acts, they must be independent acts; hence we are not free to believe that we are saved entirely by divine grace through a faith which is itself God's gift and flows to us from Calvary. Instead, we involve ourselves in a bewildering kind of double-think about salvation, telling ourselves one moment that it all depends on God and next moment that it all depends on us. The resultant mental muddle deprives God of much of the glory that we should give Him as author and finisher of salvation, and ourselves of much of the comfort we might draw from knowing that God is for us. And when we come to preach the gospel, our false preconceptions make us say just the opposite of what we intend. We want (rightly) to proclaim Christ as Saviour; yet we end up saying that Christ, having made salvation possible, has left us to become our own saviours. It comes about in this way. We want to magnify the saving grace of God and the saving power of Christ. So we declare that God's redeeming love extends to every man, and that Christ has died to save every man, and we proclaim that the glory of divine mercy is to be measured by these facts. And then, in order to avoid universalism, we have to depreciate all that we were previously extolling, and to explain that, after all, nothing that God and Christ have done can save us unless we add something to it; the decisive factor which actually saves us is our own believing. What we say comes to this—that Christ saves us with our help; and what that means, when one thinks it out, is this—that we save ourselves with Christ's help. This is a hollow anticlimax. But if we start by affirming that God has a saving love for all, and Christ died a saving death for all, and yet balk at becoming universalists, there is nothing else

that we can say. And let us be clear on what we have done when we have put the matter in this fashion. We have not exalted grace and the Cross; we have cheapened them. We have limited the atonement far more drastically than Calvinism does, for whereas Calvinism asserts Christ's death, as such, saves all whom it was meant to save, we have denied that Christ's death, as such, is sufficient to save any of them.**[12]** We have flattered impenitent sinners by assuring them that it is in their power to repent and believe, though God cannot make them do it. Perhaps we have also trivialized faith and repentance in order to make this assurance plausible ("it's very simple—just open your heart to the Lord...") Certainly, we have effectively denied God's sovereignty, and undermined the basic conviction of religion—that man is always in God's hands. In truth, we have lost a great deal. And it is, perhaps, no wonder that our preaching begets so little reverence and humility, and that our professed converts are so self-confident and so deficient in self-knowledge, and in the good works which Scripture regards as the fruit of true repentance.

It is from degenerate faith and preaching of this kind that Owen's book could set us free. If we listen to him, he will teach us both how to believe the Scripture gospel and how to preach it. For the first: he will lead us to bow down before a sovereign Saviour Who really saves, and to praise Him for a redeeming death which made it certain that all for whom He died will come to glory. It cannot be over-emphasized that we have not seen the full meaning of the Cross till we have seen it as the divines of Dort display it—as the center of the gospel, flanked on the one hand by total inability and unconditional election, and on the other by irresistible grace and final preservation. For the full meaning of the Cross only appears when the atonement is defined in terms of these four truths. Christ died to save a

certain company of helpless sinners upon whom God had set His free saving love. Christ's death ensured the calling and keeping—the present and final salvation—of all whose sins He bore. That is what Calvary meant, and means. The Cross saved; the Cross saves. This is the heart of true Evangelical faith; as Cowper sang—

*"Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."*

This is the triumphant conviction which underlay the old gospel, as it does the whole New Testament. And this is what Owen will teach us unequivocally to believe.

Then, secondly, Owen could set us free, if we would hear him, to preach the biblical gospel. This assertion may sound paradoxical, for it is often imagined that those who will not preach that Christ died to save every man are left with no gospel at all. On the contrary, however, what they are left with is just the gospel of the New Testament. What does it mean to preach "the gospel of the grace of God"? Owen only touches on this briefly and incidentally, **[13]** but his comments are full of light. Preaching the gospel, he tells us, is not a matter of telling the congregation that God has set His love on each of them and Christ has died to save each of them, for these assertions, biblically understood, would imply that they will all infallibly be saved, and this cannot be known to be true. The knowledge of being the object of God's eternal love and Christ's redeeming death belongs to the individual's assurance, **[14]** which in the nature of the case cannot precede faith's saving exercise; it is to be inferred from the fact that one has believed, not proposed as a reason why one should believe. According to Scripture, preaching the gospel is entirely a matter of proclaiming to men, as truth from God which all are bound to believe and act on, the following four facts:

- (1.) that all men are sinners, and cannot do anything to save themselves;
- (2.) that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is a perfect Saviour for sinners, even the worst;
- (3.) that the Father and the Son have promised that all who know themselves to be sinners and put faith in Christ as Saviour shall be received into favour, and none cast out (which promise is "a certain infallible truth, grounded upon the superabundant sufficiency of the oblation of Christ in itself, for whomsoever (few or more) it be intended" **[15]**);
- (4.) that God has made repentance and faith a duty, requiring of every man who hears the gospel "a serious full recumbency and rolling of the soul upon Christ in the promise of the gospel, as an all-sufficient Saviour, able to deliver and save to the utmost them that come to God by Him; ready, able and willing, through the preciousness of His blood and sufficiency of His ransom, to save every soul that shall freely give up themselves unto Him for that end."**[16]**

The preacher's task, in other words, is to display Christ: to explain man's need of Him, His sufficiency to save, and His offer of Himself in the promises as Saviour to all who truly turn to Him; and to show as fully and plainly as he can how these truths apply to the congregation before him. It is not for him to say, nor for his hearers to ask, for whom Christ died in particular. "There is none called on by the gospel once to enquire after the purpose and intention of God concerning the particular object of the death of Christ, every one being fully assured that His death shall be profitable to them that believe in Him and obey Him." After saving faith has been exercised, "it lies on a believer to assure his soul, according as he find the fruit of the death of Christ in him and towards him, of the good-will and eternal love of God to him in sending His Son to die for him in particular";**[17]** but not before. The task to which the

gospel calls him is simply to exercise faith, which he is both warranted and obliged to do by God's command and promise.

Some comments on this conception of what preaching the gospel means are in order.

First, we should observe that the old gospel of Owen contains no less full and free an offer of salvation than its modern counterpart. It presents ample grounds of faith (the sufficiency of Christ, and the promise of God), and cogent motives to faith (the sinner's need, and the Creator's command, which is also the Redeemer's invitation). The new gospel gains nothing here by asserting universal redemption. The old gospel, certainly, has no room for the cheap sentimentalizing which turns God's free mercy to sinners into a constitutional soft-heartedness on His part which we can take for granted; nor will it countenance the degrading presentation of Christ as the baffled Saviour, balked in what He hoped to do by human unbelief; nor will it indulge in maudlin appeals to the unconverted to let Christ save them out of pity for His disappointment. The pitiable Saviour and the pathetic God of modern pulpits are unknown to the old gospel. The old gospel tells men that they need God, but not that God needs them (a modern falsehood); it does not exhort them to pity Christ, but announces that Christ has pitied them, though pity was the last thing they deserved. It never loses sight of the Divine Majesty and sovereign power of the Christ Whom it proclaims, but rejects flatly all representations of Him which would obscure His free omnipotence. Does this mean, however, that the preacher of the old gospel is inhibited or confined in offering Christ to men and inviting them to receive Him? Not at all. In actual fact, just because he recognizes that Divine mercy is sovereign and free, he is in a position to make far more of

the offer of Christ in his preaching than is the expositor of the new gospel; for this offer is itself a far more wonderful thing on his principles than it can ever be in the eyes of those who regard love to all sinners as a necessity of God's nature, and therefore a matter of course. To think that the holy Creator, who never needed man for His happiness and might justly have banished our fallen race for ever without mercy, should actually have chosen to redeem some of them! and that His own Son was willing to undergo death and descend into hell to save them! and that now from His Throne He should speak to ungodly men as He does in the words of the gospel, urging upon them the command to repent and believe in the form of a compassionate invitation to pity themselves and choose life! These thoughts are the focal points round which the preaching of the old gospel revolves. It is all wonderful, just because none of it can be taken for granted. But perhaps the most wonderful thing of all—the holiest spot in all the holy ground of gospel truth—is the free invitation which “the Lord Christ” (as Owen loves to call Him) issues repeatedly to guilty sinners to come to Him and find rest for their souls. It is the glory of these invitations that it is an omnipotent King Who gives them, just as it is a chief part of the glory of the enthroned Christ that He condescends still to utter them. And it is the glory of the gospel ministry that the preacher goes to men as Christ's ambassador, charged to deliver the King's invitation personally to every sinner present and to summon them all to turn and live. Owen himself enlarges on this in a passage addressed to the unconverted.

“Consider the infinite condescension and love of Christ, in His invitations and calls of you to come unto Him for life, deliverance, mercy, grace, peace and eternal salvation. Multitudes of these invitations and calls are recorded in the Scripture, and they are all of them filled up with those

blessed encouragements which divine wisdom knows to be suited unto lost, convinced sinners . . . In the declaration and preaching of them, Jesus Christ yet stands before sinners, calling, inviting, encouraging them to come unto Him.

"This is somewhat of the word which He now speaks unto you: Why will ye die? why will ye perish? why will ye not have compassion on your own souls? Can your hearts endure, or can your hands be strong, in the day of wrath that is approaching?... Look unto Me, and be saved; come unto Me, and I will ease you of all sins, sorrows, fears, burdens, and give rest unto your souls. Come, I entreat you; lay aside all procrastinations, all delays; put Me off no more; eternity lies at the door... do not so hate Me as that you will rather perish than accept of deliverance by Me.

"These and the like things doth the Lord Christ continually declare, proclaim, plead and urge upon the souls of sinners . . He doth it in the preaching of the word, as if he were present with you, stood amongst you, and spake personally to every one of you . . . He hath appointed, the ministers of the gospel to appear before you, and to deal with you in His stead, avowing as His own the invitations which are given you in His name, 2 Cor. v.19,20."**[18]**

These invitations are universal; Christ addresses them to sinners as such, and every man, as he believes God to be true, is bound to treat them as God's words to him personally and to accept the universal assurance which accompanies them, that all who come to Christ will be received. Again, these invitations are real; Christ genuinely offers Himself to all who hear the gospel, and is in truth a perfect Saviour to all who trust Him. The question of the extent of the atonement does not arise in evangelistic preaching; the message to be delivered is simply this-that Christ Jesus, the sovereign Lord, Who died for sinners, now invites sinners freely to Himself. God commands all to

repent and believe; Christ promises life and peace to all who do so. Furthermore, these invitations are marvelously gracious; men despise and reject them, and are never in any case worthy of them, and yet Christ still issues them. He need not, but He does. "Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest" remains His word to the world, never cancelled, always to be preached. He Whose death has ensured the salvation of all His people is to be proclaimed everywhere as a perfect Saviour, and all men invited and urged to believe on Him, whoever they are, whatever they have been. Upon these three insights the evangelism of the old gospel is based.

It is a very ill-informed supposition that evangelistic preaching which proceeds on these principles must be anemic and half-hearted by comparison with what Arminians can do. Those who study the printed sermons of worthy expositors of the old gospel, such as Bunyan (whose preaching Owen himself much admired), or Whitefield, or Spurgeon, will find that in fact they hold forth the Saviour and summon sinners to Him with a fullness, warmth, intensity and moving force unmatched in Protestant pulpit literature. And it will be found on analysis that the very thing which gave their preaching its unique power to overwhelm their audiences with broken-hearted joy at the riches of God's grace—and still gives it that power, let it be said, even with hard-boiled modern readers—was their insistence on the fact that grace is free. They knew that the dimensions of Divine love are not half understood till one realizes that God need not have chosen to save nor given His Son to die; nor need Christ have taken upon Him vicarious damnation to redeem men, nor need He invite sinners indiscriminately to Himself as He does; but that all God's gracious dealings spring entirely from His own free purpose. Knowing this, they stressed it, and it is this stress that sets their evangelistic preaching in

a class by itself. Other Evangelicals, possessed of a more superficial and less adequate theology of grace, have laid the main emphasis in their gospel preaching on the sinner's need of forgiveness, or peace, or power, and of the way to get them by "deciding for Christ." It is not to be denied that their preaching has done good (for God will use His truth, even when imperfectly held and mixed with error), although this type of evangelism is always open to the criticism of being too man-centred and pietistic; but it has been left (necessarily) to Calvinists and those who, like the Wesleys, fall into Calvinistic ways of thought as soon as they begin a sermon to the unconverted, to preach the gospel in a way which highlights above everything else the free love, willing condescension, patient long-suffering and infinite kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, without doubt, this is the most Scriptural and edifying way to preach it; for gospel invitations to sinners never honour God and exalt Christ more, nor are more powerful to awaken and confirm faith, than when full weight is laid on the free omnipotence of the mercy from which they flow. It looks, indeed, as if the preachers of the old gospel are the only people whose position allows them to do justice to the revelation of Divine goodness in the free offer of Christ to sinners.

Then, in the second place, the old gospel safeguards values which the new gospel loses. We saw before that the new gospel, by asserting universal redemption and a universal Divine saving purpose, compels itself to cheapen grace and the Cross by denying that the Father and the Son are sovereign in salvation; for it assures us that, after God and Christ have done all that they can, or will, it depends finally on each man's own choice whether God's purpose to save him is realized or not. This position has two unhappy results. The first is that it compels us to misunderstand the significance of the gracious invitations of Christ in the

gospel of which we have been speaking; for we now have to read them, not as expressions of the tender patience of a mighty sovereign, but as the pathetic pleadings of impotent desire; and so the enthroned Lord is suddenly metamorphosed into a weak, futile figure tapping forlornly at the door of the human heart, which He is powerless to open. This is a shameful dishonour to the Christ of the New Testament. The second implication is equally serious: for this view in effect denies our dependence on God when it comes to vital decisions, takes us out of His Hand, tells us that we are, after all, what sin taught us to think we were—masters of our fate, captain of our souls—and so undermines the very foundation of man's religious relationship with his Maker. It can hardly be wondered at that the converts of the new gospel are so often both irreverent and irreligious, for such is the natural tendency of this teaching. The old gospel, however, speaks very differently and has a very different tendency. On the one hand, in expounding man's need of Christ, it stresses something which the new gospel effectively ignores—that sinners cannot obey the gospel, any more than the law, without renewal of heart. On the other hand, in declaring Christ's power to save, it proclaims Him as the author and chief agent of conversion, coming by His Spirit as the gospel goes forth to renew men's hearts and draw them to Himself. Accordingly, in applying the message, the old gospel, while stressing that faith is man's duty, stresses also that faith is not in man's power, but that God must give what He commands. It announces, not merely that men must come to Christ for salvation, but also that they cannot come unless Christ Himself draws them. Thus it labours to overthrow self-confidence, to convince sinners that their salvation is altogether out of their hands, and to shut them up to a self-despairing dependence on the glorious grace of a sovereign Saviour, not only for their righteousness but for their faith too.

It is not likely, therefore, that a preacher of the old gospel will be happy to express the application of it in the form of a demand to "decide for Christ," as the current phrase is. For, on the one hand, this phrase carries the wrong associations. It suggests voting a person into office—an act in which the candidate plays no part beyond offering himself for election, and everything then being settled by the voter's independent choice. But we do not vote God's Son into office as our Saviour, nor does He remain passive while preachers campaign on His behalf, whipping up support for His cause. We ought not to think of evangelism as a kind of electioneering. And then, on the other hand, this phrase obscures the very thing that is essential in repentance and faith—the denying of self in a personal approach to Christ. It is not at all obvious that deciding for Christ is the same as coming to Him and resting on Him and turning from sin and self-effort; it sounds like something much less, and is accordingly calculated to instill defective notions of what the gospel really requires of sinners. It is not a very apt phrase from any point of view.

To the question: what must I do to be saved? the old gospel replies: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. To the further question: what does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? its reply is: it means knowing oneself to be a sinner, and Christ to have died for sinners; abandoning all self-righteousness and self-confidence, and casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace; and exchanging one's natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of one's heart by the Holy Ghost. And to the further question still: how am I to go about believing on Christ and repenting, if I have no natural ability to do these things? it answers: look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy; ask Him to

give you a new heart, working in you true repentance and firm faith; ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you, that you may never henceforth stray from Him. Turn to Him and trust Him as best you can, and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to Him; watch, pray, read and hear God's Word, worship and commune with God's people, and so continue till you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being, a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired has been put within you. The emphasis in this advice is on the need to call upon Christ directly, as the very first step.

"let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him"—

so do not postpone action till you think you are better, but honestly confess your badness and give yourself up here and now to the Christ Who alone can make you better; and wait on Him till His light rises in your soul, as Scripture promises that it shall do. Anything less than this direct dealing with Christ is disobedience of the gospel. Such is the exercise of spirit to which the old evangel summons its hearers. "I believe—help thou mine unbelief": this must become their cry.

And the old gospel is proclaimed in the sure confidence that the Christ of whom it testifies, the Christ who is the real speaker when the Scriptural invitations to trust Him are expounded and applied, is not passively waiting for man's decision as the word goes forth, but is omnipotently active, working with and through the word to bring His people to faith in Himself. The preaching of the new gospel is often described as the task of "bringing men to Christ"—as if

only men move, while Christ stands still. But the task of preaching the old gospel could more properly be described as bringing Christ to men, for those who preach it know that as they do their work of setting Christ before men's eyes, the mighty Saviour Whom they proclaim is busy doing His work through their words, visiting sinners with salvation, awakening them to faith, drawing them in mercy to Himself.

It is this older gospel which Owen will teach us to preach: the gospel of the sovereign grace of God in Christ as the Author and Finisher of faith and salvation...

Notes:

[1.] Owen, Works (ea. Goold), x.6

[2.] John 2:9

[3.] Plus any others who, though they had not heard the gospel, lived up to the light they had--though this point need not concern us here.

[4.] Westminster Confession, x. 1.

[5.] Granted, it was Charles Wesley who wrote this; but it is one of the many passages in his hymns which make one ask, with "Rabbi" Duncan, 'Where's your Arminianism now, friend?'

[6.] Gal 6:14

[7.] C.H. Spurgeon was thus abundantly right when he declared: "I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism.; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel... unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah, nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the Cross; nor can I

comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called." (Spurgeon's Autobiography," Vol.1, Ch. XVI, p.172.)

[8.] P. (47) inf.

[9.] Ibid.

[10.] Eph. ii. 9.

[11.] "Life of John Owen," p.38 (Works, ed. Goold, 1).

[12.] Compare this, from C.H. Spurgeon: "We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would he saved. Now, our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, "No, certainly not." We ask them the next question-Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer "No" They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say "No, Christ has died that any man may be saved if"-and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ's death; we say, "No, my dear sir, it is you that do it." We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved but are saved, must be saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it."

[13.] See pp. (199-204, 292-8) inf.

[14.] "What, I pray, is it according to Scripture, for a man to be assured that Christ died for him in particular? Is it not the very highest improvement of faith? Doth it not include a sense of the spiritual love of God shed abroad in our hearts? Is it not the top of the apostle's consolation Rom.

viii. 34, and the bottom of all his joyful assurance, Gal. ii. 20?" (p.297 inf.).
[15.] P. (203) inf.
[16.] P. (295f) inf.
[17.] Loc. cit.
[18.] Works, I.422.

VI. Did Christ Die for all Men or Only His elect?

By John Hendryx

<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/jhendryx03.html>

The following is a written response to a brother with the following question about limited atonement (that Christ died only for the elect):

Could you please clarify the extent of the atonement, limited versus unlimited? Isn't limited atonement wrong and doesn't the Bible plainly teach unlimited atonement (that Christ died for the sins of all people in the world)?

This is a very good question and has remained an issue between believers through many centuries.

Many people popularly call themselves "four-point" Calvinists because they find the idea of a limited atonement loathsome, or believe somehow that the Bible does not teach it. What is meant by a four-point Calvinist? It is generally understood to mean that an individual claims to believe in *total depravity*, *unconditional election*, *irresistible grace* and *perseverance of the saints* but not limited atonement (dropping the "L" in limited atonement) in TULIP (TU-IP). What is interesting about this, however, is that everyone involved actually believes in a limited atonement since we can all agree that Christ did not actually redeem everyone who ever lived. There will be some who end up in the lake of fire according to both

positions. The question, therefore, is not whether there is a "limit" to the extent of the atonement, but rather, what is the nature of the limit and who limits it? Is it limited by God's choice and design or by free human choices? Did God, from eternity, sovereignly determine to whom He would apply the benefits of the atonement, or did God leave it to man's will? This is why I generally like to call my position "particular redemption" rather than limited atonement since both sides ultimately limit the application of the atonement.

If you ask one of these brothers or sisters, "*for whom did Christ die?*" they will generally answer something like this: "the Bible plainly teaches that Christ's death and His work of redemption was not only sufficient for the entire world, but that He actually died for the sins of all the world." They will back their position with this verse from 1 John 2:2 - "*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*" ...as well as John 3:16 "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." (And leave it there as if this settles the argument).

Unfortunately this view leaves an island of righteousness in man to be able to believe the Gospel without the aid of the regenerating grace, which Christ purchased on the cross. It follows that those who hold to a general atonement believe *the one sin for which Christ did not die is rejection of His person and work* (they will cite John 3:18,36). *[Some readers have claimed that I am setting up a straw man here but this is actually the position (word for word) currently being taught by such institutions as Dallas Theological Seminary. Anyone wishing to take issue with me here I have evidence of this and will gladly provide it upon request.]* So if, as they claim, that Christ did not die

for our unbelief, then who did?

What many are, in fact, teaching is that Christ *did not* die for *ALL THE SINS* of the whole world, since they have excluded the sin of unbelief. In other words they claim that Christ died for our breaking of the 2nd through 10th commandments in the Decalogue but not the first commandment. So, the obvious question to answer here is "who, then, dies for our sin of unbelief?" Do we atone for it ourselves? Does God overlook our former unbelief because the sincerity of our newly found faith makes up for our previous unbelief? Does the atonement for sins of unbelief kick in only after we unlock the door by "accepting Jesus into our hearts?" It is my contention that Christ died for all our sins including the sin of unbelief. If you agree with me yet believe in a universal atonement then why are there still people in hell? If all men's unbelief has been paid for then all sin has been forgiven—there is nothing left to forgive and we would then have universalism. But 1 John 3:23 teaches "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ." To disobey this command is a sin, and the greatest sin of all I might add. A question to ask yourself is did Christ pay for this sin or not?

It is not quite apparent to me why the text of John 3:16 should be an argument against limited atonement. The passage does not say Jesus died for everyone, but only that the Father gave his Son for ALL THOSE WHO WOULD BELIEVE. It says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES in HIM shall not perish but have eternal life." Right? Don't we all believe this? That is why the consistent biblical Calvinists, when presenting the gospel to unbelievers, simply teach that Christ died for "all who would believe", which is actually closer to the meaning of this text than the erroneous position that He died for all in a general kind of way, and yet for no individual in particular. Instead, we believe that

the benefits of the atonement will apply only to who will be believers, so he did not die for any person who would remain steadfast in their unbelief. So I would argue that John 3:16 actually supports the definite atonement position better than the indefinite position. They are reading into the text that Christ's death only potentially will save someone if they believe without the help and grace of the cross to do so. So in actuality, Christ died for no one in particular this scheme. His affection was only cast forth in a general impersonal kind of way rather than actually coming for His people who He set his affection on from eternity.

In fact, this teaching comes full circle and devastates all of the other doctrines of grace. Although claiming to believe in Total Depravity, the teaching of the so-called four-point Calvinists is really that man still has the moral ability to turn to God on his own without regenerating grace (a grace purchased on the cross) effectively destroying total depravity, even though the Bible plainly teaches that no one seeks God unless first born again (1 John 5:1; John 6:37, 39, 44, 63-65; Rom 3:11. 1 Cor 2:14, John 1:13; John 3). That is to say, natural fallen man has the ability and desire (in some cases) to believe in Christ without regenerating grace. It is teaching a "conditional" election since it depends completely on God's foreknowledge of whether or not we will have faith, even though the Bible plainly teaches that election is not conditioned on something God sees in us and that faith is a divine gift (Eph 2:5-8). So in effect WE end up choosing God with our autonomous free will in this scheme, not the other way around. Those who deny limited atonement are also surreptitiously semi-pelagian in all the other doctrines of grace as well. Salvation becomes the work of man, rather than a monergistic divine work of grace. Some may argue that God's grace works together with man, but the problem with this is that it still leaves the final decision for salvation

in the hands of man. Faith, apart from Christ's work on the cross, precedes saving grace in this view, contrary to everything the Bible teaches (Rom 9:16; John 1:13). God's grace would take us part of the way to salvation leaving man's will to make the final decision. So, according to those who claim that the atonement is unlimited (indefinite) there is no divine election in the final analysis, but only humans electing God even though we all know that it is God that chooses us. (John 15:16).

The biblical teaching is that God, before the foundation of the world in His eternal counsels, knew and determined to whom He would apply the benefits of the atonement? (2 Timothy 1 9, Titus 1:2; Eph 1:4,5)

"This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."
John 6:39 (emphasis mine)

What does *"that of all He has given Me I lose nothing"* mean except that God, in His eternal councils had already determined who would be written in the book of life and that Jesus Christ came to earth in time to carry out their eternal redemption. Is Jesus' purpose not in sync with God the Fathers' and God the Holy Spirits'? God the Father elects certain individuals and the Holy Spirit regenerates them. Does the Son have a different redemptive agenda? No, the three Persons of the Trinity are always consistent with one another. If you believe in election, which you do unless you have torn out almost every page of your Bible, then you must believe that that Christ came to redeem His elect, and the Holy Spirit applied the benefits of the atonement only on those the Father had "given" Christ. It means that He will infallibly bring His own into His eternal kingdom. I hear someone say "but that's not fair" ... does God owe you anything my friend? Is He your debtor? The only debt He owes you is His just wrath. His choosing of

you is an act of His mercy, an act of His divine good pleasure (Eph 1:4,5).

Before we get to 1 John 2:2 lets familiarize ourselves with *some other biblical texts on this crucial issue:*

First Take a look at these passages of Scripture:

"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."
Revelation 5:9 (emphasis mine)

(my comment:) did Christ redeem everybody by His blood in this passage? the entire world or a limited number? Doesn't it say that He purchased men FROM every tribe???

"...and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." Heb 9:12

(my comment:) was everybody's redemption eternal? through His blood He obtained eternal redemption—for whom? all men? then why aren't they all saved? If all men's redemption is eternal then we must become universalists.

"...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Titus 2:14

(My question:) IN this passage did Christ redeem all men from iniquity or just some? the second half of the verse also narrows the redemption to a particular people, not all people.

v.5 "...But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.... v. 8 He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke

was due? v.11... By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. v.12 ...Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors." Isaiah 53:5,8,11-12
(My comment:) Are the sins of the whole world "healed" by Christ's scourging in this passage? If they are, then why isn't everyone saved? What meaning does healing have then if it is unlimited? Are the words "my people" referring to all mankind or the many whom He would justify that the Father had "given" Him? (see John 17:9) Since He "bore the sin of many" this certainly is not including the reprobate but a particular people purchased out of the world.

Now we come to the famous text that our "four-point" brothers put all their weight upon as teaching an unlimited *atonement*:

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:2

At first glance I must admit that this appears to be a pretty good text to back up their argument but upon closer examination, it falls apart. The problem is that if the four-pointers read this verse the way they intend to then we must also conclude that the whole world's sins have already been atoned for (believers and unbelievers) and thus all will be saved (universalism). If Christ is a propitiation or atonement for all men's sins, paying for all sins ever committed, then why isn't everyone in the whole world saved? So the verse actually proves too much. The verse simply means, (and there is no doubt this is what Paul meant), Christ did not die for every person without exception but every person without distinction. . All kinds of people everywhere, is what is meant. We see this elsewhere when the Scriptures say, Christ "purchased for God with [His] blood men from every tribe and tongue and

people and nation." (Revelation 5:9). Many will argue that He didn't die for our unbelief, which I believe I thoroughly discredited in my argument above. John is speaking, rather, of sins for people *throughout the whole world*, not each and every person's sins. There are too many problems with saying that the text includes all men (believers and unbelievers) and, as I have shown, this leads to an unbiblical universalism. Saying Christ died for the sins of the whole world is similar in the use of language in many other passages in Scripture such as Mark 1:5 which says, "And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem." If you think the "all in this passage means every single person without exception, you have missed the point, it means large numbers of people; all persons without distinction, but not all persons without exception.

Christ died for all of the sins of His elect, including their previous sin of unbelief. Belief in the Gospel does not make up for our previous sin of unbelief. Belief (faith) is the witness that God has already wrought grace in our hearts, the inevitable response to His work of regeneration in our souls. (John 3:21) Christ clearly came to lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:11) and some people are not his sheep: "*...but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.*" (John 10:26) Jesus prayed for His own but he would not pray for those the Father had NOT given him: "*I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*" (Emphasis mine) (John 17:9).

This teaching does have great practical value; specifically that our prayers for the lost will be effectual. As we go out to do missions, to reach the lost, we can have confidence that we go not in vain but that we carry with us the Word of God which has the power to raise the dead to life. We

don't just go in the hope that maybe someone will be saved; or that Christ died for no one in particular. But rather that He died for a particular people to make them His own. If my hope was based solely on whether someone would respond to the Gospel message by their own free will then I would despair because no one would respond (Rom 3:11. 1 Cor. 2:14)... but because God has an eternal plan, a bride he has chosen for His Son, I can rejoice in the knowledge that God's word proclaimed will effectually bring home those whom he delivers the inward call.
(Rom 8:28-30)

Finally, remember that it is not a question of whether or not Christ's redemption was able to cleanse the sins of all men, as we know it clearly could have if this is what He so desired. The question is what does the Bible teach about the divine intent with regard to the atonement, which I hope this short paper has answered.
Soli Deo Gloria

P.S. Historically many of the greatest minds the church has produced were 5 pointers, not four. Some of the more well known ones were Jonathan Edwards, C.H. Spurgeon, A.A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, John Owen, John Calvin, George Whitfield, Thomas Goodwin and more recently, J.I. Packer, R.C Sproul, John Piper, Iain Murray, Michael Horton, James Boice and John Murray

VII. On the subject of Particular Redemption (Unlimited Atonement) also see:

2 Peter 2:1 and *Universal Redemption* (A must see) Simon Escobedo III <http://aomin.org/2PE21.html>

The Nature of the Atonement Why and for Whom did Christ Die? Phil Johnson

The Son of Man Came to Give His Life a Ransom for Many
John Piper

To God be the Glory

Wayne Mack—A Popular Exposition of the Biblical Doctrine
of Particular Redemption

For Whom Did Christ Die? (2)

C.H. Spurgeon

See also Lorraine Boettner at [http://www.mbrem.com/
calvinism/bchap12.html](http://www.mbrem.com/calvinism/bchap12.html)

Appendix C

Corresponding with Chapter Eight Death through Birth and Birth through Death Romans 5:12-21

Following are pages of additional notes on the following topics:

- I. Physical death before Adam**
- II. Does the “all” of verse 18 mean universalism (all will be saved)?**
- III. What about infants who die?**
- IV. The subject of “imputed/credited” righteousness, Page 10**
- V. The subject of “original sin”**

I. Physical death before Adam

There is another emphasis in these verses. It is on the power and scope of the Gospel. If the consequence of sin is powerful, and it is, look at verses 15 and 17: “How much more” will grace bring powerful results. Again from verse 15, see the word, “overflow”—sin flows but grace overflows. Again from verse 17, if sin brought one result, “God’s abundant provision” brought more. Look at verse 20, “where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”

We sometimes get and give the impression that Christianity and God are barely hanging on in the world and that evil is winning. I also think we have the idea that in the end, in the judgment, most people will go to hell and only a few

will be with God.

That's not what these verses sound like and when you read the book of Revelation, it definitely is not the case.

God promised to Abraham offspring as great in number as the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore.

In Revelation 7:9 we read, *"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb..."*

John Calvin wrote, "(For) if the fall of Adam had the effect of producing the ruin of many, the grace of God is much more efficacious in benefiting many, since it is granted that Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to destroy." (in Stott, 161).

Grace overwhelms our sin and the death it deserves.

For a discussion of physical death before Adam's sin see: Douglas Moo in *Romans*, 188ff. Biblical evidence suggests that at least plant "death" occurred before Adam's sin (cf "seed bearing plants" of Genesis 1:11ff), but what about animals? Many animal fossils have been found with other animal fossils within, obviously having been eaten. Then what about humans? This raises the issue of the origin and dating of human beings? The Bible clearly presents Adam as the first human. (Genesis 1-3, Matthew 19:4, Acts 17:26, etc). See also John Stott, *Romans*, 164ff.

No less a scholar than John Stott suggests that homo sapiens may have existed for millennia but not until later did God create man in the image of God, breathing into him a living soul. So while death may have been part of the experience of plants and animals, it was not part of man

created in the image of God until Adam's sin.

II. Does the "all" in verse 18 mean that all will eventually be saved (Universalism)?

The two uses of "all" of verse 18 must be explained. Does "all" mean every person without exception? Everything Paul has said thus far in Romans and emphasized here in Romans 5 demands that "all men" of 18a must be every person without exception. Does that then mean that the "all men" of 18b must likewise include every person without exception? Do these verses teach a universalism, that every person will eventually be saved? The Bible is very clear that some will spend eternity separated from God.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 *"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power."* Matthew 25:46 *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."* It is also true that the word "all" must be interpreted in its context. In Acts 2:17 *"I will pour out my Spirit on all people"* does not mean every person without exception. In Acts 19:10 "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" clearly does not mean every person without exception. So here the "all" of "life for all men," must be interpreted in its context. Our relationship to Adam is by birth; the "all" includes all who are physical descendants of Adam. Since we are all born, the "all" means every person without exception. But our relationship to Christ is by faith (5:17 "receive"); the "all" includes those who belong to Christ.

To avoid a complete contradiction with the rest of the Bible, it must be that we interpret "all" in light of the context. Specifically we must define "all" in each case with the

person who is the head – Adam or Christ. See 1 Corinthians 15—each “Adam” delimits the “all.”

1 Corinthians 15:45-49: *"So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."*

First Adam, last Adam; first man, second man, etc. Christ was not the second person who ever lived (that was Eve). Each clearly implies a unique relationship to other humanity—each as the head of those who follow. Adam is the first, the head, the source, of all who follow him, to those who are physically born (hence, every human being). Christ is the head, the source, to all who follow him, to all who are spiritually born (hence, all those who are born again).

In verse Romans 5:19 Paul changes words using “many” instead of “all.” It seems reasonable to assume that the two words are used by Paul as synonyms and the same rules apply to their interpretation—“context is king.”

III. What about infants who die?

For a discussion of the fate of infants who die see: Douglas Moo, *Romans*, 191. From an epitaph on a gravestone in the cemetery at St. Andrews in Scotland, believing that children who die in infancy are saved by God's grace:

“Bold (unbelief), turn pale and die.

Beneath this stone four sleeping infants lie

Say, are they lost or saved?

If death's by sin, they sinned, for they are here.
If heaven's by works, in heaven they can't appear.
Reason, ah, how depraved!
Turn to the Bible's sacred page, the knot's untied:
They died, for Adam sinned;
They live, for Jesus died."

(Ironsides, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1928, p. 71)

See also "Are Those Who Died in Infancy Saved?" by Sam Storms
Nov 6, 2006

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/are-those-who-die-in-infancy-saved>

"If human nature is corrupt and guilty from conception, the consequence of Adam's transgression, are those who die in infancy lost? The same question would apply to those who live beyond infancy but because of mental retardation or some other handicap are incapable of moral discernment, deliberation, or volition. This is more than a theoretical issue designed for our speculation and curiosity. It touches one of the most emotionally and spiritually unsettling experiences in all of life: the loss of a young child.

I was first confronted with this issue on a personal level in the late 1970s. I received a phone call from a family in our church which had just experienced the premature birth of twin girls. Upon arriving at the hospital I was informed that one of the girls had died. I never anticipated the question that came my way as I walked into the room of the grieving mother: "Sam, is my baby in heaven?" A few years later the young child of a good friend was killed in a car accident. The parents asked me to perform the funeral, once again putting me in the position of having to think through and articulate in a biblical and compassionate way what I believed about the eternal destiny of their child. So, what conclusion did I reach? Let's take a look at the variety of options that have been suggested.

(1) **The sinlessness of infants** - One view insists that those dying in infancy are saved for the simple reason that there is nothing in them or done by them that merits condemnation. In other words, they are born in a state of moral neutrality or moral equilibrium. They do not possess a sin nature nor are they corrupt. They are, in a word, characterless. They lack moral standing. There is nothing in their souls that is properly the object of divine judgment. Hence all dying in that state are saved for no other reason than that they are not condemnable. Several texts would seem to contradict this view, among them Pss. 51:5; 58:3; Prov. 22:15; Gen. 8:21; Job 15:14-16; Eph. 2:3.

(2) **Universalism** - Another viewpoint simply asserts that all will be saved, inclusive of those dying in infancy. None will suffer eternal condemnation. God's saving grace extends effectually to the entire human race. Again, countless texts could be cited to disprove this idea, among them Mt. 7:13-14, 21-23; 8:11-12; 10:28; 13:37-42; Luke 16:23-28; 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 6; Rev. 14:10-11; 20:11-15.

(3) **Post-Mortem Salvation** - Based on a certain interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-19 and 4:6, it is asserted that those who die without having the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ and make a cognitively and morally informed decision will be granted a "second chance" (it is, in fact, a "first" chance if they never had a legitimate opportunity in this life). As for infants in particular, it is said that God will bring them to a state in which they are sufficiently mature to understand and choose responsibly.

There are several problems with this view. First, how can they be brought into a state of maturity by God without the influence of parents, education, peers, experience, etc. which contribute to our own intellectual and spiritual framework and on the basis of which we ourselves make an

informed choice? Would they be brought into a state of moral equilibrium, having had no history of personal sin that has so decisively shaped who we are? If God is the one who somehow directly educates and nurtures them, has he not then prejudiced their minds/wills in a way that is altogether different from the way we are educated and nurtured? The problems associated with this are innumerable.

Second, the two texts on which they base their view say nothing about post-mortem evangelism for either those dying in infancy or pagans who never hear the name of Jesus. I will address both these texts in a future installment of Deciphering Difficult Texts.

Third, from a pastoral point of view, this theory does nothing to ease the anxieties of parents who want to know if their baby is in heaven. For there is no guarantee, on this view, that even if given an opportunity after death that they will respond in faith.

(4) Infant Salvation via Infant Baptism - Certain traditions within Christianity have affirmed baptismal regeneration, according to which the waters of baptism are used by God to effect the regeneration, spiritual cleansing, and forgiveness of the infant. Needless to say, this view is only as cogent as is the case for baptismal regeneration, and the case for the latter is poor. In addition, it fails to address the question of what happens to the vast majority of infants in the history of the world who died without the benefit of Christian baptism.

(5) The Roman Catholic Concept of "Limbo" - The Roman Catholic Church has acknowledged the possibility of a state of natural blessedness or happiness in which unbaptized infants experience a form of eternal peace but

not the consummate joy of heaven itself. Rome has neither formally affirmed nor denied this teaching.

(6) Salvation of the Infants of Believing Parents -

Others have appealed to 1 Cor. 7:14-16 to argue that the infants or children of a believing parent or parents are, for that reason, granted special salvific privilege in the kingdom of God. Again, this view is only as cogent as is that particular interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.

(7) Elect Infants are Saved - Another view advocated by some Reformed theologians is that some who die in infancy are elect, and therefore saved, while others are non-elect, and *therefore condemned*.

(8) All those dying in Infancy are Elect - The view that I embrace is that all those dying in infancy, as well as those so mentally incapacitated that they are incapable of making an informed choice, are among the elect of God chosen by him for salvation before the world began. The evidence for this view is scant, but significant.

First, in Romans 1:20 Paul describes people who are recipients of general revelation as being '*without excuse*.' Does this imply that those who are *not* recipients of general revelation (i.e., infants) are therefore *not* accountable to God or subject to wrath? In other words, those who die in infancy have an "*excuse*" in that they neither receive general revelation nor have the capacity to respond to it.

Second, there are texts which appear to assert or imply that infants do not know good or evil and hence lack the capacity to make morally informed and thus responsible choices. According to Deut. 1:39 they are said to 'have no knowledge of good or evil.' This in itself, however, would

not prove infant salvation, for they may still be held liable for the sin of Adam.

Third, is the story of David's son in 2 Sam. 12:15-23 (esp. v. 23). The first-born child of David and Bathsheba was struck by the Lord and died. In the seven days before his death, David fasted and prayed, hoping that "the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live" (v. 22). Following his death, David washed himself, ate food, and worshipped (v. 20). When asked why he responded in this way, he said that the child "has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (v. 23). What does it mean when David says "I shall go to him?" If this is merely a reference to the grave or death, in the sense that David, too, shall one day die and be buried, one wonders why he would say something so patently obvious! Also, it *appears* that David draws some measure of comfort from knowing that he will "go to him." It is the reason why David resumes the normal routine of life. It *appears* to be the reason David ceases from the outward display of grief. It *appears* to be a truth from which David derives comfort and encouragement. How could any of this be true if David will simply die like his son. It would, therefore, *appear* that David believed he would be reunited with his deceased infant. Does this imply that at least *this one particular infant* was saved? Perhaps. But if so, are we justified in constructing a doctrine in which we affirm the salvation of *all* who die in infancy?

Fourth, there is consistent testimony of Scripture that people are judged on the basis of sins voluntary and consciously committed in the body. See 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rev. 20:11-12. In other words, eternal judgment is always based on conscious rejection of divine revelation (whether in creation, conscience, or Christ) and willful disobedience. Are infants capable of either? There is no

explicit account in Scripture of any other judgment based on any other grounds. Thus, those dying in infancy are saved because they do not (cannot) satisfy the conditions for divine judgment.

Fifth, and related to the above point, is what R. A. Webb states. If a deceased infant “were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, there would be a good reason to the divine mind for the judgment, but the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances, it would know suffering, but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. It could not tell its neighbor—it could not tell itself—why it was so awfully smitten; and consequently the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings, being to it a conscious enigma, the very essence of penalty would be absent, and justice would be disappointed of its vindication. Such an infant could feel that it was in hell, but it could not explain, to its own conscience, why it was there”

(*The Theology of Infant Salvation* Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1981, 288-89).

Sixth, we have what would appear to be clear biblical evidence that at least *some* infants are regenerate in the womb, such that if they had died in their infancy they would be saved. This at least provides a theoretical basis for considering whether the same may be true of all who die in infancy. That is to say, “if this sort of thing happens even once, it can certainly happen in other cases” (Ronald Nash, *When a Baby Dies* [Zondervan, 1999], 65). These texts include Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15.

Seventh, some have appealed to Matthew 19:13-15 (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17) where Jesus declares, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the

kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' Is Jesus simply saying that if one wishes to be saved he/she must be as trusting as children, i.e., devoid of skepticism and arrogance? In other words, is Jesus merely describing the *kind* of people who enter the kingdom? Or is he saying that these very children were recipients of saving grace? But if the latter were true, it would seem to imply that Jesus knew that the children whom he was then receiving would all die in their infancy. Is that credible?

Eighth, Millard Erickson argues for the salvation of deceased infants in an unusual way. He argues that notwithstanding Adam's sin, there must be a conscious and voluntary decision on our part to embrace or ratify it. Until such is the case, the imputation of Adam's sin to his physical posterity, as is also true of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to his spiritual posterity, is *conditional*. Thus, prior to reaching the "age of accountability" all infants are innocent. When and in what way does this ratification of Adam's sin come about?

Erickson explains:

"We become responsible and guilty when we accept or approve of our corrupt nature. There is a time in the life of each one of us when we become aware of our own tendency toward sin. At that point we may abhor the sinful nature that has been there all the time. We would in that case repent of it and might even, if there is an awareness of the gospel, ask God for forgiveness and cleansing. . . . But if we acquiesce in that sinful nature, we are in effect saying that it is good. In placing our tacit approval upon the corruption, we are also approving or concurring in the action in the Garden of Eden so long ago. We become guilty of that sin without having to commit a sin of our own" (*Christian Theology*, 2:639).

But there are at least two problems with this. First, if we are born with a corrupt and sinful nature, as Erickson concedes we are, our willing ratification of Adam's transgression and the guilt and corruption of nature which are its effects is *itself* an inevitable effect of the corrupt nature to which we are now ostensibly giving our approval.

In other words, how else *could* a person who is born corrupt and wicked respond but in a corrupt and wicked way, namely, by ratifying Adam's sin? If Erickson should suggest that such a response is *not* inevitable, one can only wonder why it is that *every single human being* who ever lived (except Jesus) ratifies and embraces the sin of Adam and its resultant corruption of nature. Surely someone, somewhere would have said No. Erickson would have to argue that at the point when each soul becomes morally accountable it enters a state of complete moral and spiritual equilibrium, in no way biased by the corruption of nature and wicked disposition with which it was born. But that leads to the second problem, for it would mean that each of us experiences our own Garden of Eden, as it were.

Each human soul stands its own probation at the moment the age of moral accountability is reached. But if that is so, what is the point of trying to retain any connection at all between what Adam did and who/what we are? If ultimately I become corrupt by my own first choice, what need is there of Adam? And if I am corrupt *antecedent* to that first choice, we are back to square one: my guilt and corruption inherited from Adam, the penal consequence of *his* choice as the head and representative of the race.

Ninth, an argument that is entirely subjective in nature (and therefore of questionable evidential value) may be noted. We must ask the question: Given our understanding of the character of God as presented in Scripture, does He

appear as the kind of God who would eternally condemn infants on no other ground than that of Adam's transgression? Admittedly, this is a subjective (and perhaps sentimental) question. But it deserves an answer, nonetheless.

Personally speaking, I find the first, third, fourth, fifth, and ninth points convincing. Therefore, I do believe in the salvation of those dying in infancy. I affirm their salvation, however, neither because they are innocent nor because they have merited God's forgiveness but solely because God has sovereignly chosen them for eternal life, regenerated their souls, and applied the saving benefits of the blood of Christ to them apart from conscious faith.

IV. The subject of "imputed/credited" righteousness

For an excellent discussion of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us see John Piper, "Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part IV. See also parts I-III. http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/BySeries/2/24_Adam_Christ_and_Justification_Part_4/

For discussion of imputation and original sin see here also: Jonathan Edwards on original sin with particular reference to his contribution to understanding the Doctrine of Imputation by David S. Brown <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/3505/JonathanEdwards.html>

I. Original Sin - The Treatise

Jonathan Edward's *The Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758) was written in response to Dr. John Taylor's *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to a Free and Candid Examination* (1741), which presents the Arminian arguments for actual sins rather original sin. Being a thoroughbred Calvinist and "the last Puritan" (as J. I. Packer calls him), Edwards was solidly committed to the Augustinian/ Reformation doctrine of original sin, which in his day as it is in our's is a major offense to many, if not

most, people. Pascal once observed that the doctrine seems an offense to reason but once one accepted it makes total sense of the entire human condition. John Gertsner comments that Edwards' work, *Original Sin*, "may be the most profound articulation and defense of that Reformed doctrine ever written." Edwards' reason for going after Taylor was his deep, abiding concern that Taylor's Arminian theology would destroy the Scriptural basis of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone:

"I look on the doctrine [of original sin] as of great importance, which every body will doubtless own it is, if it be true. For if the case be such indeed, that all mankind are by nature in a state of total ruin, both with respect to the moral evil of which they are subjects, and the afflictive evil to which they are exposed, the one as the consequence and punishment of the other; then doubtless, the great salvation by Christ stands in direct relation to this ruin, as the remedy to the disease; and the whole Gospel, or doctrine of salvation, must suppose it; and all real belief, or true notion of that gospel, must be built upon it." In this paper I will give particular focus on Edwards' unique and, I think, helpful philosophical and theological insights on the imputation of Adam's sin and guilt to us.

II. Original Sin—the Doctrine

The doctrine of original sin (first coined by Augustine) doesn't so much refer to the first or original sin committed by Adam as it does to the result of the first sin i.e. the corruption of the human race and the fallen condition into which we are all born and in which makes natural men "enemies of God". In short, the classic doctrine, while maintaining that God made Man upright (Eccles. 7:29), holds the entire race is corrupt and culpable. Edwards also viewed the Fall as the loss of the spiritual nature (original holiness and righteousness) that belonged to the human

race as the created imago dei. Therefore, Man has a twisted heart prior to any actual sin. This inner sinful disposition or motivation is the root of all sin and it derives to everyone of the human race in a mysterious but real way through our first parent, who was our representative before God.

The doctrine is therefore the basis for the familiar formulation: we are not sinners because we sin but rather we sin because we are sinners. (*"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* Ps. Ps. 51:5). The Westminster Confession brilliantly captures the results of the Fall: By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly disposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Edwards subscribed to this Reformed understanding but he perhaps moved into the doctrine more deeply and with a more unique, fresh perspective than perhaps anyone save Augustine. He writes of two principles God implanted in Man. One, the "natural" (or call the flesh) is self love, passions, natural appetites etc. The other refers to as "divine" (or Spirit) which is the image of God and is the superior principle that is to dominate the heart or affections. When Man sinned, the divine principle left the heart and the "Holy Spirit, that divine inhabitant, forsook the house." When that happened, Man was given over to his inward, private affections. Consequently, the "natural principle", not the "divine", now reigned, cosmic treason

occurred, God is forsaken and the imago dei is shattered. Thus, it is God's absence from us, i.e. the withdraw of His Spirit, not His presence, which explains sin.

By original sin, Edwards meant that "innate sinful depravity of the heart" Consistent with classic doctrine, Edwards believed, not that we tend always to sin, but we always have a disposition to sin. Evidence for this innate tendency of corruption as the prevalent, universal condition of man, Edwards contended, is readily found in observation, experience and Scripture. On the other hand, Taylor to support his moralism supposedly looked at the same evidence and saw a preponderance of good and virtue in the tendencies of the race to support. Taylor's conclusion, like that of other Arminians, suggests that it is not necessarily the evidence about the twisted heart of man that is want but either the sufficient strength of the lens through which it is examined or the absence of spiritual lens at all.

Edwards argues that we humans are born into and retain only a physical nature which is completely "bereft" of the "things of religion". We are by nature totally depraved, that is, every part of our being is permeated with sin—it is at our core—and we are alienated from God. Our will (which Edwards defines as the mind choosing) is so corrupted that we cannot by nature choose God apart from His affecting grace. Although we have a rational capacity, it is corrupted in spiritual things and cannot see sin for what it is.

In his *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards argued that we are free to always choose according to our strongest desire at the moment of choosing. The problem is that in our fallen state we cannot choose God because we do not desire Him. We have freedom to choose what we would have but we will not have God in our lives. We do not have liberty to

choose God because our nature lacks Edwards' divine principle.

III. Adam As Federal Head

Edwards saw Adam as a representative through whom God covenanted with the entire human race, not only in a parental sense but more particularly in a federal sense. Adam as the federal head of the race was tested and when he sinned as the public person, he thus sinned for all of us. His fall, as well as his guilt, is ours. When God punished Adam by withdrawing His grace and communion and by giving him over to his own affections and desires, Adam lost or forfeited his original righteousness and the same consequences attend all his posterity. We follow after Adam willingly and like Adam hide ourselves from God, cover ourselves with our own works of righteousness and seek peace, as Edwards said, with false gods. Therefore no infusion of evil was necessary for us to sin in Adam.

Edwards contended that it is privation of God's divine love that explains man's wickedness and therefore, its cause is internal, not external or environmental. No external act belongs to a person "otherwise...than as his heart was in it." Yet because the human race's heart is inclined to Adam's act, his act is the race's act as well. For Edwards all it takes is for God in response to Adam's sin to withdraw special grace from him and create his posterity without it.

Edwards thought the most excruciating of all theological problems was how, in the case of Adam who was created fresh from the hand of God with holiness and righteousness, can a good tree can bear bad fruit. From whence did Adam's disposition or inclination come? As much as this challenged Edwards' acute intellect and as much as he labored with it, it is even more of an unfathomable mystery to us. But Edwards waded into its

depths concluding based on Scripture that a perfectly righteous person, which Adam was, may will that which he knows to be unrighteous. Yet Edwards held fast to Scripture that God could not be and is not the author of the sinner but the sinner is himself morally responsible for his choices.

John Gertsner at this point helps place this gordian knot into some perspective at least by suggesting that "God intends the question of the origin of sin as an academic thorn in the flesh. There must be an answer to the question but no one has yet discovered it. Edwards mistakenly believed he had." Edwards did, however, succinctly capture the essence of the pattern of sin and guilt in the following brilliant explanation:

"The depraved disposition of Adam's heart is to be considered two ways. (1) As the first rising of an evil inclination in his heart, exerted in his first act of sin, and the ground of the complete transgression. (2) An evil disposition of heart continuing afterwards, as a confirmed principle, that came by God's forsaking him; which was a punishment of his first transgression. This confirmed corruption, by its remaining and continued operation, brought additional guilt on his soul.

And in like manner, depravity of heart is to be considered two in Adams's posterity. The first existing of a corrupt disposition in their hearts is not to be looked upon as sin belonging to them, distinct from their participation of Adam's first sin; it is as it were the extended pollution of that sin, through the whole tree, by virtue of the constituted union of the branches with the root; or the inheritance of the sin of that head of the species in the members, in the consent and concurrence of the hearts of the members with the head in that first act...But the depravity of nature, remaining an established principle in

the heart of a child of Adam, and as exhibited in after-operation, is a consequence and punishment of the first apostasy thus participated, and brings new guilt. The first being of an evil disposition in the heart of the child of Adam,, whereby he is disposed to approve of the sin of his first father, as fully as he himself approved of it when he committed it, or so far as to imply a full and perfect consent of heart to it, I think, is not be looked upon as a consequence of the imputation of that first sin, any more than the full consent of Adam's own heart in the act of sinning; which was not consequent on the imputation of his sin to himself, but rather prior to it in the order of nature. indeed the derivation of the evil disposition to the hearts of Adam's posterity, or rather the coexistence of the evil disposition, implied in Adam's first rebellion, in the root and branches, is a consequence of the union, that the wise Author of the world has established between Adam and his posterity: but not properly a consequence of the imputation of his sin; nay, rather antecedent to it, as it was in Adam himself. The first depravity of heart, and the imputation of that sin, are both the consequences of that established union: but yet in such order, that the evil disposition is first, and the charge of guilt consequent; as it was in the case of Adam himself.

In addition to the antipathy Arminians and others have toward to the doctrine of original sin and total depravity, there is their persistent objection to what they see as the inherent unfairness of judging anyone in another. The imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity is a real issue for them, although they do not seem to rail against the imputation of sinners' guilt to an innocent Christ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to guilty sinners. How Edwards dealt with the problem of Adam's imputation was one of his most unique and original philosophical insights.

IV. Objections Answered - A Doctrine Deepened

In answering Taylor on imputation, Edwards framed the concept of personal identity whereby Adam and his posterity are constitutionally united in the divine order of things. The issue of why human should bear responsibility for Adam's sin is no more of a philosophical problem for Edwards than why humans should bear responsibility for their own past deeds. He said that God sovereignly orders and sustains unity and continuity of all created substances (and their effects) - in nature, in a person and in the race. Edwards' central point about imputation was that God in his dealings with Adam under the covenant of works (Gen 2: 16-17) "looked on his posterity as being one with him." He further explains that man's innate corrupt disposition is not a judicial punishment for Adam's guilt but really is our own because of our participation (being one with) in the sinful inclination that preceded Adam's sinful act, what Edwards called "extended pollution of that sin". John Gertsner puts it this way, "there was a divinely constituted unity between Adam and those he represented. This constituted unity, being in tact, when Adam sinned, all sinned. The order of imputation is actually the same in Adam and in mankind: first, sin; second, imputation of guilt; third, pollution." Adam's case and ours are parallel, not sequential and are the same except the first appearance of evil and the first act are the same event which turned the heart away.

Edwards believed in a "real union between the root and the branches of the world of mankind, established by the author of the whole system of the universe...and the full consent of the hearts of Adam's posterity to the first apostasy...and therefore the sin of the apostasy is not theirs merely because God imputes it to them but it is truly and properly theirs and on that ground God imputed it to them." Edwards viewed depravity and imputation as stemming from this union of Adam and his posterity. God

so identified Adam with us that his choice and act was our choice and act. We too would have, had we physically been there in the garden, told Eve "pluck the fruit and eat it!"

God dealt "more immediately" with Adam but he did so as the root of the whole tree and also with all the branches "as if they had been existing in their root." Based then on unity and identity, the only difference between Adam's sin and our own is that Adam's is first and we are merely repeating what he did. While the acorn that comes from a century's old giant oak is distinct from it, it bears in it, however, constant succession of common nature by continuous divine creation. As Edwards saw it, when God deals with the whole tree He has sovereignly chosen to deal with each individual branch as well. This is what Edwards says is meant in Scripture by the oneness or personal identity of Adam and his posterity. He argues that "God, according to an established law of nature, has in a constant succession communicated to it many of the same qualities...as if it were one."

Likewise Edwards argued the mature person's body is one with the infant body from which he or she developed and although its substance has changed greatly over time God sovereignly caused a "communication" between the infantile and the mature body so that he treats the individual as one body. He argued the same way for the mind and body in that when considered individually they are very different but by God's contributions they are strongly united and become one. While we are not the same as our past existence, Edwards contends that God chooses to treat all new effects in us as a single identity resulting from His continuous creation. Since God chooses me to be the same as yesterday's person I am also the same person as Adam. All the parts of the world "are derived from the fruit of the kind as from their root and

fountain and the entire human race "partakes of the sin of the fruit apostasy." There is unity and continuity in all created substance. In other words, just as there is by divine power a consistency and connectedness in all created entities and their derived effects so there is between sin and guilt past and sin and guilt present. Not only did we have a hand in Adam's sin, but it was actually our sin. Edwards characterizes what happened this way: "Adam's posterity came by corruption of nature by God's withholding his Spirit and image from them judicially for their breach of the first covenant. It is not derived down naturally but God withholds his Spirit from them in judgment for their sin viz. for their eating the forbidden fruit...They are looked upon as having eaten the forbidden fruit as well as Adam. They transgressed in Adam and therefore are subject to the same judgment...The guilt of the breach of the covenant of works is imputed to them and so they suffered the consequences and ill fruits of it which with loss of spiritual and holy principles and the consequent reigning of corruption is one...Adam's posterity were as much concerned with the covenant of works as he himself."

It really does become our sin because of the real union that exists between the root - Adam - in each of us. In Adam, God judged the entire human race guilty, but only in Jesus Christ is this fact fully understood, as when on the Cross He cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." (Mk 15:34, Isa 53:4-6, 2 Cor., 5:21).

V.

Joseph Bellamy, Edwards' intimate friend and neighbor, well states in his book, which Edwards endorsed, what in the final analysis stands behind the issue of imputation: Obj. But I was brought into this state by Adam's fall.

Ans. Let it be by Adam's fall, or how it will, yet if you are an enemy to the infinitely glorious God, your maker, and that

voluntarily, you are infinitely to blame, and without excuse; for nothing can make it right for a creature to be a voluntary enemy to his glorious Creator, or possibly excuse such a crime. it is, in its own nature, infinitely wrong; there is nothing, therefore to be said; you stand guilty before God. it is vain to make this or any other pleas, so long as we are what we are, not by compulsion, but voluntarily. And it is in vain to pretend that we are not voluntary in our corruptions, when they are nothing else but the free, spontaneous inclinations of our own hearts. Since this is the case, every mouth will be stopped, and all the world will become guilty before God, sooner or later.”

The Edwards-Taylor debate continues today perhaps with less devotion to and knowledge of sound Biblical exegesis and even less appreciation for why it's important to even discuss the great doctrines of sin and salvation publicly. Nevertheless, Conrad Cherry in his work puts his finger on what's really at stake in properly understanding the context of human sin:

“Central to Edwards’ interpretation is his attempt to show how original sin illuminates the Pauline ‘justification by faith alone. Salvation by grace through faith means God accomplishes for man what man cannot do for himself; confidence in God’s power to deliver has as its correlate a conviction that man needs deliverance by a power not his own. The abandonment of the Calvinist doctrine that all men are totally corrupt *coram deo* has as its counterpart the abandonment of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. For the depravity of man and the glorious majesty of God’s saving grace mutually illuminate each other. That is why Edwards insists that sin is a fall of the race in Adam (the continuity of guilt being maintained by the direct power of God) and not simply a series of separate human acts. It is a corruption of heart that reaches deep into the human subject, a corruption to be

estimated primarily by comparing the selfishness of man with the overflowing love of the infinite God. The divine deliverance appears in its true light when one acknowledges that man cannot lift himself out of the mire of his own sin."

V. The subject of "original sin"

Am I Really Blamed for Something I Did Not Do? A Study of Original Sin

by Geoff Volker

<http://www.ids.org/pdf/classic/blame.pdf>

Defining Our Terms

When was the last time that you heard a message on the subject of ORIGINAL SIN? Quite frankly, I can't remember. The subject of ORIGINAL SIN seems to be as popular as ants at a picnic! Why is this so? Before I go on it is absolutely necessary that I define exactly what I mean when I say ORIGINAL SIN. What I don't mean is a description of Adam's first sin. I admit that the terminology may be a bit misleading, but our study has nothing to do with the specifics of that first sin. When I say I am studying ORIGINAL SIN I mean that I am examining the consequences of Adam's first sin for the rest of us (i.e. all mankind since Adam).

The Locus Classicus

Where do we begin? The "Locus Classicus" (that portion of the Bible that we go to when we are beginning our study of a particular subject, the primary passage of scripture that speaks to the truth that we are studying) of ORIGINAL SIN is Romans 5:12-21. Here we find the Apostle Paul describing the method by which we are saved. In order to properly describe how it is that we are saved by Jesus Christ Paul finds it necessary to first relate how it is that we come to be condemned.

Stating the Problem

The first point to be noted involves the ending of verse 12. Paul is stating an argument that he is unable to finish until verse 18. No matter what translation you may have it ends verse 12 in a rather peculiar way.

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12 (NIV)

It is just as if Paul was interrupted by his listeners. Now we know that this could not literally be the case, for Paul was writing his letter to the church at Rome. But that notwithstanding, Paul writes his letter in such a way as to give the appearance of a speaker being interrupted and forced to stop his message and make a detour in order to answer the complaint. In this passage the interruption takes place at the end of verse 12, and it is not until verse 18 that he picks up his original train of thought.

All Die = All Have Sinned

The argument that Paul uses in verse 12 is that all men die because they have sinned. Now the problem that we are faced with is this, are there individuals who have died that have not sinned? In answer to this question we can put forth two categories of people:

1. The heathen in "Altoona" (those who have not heard the gospel).
2. The "Innocent" (children who die before they are able to distinguish between right and wrong, this includes the unborn child).

In verse 13 we are told that the first time any law was put down in black and white (in "stone") was with the giving of the Mosaic Law on Mt. Sinai (c. {Around} 1400 BC). The argument that is being put forth states that someone cannot be held accountable to obey the law if the law has not yet been revealed to them. Now in saying this, we must understand there must have been some law passed down

orally from Adam to his ancestors, for the Lord punishes Cain in Genesis 4 for murdering his brother Abel. God could not have judged Cain guilty if he had not broken one of God's laws. In addition to this we find in scripture the law of the "conscience."

"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."
Romans 2:14-15 (NIV)

The law of the "conscience" is that imperfect standard of right and wrong that resides within us as a result of our being made in the "image of God."

So even though there may have existed a heathen in "Altoona" who was never exposed to the written law, we know that he was exposed to the law of "conscience," and very possibly, if he were living in the patriarchal era, he was confronted by the oral law. Yet, as far as the argument of Romans 5:12-14 is concerned the only law that is of any relevance is the written or Mosaic law. The point that is being made is how do we account for the death of everyone who lived before the written law.

*"For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come."*Romans 5:13-14

It is at this juncture that we must examine that second category of individuals mentioned above, namely, those dying before they reach the age of "accountability" (unable

to distinguish between right and wrong).

Since the scripture is clear that you do not die unless you have sinned, the only explanation for infants dying is that they must have sinned in some way. The only option available is that Adam's sin is applied to their account. Or to put it another way, they are blamed for Adam's sin.

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men," Romans 5:18a (NIV)

Realism, a Way Out?

It is a clear biblical fact that we are condemned for Adam's sin. The issue that plagues us is how we can be blamed for something that we did not do. One answer to this dilemma is the "REALISTIC" approach. To state it in simple terms, we were "really" there when Adam sinned. If we were really there then it could be said that "we" sinned in Adam, and the sting of being blamed for something we did not do is removed. A key proof text for this view is found in the book of Hebrews.

"One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor."

Hebrews 7:9-10 (NIV)

Here we have the account of Abraham rescuing Lot in Genesis 14. On his return from the battle Abraham is met by Melchizedek the king of Salem, who is also a priest of the Most High God. 2

Abraham is described as being blessed by Melchizedek, and then he, that is Abraham, gives him a tenth of all the spoils. The argument that is put forth is that since Levi was a descendant of Abraham, and the Levites were given the responsibility of collecting the tithes from the Israelites, one could say that when Abraham paid his tithe to Melchizedek it was also Levi paying his tithe to Melchizedek. Now, I may

have been physically in Adam in some way, yet the issue at stake is whether "I" as an act of my will participated in Adam's fall. The answer to the above is a straightforward "NO." I don't care how you play with it, the "REALISTIC" approach does not make our being blamed for Adam's sin any easier to accept. The bottom line is that we are blamed for something that we did not do!

The Ethics of the Almighty

Is it ethically right for the Lord God to blame me for what Adam did? Here we are appealing to the American sense of fair play. Surely God owes me a chance to make or break it myself. What do the Scriptures say?

"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)

The answer to our question is quite simple. As our creator, God has the right to do with us whatever he wants to do. We are his clay. I admit that this is not a very settling thought, but it is the biblical answer.

The problem seems to be that we keep getting confused as to what is our true identity. We like to see ourselves as only a "bit" lower than God, and surely on debating terms with Him. But the Bible does not see it this way and we are reminded of it in no uncertain terms. The bottom line is this, is the God of ORIGINAL SIN the God we love? Nothing else than eternal life is at stake. *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* John 17:3 (NIV) To reject the God of ORIGINAL SIN is to reject the God of the Bible. Indeed, your God may not blame us for the sin of Adam, but the God of Scripture has.

It's All or Nothing

Now that the guilt of Adam's sin for all his posterity has been established is ought to be stated that the purpose in Romans 5 for delving into ORIGINAL SIN is to describe the method used for our salvation.

For just as the guilt of Adam's sin was applied to those whom he represented, so also the salvation that Jesus Christ purchased on the cross was applied to those whom he represented. This is the truth of Romans 5:18.

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men."

Romans 5:18 (NIV) Let me point out that in both cases you and I are left out of the initial decision-making process. If you hold that the basis of our condemnation to be immoral, then you must also hold that the basis of our salvation is also immoral. The method in both instances is identical. The answer to the question, who are the "all men" that Jesus represented on the cross? Is found not in Romans 5, for this passage only describes the method of salvation. If you want to answer that question you must go to 1 Corinthians 15:20-23! 3 4

A Closing Note

ORIGINAL SIN consists of two parts. We come into this world with both a BAD RECORD (that is we are blamed for Adam's sin) and a BAD HEART (a corrupted heart that causes us to come into the world as a God hater). In this study we have only focused on the BAD RECORD. I will save the study of the BAD HEART for a future review.

Adam's Fall and Mine by Dr. R.C. Sproul
http://www.the-highway.com/fall_Sproul.html

Another difficult question that shrouds the doctrine of predestination is the question of how our sinful nature can be inherited from Adam. If we are born with a fallen nature, if we are born in sin, if we are born in a state of moral inability, how can God hold us responsible for our sins?

We remember that original sin does not refer to the first sin but to the result of that first sin. The Scriptures speak repeatedly of sin and death entering the world through "one man's transgression." As a result of Adam's sin, all men are now sinners. The Fall was great. It had radical repercussions for the entire human race.

There have been many attempts to explain the relationship of Adam's fall to the rest of mankind. Some of the theories presented are quite complex and imaginative. Three theories, however, have emerged from the list as the most widely accepted. The first of these I will call the Myth Theory of the Fall.

THE MYTH THEORY OF THE FALL

The myth theory of the Fall, as the name suggests, holds that there was no factual, historical fall. Adam and Eve are not considered historical persons. They are mythological symbols drawn to explain or represent the problem of man's corruption. The story of the Fall in the Bible is a kind of parable; it teaches a moral lesson.

According to this theory the first few chapters of Genesis are mythological. There never was an Adam; there never was an Eve. The very structure of the story suggests parable or myth because it includes such elements as a talking serpent and such obviously symbolic objects as the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The moral truth communicated by the myth is that people fall into sin. Sin is a universal problem. Everyone commits sin; no one is perfect. The myth points to a higher reality: Everyone is his own Adam. Every person has his own private fall. Sin is a universal human condition precisely because every person succumbs to his own private temptation.

The attractive elements of this theory are important. In the first place, this view absolves God entirely of any responsibility for holding future generations of people responsible for what one couple did. Here, no one can blame their parents or their Creator for their own sin. In this scheme, my fallenness is a direct result of my own fall, not of someone else's.

A second advantage of this view is that it escapes all need to defend the historical character of the beginning chapters of the Bible. This view suffers no anxiety from certain theories of evolution or from scientific disputes about the nature of creation. The factual truth of a myth never needs to be defended.

The disadvantages of this view, however, are more serious. Its most crucial failing is that it actually offers nothing by way of explanation for the universality of sin. If each one of us is born without a sinful nature, how account for the universality of sin? If four billion people were born with no inclination to sin, with no corruption to their nature, we would reasonably expect that at least some of them would refrain from falling. If our natural moral state is one of innocent neutrality, we would statistically expect that half of the human race would remain perfect. I grant that to account for one innocent person's fall presents an enormous intellectual problem. But when we compound that difficulty by the billions of people who have fallen, the

problem becomes several billion times more difficult. We also grant that if one person created in the image of God could fall, then it is indeed possible that billions can likewise fall. It is the statistical probability here that is so astonishing. When we think of one person falling, that is one thing. But if everybody does it, without exception, then we begin to wonder why. We begin to wonder if man's natural state is all that neutral.

The standard reply of the advocates of the myth view is that people are not universally born in an idyllic environment like Eden. Society is corrupt. We are born into a corrupt environment. We are like Rousseau's "innocent savage" who is corrupted by the negative influences of civilization.

This explanation begs the question. How did society or civilization get corrupt in the first place? If everyone is born innocent, without a trace of personal corruption, we would expect to find societies that are no more than half corrupt. If birds of a feather flock together, we might find societies where all the corrupt people band together and other societies where no evil is present. Society cannot be a corrupting influence until it first becomes corrupt itself. To explain the fall of an entire society or civilization, one must face the difficulties we have already pointed out.

In another one of Jonathan Edwards's famous works, his treatise on original sin, he makes the important observation that because the sin of man is universal, even if the Bible said nothing about an original Fall of the human race, reason would demand such an explanation. Nothing screams more loudly about the fact that we are born in a state of corruption than the fact that we all sin.

Another thorny question that arises concerns the relationship of sin and death. The Bible makes it clear that death is not “natural” to man. That is, death is repeatedly said to have come into the world as a result of sin. If that is so, how do we account for the death of infants? If all men are born innocent, with no innate corruption, God would be unjust to allow as yet unfallen babies to die.

The mythological view of the Fall must also face the fact that it does radical violence to the teaching of Scripture. The view does more than merely interpret the opening chapters of the Bible as non-factual. In so doing the view sets itself in clear opposition to the New Testament view of the Fall. It would take intellectual gymnastics of the most severe sort to argue that the Apostle Paul did not teach a historical Fall. The parallels that he draws between the first Adam and the second Adam are too strong to allow this, unless we argue that in Paul’s mind Jesus was also a mythological character.

We grant that the Genesis account of the Fall has some unusual literary elements in it. The presence of a tree that does not follow the pattern of normal trees follows certain images of poetry. It is proper to interpret poetry as poetry and not as historical narrative. On the other hand, there are strong elements of historical narrative literature in Genesis 3. The setting of Eden is located in chapter 2 in the midst of four riverheads, including Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel (or Tigris), and Euphrates.

We know that parables can be set in real historical settings. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan is set in the geographical context of the road to Jericho. Therefore the mere presence of real historical rivers does not absolutely demand that we identify this section of Genesis ‘as historical narrative.

There is another element of the text, however, that is more compelling. The account of Adam and Eve contains a significant genealogy. The Romans, with their penchant for mythology may have no difficulty tracing their lineage to Romulus and Remus, but the Jews were surely more scrupulous about such matters. The Jews had a strong commitment to real history. In light of the vast difference between the Jewish view of history and the Greek view of history, it is unthinkable that Jewish people would include mythological characters in their own genealogies. In Jewish writing, the presence of genealogy indicates historical narrative. Note that the New Testament historian, Luke, includes Adam in the genealogy of Jesus.

It is much easier to account for a real tree serving as a focal point of a moral test and thereby being called a tree of the knowledge of good and evil than it is to accommodate genealogy to a parable or a myth. This of course could be done if other factors demanded it. But no such factors exist. There is no sound reason why we should not interpret Genesis 3 as historical narrative and multiple reasons why we should not treat it as parable or myth. To treat it as history is to treat it as the Jews did, including Paul and Jesus. To treat it otherwise is usually motivated by some contemporary agenda that has nothing to do with Jewish history.

THE REALIST VIEW OF THE FALL

Remember the famous television series from the 1950s called "You Are There"? It took viewers, through the magic of television, to famous historical scenes. But in fact no electronic device has yet been invented to transport us back in time, H. G. Wells notwithstanding. We live in the present. Our only access to the past is through books, artifacts of archaeology, and the memories of ourselves and of others.

I remember teaching a course on the Bible that involved a brief study of Roman soldiers. I mentioned the Roman standard that carried the initials SPQR. I asked if anyone knew what those letters stood for. A dear friend who was in his seventies piped up, "*Senatus Populus Que Romanus*, 'The senate and the people of Rome.'" I smiled at my friend and said, "You are the only person in this room old enough to remember!"

None of us is old enough to carry memory images of the fall of Adam. Or are we? The realist view of the Fall contends that we are all old enough to remember the Fall. We should be able to remember it because we were really there. Realism is not an exercise in a Bridey-Murphy kind of reincarnation. Rather, realism is a serious attempt to answer the problem of the Fall. The key concept is this: We cannot morally be held accountable for a sin committed by someone else. To be accountable we must have been actively involved somehow in the sin itself. Somehow we must have been present at the Fall. *Really* present. Hence the name *Realism*.

The realist view of the Fall demands some kind of concept of the preexistence of the human soul. That is, before we were born, our souls must have already existed. They were present with Adam at the Fall. They fell along with Adam. Adam's sin was not merely an act for us; it was an act *with* us. We were there.

This theory seems speculative, perhaps even bizarre. Its advocates, however, appeal to two pivotal biblical texts as warrant for this view. The first is found in Ezekiel 18:2-4: "*What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?'*"

As I live, says the Lord God, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.

Behold, all souls are Mine;

The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine;

The soul who sins shall die”.

Later in this chapter, Ezekiel writes:

“Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?’ Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” (Ezekiel 18:19, 20).

Here the realist finds a definitive text for his case. God clearly declares that the son is not held guilty for the sins of his father. This would seem to pose serious difficulties for the whole idea of people falling “in Adam.”

The second pivotal text for realism is found in the New Testament Book of Hebrews:

“Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (Hebrews 7:9, 10).

This text is part of a lengthy treatment by the author of Hebrews concerning the role of Christ as our Great High Priest. The New Testament declares that Jesus is both our king and our priest. It labors the fact that Jesus was from the line of Judah, to whom the royal kingdom was promised. Jesus was a son of David, who also was of the line of Judah.

The priesthood of the Old Testament was not given to Judah, but to the sons of Levi. The Levites were the priestly

line. We normally speak, therefore, of the Levitical priesthood or the Aaronic priesthood. Aaron was a Levite. If this is so, how could Jesus be a priest if he was not from the line of Levi? This problem vexed some ancient Jews. The author of Hebrews argues that there was another priesthood mentioned in the Old Testament, the priesthood of the mysterious figure named Melchizedek. Jesus is said to be a priest of the order of Melchizedek.

This lengthy portion of Hebrews is not satisfied, however, merely to prove that there was another priesthood in the Old Testament besides the Levitical priesthood. The major point of the argument here is that the priesthood of Melchizedek was *superior* to the priesthood of Levi.

The author of Hebrews rehearses a bit of Old Testament history to prove his point. He calls attention to the fact that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, not Melchizedek to Abraham. Melchizedek also blessed Abraham; Abraham did not bless Melchizedek. The point is this: In the relationship between Abraham and Melchizedek it was Melchizedek who served as the priest, not Abraham.

The key thought to the Jew is cited in verse 7: "Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better." The author of Hebrews continues to weave the thread of his argument. He argues that, in effect, the father is superior to the son. That means that Abraham is ahead of Isaac in the patriarchal pecking order. In turn, Isaac is ahead of Jacob, and Jacob ahead of his sons, including his son Levi. If we carry this out, it means that Abraham is greater than his great-grandson Levi.

Now if Abraham is greater than Levi and Abraham subordinated himself to Melchizedek, then it means that the priest Melchizedek is greater than Levi and the entire line of

Levi. The conclusion is clear. The priesthood of Melchizedek is a higher order of priesthood than the Levitical priesthood. This gives supreme dignity to the high priestly office of Christ.

It was not the chief concern of the author of Hebrews to explain the mystery of the fall of Adam with all this. Yet he says something along the way that the realists jump on to prove their theory. He writes that "Levi paid tithes through Abraham." Levi did this while he was "still in the loins of his father."

The realists see this reference to Levi doing something before he was even born as biblical proof for the concept of the preexistence of the human soul. If Levi could pay tithes while he was still in the loins of his father, that must mean that Levi in some sense already existed. This treatment of this passage of Hebrews begs the question. The text does not explicitly teach that Levi really existed or preexisted in the loins of his father. The text itself calls it a "manner of speaking." The text does not demand that we leap to the conclusion that Levi "really" preexisted. The realists come to this text armed with a theory they did not find from the text and then read the theory into the text.

The argument from the text of Ezekiel also misses the point. Ezekiel was not giving a discourse on the fall of Adam. The Fall is not in view here. Rather, Ezekiel is addressing the commonplace excuse that men use for their sins. They try to blame someone else for their own misdeeds. That human activity has gone on since the Fall, but that is about all this passage has to do with the Fall. In the Fall Eve blamed the serpent, and Adam blamed both God and Eve for his own sin. He said, "The woman whom *You* gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12).

Ever since, men have tried to pass the buck of their own guilt. Still, the realists argue, a principle is set forth in Ezekiel 18 that has bearing on the matter. The principle is that men are not held accountable for other people's sins. To be sure, that general principle is set forth in Ezekiel. It is a grand principle of God's justice. Yet we dare not make it an absolute principle. If we do, then the text of Ezekiel would prove too much. It would prove away the atonement of Christ. If it is never possible for one person to be punished for the sins of another, then we have no Savior. Jesus was punished for our sins. That is the very essence of the gospel. Not only was Jesus punished for our sins, but his righteousness is the meritorious basis for our justification. We are justified by an alien righteousness, a righteousness that is not our own. If we press Ezekiel's statement to the absolute limit when we read, "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself," then we are left as sinners who must justify themselves. That puts us all in deep weeds.

To be sure, the Bible speaks of God's "visiting" the iniquities of persons on the third and fourth generations. This refers to the "fallout" or consequences of sin. A child may suffer from the consequences of his father's sin, but God does not hold him *responsible* for his father's sin.

The principle of Ezekiel allows for two exceptions: the Cross, and the Fall. Somehow we don't mind the exception of the Cross. It is the Fall that rankles us. We don't mind having our guilt transferred to Jesus or having his righteousness transferred to us; it is having the guilt of Adam transferred to us that makes us howl. We argue that if the guilt of Adam had never been transmitted to us then the work of Jesus would never have been necessary

THE FEDERAL OR REPRESENTATIVE VIEW OF THE FALL

For the most part, the federal view of the Fall has been the most popular among advocates of the Reformed view of predestination. This view teaches that Adam acted as a representative of the entire human race. With the test that God set before Adam and Eve, he was testing the whole of mankind. Adam's name means "man" or "mankind." Adam was the first human being created. He stands at the head of the human race. He was placed in the garden to act not only for himself but for all of his future descendents. Just as a federal government has a chief spokesman who is the head of the nation, so Adam was the federal head of mankind.

The chief idea of federalism is that, when Adam sinned, he sinned for all of us. His fall was our fall. When God punished Adam by taking away his original righteousness, we were all likewise punished. The curse of the Fall affects us all. Not only was Adam destined to make his living by the sweat of his brow, but that is true for us as well. Not only was Eve consigned to have pain in childbirth, but that has been true for women of all human generations. The offending serpent in the garden was not the only member of his species who was cursed to crawl on his belly.

When they were created, Adam and Eve were given dominion over the entire creation. As a result of their sin the whole world suffered. Paul tells us:

"For the creation was subjected to futility not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:20-22).

The whole creation groans as it awaits the full redemption of man. When man sinned, the repercussions of the sin were felt throughout the whole range of man's domain. Because of Adam's sin, not only do we suffer, but lions, elephants, butterflies, and puppy dogs also suffer. They did not ask for such suffering. They were hurt by the fall of their master.

That we suffer as a result of Adam's sin is explicitly taught in the New Testament. In Romans 5, for example, Paul makes the following observations:

"Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin" (v. 12).

"By the one man's offense many died" (v. 15).

"Through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation" (v. 18).

"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (v. 19).

There is no way to avoid the obvious teaching of Scripture that Adam's sin had dreadful consequences for his descendents. It is precisely because of the abundance of such biblical statements that virtually every Christian body has composed some doctrine of original sin linked to the fall of Adam.

We are still left with a big question. If God did in fact judge the entire human race in Adam, how is that fair? It seems manifestly unjust of God to allow not only all subsequent human beings but all of creation to suffer because of Adam.

It is the question of God's fairness that federalism seeks to answer. Federalism assumes that we were in fact represented by Adam and that such representation was both fair and accurate. It holds that Adam *perfectly*

represented us.

Within our own legal system we have situations that, not perfectly but approximately, parallel this concept of representation. We know that if I hire a man to kill someone and that hired gunman carries out the contract, I can justly be tried for first-degree murder in spite of the fact that I did not actually pull the trigger. I am judged to be guilty for a crime someone else committed because the other person acted in my place.

The obvious protest that arises at this point is, "But we did not hire Adam to sin in our behalf." That is true. This example merely illustrates that there are *some* cases in which it is just to punish one person for the crime of another.

The federal view of the Fall still exudes a faint odor of tyranny. Our cry is, "No damnation without representation!" Just as people in a nation clamor for representatives to insure freedom from despotic tyranny, so we demand representation before God that is fair and just. The federal view states that we are judged guilty for Adam's sin because he was our fair and just representative.

Wait a minute. Adam may have represented us, but we did not choose him. What if the fathers of the American republic had demanded representation from King George and the king replied, "Of course you may have representatives. You will be represented by my brother!" Such an answer would have spilled even more tea in Boston Harbor.

We want the right to select our own representatives. We want to be able to cast our own vote, not have somebody else cast that vote for us. The word *vote* comes from the

Latin *votum* which meant “wish” or “choice.” When we cast our vote, we are expressing our wishes, setting forth our wills.

Suppose we would have had the total freedom to vote for our representative in Eden. Would that have satisfied us? And why do we want the right to vote for our representative? Why do we object if the king or any other sovereign wants to appoint our representatives for us? The answer is obvious. ‘We want to be sure that our will is being carried out. If the king appoints my representative, then I will have little confidence that my wishes will be accomplished. I would fear that the appointed representative would be more eager to carry out the wishes of the king than my wishes. I would not feel fairly represented.

But even if we have the right to choose our own representatives, we have no guarantee that our wishes will be carried out. Who among us has not been enticed by politicians who promise one thing during an election campaign and do another thing after they are elected? Again, the reason we want to select our own representative is so that we can be sure we are accurately represented.

At no time in all of human history have we been more accurately represented than in the Garden of Eden. To be sure, we did not choose our representative there. Our representative was chosen for us. The one who chose our representative, however, was not King George. It was almighty God.

When God chooses our representative, he does so perfectly. His choice is an infallible choice. When I choose my own representatives, I do so fallibly. Sometimes I select the wrong person and am then inaccurately represented.

Adam represented me infallibly, not because he was infallible, but because God is infallible. Given God's infallibility, I can never argue that Adam was a poor choice to represent me.

The assumption many of us make when we struggle with the Fall is that, had we been there, we would have made a different choice. We would not have made a decision that would plunge the world into ruin. Such an assumption is just not possible given the character of God. God doesn't make mistakes. His choice of my representative is greater than my choice of my own.

Even if we grant that indeed we were perfectly represented by Adam, we still must ask if it is fair to be represented at all with such high stakes. I can only answer that it pleased the Lord to do this. We know that the world fell through Adam. We know that in some sense Adam represented us. We know that we did not choose him to be our representative. We know that God's selection of Adam was an infallible selection. But was the whole process just?

I can only answer this question ultimately by asking another question—one the Apostle Paul asked. "Is there unrighteousness in God?" The apostolic answer to this rhetorical question is as plain as it is emphatic. "God forbid!"

If we know anything at all about the character of God, then we know that he is not a tyrant and that he is never unjust. His structure of the terms of mankind's probation satisfied God's own righteousness. That should be enough to satisfy us. Yet we still quarrel. We still contend with the Almighty. We still assume that somehow God did us wrong and that we suffer as innocent victims of God's judgment. Such sentiments only confirm the radical degree of our

fallenness. When we think like this, we are thinking like Adam's children. Such blasphemous thoughts only underline in red how accurately we were represented by Adam.

I am persuaded that the federal view of the Fall is substantially correct. It alone of the three we have examined does justice to the biblical teaching of the fall of man. It satisfies me that God is not an arbitrary tyrant. I know that I am a fallen creature. That is, I know that I am a creature and I know that I am fallen. I also know that it is not God's "fault" that I am a sinner. What God has done for me is to redeem me from my sin. He has not redeemed me from his sin.

Though the federal representational view of the Fall is held by most Calvinists, we must remember that the question of our relationship to Adam's fall is not a problem unique to Calvinism. All Christians must struggle with it.

It is also vital to see predestination in light of the Fall. All Christians agree that God's decree of predestination was made before the Fall. Some argue that God first predestinated some people to salvation and others to damnation and then decreed the Fall to make sure that some folks would perish. Sometimes this dreadful view is even attributed to Calvinism. Such an idea was repugnant to Calvin and is equally repugnant to all orthodox Calvinists. The notion is sometimes called "hyper-Calvinism." But even that is an insult. This view has nothing to do with Calvinism. Rather than hyper-Calvinism, it is anti-Calvinism.

Calvinism, along with other views of predestination, teaches that God's decree was made both *before* the Fall, and *in light of* the Fall. Why is this important? Because the Calvinistic view of predestination always accents the

gracious character of God's redemption. When God predestines people to salvation he is predestinating people to be saved whom he knows really *need* to be saved. They need to be saved because they are sinners in Adam, not because he forced them to be sinners. Calvinism sees Adam sinning by his own free will, not by divine coercion.

To be sure, God knew before the Fall that there would most certainly be a Fall and he took action to redeem some. He ordained the Fall in the sense that he chose to allow it, but not in the sense that he chose to coerce it. His predestinating grace is gracious precisely because he chooses to save people whom he knows in advance will be spiritually dead.

One final illustration may be helpful here. We bristle at the idea that God calls us to be righteous when we are hampered by original sin. We say, "But God, we can't be righteous. We are fallen creatures. How can you hold us accountable when you know very well we were born with original sin?"

The illustration is as follows. Suppose God said to a man, "I want you to trim these bushes by three o'clock this afternoon. But be careful. There is a large open pit at the edge of the garden. If you fall into that pit, you will not be able to get yourself out. So whatever you do, stay away from that pit."

Suppose that as soon as God leaves the garden the man runs over and jumps into the pit. At three o'clock God returns and finds the bushes untrimmed. He calls for the gardener and hears a faint cry from the edge of the garden. He walks to the edge of the pit and sees the gardener helplessly flailing around on the bottom. He says to the gardener, "Why haven't you trimmed the bushes I

told you to trim?" The gardener responds in anger, "How do you expect me to trim these bushes when I am trapped in this pit? If you hadn't left this empty pit here, I would not be in this predicament."

Adam jumped into the pit. In Adam we all jumped into the pit. God did not throw us into the pit. Adam was clearly warned about the pit. God told him to stay away. The consequences Adam experienced from being in the pit were a direct punishment for jumping into it. So it is with original sin. Original sin is both the consequence of Adam's sin and the punishment for Adam's sin. We are born sinners because in Adam all fell. Even the word *fall* is a bit of a euphemism. It is a rose-colored view of the matter. The word *fall* suggests an accident of sorts. Adam's sin was not an accident. He was not Humpty Dumpty. Adam didn't simply slip into sin; he jumped into it with both feet. We jumped headlong with him. God didn't push us. He didn't trick us. He gave us adequate and fair warning. The fault is ours and only ours.

It is not that Adam ate sour grapes and our teeth are set on edge. The biblical teaching is that in Adam we all ate the sour grapes. That is why our teeth are set on edge.

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This article is from Dr. R.C. Sproul's marvelous book, *Chosen by God*® and used by permission.

Appendix D

Corresponding with Chapter Ten

Romans 7:12-25

Romans 7:1-13

How the Christian's relationship to the law has changed (7:1-7) and the role of the law in the non-Christian's life (7:8-13)

Notes by Dr. Jerry Nelson (Not preached)

(A sermon I preached in September of 2005 addresses this issue of "The Law of God in the Life of the Christian from *Exodus* 19-20 www.soundliving.org.)

In the first 2½ chapters of Romans Paul describes the definite need every person on earth has to become a Christian. From half-way through the first chapter through the first half of the 3rd chapter Paul demonstrates how everyone on earth is sinful, condemned by God and helpless to do anything about it. Mid-way through the 3rd chapter Paul begins to describe how we can become Christians. It is only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Because of who Christ is and what He did on the cross, it is possible for the righteousness of God to be credited to us through faith in Jesus.

In chapter 4 Paul uses the illustration of the Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, to prove that it has always been true that righteousness is credited by faith not earned by being good enough.

Then, at chapter 5 Paul begins to describe the great benefits of being a Christian. The first result he mentions is that we are no longer enemies of God's but now we have peace with God—we have become part of His family, God's friends. Those thoughts end with 5:11: *"Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Reading through Romans carefully it would seem likely that the subject of chapter 8 would come next. That subject is how we live this new life in Christ. Romans 8 begins with 8:1-2, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."* Paul then goes on to describe life controlled by the Spirit in contrast to life controlled by sin. But there are 2½ chapters between the first part of chapter 5 and chapter 8. In these chapters Paul digresses with some very important clarifications.

We have already looked at the first two in the last half of chapter 5 and then in chapter 6. In the latter part of chapter 5 Paul describes how it is possible for the righteousness of Jesus to be credited to us. You might recall that he does it by using the analogy of our relationship with Adam; just as we were "in Adam" when he sinned so that his sin is credited to us, so also we who trust in Christ were "in Christ" when He died and rose again so that His righteousness is credited to us.

In chapter 6 Paul deals head on with an erroneous assumption. In chapters 1-5, Paul so emphasized the fact that we are not saved by what we do, by our good efforts, that it was possible for people to assume that it therefore doesn't matter how we live—after all we are saved by grace not by works. In two different ways Paul demonstrates how that kind of thinking is absolutely false.

Now in chapter 7 Paul clarifies another issue, the one with which we deal now. In the first 6 chapters of Romans Paul said several things that could have been understood as disparaging the law.

3:20 *"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law..."*

3:31 *"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith?"*

6:14 *"you are not under law, but under grace."*

Now here in the first part of chapter 7 Paul uses some of that same language:

7:4 *"you also died to the law..."*

7:6 *"we have been released from the law..."*

In the minds of those familiar with the Old Testament, that would have raised an important question of the purpose of the law in Christianity. If we are saved by grace, what then is our relationship to the Law of God? (For a commentary on 7:1-13 see the notes below.)

With the coming of Christ our relationship to the law changed, but not in the way some people think. There is a popular misconception that before Christ came people were saved on the basis of keeping the law and that because so few were able to keep the law, Jesus came and changed the basis of salvation to grace. The Scofield Reference Bible was for many years a purveyor of this error. In his comment on John 1:17 for example, Scofield wrote that under the Mosaic covenant, "legal obedience (is) the condition of salvation."¹ But Paul clearly shows, particularly in chapter 4 of Romans that salvation has never been by law-keeping, not by Abraham nor by any other Old Testament believer.

Still others would suggest that we are no longer responsible to obey the law of God. They object to even reciting the 10 Commandments in our corporate and personal worship. To be fair to them it is likely that they fear a return to legalism; they fear leaving the impression that we can earn God's favor by keeping the law. And so they suggest that we no longer need to keep the law of God because we are

now under grace. And they cite such phrases as "we are not under law," "we have died to the law," and "we have been released from the law" to make their case. But in this very same context Paul says such things as:

7:12 *"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."*

7:14 *"We know that the law is spiritual"*

7:16 *"I agree that the law is good."*

7:22 *"For in my inner being I delight in God's law;"*

7:25 *"I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law,"*

And he adds in 1 Corinthians 7:19, *"Keeping God's commands is what counts."* So we cannot take Paul to mean that we are to jettison the law.

So how has a believer's relationship to the law change now that Christ has come? To use Paul's words, how have we "died to the law" or how have we been "released from the law?" Under the Old Covenant, the law had both a controlling authority and a condemning authority. As to that controlling authority, the Old Covenant believer was expected to obey the laws of God as set forth in the Old Testament. Now we have already seen that he was not to think that by keeping those laws he was saved. No, he was saved by grace through faith: *"Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness."* But as a saved man, one to whom God's righteousness was credited, he still lived under the laws controlling authority and steep penalties attached to disobedience.

It is also true that the law had a condemning authority. Failure to keep the entire law perfectly meant spiritual death. Like us, the Old Testament believer was doomed before he started; he was born in sin as we saw in Romans 5. Not only that but he did fail, over and over again to keep the law of God. And the Bible says the soul that sins will die (Ezekiel 18:4). The Law brought condemnation. It seems

apparent to me that God knew that His Old Testament followers could not keep those laws perfectly and so He established the sacrificial system whereby their sins, their failures to keep the law, were somehow covered for the time being.

But when Christ came and died, and we died in Him, it changed everything. First of all, the condemning authority of the law was satisfied. When Christ died, the guilt of the sin of all His people of all the ages (from Adam, through Abraham, Moses, David, Matthew, Peter, Augustine, Calvin, Spurgeon, you and me and to those believers alive when Jesus comes again) was finally and fully atoned for. (Cf. Romans 3:25) And with the guilt removed, the condemnation is gone. Romans 8:1 says, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* By the way, I think that every Old Testament believer is also now "in Christ." The Law's condemning authority has finally been removed for them and for us.

And with Christ's coming the Law's controlling authority has also been removed. As I said, before Christ, God-followers were obligated to keep the entire law of God, even though they couldn't, and thus the sacrificial system. But now we are no longer under the law's controlling authority. Christ fulfilled the law and we are now under Christ's authority. Does that mean we no longer need to obey the laws of God as given in the Old Testament? A sermon I preached in September of 2005 addresses this issue more fully. It is titled "The Law of God in the Life of the Christian" from Exodus 19-20 (www.soundliving.org). But a briefer explanation comes out of a conversation I had recently with Dr. Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary.

Old Testament

Faith in God leading to Law-keeping

New Testament

Faith in God (Christ) leading to obedience to the Law mediated through the Jesus.

Faith in law keeping

Faith in law keeping

Below the line demonstrates mankind's perversion of God's plan for people. In the Old Testament period up to the time of Christ, there were people who incorrectly assumed they could earn their relationship with God by obeying the laws of God. I think in Jesus' day the Pharisees were examples of this kind of thinking. In and since New Testament times, there have likewise been multitudes of people who incorrectly believe they can earn God's saving favor by being good enough.

But for our purposes, it is above the line that we need to understand the difference between the Old Covenant and the New. But first notice the similarity: Faith results in law keeping in both the Old Testament and New Testament as we saw in Romans 6. Faith results in obedience or there is no faith. We dare not separate faith and obedience. It is not that faith-plus-obedience saves us but it is that only a faith-that-obey saves us.

Now to the differences: in the Old Testament time, faith in God was a faith in whatever God would eventually do to deal with their sin. They knew they were at the mercy of God and as with Abraham so others believed God and it was credited to them for righteousness. And the result of their faith in God was a desire to keep the law of God. But it is also true that this law keeping meant an exacting obedience to all the commands with temporal penalties for disobedience and a temporary sacrificial system to deal

with the guilt of their disobedience.

In and since New Testament time faith in God is faith in the now revealed means God used to deal with our sin—Christ and His atoning sacrifice. And just as in the Old Testament, so that faith results in obedience to Christ. But the New Testament believer is not under the law's commands in the way the Old Testament believer was. The Old Testament believer had no alternative to keeping all the commands, not so that they would be "saved" by keeping them but so that they would live as God desired for them. They were obligated to keep all the laws. But in Christ the penalties and sacrifices for breaking the laws are done away with—the law's condemning authority is over. And the laws themselves have now been mediated through Christ who fulfilled the law—the law's controlling authority is over. But what Christ and the New Testament writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, indicate are Christ's will for us is that we are to obey in the new way of the Spirit, which will be more fully explained in Chapter 8.

In Romans 7:1-6 Paul is writing about the believer's relationship to the law—the relationship I've just described. Using the example of a woman whose husband dies in verses 2-3, Paul says in verse 4, our relationship to the law has changed since Christ has died for us and we died in Christ.

In Romans 7-13 Paul describes the law's relationship to us as sinners before we became believers. To do this he speaks in the first person ("I") but in the past tense; what was true before he became a Christian. *"I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'."* (Romans 7:7) Back in verse 5 he wrote, *"when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the*

sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies." So again in verse 8 he writes, *"But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire."*

As we saw in verse 5, it is amazing to watch this principle at work in young children—if you don't tell them something is wrong they may not do it. But just mention that it is wrong and something in them wants desperately to do it. But this is not just the idea of forbidden fruit being the sweetest.² Sin takes what God intended for our freedom and good and distorts the command to make it sound limiting and bad for us. Genesis 3 is the classic example of this: God said don't eat of the certain tree because it will bring death. Satan said you wouldn't die; God just doesn't want you to be like Him. God forbids sexual relationships outside of the covenant of marriage for myriad reasons but sin comes along and says that is too limiting; that command is frustrating your God-given right to self-expression.

Romans 7:7,13 says, *"What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?" Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.*" No, the law, which is good, didn't produce death in me; The Law of God is not to blame. God has several purposes for His law; one is to show sin for what it is, utterly sinful. The law of God reveals sin for the sinfulness that it is—a violation not just of courtesy or kindness but also and more importantly a violation of God Himself.

At this point in his letter Paul switches tenses. He used the past tense to describe his relationship to the law and sin before his conversion.

Before he was a Christian one purpose and result of the law was to show him how much he needed a Savior. Now he switches to the present tense; no longer does he write of what had been true but now he writes of what is still true. He is describing his relationship to the law as a Christian. The law still does for Paul, as a Christian, what it did for him before he became a Christian—it shows him his sinfulness and his constant need for the intervention of the Savior. For a study of Romans 7:14-25 see Chapter 10—“The Real Me.”

Commentary on Romans 7:1-13

To prove that you are not under sin’s “condemnation” or it’s “controlling authority” any longer Paul explains it this way:

"Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man." (Romans 7)

Romans 7:2-3

Verses 2-3 illustrate the point of verse 1 that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives. Please note that this passage is not about marriage and remarriage and certainly not about divorce and remarriage; it is about our relationship to one aspect of the law. Having made that point, Paul now links it to verse 4 and what he has said so well in chapters 5 and 6—that you are dead to the law’s condemnation and its binding authority and are now “in Christ” so that you might live for God. When Christ died, you who are believers, died in Him. The law’s

condemnation of us and the law's relationship to us changed because Christ has come, ushering in a new age, and our sin has been borne by Christ.

Romans 7:4

"So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God."

When Christ came, died and rose again, He changed the rules. He was the fulfillment of the law. If we are "in Christ" we no longer stand under the law's condemnation (see verse 5ff) and we no longer live under the law's ruling authority in the same way the Old Testament believers did. (See the discussion above on above and below the line.)

Romans 7:5

"For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death."

Before we became Christians we were virtually controlled by our sinful natures. It is also true that the effect of the law of God was to arouse in us a greater desire to sin.

Romans 7:7-8 says, *"For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire."* While it is not our intention, one effect of telling a child "no" is to increase the child's desire to do the forbidden thing.³ This all yields death as Paul reminded us in Romans 6:23: *"The wages of sin is death..."*

Romans 7:6

"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

“What once bound us” was both the law’s condemnation and the law’s controlling authority; we have died to that in Christ so that we are released from it to serve in the new way of the Spirit (which Paul will elucidate in chapter 8). We are not legalists trying, on our own, to live up to the letter of the law. But again, that doesn’t mean that the law of God doesn’t matter. Oh, it matters but not in the way that the legalists think it does.

Romans 7:7-12

Verses 7-12 are autobiographical. Paul uses the past tense to describe himself, and by inference all people, in relationship to sin and the law prior to his conversion.

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’.”

The law of God reveals sin for the sinfulness that it is—a violation not just of courtesy or kindness but also and more importantly a violation of God himself.

Romans 7:8

“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.”

As we saw in verse 5, it is amazing to watch this principle at work in young children; if you don’t tell them something is wrong they may not do it. But just mention that it is wrong and something in them wants to do it. Sin takes what God intended for our freedom and good and distorts the command to make it sound limiting and bad for us. Genesis 3 is the classic example of this: God said don’t eat of the certain tree because it will bring death. Satan said you won’t die; God just doesn’t want you to be like Him. God forbids sexual relationships outside of the covenant of marriage for myriad reasons but sin comes along and says

that is too limiting; that command is frustrating your God-given right to self-expression.

Romans 7:9-13

"Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death."

Paul, in the next verse, doesn't make the law the culprit but says that sin is.

"For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

Verse 13 summarizes the previous 12 verses and transitions us to the next 12 verses. No, the law, which is good, didn't produce death in me; it is not to blame. God has several purposes for His law, one to show sin for what it is, utterly sinful. Now sin took advantage of the law to produce death. It took advantage in the way that verses 5 and 8 have already described.

The word "law" is used in a variety of ways in these chapters. As a reference to the written law of God it says, *"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."* (3:20) Romans 4:19 says, *"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."* Romans 5:13 repeats,

"before the law was given, sin was in the world."

And Romans 7:2 echoes, *"by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage."*

But the word "law" is also used as a reference to a power or an influence. Five times the word "law" is used but only once in reference to the law of God. Romans 7:21-23 says, *"So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."*

See it also in Romans 8:2: *"because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."*

End Notes

¹ F.B. Meyer suggests the same in *Studies in Exodus*, p. 220

² CEB Cranfield, _____, p. 160

³ See Augustine in John Stott, _____, p. 203

Appendix E

Corresponding with Chapter Ten

Romans 8:1-13

The following notes contain:

Comments on Romans 8:1-17

Sinclair Ferguson on Christian Spirituality

J.I. Packer on "Sanctification—*The Christian Grows in Grace* from *Concise Theology*)

Robert Brinsmead on "Justification by Faith and the Current Religious Scene

Three views of how we grow in Holiness

John Piper, Three sermons on "How to Kill Sin."

I. Comments on Romans 8:1-17

1 *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* Paul will explain that in verses 2-4.

(See Romans 8:1 sermon from Spurgeon—the basis of all of Christian living is my confidence in Jesus—I am no longer under condemnation.)

2 *"because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."*

The "law of the Spirit of life" is that powerful influence the Spirit now exerts in the life of the Christian. The "law of sin and death" is that powerful influence that the sinful nature still wields (Romans 7:14-25).

But notice which power is greater! God! 7:25 ended with *"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."* How can Paul say both 7:25 and 8:2? How can I be both slave and free at the same time?

In this life, before the resurrection, we still have a powerful sinful influence (we call it the sin nature) that is sold out to

sin—a slave to sin. But when the Holy Spirit regenerates us, God gives to us another even more powerful influence. It is so powerful that Paul can use such strong language as we are set free. While as an unbeliever Paul had no power to resist sin effectively, now as a believer he has the power of the Spirit of God. As we said in reference to Romans 6, before we had no power to not sin. Now we have the power to not sin. It doesn't mean that we won't sin, but now we have the power to not sin. That is radically different than before. The believer can now revolt against the controlling power of sin. He can now fight back. (Cranfield, p. 175)

"Though the hold of his old master (the sinful nature we inherited from Adam) is not yet destroyed, his new, his rightful, Master has a firm hold upon him, and has claimed him for Himself and will not let go His claim... And we know that, powerful though sin still is over us and in us and capable of worsting us again and again, the power of the Spirit is far stronger and must triumph at the end..." (Cranfield, 175-6)

Paul says in verse 2 that it is something that Christ has done which made the enormous change. What he did is explained in verses 3 and 4.

3-4 *"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ 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."*

The Law of God (Mosaic Law) was unable to, in fact was never intended to, free us from condemnation. One of its

purpose, among others, as we have seen earlier, was to show us how desperately sinful and helpless we are. But what the Law could not do, God did by sending His son to "condemn sin in sinful man." "Condemn" both the divine disapproval of and the punishment for sin. In verse 3 we see that Christ became sin (1 Cor. 5:21) or a sin offering (the sacrifice) for us.

"In sinful man" translates the word "flesh." So is the "flesh" Christ's flesh so that it means Christ bore the sinfulness and punishment of sin in his own body? 1 Peter 2:24 says, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."* Or does "flesh" mean "sinful man" in that Christ's death satisfied the divine demands against "sinful man's" sins? Romans 5:8: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Either way Christ fully satisfied divine disapproval and punishment against us. No longer will we face condemnation because Christ faced it for us.

But Paul goes on to say that not only did Christ's death deal with the demands of divine justice but God/Christ did this, *"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."* Yes, I believe that Christ perfectly obeyed and fulfilled the law so that in him we can be said to be perfect already—a positional sanctification but I don't think that's what this verse is describing. Here I believe Paul is saying the result of Christ's cross-work is that we might meet the requirements of the law. We have been saved so that we may be saved from the controlling power of sin in our lives. Or to say it differently, that we might live increasingly holy lives. Christ's death for us was never meant to only give us a ticket to heaven, but was always meant to sanctify us. God

saves us to make us holy. And although it will only be completed in our resurrected bodies, when Jesus comes again, God has begun that process now.

How this increasing righteous living takes place is by living according to the Spirit rather than according to the sinful nature. It is a matter of whose voice you respond to—your Savior's or your old sinful nature. In the language of chapter 6 it is the question of who you yield to, sin or God.

5 *"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."*

This is a matter of whose side you are choosing to take—the Spirit's side or your sinful nature's side.

6 *"The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."* We must remember that a mind set on responding to the powerful influence of the sinful nature within us is death. And a mind set on responding to the more powerful influence of the Spirit is life and peace.

7-8 *"...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."* Why does setting our minds to do sinful behaviors lead to death? Because it demonstrates a hostility to God; it refuses God's authority and cannot please God.

9 *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."* Now the crucial fact, the determining factor, or the essential truth: you are not like verses 7-8 describe. Back in

Romans 3, 4, and 5 Paul made it clear that a relationship with God is by grace through faith not works. By trusting Jesus to do what He says He will do, His righteousness is credited to us.

In Romans 5 Paul then describes some of the benefits of this new relationship with God. We have peace with God, we have access to the full grace of God and God grants to us His Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5 says, *"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."*

So here in 8:9 Paul is not challenging you to question whether you are a Christian—that is by faith. He is asserting that one who is a Christian has the Holy Spirit and conversely one who does not have the Holy Spirit doesn't belong to Christ and by inference in this context, doesn't have the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit to live for Christ. But you do have the Spirit and thus you do not have to live any longer under the control of sin because you have the powerful influence of the Spirit.

I see 8:10-11 as something of an explanation out of the main flow of the discussion. Paul digresses to speak to how it is that the believer still has a mortal body and what happens in the future.

10 *"But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness."* You are a Christian, and Christ is in you in the person of His Spirit. It is true that your body is dead because of sin, you will suffer physical death (unless Jesus comes before then) but your spirit is alive or the Spirit is life to you because of righteousness (the righteousness you have in Christ).

11 *"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. "And furthermore, speaking of your body's death, you know that since the Spirit lives in you, even your body will be resurrected when Jesus comes again.

Now back to the main point:

12-13 *"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..."*

Paul starts this thought by saying you aren't indebted or obligated to your old sinful nature to live that way—in fact, knowing where that leads (verse 13a) you owe it nothing but to kill it. Instead, implied from verse 12 is that our obligation is to the Spirit to live according to the Spirit. But instead of saying that, Paul again shows the great and eternal consequences of two ways of life: *"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..."*

Deuteronomy 30:15-18 says, *"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed."* Among other important points, Romans 6 made a clear declaration that if there is no fruit there is no root. I won't cover that ground again.

I want to focus on the last part of 8:13" *"if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live..."* This is our part in the sanctification process that God is doing. Here is the synergy: "It is a clear-sighted recognition of evil as evil, leading to such a decisive and radical repudiation of it that no imagery can do it justice except putting it to death." (John Stott, p. 229) Jesus said we must deny ourselves and take up our cross (an instrument that deals out death) and follow him. We must act. We have to "pull it out, look at it, denounce it, hate it for what it is; then you have really dealt with it." (D.M. Lloyd-Jones in Stott, p. 229) The result of this transformed and transforming way of acting is "you will live."

II. Christian Spirituality

By Sinclair Ferguson, Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification

Union with Christ in his death and resurrection is the element of union which Paul most extensively expounds...if we are united to Christ, then we are united to him at all points of his activity on our behalf. We share in his death (we were baptized into his death), in his resurrection (we are resurrected with Christ), in his ascension (we have been raised with him), in his heavenly session (we sit with him in heavenly places, so that our life is hidden with Christ in God), and we will share in his promised return (when Christ, who is our life, appears, we also will appear with him in glory) (Rom. 6:14; Col. 2:11-12; 3:1-3).

This, then, is the foundation of sanctification in Reformed theology. It is rooted, not in humanity and their achievement of holiness or sanctification, but in what God has done in Christ, and for us in union with him. Rather than view Christians first and foremost in the microcosmic context of their own progress, the Reformed doctrine first

of all sets them in the macrocosm of God's activity in redemptive history. It is seeing oneself in this context that enables the individual Christian to grow in true holiness.

III. Sanctification—*The Christian Grows in Grace*

By J.I. Packer (from *Concise Theology*)

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?...And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9, 11).

Sanctification, says the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.35), is "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." The concept is not of sin being totally eradicated (that is to claim too much) or merely counteracted (that is to say too little), but of a divinely wrought character change freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues.

Sanctification is an ongoing transformation within a maintained consecration, and it engenders real righteousness within the frame of relational holiness. Relational sanctification, the state of being permanently set apart for God, flows from the cross, where God through Christ purchased and claimed us for himself (Acts 20:28; 26:18; Heb. 10:10). Moral renovation, whereby we are increasingly changed from what we once were, flows from the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:11, 19-20; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 13:20-21). God calls his children to sanctity and graciously gives what he commands (1 Thess. 4:4; 5:23).

Regeneration is birth; sanctification is growth. In regeneration, God implants desires that were not there before: desire for God, for holiness, and for the hallowing and glorifying of God's name in this world; desire to pray, worship, love, serve, honor, and please God; desire to show love and bring benefit to others. In sanctification, the Holy Spirit "works in you to will and to act" according to God's purpose; what he does is prompt you to "work out your salvation" (i.e., express it in action) by fulfilling these new desires (Phil. 2:12-13). Christians become increasingly Christlike as the moral profile of Jesus (the "fruit of the Spirit") is progressively formed in them (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; 5:22-25). Paul's use of glory in 2 Corinthians 3:18 shows that for him sanctification of character is glorification begun. Then the physical transformation that gives us a body like Christ's, one that will match our totally transformed character and be a perfect means of expressing it, will be glorification completed (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:49-53).

Regeneration was a momentary monergistic act of quickening the spiritually dead. As such, it was God's work alone. Sanctification, however, is in one sense synergistic - it is an ongoing cooperative process in which regenerate persons, alive to God and freed from sin's dominion (Rom. 6:11, 14-18), are required to exert themselves in sustained obedience. God's method of sanctification is neither activism (self-reliant activity) nor apathy (God-reliant passivity), but God-dependent effort (2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 3:10-14; Heb. 12:14). Knowing that without Christ's enabling we can do nothing, morally speaking, as we should, and that he is ready to strengthen us for all that we have to do (Phil. 4:13), we "stay put" (remain, abide) in Christ, asking for his help constantly—and we receive it (Col. 1:11; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:7; 2:1).

The standard to which God's work of sanctifying his saints is directed is his own revealed moral law, as expounded and modeled by Christ himself. Christ's love, humility, and patience under pressure are to be consciously imitated (Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Pet. 2:21), for a Christlike spirit and attitude are part of what law-keeping involves. Believers find within themselves contrary urgings. The Spirit sustains their regenerate desires and purposes; their fallen, Adamic instincts (the "flesh") which, though dethroned, are not yet destroyed, constantly distract them from doing God's will and allure them along paths that lead to death (Gal. 5:16-17; James 1:14-15). To clarify the relationship between the law and sin, Paul analyzes in a personal and dramatic way the sense of impotence for complete law-keeping, and the enslavement to behavior one dislikes, that the Spirit-flesh tension produces (Rom. 7:14-25). This conflict and frustration will be with Christians as long as they are in the body. Yet by watching and praying against temptation, and cultivating opposite virtues, they may through the Spirit's help "mortify" (i.e., drain the life out of, weaken as a means of killing) particular bad habits, and in that sense more and more die unto sin (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). They will experience many particular deliverances and victories in their unending battle with sin, while never being exposed to temptations that are impossible to resist (1 Cor. 10:13).

IV. The role of Justification in Sanctification

By Robert Brinsmead

Justification by Faith and the Current Religious Scene
<http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/IX/9-4p3.html>

"It can be seen that Luther did not think that the doctrine of imputed righteousness was only something to be preached to mere Christian beginners or that it could be

forgotten as a mastered accomplishment. He not only stressed that this truth cannot be learned too well but that it must occupy the central position in the teaching and thinking of the church.... Not by any stretch of the imagination is Christ's imputed righteousness central in present-day thinking or witness. Some will make cursory mention of it, and even most who do mention it relegate it to something which is required at the time of Christian initiation. Apparently it is thought that more mature Christians can get past it and go on to higher things... Most evangelical witness tends to lack a central theology of justification. Its overwhelming focus is on the internal experience of being born again and saved. There is much truth in it. The need for the new birth ought to be taught.

But when it is not seen in the setting of the pre-eminence of justification by an imputed righteousness, there is grave danger that people come to think that salvation is based on an internal change within their own hearts. Then the focus is inward instead of outward, on Christian experience instead of Christ's experience, on a subjective happening instead of a historical reality... In the popular evangelical message, people are urged to get saved by inviting Christ to come into their hearts. Being saved is then identified with having that internal experience of being born again by the presence of the indwelling Christ... The apostles did not begin by proclaiming that their hearers could be saved by having Christ come into their hearts to produce an internal experience. Their focus was not an internal happening but an external happening. Christ lived, died and rose again for the sinner's justification. The apostles proclaimed an objective, historical reality. Here was Paul's *kerygma*:
"We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again...Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren,

that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”(Acts 13:32-33, 38-39)

Salvation was said to be in something which God had already done outside the sinner in the person of Jesus Christ. As men listened, the Holy Spirit was present to give them faith. Now the hearers were exhorted to accept this salvation by faith. *"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."*(Rom. 10:9)... Faith does not bring the person of Christ down out of heaven to come into the believer's heart,² for *"the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above)"*(Rom. 10:6).

Rather, faith lifts the believer up to heaven and places him "in Christ." Then and then alone is the scripture fulfilled, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
2 Cor. 5:17... Rather than the new birth being the result of focusing on the inner change itself, the very opposite is true. We see this illustrated in Jesus' lesson to Nicodemus. After telling the proud ruler about his need of a new birth, Jesus did not lead the convicted sinner to dwell on his internal experience. He directed Nicodemus' eyes to that great external event which guaranteed his salvation. *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* John 3:14,15... Sanctification has often been separated from justification. When the renewing power of the Holy Spirit is separated from the doctrine of justification, all that is left is a cold, legal, intellectualized concept. Then there is only a

fictitious "justification" which brings neither the Holy Ghost nor His transforming power into the life of the church. People profess salvation while their lives are a positive denial of it.

Then what happens? The preacher looks at the church and thinks, "These people have been 'saved,' but they certainly need something else to lift them out of their low spiritual [carnal?] state." Along comes a "second blessing" or "renewal" expert who proceeds to say, "What these people need now is to learn the secret of the deeper life. They have been taught justification [?], but now they need to be taught the secret of sanctification."

This program is quite palatable to proud human hearts—especially to responsible people in the church who are supposed to have been "saved" for years. It would be altogether too humbling to admit that what is needed is a true, Bible experience of accepting the gospel, being justified by faith and being truly born again in consequence of it. It is too hard to confess being among those thieves and robbers who have really tried to climb over the wall rather than to get into the fold by the one true door (John 10:1). So instead of submitting to going back and entering the real door of salvation, men think it much better to get a second blessing, some baptism of power that will correct their carnal condition. Being outside of Christ, they expose themselves to a false spirit and delude themselves that they are filled with the Holy Spirit because they can do fantastic things like speak in an unknown tongue—unknown to God as well as to man.

Certainly justification must be distinguished from sanctification.³ We must not transfer the property of one benefit to the other. But it is just as certain that they can never be separated. Union with Christ by saving faith

results in justification as a judicial benefit, but it also results in sanctification as a moral benefit. One blessing cannot be enjoyed without the other. They are as related as light and heat. Where there is light, there will be heat.

Sanctification of the Spirit through a life of active obedience, is not optional. God does not justify the sinner in such a way that obedience to the Ten Commandments is optional. Submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not optional. Faith that is unto justification means that the whole life turns from disobedience and submits to the sanctifying authority of Heaven's government. It is impossible to be justified and not have the renewing, transforming gift of the Holy Spirit...

Justification means that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer and that he stands before God as if he were perfect. God must, therefore, treat him as a righteous man; and He does this by giving the believer the gift and infilling of the Spirit. What is needed, therefore, is not a "second blessing" doctrine to add to justification but a true justification which will bring every blessing in its train.

V. Three Views of Holiness

For a summary see Chapter 4 of J.I. Packer's *Keep in Step with the Spirit*

Augustine, The Reformers, Piper (in the sermons below):
Progressive Sanctification to which I hold and teach in this and other sermons (Augustine, Reformers)

Wesley, et al: "Total love" perfectionism through a "second work of grace" which is usually associated with holiness denominations such as Free Methodist, Wesleyan, Nazarene, etc.

Keswick, Higher Life, Campus Crusade for Christ's "How to

be filled with the Spirit” and “How to Walk in the Spirit”—a view held by many evangelicals. This view avoids the “perfectionism” of Wesley’s view but, though subtle, it still holds to a “second (or third, fourth, or nearly infinite number) work of grace” and is far too passive; it is a “let go and let God” approach.

From Bill Bright, *Transferable Concepts*:

“How to be filled with the Spirit: Though you are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith and faith alone, it is important to recognize that several factors contribute to preparing your heart for the filling of the Spirit.

First, you must desire to live a life that will please the Lord. You have the promise of our Savior, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Second, be willing to surrender your life totally and irrevocably to our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul admonishes in Romans 12:1,2: *“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. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Third, confess every known sin which the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and experience the cleansing and forgiveness which God promises in 1 John 1:9: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* ...Have you met God’s conditions? Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness? Do you sincerely desire to be controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit? If so, I invite you to bow

your head and pray this prayer of faith right now. Expect God to fill you. Without begging or pleading, just say: 'Dear Father, I need You. I hunger and thirst for a more vital relationship with You. I admit that I have been in control of my life. As a result, I have sinned against You. Thank You for forgiving my sins through Christ's death on the cross for me. I now confess and turn from my sins and surrender the control of my life to the Lord Jesus. By faith I invite You to fill me with the Holy Spirit as You *commanded* me to be filled. You *promised* to fill me if I ask according to Your will. I pray this in the authority of the name of Jesus Christ. To demonstrate my faith, I now thank You for filling me with Your Holy Spirit and for taking control of my life. Amen.'

"Now, if you sincerely prayed that prayer, you are filled with the Holy Spirit. You will begin to experience a greater love for God. You will want to spend time with Him in studying His Word and in prayer. You will want to trust and obey God and His Word. You will want to share your love for Christ with others who do not know Him.

From Bill Bright, Transferable Concept "How You Can Walk in the Spirit"

"What greater promise could Christ offer to the Christian than the assurance that he can walk daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and experience an abundant and fruitful life of purpose and adventure? Here is His promise:

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

"As you walk in the Spirit by faith, practicing Spiritual Breathing, you need never again live in spiritual defeat. Spiritual Breathing, like physical breathing, is a process of

exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure, an exercise in faith that enables you to experience God's love and forgiveness and walk in the Spirit as a way of life. If you sin by committing a deliberate act of disobedience, breathe spiritually. *Exhale by confession*...If this is your experience, Spiritual Breathing will enable you to get off this emotional roller coaster and enjoy the Christian life that the Lord Jesus promised to you when He said, "I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly." As an exercise in faith, Spiritual Breathing will make it possible for you to continue to experience God's love, forgiveness, and the power and control of the Holy Spirit.

"First, you acknowledge that your sin or sins—which should be named to God specifically—are wrong and are therefore grievous to Him. Second, you acknowledge that God has already forgiven you through Christ's death on the cross for your sins. Third, you repent, which means that you change your attitude toward your sin. The power of the Holy Spirit will enable you to change both your attitude and conduct. Instead of doing what your old sinful nature—your flesh—wants to do, you can do what God wants you to do. Now *inhale* by appropriating the fullness of God's Spirit by faith. Trust him to control and empower you according to his command to "be filled with the Spirit" which actually means to be constantly and continually controlled and empowered with the Holy Spirit.

"According to His *promise*, God hears you and grants your request because you pray according to His will. I encourage you to continue to claim his love, forgiveness and power by faith and continue to have fellowship with Him moment by moment. You can get off your spiritual roller coaster, cease to be a worldly or carnal Christian, and become a Spirit-filled believer by practicing Spiritual Breathing. If you are breathing and inhaling by appropriating the fullness of the

holy Spirit by faith—you are a Spirit-filled Christian.”

VI. Three sermons on “How to Kill Sin”

John Piper

Part One

Now this morning we have returned to Romans 8 to pick up where we left off on December 16. But I am still trumpeting Planting a Passion, and I am still working to build “justice-pursuing” churches, and I am still pleading for God to create coronary Christians, because that is what verses 12-13 help me do. If you are going to be the kind of person who gets up when you get knocked down and instead of planning revenge, plans fresh strategies of love; and instead of questioning God, submits to his wise and good sovereignty; and instead of whining, rejoices in tribulation and is refined like steel, then you will have to learn to kill the sins of self-pity and pride and grudge-holding and loving the praise of man. In other words, coronary Christians who joyfully press on in some great Cause of love and justice don't come out of nowhere. They come out of the fiery furnace of warfare with sin—fought mainly in their own souls.

Let's look at verses 12-13, “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh [literally: we are debtors not to the flesh], to live according to the flesh—(13) for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” If you are going to be a coronary, justice-pursuing, Passion-planting Christian—or, for that matter, any kind of Christian who inherits life and not death—Paul says you must not be the debt-paying slave of the flesh—that old rebellious, insubordinate, self-sufficient nature we all have (Romans 8:7). “Brethren, we are debtors *not* to the flesh, to live according to the flesh”—we owe the flesh

nothing but enmity and war. Don't dally with your destroyer. Don't be a debtor to your destroyer. Get out debt to the flesh, don't pay for your own destruction.

How? we ask. That's what verse 13 describes. If you are going to be a coronary, justice-pursuing, Passion-planting, free-from-debt-to-fatal-flesh Christian, you must be skilled at killing your own sins. This is dangerous language here, so be careful. Don't think about other people's sins. Don't think about how people wrong you. Think about your own sins. That's what Paul is talking about. Verse 13b: "But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of [your!] body, you will live."

John Owen on Mortification of Sin

The great teacher of the church on this doctrine is John Owen. Nobody has probed it more deeply, probably. He wrote a little 86-page book called *Mortification of Sin in Believers*. "Mortify" means "kill" in 17th century English. Today it just means "embarrass" or "shame." But Owen was talking about this verse—in fact, his whole book is an exposition of this verse, Romans 8:13. He put it like this: "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."

My mother wrote in my Bible when I was 15 years old—I still have the Bible—"This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." Now Owen says, based on Romans 8:13, "Be killing sin or [sin] will be killing you." We will see that these two mottos are very closely connected, because Romans 8:13 says that we are to put be putting sin to death *by the Spirit*—"If *by the Spirit* you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live"—and what is the instrument of death wielded by the Spirit? The answer is given in Ephesians 6:17—"the sword of the Spirit, the word of God." This book will keep you from sin—this book will kill sin. We'll come back to this in two weeks.

But for now I just want you to see how everything in these recent weeks is connected. We thought we were taking a detour from Romans since December 16, but it turns out that we were really simply giving application of what happens when Christians put to death the deeds of the body. They become coronary, marathon, God-centered, Christ-exalting, justice-pursuing, passion-planting Christians.

So now, what would be helpful to know in order to experience what Romans 8:13 is calling for? Well, I see four questions that would be helpful to answer so that we can be about this crucial duty of killing sin. What are “the deeds of the body” when Paul says, “If by the Spirit you kill the deeds of the body, you will live”? Surely not all the deeds of the body are to be killed. The body is supposed to be an instrument of righteousness. So what are the deeds of the body that are to be killed? What does killing them mean? Do they have life that we should take away? What will killing them involve? What does “by the Spirit” mean? The Spirit is himself God. He is not a lifeless instrument in our hands to wield as we wish. The very thought of having the Spirit in my hand gives me the shivers of disrespect. I am in *his* hand, aren't I? Not he in mine. *He* is the power, not me. How am I to understand this killing of sin “by the Spirit”?

Does this threat of death mean that I can lose my salvation? Verse 13a: “If you are living according to the flesh, you must die.” This is spoken to the whole church at Rome. And death here is eternal death and judgment. We know that, because *everyone*—whether you live according to the flesh or not—dies a physical death. So the death this verse warns about is something more, something that happens only to *some* and not to others. So the question remains: can we die eternally if we have justified by faith?

If so what becomes of our assurance, and if not why does Paul threaten us all with death if we live according to the flesh and tell us to be about the business of killing sin? So let's start here with this last question and then take up the others in two weeks. What we should take away this morning is a general sense of how justification relates to sin-killing; and how crucial it is that we do it.

Does the Threat of Death Imply We Can Lose Our Salvation?

You know my answer: No, someone who is justified by faith alone apart from works of the law cannot die in this sense of eternal death. One of my main reasons for believing this is found in this chapter in verse 30. In this verse Paul argues that salvation from beginning to end is a work of God with every part linked to the other in an unbreakable chain. Romans 8:30, "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." Here the link between justification and glorification is certain. If you have been justified by faith you will be glorified. That is, you will be brought to eternal life and glory. The chain will not be broken: Predestination, calling, justification, glorification.

Killing Sin Is the Result and Evidence of Justification

So the question then is why does Paul say to the church in Rome—and to Bethlehem—(verse 13) "If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live"? The reason is this: Putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit—the daily practice of killing sin in your life—is the result of being justified and the evidence that you are justified by faith alone apart from works of the law. If you are making war on your sin, and walking by the Spirit, then you know that you have been united with Christ by faith alone. And if you have been united to Christ, then his blood

and righteousness provide the unshakable ground of your justification.

On the other hand, if you are living according to the flesh—if you are not making war on the flesh, and not making a practice out of killing sin in your life, then there is no compelling reason for thinking that you are united to Christ by faith or that you are therefore justified. In other words, putting to death the deeds of the body is not the way we get justified, it's one of the ways God shows that we are justified. And so Paul commands us to do it—be killing sin—because if we don't—if we don't make war on the flesh and put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit—if growth in grace and holiness mean nothing to us—then we show that we are probably false in our profession of faith, and that our church membership is a sham and our baptism is a fraud, and we are probably not Christians after all and never were.

Killing Sin Is the Effect, not the Cause, of Our Justification

This is a good place to review and reestablish the great foundation for our call for coronary, justice-pursuing Christians. Are we calling for you to live this way so that you will get justified, or are we calling for you to live this way because this is the way justified sinners live? Is the pursuit of justice and love “by the Spirit” with life-long perseverance the cause or the effect of being set right with God?

Let Wilberforce answer. Here was a man who had a passion for holiness and righteousness and justice greater than anyone in his day perhaps. When he wrote his book, *A Practical View of Christianity*, to trumpet this passion for justice and for political engagement in the cause of righteousness, here is what he said, Christianity is a

scheme “for justifying *the ungodly*” [Romans 4:5], by Christ’s dying for them “*when yet sinners*” [Romans 5:6-8], a scheme “for reconciling us to God”—*when enemies* [Romans 5:10]; and for making the fruits of holiness *the effects, not the cause*, of our being justified and reconciled.

We have spent almost four years laying the foundation for understanding Romans 8. The first five chapters of Romans demonstrate that the only way for us sinners to be declared righteous in God’s sight is by having righteousness reckoned to us—credited to us, imputed to us—by grace, through faith, on the basis of Christ’s perfect life and death, and not on the basis of our own works. God is just and justifies the ungodly who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

With that stunning and unspeakably wonderful foundation laid, Paul has to ask in chapter 6, two times: Verse 1, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” Verse 15, “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” And all of chapters 6 and 7 is written to show that justification by faith alone apart from works *does not* and *cannot* lead a person to make peace with sin.

Paul answers his own question in Romans 6:1, “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” We can’t. If we died to sin by being united with Jesus in his death, we can’t stay married to sin. The faith that unites us to Christ disunites from his competitors. The faith that makes peace with God makes war on our sin. If you are not at odds with sin, you are not at home with Jesus, *not* because being at odds with sin makes you at home with Jesus, but because being at home with Jesus makes you at odds with sin.

Therefore, I call you and urge you, for the sake of being

God-centered, Christ-exalting, soul-winning, justice-pursuing, passion-planting, coronary Christians, don't live according to the flesh but "by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body." Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you. From Piper, "How to Kill Sin, Part 1 February 2, 2002

Part Two

Ed Welch, in preparation for his book called *A Banquet in the Grave* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2001), said: ...there is a mean streak to authentic self-control... Self-control is not for the timid. When we want to grow in it, not only do we nurture an exuberance for Jesus Christ, we also demand of ourselves a hatred for sin....The only possible attitude toward out-of-control desire is a declaration of all-out war....There is something about war that sharpens the senses...You hear a twig snap or the rustling of leaves and you are in attack mode. Someone coughs and you are ready to pull the trigger. Even after days of little or no sleep, war keeps us vigilant.

There is a mean, violent streak in the true Christian life! But violence against whom, or what? Not other people. It's a violence against all the impulses in us that would be violent to other people. It's a violence against all the impulses in our own selves that would make peace with our own sin and settle in with a peacetime mentality. It's a violence against all lust in ourselves, and enslaving desires for food or caffeine or sugar or chocolate or alcohol or pornography or money or the praise of men and the approval of others or power or fame. It's violence against the impulses in our own soul toward racism and sluggish indifference to injustice and poverty and abortion.

Christianity is not a settle-in-and-live-at-peace-with-this-world-the-way-it-is kind of religion. If by the Spirit you kill the deeds of your own body, you will live. Christianity is

war. On our own sinful impulses.

1. What Are "The Deeds of the Body" that We Are to Kill?

Paul is picking up here on what he had said already in Romans 6. So go back there with me and let's remind ourselves of a few things. Take three verses to shed light on Romans 8:13.

First, Romans 6:13, "Do not present your members [=your bodies] to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness." What then are "the deeds of the body" that we are to kill? They are those deeds that we are about to do (you kill them before they happen) when our bodies are "instruments or unrighteousness."

Second, Romans 6:12, *"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts."* When the mortal body is taken captive by sin and made to obey lusts, then and there we see "deeds of the body" that should be put to death.

Third, Romans 6:6, *"Our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin."* I cite this verse to remind you of the all-important distinctively Christian truth about killing the sinful actions of the body, namely, in union with Jesus Christ by faith alone, you are already dead to sin and alive to God, and what you are doing when you put to death the deeds of the body is becoming in practice what you are in Christ. *"Our old self was crucified, in order that our body of sin might be done away with!"* When Christ died, we died in him if we are united to him by faith. And we died with him so that we might demonstrate this death

by putting to death the sinful deeds of the body. Because we already have the victory we can succeed in our violence against sin! He breaks the power of *cancelled* sin. We can only kill the sin that has already been killed when we were killed in Christ. This is Christianity, not moral self improvement.

So the answer to the first question, "What are the deeds of the body in Romans 8:13?" is the deeds that we are about to do prompted by sin or lust or unrighteousness. Sin is deeper than deeds. The deeds are the instrument of the sin. And when that is what our bodies are about to do—go over to the side of the enemy—we put that action to death. In this war with ourselves, traitors are put to death.

2. What Is This Putting to Death?

The answer is that you suffocate the sinful deeds of the body. You cut off the life-line, the blood flow. Deeds of the body come from somewhere. Jesus said, "The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. (20) These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man" (Matthew 15:18-20). Sinful deeds have a life line that must be cut.

In other words, there is a condition of the heart that gives rise to the "deeds of the body." It's a heart issue. We must cut off the hands and gouge out the eyes, not literally—that would do no good—but with that kind of violent heart-work. You kill the bad fruit by severing the bad root.

What's the bad root of "the deeds of the body"? You can see it in Romans 8:7. *"The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God,*

for it is not even able to do so."The root of "the deeds of the body" that have to be killed is the flesh that is hostile to God and unwilling and unable to submit to him. Verse 12: *"If you live according to the flesh you will die."*Flesh is the great enemy here. And it's an enemy because it is insubordinate and hostile to God. It doesn't like God and does not want to be told by him what to do.

So to kill "the deeds of the body" that this enmity produces, you have to cut the life-line. Pinch the air pipe. Stop the blood flow. Deeds must be killed before they happen by severing the root of hostility and insubordination that rejects God.

3. How Do You Do This "By the Spirit"?

Let's get at answer by following three steps, each with a different text.

Step One: Set Your Mind on the Things of the Spirit

Notice Romans 8:5-6 and how Paul speaks there of the flesh and the Spirit (the same pair he contrasts here in verse 13): *"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit.* (6) For the mind set on the flesh is death (as verse 13a says!), but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (as verse 13b says)." So the first step in the answer is this: putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit involves "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit." You don't just look at the temptation and say NO. You do that! But if you are going to put it to death *by the Spirit*, you have to do more: you direct your mind, your heart, your spiritual focus another way, namely to the "things of the Spirit."

Step Two: Set Your Mind on the Words of God and the Realities They Stand For

What are “the things of the Spirit”? If we are going to rivet our minds and hearts on them in the hour of temptation so as to kill sin, what are we looking at? Here the key text is 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 where Paul talks about his own teaching as God-inspired words. This is the only other place in the New Testament where the very phrase “things of the Spirit” is used. He speaks of his revelations like this: “. . . which things we also speak, not in *words* taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit. . . . (14) But a natural man does not accept the *things of the Spirit* of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

So here “the things of the Spirit” are the words of God spoken by the apostles. From this I infer that when Romans 8:6 says that “those who are according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” he means that they set their minds on the words of God and the realities they stand for. These are the “things of the Spirit” that the natural person rejects and the spiritual person embraces. So to put to death the deeds of the body “by the Spirit” is to “set your mind on the things of the Spirit,” which we now see means embracing the words of God (and the reality they point to) spoken by his inspired spokesmen.

This is especially significant because the “word of God” is called “the sword of the Spirit” in Ephesians 6:17. And swords are used for killing. And that is what we are to do “by the Spirit” in Romans 8:13. Kill the deeds of the body by the Spirit, that is by fixing your mind on “the things of the Spirit,” that is, by welcoming and embracing the “word of God” in your mind and heart, that is, by taking the Sword of the Spirit which is the deadly sword for sin-killing.

Step Three: By Hearing with Faith, not Works of the Law
Very practically what do you do to bring the power of the Spirit by the word of God into vigorous, sin-killing action? The answer is clear in Galatians 3:5, "So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" The answer is that the Spirit is supplied to us for the miraculously mighty killing of sin not by works of the law but by "hearing with faith."

Why does he say "by *hearing* with faith" instead of just "by faith"? To emphasize that what faith hears and receives and embraces is something heard, namely, "the word of God," which is the sword of the Spirit, which kills sin.

How does it do that? Well, let's save that for a whole sermon when I come back. But we are not left helpless this morning. What we are saying is that when temptation comes, alongside a very powerful and resolute NO!, you look to a word from God, especially a word that promises he will *be* more for us and *do* more for us than what this sin promises. And if you believe him—there is the main battle—you will sever the root of sin.

So immerse your mind and heart in the fountain of truth and life and power – the promises of God, and when the temptation comes, take this all-satisfying word, this sword of the Spirit, and believe it, and by it sever the root of sin. Kill it. Piper How to Kill Sin part 2, Feb 17, 2002

Part Three

Three weeks ago I promised a third message on verse 13 about how to kill sin. "*If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*" I get the words "kill sin" from this verse: "If you put to death (=kill) the

deeds of the body. . . ." So this verse says, If you want to live, you must kill. Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.

A Violence against Our Flesh

There is a mean streak in the Christian life. There is a violence. There is a militancy. But it is exactly the opposite of selfish violence against people. It is a violence against the "flesh" or against "the deeds of the body"—*our* flesh and *our* body. The Christian is not mean to others. He is mean to his own sinfulness—his own flesh.

We saw the meaning of "flesh" in Romans 8:7, "The mind that is set on the *flesh* is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot." The flesh is what we are when rebellion against God and insubordination and hostility to God rule our bodies and our minds. So the way you put to death "the deeds of the body" is to strangle the air that sinful deeds breathe. Strangle the flesh. Cut the lifeline. Pinch the air pipe. Stop the blood flow. Sinful deeds must be killed before they happen—by severing the root of distrust and hostility and insubordination toward God.

"By the Spirit" and through the "Things of the Spirit"
So we asked, How do you do that? Paul says it is "by the Spirit." Verse 13b: *"If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."* Now what does that mean? This is a key to the Christian life. Putting to death the deeds of the body "by the Spirit." Killing sin "by the Spirit."

Now what is that? We argued that putting sin to death "by the Spirit" is probably related to what Romans 8:5 says about "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit." "Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." In other words, one way to kill sin "by

the Spirit" is to "set your mind on the things of the Spirit."

So we asked, What are the "things of the Spirit." We answered from 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 which says this: "We speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit...But a natural man does not accept the *things of the Spirit* of God, for they are foolishness to him." Here we have the very phrase of Romans 8:5, "things of the Spirit." What are they? The words of God, spoken by the apostles, taught by the Spirit, not human wisdom.

So to put to death the deeds of the body (as Romans 8:13 says) "by the Spirit" we must set our minds on "the things of the Spirit," which we now see means: set your mind on the word of God in scripture. What makes this ring so true is the connection with Ephesians 6:17 where Paul says in our battle against evil we must "take the helmet of salvation, and *the sword of the Spirit*, which is *the word of God*."

Among all the spiritual armor that we are to "put on" in our warfare there is only one offensive weapon that is used for killing. The sword. And what is it? It is described in two ways that link it with Romans 8:13. 1) It's the sword "*of the Spirit*." So if we are to kill the deeds of the body "by the Spirit," and the one killing weapon in our armor is the sword and it is called "*the sword of the Spirit*," we have good reason to think that the agent for killing sin "by the Spirit" is this sword. 2) And second, what is this "sword of the Spirit"? Ephesians 6:17 says it is "the word of God," which confirms our connection with 1 Corinthians 2:14. The sword that kills sin is the word of God. And the way we kill sin "by the Spirit" is to set our minds on "the things of the Spirit," that is, the word of God in Scripture, which becomes then the sword of the Spirit.

The Paradox of Who Is Doing the Work

So the question we are asking and trying to answer is: What can I do tonight to bring the power of the Holy Spirit into vigorous, sin-killing action in my life? Because you see the paradox in Romans 8:13, don't you? On the one hand, killing sin is something Paul says you must do. *You*, must do it. "[*You*] put to death the deeds of the body." But on the other hand, it says, you do it "by the Spirit." Now the Spirit is not a tool or a weapon. He is a person. He is God. Put to death the deeds of the body by means of God, the Spirit. So, evidently, the Spirit is the decisive killer. That's the paradox: you do it; but you do it in such a way that it is he who does it. That is the difference between the Christian life and a moral self-help program.

This is what Paul was saying in Romans 15:18, "I will not venture to speak of anything except what *Christ has accomplished through me*." And what he was saying in 1 Corinthians 15:10b, "I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." I labored, but it was not I, but God's grace—God's Spirit—in me and with me.

So it is absolutely right that we are asking, What can I do tonight to bring the power of the Spirit into vigorous, sin-killing action? If we are going to live the Christian life—not just an imitation of it—we must experience Romans 8:13: We must put sin to death in a way that it is decisively the Spirit which puts it to death. The glory of God is at stake here. Because the ultimate sin-killer will get the greatest badge of honor. You or God.

By Works of Law or by Hearing with Faith?

So we ended last time by looking at the key text in Galatians 3:5. Here Paul answers the question, How do you bring the Spirit into vigorous sin-killing action? He asks,

"Does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" In other words, he is asking, How does the Holy Spirit flow with miracle-working power in our lives? How does He come into vigorous, sin-killing action in our lives? He mentions two options: by works of law, or by hearing with faith. And the answer he expects is clearly: not by works of law, but by hearing with faith. Now why does he say "by *hearing* with faith" instead of just "by faith"? The Spirit comes and works mightily in our lives, killing sin, not just "by faith" but by "*hearing* with faith." Why does he say it that way? The answer is that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God, and it's the word that you hear and believe. When the word of God—the Sword of the Spirit—is heard and believed, the Spirit is moving with vigorous, sin-killing action.

In other words, the connection between the Holy Spirit and you is the word of God and faith. They are like socket and plug. When the plug of your faith goes in the socket of God's Word, the Spirit is flowing. And when he flows, he kills sin. Before I give you some practical illustrations how this works there are two important things to say.

We Kill Sin the Same Way We Get Saved

One is that you can see that we kill sin the same way we get saved. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."* Faith, not works, is the way we are made right with God; and faith, not works, is the way we engage the Holy Spirit to kill sin. So if you are here this morning and you are not a Christian, what you are hearing in this sermon is not some remote advanced form of Christian living way down the line of Christian maturity. This is how you become a Christian. And this is how you grow as a Christian.

To become a Christian you believe the promises of God: like, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Romans 10:12). And to fight sin as a Christian, you believe the promises of God: like, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). When Christ died for us, he bought with his blood both justification and sanctification. And both are obtained by faith. That's one thing that needs to be said. You never outgrow your need to live by faith. We begin and end by trusting the gift of imputed righteousness and the power of God's grace to kill sin and impart practical righteousness.

The Glory of Christ Is at Stake in Living This Way

The second thing that needs to be said is that the glory of Christ is at stake in living this way. All of life is meant to make much of Jesus Christ. Everything we do should magnify his greatness. Now ask yourself: Why isn't the way to bring the power of the Spirit into vigorous, sin-killing action simply to pray for it to happen? Why not just ask God to kill the sin in your life? *"Ask and you will receive"* (Luke 11:9, 13).

Well, we should indeed ask. Prayer is crucial. But that is *not* the sum total of what "put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit" means. Paul says, the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you does so by hearing with faith. Not just asking, but hearing. And not just hearing, but hearing with faith. Now, why does God design his triumphs in this way?

For this reason: if God simply killed sin when we ask him to without making our hearing and believing a part of the process, Jesus Christ would not get the glory for our holiness. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of Truth comes . . . he will glorify me" (John 16:13-14). The work of the Spirit, in killing our sin, is to do it in a way that gives glory to

Jesus Christ. Now how can that happen? It happens because the Spirit only flows through "hearing with faith." And what we *hear* is, at root, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yes it includes all the promises of God. Because, as 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, *"All the promises of God find their 'Yes' in him."* In other words, Jesus paid for every promise for those who trust him. So every promise that you hear and believe, gives glory to Jesus Christ. If we merely pray and ask God to kill our sin, without hearing the gospel of Christ or any of its promises, Christ would not be honored by our holiness. And God means for his Son to be magnified in justification and in sanctification. So he does not design sanctification to happen by prayer alone, but by hearing the Christ-exalting, blood-bought promises of God and believing them as we ask God to kill our sin.

That's the second thing that needs to be said. Killing sin in our lives must glorify Jesus. And Jesus is glorified when we kill sin by the Spirit, that is, by hearing and believing the promises that he bought and secured by his own blood.

Illustrations of How This Is Done

Now let me close with some illustrations. Right now three of our missionary families are being forced out of Tanzania within 30 days. One of the missionary wives compared their situation to the disciples after the death of Jesus and before the resurrection: "They are sitting quietly and numbly at someone's house...and they don't know about the resurrection that is to come. That's what this time feels like to us in many ways: darkness, and an unknown future. Out of the blue, we're packing up and leaving the country, our home for the last 7 years, the only home our children have known."

Now what are the dangers of sin here? What are the sins that need to be killed before they get the upper hand? Anger. Despair. Self-pity. Fear. Impatience and irritability. So how do you put to death those sins and the deeds of the body that might come from them?

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Here is the answer from that same email from the missionary wife:

We are clinging to these truths: God is good, He is in control, He loves us more than we can comprehend, and He has plans to give us hope and future, plans to prosper us (Jeremiah 29:11). Our spirits are understandably low, we are emotionally and physically exhausted. BUT . . .
"because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

In other words, they are putting to death the deeds of the body—they are killing sin—by the Spirit. They are hearing the promises of God and believing them. And by that means the Holy Spirit is flowing and sustaining and sanctifying.

Here's another illustration. A missionary couple was with us ministering among refugees here in the Cities until last year. Now they are headed with three small children to a country in Africa which is so sensitive they can't name it. Their February prayer letter was one of the clearest examples of how to put sin to death by the Spirit that I have ever seen.

They listed the sins that were threatening them and then gave the promises of God that they were using to put the sins to death. "Whereas the Constitution of [this country] may state one thing, the Word of God says, *"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1

John 4:4).

Where fear says, "what if...happens?" faith says, *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* (Isaiah 41:10).

When worry surfaces, faith responds, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid"* (John 14:27).

When doubt and frustration scoff, "They'll never change, this is a waste of time!" Jesus looks us in the eye and responds, *"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."* (Mark 10:27).

Learn from our missionaries. Learn from the apostle Paul. Put to death the deeds of the body *by the Spirit*. Not by the works of the law. Kill sin *by the Spirit*. Not by works of the law. Glorify Jesus Christ by taking the sword of the Spirit, the promises of God, purchased by his blood, and set your mind on them. Bank on them. Be satisfied by them. The power of sin will be broken. Sin will not have dominion over you. Jesus Christ will be magnified in your body! Amen.

Appendix F

Corresponding with Chapter Fifteen

Romans 29-31

I. "Foreknowledge" in *The Progress of Salvation*.

John McArthur

(<http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/90-181.html>)

2 Thessalonians 2:13, "*God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.*" Second Timothy 1:9, "*He saved us, called us with a holy calling not according to our works but according to His own purpose.*" There it is again. This is all bound up in the eternal counsel of God which He Himself determined before the world began. And that's why, as I told you the last time, John 1:12 says that we have become the children of God not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but of God. Putting it simply, salvation does not occur because of what you decided. Salvation occurs because of what God has already decided. It's all bound up in His eternal purpose...

And so much of modern evangelism today fails to grasp this. So much of modern evangelism leaves people the idea that somehow their eternal destiny is based upon a decision that they make. Scripture frankly has quite a different emphasis. In the first place, an unregenerate man is dead in trespasses and sin and utterly unable to respond to the gospel. The god of this world has blinded his mind. He is ignorant. He is the captive to sin, so much so according to 1 Corinthians 2:14 it says, "A natural man," that's an unconverted man, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, they're foolishness to him, he cannot

understand them." He can't. On his own he can't make that decision. It's impossible...

Even if you agree that God just saw what people were going to do, you really don't save God from some imagined injustice, because you still have to ask the question if (God) knew people were going to choose against Him and go to hell forever, why did He create them? And if you say He didn't have any power over whether they were created or not, you really have a problem because now you have a God that's less than sovereign, you have a God that's not the King of the universe and He's not in control, and that's not the God of the Bible...

Then you have to ask the question...all right, if He just looks down the road and sees some people believe and some people not believe, you have to ask the question...where did their faith come from? Is it natural for an unregenerate, wicked, blind, hopeless, helpless sinner to all of a sudden exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ? No, it's not natural, it's impossible, right? It's absolutely impossible...can't happen, couldn't do it. I mean, the terminology is dead in trespasses and sins, cannot understand the things of God, blinded, ignorant, hopeless, helpless, desperately wicked, no knowledge of God is in them. They love darkness. There's no way that this could mean foresight...

So, back to Romans chapter 8, when you see the word "foreknowledge" there, of course there is a foreordaining element to it, and of course there is a foresight element to it as God can see down the path. But there is also a fore-love in it. God foreordains, predetermines to love a certain person, a predetermined, foreordained, foreseen love relationship born in the eternal purpose of God. That's whom He foreknew. He would come to know them, that's

why “fore” is there, it hadn't happened yet, He foreknew. He would come eventually to an intimate relationship with them down the way through redemptive history.

II. What would it mean to God if a true believer could fully and finally fall away from saving grace?

Sam Storms

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/a-defense-of-the-perseverance-of-the-saints-part-i> (Parts 1 and 2)

He would not be worthy of glory nor of our adoring praise and worship

(Jude 24,25)

His purpose in redemption would fail and unravel

(Romans 8:29-30)

His will would be frustrated and fail of fulfillment

(John 6:38-40)

It would mean that the Father has refused to answer the prayers of His Son (John 17:11-15)

God, supposedly all-powerful, would be exposed as impotent and helpless (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:35-39)

God would prove to be faithless (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Christ will have failed in the purpose for which He died (John 6:37-40; 10:14-18,27-30)

Christ will have failed in the purpose for which He was raised (Romans 4:24-25)

Christ will have failed in the purpose for which He now intercedes in the presence of the Father (Rom. 8:31-34; 1 John 2:1-2; Heb. 7:25)

Christ will fail to accomplish the goal for which He is to return to this earth. (John 6:40b)

Christ will prove to have been a liar (John 6:37; 10:27-28)

The Holy Spirit will have failed in his work of sealing.

(2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30)

The Holy Spirit will have failed in his ministry as a pledge of

the future consummation of our redemption (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5)

III. TWO KINDS OF "CALL" IN THE BIBLE

Charles Spurgeon

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/predest.txt>

Now, in considering this solemn subject, let me remark that there are two kinds of callings mentioned in the Word of God. The first is the general call, which is in the gospel sincerely given to everyone that heareth the word. The duty of the minister is to call souls to Christ, he is to make no distinction whatever--"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The trumpet of the gospel sounds aloud to every man in our congregations--"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man" (Prov. 8:4). This call is sincere on God's part; but man by nature is so opposed to God, that this call is never effectual, for man disregards it, turns his back upon it, and goes his way, caring for none of these things. But mark, although this call be rejected, man is without excuse in the rejection; the universal call has in it such authority, that the man who will not obey it shall be without excuse in the day of judgment. When thou art commanded to believe and repent, when thou art exhorted to flee from the wrath to come, the sin lies on thy own head if thou dost despise the exhortation, and reject the commandment. And this solemn text drops an awful warning: "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation." But I repeat it, this universal call is rejected by man; it is a call, but it is not a attended with divine force and energy of the Holy Spirit in such a degree as to make it an unconquerable call, consequently men perish, even though they have the universal call of the

gospel ringing in their ears. The bell of God's house rings every day, sinners hear it, but they put their fingers in their ears, and go their way, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise, and though they are bidden and are called to the wedding (Luke 14:16,17,18), yet they will not come, and by not coming they incur God's wrath, and he declareth of such—"*None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper*" (Luke 14:24).

The call of our text is of a different kind; it is not a universal call, it is a special, particular, personal, discriminating, efficacious, unconquerable, call. This call is sent to the predestinated, and to them only; they by grace hear the call, obey it, and receive it. These are they who can now say, "Draw us, and we will run after thee."

IV. The doctrine of election (and by implication "foreknowledge")

Leon Morris

"We naturally think that we are completely free. If we are saved, we hold, it is because we have in our freedom decided to turn away from evil and to commit our lives to God... But the doctrine of election tells us that we can never do that in our own strength and wisdom. Left to ourselves, we would never make the motion of giving up evil and turning to God. It is only because God works in us FIRST that we come to him. And because he does this good work (of electing) us, we have a deep assurance that we could never have if it all depended on us." (Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians, 16)

V. The supposed evil of the doctrine of Predestination

John Stott

It doesn't foster arrogance but rather it excludes all boasting. God didn't choose us because he foresaw we would have faith but solely according to his good pleasure—because he chose to love us. It doesn't foster uncertainty about whether we are predestined but rather gives certainty of our relationship with God because we know it is all of God. Unbelievers aren't concerned about their relationship with God unless the Spirit convicts them. It doesn't foster apathy or complacency because the Bible is clear about our responsibility. Romans 6 is all about that issue. (John Stott, *Romans*, p. 252)

VI. And I (Jerry Nelson) add,

"It doesn't stifle evangelism or world evangelization because it is only our belief that God will break through the unbelief of others that we have any reason to witness or any confidence in the effectiveness of evangelism and missions."

Appendix G

Corresponding with Chapter Seventeen

Romans 9

- I. "What is Election" by Sam Storms, p. ____
- II. "Misunderstanding of the Doctrine of Election" by Wayne Grudem p. ____
- III. "How Can God be Just" by Sam Storms, p. ____
- IV. "Double Predestination" by RC Sproul, p. ____
- V. "What is Hyper-Calvinism" by Sam Storms, p. ____
- VI. "Free Will" by Jerry Nelson, p. ____
- VII. "God's Choice and Our Choice" by John Piper, p. ____
- VIII. "Freedom of the Will" by RC Sproul, p. ____
- IX. "The Myth of Free Will" by Chantry, p. ____

See also the following books:

Willing to Believe by R. C. Sproul:

Description: What is the role of the will in believing the good news of the gospel? Why is there so much controversy over free will throughout church history? R. C. Sproul finds that Christians have often been influenced by pagan views of the human will that deny the effects of Adam's fall. In *Willing to Believe*, Sproul traces the free-will controversy from its formal beginning in the fifth century, with the writings of Augustine and Pelagius, to the present. Readers will gain understanding into the nuances separating the views of Protestants and Catholics, Calvinists and Arminians, and Reformed and Dispensationalists. This book, like Sproul's *Faith Alone*, is a major work on an essential evangelical tenet.

The Justification of God by John Piper.

Description: "Written in an irenic spirit with a keen awareness and interaction with all significant scholarly – it

is the best on Romans 9.” G.K. Beale of Gordon-Conwell Seminary

I. What is Election?

By Sam Storms

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/what-is-election>

Divine election is certainly one of the more profound and controversial doctrines in Holy Scripture. To some it is an idea conceived in hell, a tool of Satan wielded by him to thwart the evangelistic zeal of the church and thus responsible for populating hell with men and women who otherwise would have been reached with the gospel message. To others divine election is the heart and soul of Scripture, the most comforting and reassuring of biblical truths apart from which grace loses its power and God his glory. To the former, then, election is a primary reason why people are in hell. To the latter, it is the only reason why people are in heaven!

This radical difference of opinion concerning the doctrine of election and predestination is illustrated beautifully (and humorously) in a poem which appeared in *The Continental Journal*, March 11, 1779. It was entitled “On Predestination.”

“If all things succeed as already agreed,
And immutable impulses rule us;
To preach and to pray, is but time thrown away,
And our teachers do nothing but fool us.

“If we’re driven by fate, either this way or that,
As the carman whips up his horses,
Then no man can stray--all go the right way,
As the stars that are fix’d in their courses.
“But if by free will, we can go or stand still,
As best suits the present occasion;

Then fill up the glass, and confirm him an ass
That depends upon Predestination."

Two weeks later an answer appeared in the same newspaper.

"If an all perfect mind rules over mankind,
With infinite wisdom and power;
Sure he may decree, and yet the will be free,
The deeds and events of each hour.

"If scripture affirms in the plainest of terms,
The doctrine of Predestination;
We ought to believe it, and humbly receive it,
As a truth of divine revelation.

"If all things advance with the force of mere chance,
Or by human free will are directed;
To preach and to pray, will be time thrown away,
Our teachers may be well rejected.

"If men are deprav'd, and to vice so enslav'd,
That the heart chuses nothing but evil;
Then who goes on still by his own corrupt will,
Is driving post haste to the devil.

"Then let human pride and vain cavil subside,
It is plain to a full demonstration,
That he's a wild ass, who over his glass,
Dares ridicule Predestination."

[Both of these poems are quoted by Charles W. Akers,
"Calvinism and the American Revolution," in *The Heritage of John Calvin: Lectures*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 170-171.]

Much of the disagreement and most of the animosity concerning this doctrine proceeds from a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means. Our analysis of divine

election must, therefore, begin with an attempt to clarify precisely what is at stake and, at the same time, correct misrepresentations of it.

When I am asked, and I am asked often, "Sam, are you a Calvinist?," I immediately respond with a request of my own, "Tell me what you mean by 'Calvinist.' Then I'll tell you if I'm one!" Often the person then defines "Calvinism" as a rigid, fatalistic system of theology, devoid of life and joy, in which God is portrayed as a celestial bully who takes sadistic glee in sending people to hell whether they deserve it or not. "If *that* is what you mean by 'Calvinist', then I most assuredly am *not* one!"

The problem is that Arminians often run into an equally distressing caricature of their own position. Sadly, many Calvinists think of Arminianism as an intellectually flabby, overly sentimental view of the Christian faith that borders on liberalism, if not universalism. The "God" of Arminianism, I once heard someone sarcastically say, is actually "man" spoke of in a very loud voice. I hope these studies will go a long way in dispelling such unkind and terribly misleading caricatures of what people really believe. Whereas much may and will be said of election in these studies, the point of dispute is surprisingly simple. No one who believes in the Bible disputes the fact that election is taught there. It isn't the reality of election, or even its source, author, time, or goal that has elicited so much venom among professing Christians. It is rather the basis of divine election, that is to say, *why and on what grounds some are elected to salvation and life and others are not*. There are essentially only three options, the first of which is more pagan than Christian.

First, it has been argued that God elects those who are good. In this view, election is a debt God is obliged to pay,

not a gift he graciously bestows. It is on the basis of inherent or self-generated righteousness that God elects men and women. This is the doctrine of Pelagianism, named after the British monk Pelagius who popularized the view in the fifth century. One would be hard-pressed to find an advocate of this perspective within the professing Christian church.

Second, others contend that God elects some who are bad who, notwithstanding their being bad, choose to exercise faith in Jesus Christ. It is on the basis of this *foreseen faith* that God elects them. This is the doctrine of Arminianism, named after the Dutch theologian James Arminius (1560-1609). It has also been called Wesleyanism because of the influence of John Wesley.

Third, there is the view that God elects some who are bad who, because of their being bad, are not of themselves able to exercise faith in Christ. It is on the basis of his own sovereign good pleasure that God elects them. This is the doctrine of Calvinism, named after the French theologian John Calvin (1509-1564).

We are concerned with the latter two options. The question reduces to this: Does God elect people because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or does God elect people in order that they shall believe in Christ? Jack W. Cottrell, an Arminian, is to be complimented for acknowledging that this is in fact the issue separating Calvinists and Arminians. "The Calvinistic mind," says Cottrell, "sees election as bringing about the transition from unbelief to belief, hence making unbelievers the object of election. The Arminian says that this transition is made by a free act of will; election then is an act of God directed toward the believer after the transition has been made" (Jack W. Cottrell, "Conditional Election," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H.

Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975], p. 72). Perhaps the most cogent recent exposition of Arminianism, particularly in its view of God, providence, and predestination, is Cottrell's work, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1984). The article cited, "Conditional Election," has been revised and included in this more recent work in the chapter "Predestination," pp. 331-52.

Thus the Calvinist says that God elects unbelievers and predestines them to become believers. The Arminian, on the other hand, says that God elects believers and predestines them to become his children.

The issue is not whether there is a cause or basis of God's choice of people, but whether that cause is some condition (faith) fulfilled by an individual acting from free will or the sovereign good pleasure of God. Does God elect a person because that person wants God, or does God elect a person because God wants that person in spite of the fact that the person does not want God? We are not disputing whether faith and repentance are necessary for salvation. Indeed, one may even speak of faith and repentance as the *condition* for salvation, in the sense that one must believe and repent in order to be saved. The question, rather, is this: *Are faith and repentance produced by free will and thus the cause of election, or are they produced by the Holy Spirit and thus the effect of election?*

According to Arminianism, election is that act of God whereby he foreordains to eternal life those whom he foresees will respond in faith to the gospel. According to Calvinism, election is that act of God whereby he foreordains to eternal life those who, because of sin, cannot respond in faith to the gospel. Which of these two views is the one the Bible teaches? Or is there a third,

mediating option? That is the question which I have set myself to answer in these studies.

II. Misunderstandings of the Doctrine of Election

(excerpt from *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem, pp. 674-79)

Election Is Not Fatalistic or Mechanistic.

Sometimes those who object to the doctrine of election say that it is “fatalism” or that it presents a “mechanistic system” for the universe. Two somewhat different objections are involved here. By “fatalism” is meant a system in which human choices and human decisions really do not make any difference. In fatalism, no matter what we do, things are going to turn out as they have been previously ordained. Therefore, it is futile to attempt to influence the outcome of events or the outcome of our lives by putting forth any effort or making any significant choices, because these will not make any difference any way. In a true fatalistic system, of course, our humanity is destroyed for our choices really mean nothing, and the motivation for moral accountability is removed.

In a mechanistic system the picture is one of an impersonal universe in which all things that happen have been inflexibly determined by an impersonal force long ago, and the universe functions in a mechanical way so that human beings are more like machines or robots than genuine persons. Here also genuine human personality would be reduced to the level of a machine that simply functions in accordance with predetermined plans and in response to predetermined causes and influences.

By contrast to the mechanistic picture, the New Testament presents the entire outworking of our salvation as

something brought about by a personal God in relationship with personal creatures. God "destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). God's act of election was neither impersonal nor mechanistic, but was permeated with personal love for those whom he chose. Moreover, the personal care of God for his creatures, even those who rebel against him, is seen clearly in God's plea through Ezekiel, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).

When talking about our response to the gospel offer, Scripture continually views us not as mechanistic creatures or robots, but as genuine persons, personal creatures who make willing choices to accept or reject the gospel. Jesus invites everyone, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And we read the invitation at the end of Revelation: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17). This invitation and many others like it are addressed to genuine persons who are capable of hearing the invitation and responding to it by a decision of their wills. Regarding those who will not accept him, Jesus clearly emphasizes their hardness of heart and their stubborn refusal to come to him: "Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:40). And Jesus cries out in sorrow to the city that had rejected him, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt. 23:37).

In contrast to the charge of fatalism, we also see a much

different picture in the New Testament. Not only do we make willing choices as real persons, but these choices are also real choices because they do affect the course of events in the world. They affect our own lives and they affect the lives and destinies of others. So, "He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18). Our personal decisions to believe or not believe in Christ have eternal consequences in our lives, and Scripture is quite willing to talk about our decision to believe or not believe as the factor that decides our eternal destiny.

The implication of this is that we certainly must preach the gospel, and people's eternal destiny hinges on whether we proclaim the gospel or not. Therefore when the Lord one night told Paul, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10), Paul did not simply conclude that the "many people" who belong to God would be saved whether he stayed there preaching the gospel or not. Rather, "he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11)—this was longer than Paul stayed in any other city except Ephesus during his three missionary journeys. When Paul was told that God had many elect people in Corinth, he stayed a long time and preached, in order that those elect people might be saved! Paul is quite clear about the fact that unless people preach the gospel others will not be saved:

"But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" ... "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." (Rom.

10:14, 17)

Did Paul know before he went to a city who was elected by God for salvation and who was not? No, he did not. That is something that God does not show to us ahead of time. But once people come to faith in Christ then we can be confident that God had earlier chosen them for salvation. This is exactly Paul's conclusion regarding the Thessalonians; he says that he knows that God chose them because when he preached to them, the gospel came in power and with full conviction: *"For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"* (1 Thess. 1:4-5). Far from saying that whatever he did made no difference, and that God's elect would be saved whether he preached or not, Paul endured a life of incredible hardship in order to bring the gospel to those whom God had chosen. At the end of a life filled with suffering he said, *"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory"* (1 Tim. 2:10).

Election Is Not Based on God's Foreknowledge of Our Faith.

Quite commonly people will agree that God predestines some to be saved, but they will say that he does this by looking into the future and seeing who will believe in Christ and who will not. If he sees that a person is going to come to saving faith, then he will predestine that person to be saved. In this way, it is thought, the ultimate reason why some are saved and some are not lies within the people themselves, not within God. All that God does in his predestining work is to give confirmation to the decision he knows people will make on their own. The verse commonly used to support this view is Romans 8:29: *"For those whom*

he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."

A. Foreknowledge of Persons, Not Facts:

But this verse can hardly be used to demonstrate that God based his predestination on foreknowledge of the fact that a person would believe. The passage speaks rather of the fact that God knew persons ("those whom he foreknew"), not that he knew some fact about them, such as the fact that they would believe. It is a personal, relational knowledge that is spoken of here: God, looking into the future, thought of certain people in saving relationship to him, and in that sense he "knew them" long ago. This is the sense in which Paul can talk about God's "knowing" someone, for example, in 1 Corinthians 8:3: "But if one loves God, one is known by him." Similarly, he says, "but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God..." (Gal. 4:9). When people know God in Scripture, or when God knows them, it is personal knowledge that involves a saving relationship. therefore in Romans 8:29, "those whom he foreknew" is best understood to mean, "those whom he long ago thought of in a saving relationship to himself." The text actually says nothing about God foreknowing or foreseeing that certain people would believe, nor is that idea mentioned in any other text of Scripture.

Sometimes people say that God elected groups of people, but not individuals to salvation. In some Arminian views, God just elected the church as a group, while the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) said that God elected Christ, and all people in Christ. But Romans 8:29 talks about certain people whom God foreknew ("those whom he foreknew"), not just undefined or unfilled groups. And in Ephesians Paul talks about certain people whom God chose, including himself: "He chose us in him before the

foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). To talk about God choosing a group with no people in it is not biblical election at all. But to talk about God choosing a group of people means that he chose specific individuals who constituted that group.

B. Scripture Never Speaks of Our Faith As the Reason God Chose Us:

In addition, when we look beyond these specific passages that speak of foreknowledge and look at verses that talk about the reason God chose us, we find that Scripture never speaks of our faith or the fact that we would come to believe in Christ as the reason God chose us. In fact, Paul seems explicitly to exclude the consideration of what people would do in life from his understanding of God's choice of Jacob rather than Esau: he says, "Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, 'The elder will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Rom. 9:11-13). Nothing that Jacob or Esau would do in life influenced God's decision; it was simply in order that his purpose of election might continue.

When discussing the Jewish people who have come to faith in Christ, Paul says, "*So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works*" (Rom. 11:5-6). Here again Paul emphasizes God's grace and the complete absence of human merit in the process of election. Someone might object that faith is not viewed as a "work" in Scripture and therefore faith should be excluded from the quotation above ("It is no longer on the basis of works"). Based on this objection, Paul could actually mean, "*But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, but rather on*

the basis of whether someone will believe." However, this is unlikely in this context: Paul is not contrasting human faith and human works; he is contrasting God's sovereign choosing of people with any human activity, and he points to God's sovereign will as the ultimate basis for God's choice of the Jews who have come to Christ.

Similarly, when Paul talks about election in Ephesians, there is no mention of any foreknowledge of the fact that we would believe, or any idea that there was anything worthy of meritorious in us (such as a tendency to believe) that was the basis for God's choosing us. Rather, Paul says, *"He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved"* (Eph. 1:5-6). Now if God's grace is to be praised for election, and not human ability to believe or decision to believe, then once again it is consistent for Paul to mention nothing of human faith but only to mention God's predestining activity, his purpose and will, and his freely given grace.

Again in 2 Timothy, Paul says that God *"saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago"* (2 Tim. 1:9). Once again God's sovereign purpose is seen as the ultimate reason for our salvation, and Paul connects this with the fact that God gave us grace in Christ Jesus ages ago - another way of speaking of the truth that God freely gave favor to us when he chose us without reference to any foreseen merit or worthiness on our part.

C. Election Based on Something Good in Us (Our Faith) Would Be the Beginning of Salvation by Merit:

Yet another kind of objection can be brought against the

idea that God chose us because he foreknew that we would come to faith. If the ultimate determining factor in whether we will be saved or not is our own decision to accept Christ, then we shall be more inclined to think that we deserve some credit for the fact that we were saved: in distinction from other people who continue to reject Christ, we were wise enough in our judgment or capacities to decide to believe in Christ. But once we begin to think this way then we seriously diminish the glory that is to be given to God for our salvation. We become uncomfortable speaking like Paul who says that God "destined us ... according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:5-6), and we begin to think that God "destined us ... according to the fact that he knew that we would have enough tendencies toward goodness and faith within us that we would believe." When we think like this we begin to sound very much unlike the New Testament when it talks about election or predestination. By contrast, if election is solely based on God's own good pleasure and his sovereign decision to love us in spite of our lack of goodness or merit, then certainly we have a profound sense of appreciation to him for a salvation that is totally undeserved, and we will forever be willing to praise his "glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6).

In the final analysis, the difference between two views of election can be seen in the way they answer a very simple question. Given the fact that in the final analysis some people will choose to accept Christ and some people will not, the question is, "What makes people differ?" That is, what ultimately makes the difference between those who believe and those who do not? If our answer is that it is ultimately based on something God does (namely, his sovereign election of those who would be saved), then we see that salvation at its most foundational level is based on grace alone. On the other hand, if we answer that the ultimate difference between those who are saved and those

who are not is because of something in man (that is, a tendency or disposition to believe or not believe), then salvation ultimately depends on a combination of grace plus human ability.

D. Predestination Based on Foreknowledge Still Does Not Give People Free Choice:

The idea that God's predestination of some to believe is based on foreknowledge of their faith encounters still other problems: upon reflection, this system turns out to give no real freedom to man either. For if God can look into the future and see that person A will come to faith in Christ, and that person B will not come to faith in Christ, then those facts are already fixed, they are already determined. If we assume that God's knowledge of the future is true (which it must be), then it is absolutely certain that person A will believe and person B will not. There is no way that their lives could turn out any differently than this. Therefore it is fair to say that their destinies are still determined, for they could not be otherwise. But by what are these destinies determined? If they are determined by God himself, then we no longer have election based ultimately on foreknowledge of faith, but rather on God's sovereign will. But if these destinies are not determined by God, then who or what determines them? Certainly no Christian would say that there is some powerful being other than God controlling people's destinies. Therefore it seems that the only other possible solution is to say they are determined by some impersonal force, some kind of fate, operative in the universe, making things turn out as they do. But what kind of benefit is this? We have then sacrificed election in love by a personal God for a kind of determinism by an impersonal force and God is no longer to be given the ultimate credit for our salvation.

E. Conclusion: Election is Unconditional:

It seems best, for the previous four reasons, to reject the idea that election is based on God's foreknowledge of our faith. We conclude instead that the reason for election is simple God's sovereign choice—he “destined us in love to be his sons” (Eph. 1:5). God chose us simply because he decided to bestow his love upon us. It was not because of any foreseen faith or foreseen merit in us.

This understanding of election has traditionally been called “unconditional election.” It is “unconditional” because it is not conditioned upon anything that God sees in us that makes us worthy of his choosing us.

III. “How Can God Be Just?”

Sam Storms November 6, 2006

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/how-can-god-be-just>

One of the more frequently heard objections to unconditional election is that it impugns God’s justice. God is unfair and unjust, says the Arminian, if he treats people differently or bestows on some a favor that he withholds from others.

But this is surely a strange way of defining justice. Justice is that principle in virtue of which a person is given his due. To withhold from a person what he deserves or what the law demands that he receive is to act unjustly. How, then, can it be unjust to withhold from a person what he does *not* deserve? If you are in my debt and I demand payment, I can hardly be said to have acted unjustly. Similarly, should you not pay me, as you are obligated by law, it is justice that demands that you suffer the consequences.

All humanity stands infinitely indebted to God, rightly condemned to suffer the penal consequences that our sin

deserves. No man can rightfully claim to deserve mercy or divine clemency, for "*there is none who does good, there is not even one*" (Rom. 3:12b). The verdict of Holy Scripture is "guilty as charged," with no grounds for a new trial or for appeal.

No legitimate indictment may be brought against the bench should "His Honor" immediately consign the whole of Adam's race to eternal death. There is justifiable recourse for the defendants neither in the law nor in themselves. No technicality in the procedural development of the trial nor character witness on behalf of the accursed can be claimed. Unlike earthly judges who may be baffled by quick-witted lawyers or bribed by unscrupulous partisans, God weighs all the evidence and judges with absolute impartiality. The verdict is the same for all: *Guilty!* The punishment is the same for all: *Eternal Death!*

God is under no obligation to save any, and is entirely just in condemning all. That he should pardon some is owing entirely to free and sovereign grace. Thus, "the marvel of marvels," says Benjamin Warfield, "is not that God, in his infinite love, has not elected all of this guilty race to be saved, but that he has elected any. What really needs accounting for--though to account for it passes the powers of our extremest flights of imagination—is how the holy God could get the consent of his nature to save a single sinner. If we know what sin is, and what holiness is, and what salvation from sin to holiness is, this is what we shall face" (Benjamin B. Warfield, "Election," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter, 2 vols. [Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970], I:297-98).

I must confess that the question that haunts my heart is not "How can God be just?", but "How can God be merciful?" It isn't "Esau I hated" that disturbs me, but

"Jacob I loved" that absolutely astounds me.

How Can God Be Impartial?

Somewhat related to the foregoing objection concerning God's justice is the one which accuses him of partiality. God is not impartial, say many Arminians, if he favors some with life but not all. He is guilty of showing partiality toward the elect.

Of course he is! That is what unconditional election is all about. But we should refrain from saying that God is "guilty" of being partial toward the elect because this kind of partiality is a virtue, not a vice. It is a divine prerogative for which God should be praised, not vilified. Let me explain what I mean.

To say that God is impartial means that he is not moved or motivated by human characteristics such as race or gender or color of hair or socio-economic achievements. When God set his electing love on some but not all, he was not influenced by wealth or power or beauty or education or skill or potential or any other human consideration. God favored the elect, God was *partial* toward them, because that is what he wanted to do. He was not obligated by anything in any person to show favor to anyone. If God grants preferential treatment to his elect it is solely because it pleases him to do so, and not because the elect distinguished themselves from the non-elect by fulfilling some condition, either spiritual or physical.

Scripture makes it ever so clear that there is nothing that makes one person to differ from another in the eyes of God. In every morally and spiritually relevant concern, all people are equal. No person in any morally or spiritually relevant way stands out as different from any other person, or manifests any feature or performs any deed or fulfills

any condition that God is obligated to acknowledge or to which he must respond. In that sense, therefore, he is utterly *impartial* when he chooses one but not another. The basis for this choice is not because of some distinctive element in the former that the latter lacks. No physical trait or spiritual virtue (or vice, for that matter), no financial or political achievement, nothing, dictates or determines God's election of men and women to eternal life. This is just another way of saying that election is utterly of *grace*.

What is it, then, that dictates and determines God's choice? *God*. He chooses one, but not another, because it pleases him to do so. Why that particular choice is more pleasing to God than another, or neither, is not revealed in Holy Scripture. That is simply the way God wants it, and so it shall be.

I've heard people say: "But I don't agree with or care for God's reason in choosing Jerry instead of Ed." But what, may I ask, is that reason, the one of which you disapprove? I am not aware that Scripture provides such information. How can anyone object to the reason God elected Jerry instead of Ed when no one knows what it is?

I can tell you what that reason *is not*. It is not anything having to do with Jerry or Ed, either foreseen or actual. God chose Jerry instead of Ed because it was pleasing to God, and that is all the reason he needs. This is the heart and soul of the doctrine of unconditional election, that God sovereignly decided to show love and favor toward some who did not deserve it, but not all, without regard to anything in either.

To sum up, God is *partial toward the elect*, but not because of the elect. He favors them with love and life, without regard for their life or love. He is, therefore, *utterly*

impartial in the partiality he has for his own. This is just another way of saying that God unconditionally (impartially) loves (is partial toward) the elect.

IV. Double Predestination

R.C. Sproul

http://www.the-highway.com/DoublePredestination_Sproul.html

"A horrible decree" "Most ruthless statement. . . ." "A terrible theological theory. . . ." "An illegitimate inference of logic. . . ." These and other similar epithets have been used frequently to articulate displeasure and revulsion at the Reformed doctrine of double predestination. Particularly abhorrent to many is the notion that God would predestinate (in any sense) the doom of the reprobate.

The "Double" of Predestination

The goal of this essay is not to provide a comprehensive analysis, exposition, or defense of the doctrine of election or predestination. Rather, the essay is limited to a concern for the "double" aspect of predestination with particular reference to the question of the relationship of God's sovereignty to reprobation or preterition.

The use of the qualifying term "double" has been somewhat confusing in discussions concerning predestination. The term apparently means one thing within the circle of Reformed theology and quite another outside that circle and at a popular level of theological discourse. The term "double" has been set in contrast with a notion of "single" predestination. It has also been used as a synonym for a symmetrical view of predestination which sees election and reprobation being worked out in a parallel mode of divine operation. Both usages involve a serious distortion of the Reformed view of double predestination.

Viewing double predestination as a distinction from single predestination may be seen in the work of Emil Brunner. Brunner argues that it is impossible to deduce the doctrine of double predestination from the Bible. He says: The Bible does not contain the doctrine of double predestination, although in a few isolated passages it seems to come close to it. The Bible teaches that all salvation is based on the eternal Election of God in Jesus Christ, and that this eternal Election springs wholly and entirely from God's sovereign freedom. But wherever this happens, there is no mention of a decree of rejection. The Bible teaches that alongside of the elect there are those who are not elect, who are "reprobate," and indeed that the former are the minority and the latter the majority; but in these passages the point at issue is not eternal election but "separation" or "selection" in judgment. Thus the Bible teaches that there will be a double outcome of world history, salvation and ruin, Heaven and hell. But while salvation is explicitly taught as derived from the eternal election, the further conclusion is not drawn that destruction is also based upon a corresponding decree of doom.¹

Here Brunner argues passionately, though not coherently, for "single" predestination. There is a decree of election, but not of reprobation. Predestination has only one side—election. In this context, double predestination is "avoided" (or evaded) by the dialectical method. The dialectical method which sidesteps logical consistency has had a pervasive influence on contemporary discussions of double predestination. A growing antipathy to logic in theology is manifesting itself widely. Even G. C. Berkouwer seems allergic to the notion that logic should play a role in developing our understanding of election.

It is one thing to construct a theology of election (or any

other kind of theology) purely on the basis of rational speculation. It is quite another to utilize logic in seeking a coherent understanding of biblical revelation. Brunner seems to abhor both.

Let us examine the "logic" of Brunner's position. He maintains that (1) there is a divine decree of election that is eternal; (2) that divine decree is particular in scope ("There are those who are not elect"); (3) yet there is no decree of reprobation. Consider the implications. If God has predestined some but not all to election, does it not follow by what Luther called a "resistless logic" that some are not predestined to election? If, as Brunner maintains, *all* salvation is based upon the eternal election of God and not all men are elect from eternity, does that not mean that from eternity there are non-elect who most certainly will not be saved? Has not God chosen from eternity not to elect some people? If so, then we have an eternal choice of non-election which we call reprobation. The inference is clear and necessary, yet some shrink from drawing it.

I once heard the case for "single" predestination articulated by a prominent Lutheran theologian in the above manner. He admitted to me that the conclusion of reprobation was logically inescapable, but he refused to draw the inference, holding steadfastly to "single" predestination. Such a notion of predestination is manifest nonsense.

Theoretically there are four possible kinds of consistent single predestination. (1) Universal predestination to election (which Brunner does not hold); (2) universal predestination to reprobation (which nobody holds); (3) particular predestination to election with the option of salvation by self-initiative to those not elect (a qualified Arminianism) which Brunner emphatically rejects; and (4) particular predestination to reprobation with the option of

salvation by self-initiative to those not reprobate (which nobody holds). The only other kind of single predestination is the dialectical kind, which is absurd. (I once witnessed a closed discussion of theology between H. M. Kuitert of the Netherlands and Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary. Kuitert went into a lengthy discourse on theology, utilizing the method of the dialectic as he went. When he was finished, Dr. Van Til calmly replied: "Now tell me your theology *without the dialectic*, so I can understand it!" Kuitert was unable to do so. With Brunner's view of predestination the only way to avoid "double" predestination is with the use of "double-talk."

Thus, "single" predestination can be consistently maintained only within the framework of universalism or some sort of qualified Arminianism. If particular election is to be maintained and if the notion that all salvation is ultimately based upon that particular election is to be maintained, then we must speak of double predestination.

The much greater issue of "double" predestination is the issue over the relationship between election and reprobation with respect to the nature of the decrees and the nature of the divine outworking of the decrees. If "double" predestination means a symmetrical view of predestination, then we must reject the notion. But such a view of "double" predestination would be a caricature and a serious distortion of the Reformed doctrine of predestination.

The Double-Predestination Distortion

The distortion of double predestination looks like this: There is a symmetry that exists between election and reprobation. God WORKS in the same way and same manner with respect to the elect and to the reprobate. That is to say, from all eternity God decreed some to election and by divine initiative works faith in their hearts and

brings them actively to salvation. By the same token, from all eternity God decrees some to sin and damnation (*destinare ad peccatum*) and actively intervenes to work sin in their lives, bringing them to damnation by divine initiative. In the case of the elect, *regeneration* is the monergistic work of God. In the case of the reprobate, sin and *degeneration* are the monergistic work of God. Stated another way, we can establish a parallelism of foreordination and predestination by means of a *positive* symmetry. We can call this a *positive-positive* view of predestination. This is, God *positively* and *actively* intervenes in the lives of the elect to bring them to salvation. In the same way God *positively* and *actively* intervenes in the life of the reprobate to bring him to sin.

This distortion of positive-positive predestination clearly makes God the author of sin who punishes a person for doing what God monergistically and irresistibly coerces man to do. Such a view is indeed a monstrous assault on the integrity of God. This is not the Reformed view of predestination, but a gross and inexcusable caricature of the doctrine. Such a view may be identified with what is often loosely described as hyper-Calvinism and involves a radical form of supralapsarianism. Such a view of predestination has been virtually universally and monolithically rejected by Reformed thinkers.

The Reformed View of Predestination

In sharp contrast to the caricature of double predestination seen in the positive-positive schema is the classic position of Reformed theology on predestination. In this view predestination is double in that it involves both election and reprobation but is not symmetrical with respect to the mode of divine activity. A strict parallelism of operation is denied. Rather we view predestination in terms of a positive-negative relationship.

In the Reformed view God from all eternity decrees some to election and positively intervenes in their lives to work regeneration and faith by a monergistic work of grace. To the non-elect God withholds this monergistic work of grace, passing them by and leaving them to themselves. He does not monergistically work sin or unbelief in their lives. Even in the case of the "hardening" of the sinners' already recalcitrant hearts, God does not, as Luther stated, "work evil in us (for hardening is working evil) by creating fresh evil in us."² Luther continued:

When men hear us say that God works both good and evil in us, and that we are subject to God's working by mere passive necessity, they seem to imagine a man who is in himself good, and not evil, having an evil work wrought in him by God; for they do not sufficiently bear in mind how incessantly active God is in all His creatures, allowing none of them to keep holiday. He who would understand these matters, however, should think thus: God works evil in us (that is, by means of us) not through God's own fault, but by reason of our own defect. We being evil by nature, and God being good, when He impels us to act by His own acting upon us according to the nature of His omnipotence, good though He is in Himself, He cannot but do evil by our evil instrumentality; although, according to His wisdom, He makes good use of this evil for His own glory and for our salvation.²

Thus, the mode of operation in the lives of the elect is not parallel with that operation in the lives of the reprobate. God works regeneration monergistically but never sin. Sin falls within the category of providential concurrence. Another significant difference between the activity of God with respect to the elect and the reprobate concerns God's justice. The decree and fulfillment of election provide mercy for the elect while the efficacy of reprobation provides justice for the reprobate. God shows mercy sovereignly and

unconditionally to some, and gives justice to those passed over in election. That is to say, God grants the mercy of election to some and justice to others. No one is the victim of injustice. To fail to receive mercy is not to be treated unjustly. God is under no obligation to grant mercy to all—in fact He is under no obligation to grant mercy to any. He says, *"I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy"* (Rom. 9). The divine prerogative to grant mercy voluntarily cannot be faulted. If God is required by some cosmic law apart from Himself to be merciful to all men, then we would have to conclude that justice demands mercy. If that is so, then mercy is no longer voluntary, but required. If mercy is required, it is no longer mercy, but justice. What God does not do is sin by visiting injustice upon the reprobate. Only by considering election and reprobation as being asymmetrical in terms of a positive-negative schema can God be exonerated from injustice.

The Reformed Confessions

By a brief reconnaissance of Reformed confessions and by a brief roll-call of the theologians of the Reformed faith, we can readily see that double predestination has been consistently maintained along the lines of a positive-negative schema.

The Reformed Confession: 1536

Our salvation is from God, but from ourselves there is nothing but sin and damnation. (Art. 9)

French Confession of Faith: 1559

We believe that from this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calleth those whom he hath chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy; leaving the rest in

this same corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice. (Art. XII)

The Belgic Confession of Faith: 1561

We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, MERCIFUL AND JUST: MERCIFUL, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable council, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without respect to their works: JUST, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves. (Art. XVI)

The Second Helvetic Confession: 1566

Finally, as often as God in Scripture is said or seems to do something evil, it is not thereby said that man does not do evil, but that God permits it and does not prevent it, according to his just judgment, who could prevent it if he wished, or because he turns man's evil into good. . . . St. Augustine writes in his *Enchiridion*: "What happens contrary to his will occurs, in a wonderful and ineffable way, not apart from his will. For it would not happen if he did not allow it. And yet he does not allow it unwillingly but willingly." (Art. VIII)

The Westminster Confession of Faith: 1643

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected . . . are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His Sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice. (Chap. III — Art. VI and VII)

These examples selected from confessional formulas of the Reformation indicate the care with which the doctrine of double predestination has been treated. The asymmetrical expression of the "double" aspect has been clearly maintained. This is in keeping with the care exhibited consistently throughout the history of the Church. The same kind of careful delineation can be seen in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Zanchius, Turretini, Edwards, Hodge, Warfield, Bavinck, Berkouwer, *et al.*

Foreordination to Reprobation

In spite of the distinction of positive-negative with respect to the mode of God's activity toward the elect and the reprobate, we are left with the thorny question of God predestinating the reprobate. If God in any sense predestines or foreordains reprobation, doesn't this make the rejection of Christ by the reprobate absolutely certain and inevitable? And if the reprobate's reprobation is certain in light of predestination, doesn't this make God responsible for the sin of the reprobate? We must answer the first question in the affirmative, and the second in the negative.

If God foreordains anything, it is absolutely certain that what He foreordains will come to pass. The purpose of God can never be frustrated. Even God's foreknowledge or prescience makes future events certain with respect to time. That is to say, if God knows on Tuesday that I will drive to Pittsburgh on Friday, then there is no doubt that, come Friday, I will drive to Pittsburgh. Otherwise God's

knowledge would have been in error. Yet, there is a significant difference between God's knowing that I would drive to Pittsburgh and God's ordaining that I would do so. Theoretically He could know of a future act without ordaining it, but He could not ordain it without knowing what it is that He is ordaining. But in either case, the future event would be certain with respect to time and the knowledge of God.

Luther, in discussing the traitorous act of Judas, says: Have I not put on record in many books that I am talking about *necessity of immutability*? I know that the Father begets willingly, and that Judas betrayed Christ willingly. My point is that this act of the will in Judas was certainly and infallibly bound to take place, if God foreknew it. That is to say (if my meaning is not yet grasped), I distinguish two necessities: one I call *necessity of force* (*necessitatem violentam*), referring to action; the other I call *necessity of infallibility* (*necessitatem infallibilem*), referring to time. Let him who hears me understand that I am speaking of the latter, not the former; that is, I am not discussing whether Judas became a traitor willingly or unwillingly, but whether it was infallibly bound to come to pass that Judas should willingly betray Christ at a time predetermined by God.³ We see then, that what God knows in advance comes to pass by necessity or infallibly or necessity of immutability. But what about His foreordaining or predestinating what comes to pass? If God foreordains reprobation does this not obliterate the distinction between positive-negative and involve a *necessity of force*? If God foreordains reprobation does this not mean that God forces, compels, or coerces the reprobate to sin? Again the answer must be negative. If God, when He is decreeing reprobation, does so in consideration of the reprobate's being already fallen, then He does not coerce him to sin. To be reprobate is to be left in sin, not pushed or forced to sin. If the decree of

reprobation were made without a view to the fall, then the objection to double predestination would be valid and God would be properly charged with being the author of sin. But Reformed theologians have been careful to avoid such a blasphemous notion. Berkouwer states the boundaries of the discussion clearly:

On the one hand, we want to maintain the freedom of God in election, and on the other hand, we want to avoid any conclusion which would make God the cause of sin and unbelief.⁴

God's decree of reprobation, given in light of the fall, is a decree to justice, not injustice. In this view the biblical *a priori* that God is neither the cause nor the author of sin is safeguarded. Turretini says, "We have proved the object of predestination to be man considered as fallen, sin ought necessarily to be supposed as the condition in him who is reprobated, no less than him who is elected."⁵ He writes elsewhere:

The negative act includes two, both preterition, by which in the election of some as well to glory as to grace, he neglected and slighted others, which is evident from the event of election, and *negative desertion*, by which he left them in the corrupt mass and in their misery; which, however, is as to be understood, 1. That they are not excepted from the laws of common providence, but remain subject to them, nor are immediately deprived of all God's favor, but only of the saving and vivifying which is the fruit of election, 2. That preterition and desertion; not indeed from the nature of preterition and desertion itself, and the force of the denied grace itself, but from the nature of the corrupt free will, and the force of corruption in it; as he who does not cure the disease of a sick man, is not the cause per se of the disease, nor of the results flowing from it; so sins are *the consequents*, rather than the *effects* of reprobation, necessarily bringing about the futuration of the

event, but yet not infusing nor producing the wickedness.⁶ The importance of viewing the decree of reprobation in light of the fall is seen in the on-going discussions between Reformed theologians concerning infra- and supra-lapsarianism. Both viewpoints include the fall in God's decree. Both view the decree of preterition in terms of divine permission. The real issue between the positions concerns the *logical order* of the decrees. In the supralapsarian view the decree of election and reprobation is logically prior to the decree to permit the fall. In the infralapsarian view the decree to permit the fall is logically prior to the decree to election and reprobation.

Though this writer favors the infralapsarian view along the lines developed by Turretini, it is important to note that both views see election and reprobation in light of the fall and avoid the awful conclusion that God is the author of sin. Both views protect the boundaries Berkouwer mentions.

Only in a positive-positive schema of predestination does *double-predestination* leave us with a capricious deity whose sovereign decrees manifest a divine tyranny. Reformed theology has consistently eschewed such a hyper-supralapsarianism. Opponents of Calvinism, however, persistently caricature the straw man of hyper-supralapsarianism, doing violence to the Reformed faith and assaulting the dignity of God's sovereignty. We rejoice in the biblical clarity which reveals God's sovereignty in majestic terms. We rejoice in the knowledge of divine mercy and grace that go to such extremes to redeem the elect. We rejoice that God's glory and honor are manifested both in His mercy and in His justice. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

Chapter Notes

Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 326.

Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), p. 206.

Ibid, p. 220

G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 181.

Francois Turretini, *Theological institutes* (Typescript manuscript of *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 3 vols., 1679-1685), trans. George Musgrave Giger. D.D., p. 98.

Ibid, p. 97

V. "What is Hyper-Calvinism"

Sam Storms

<http://www.enjoyinggodbministries.com/article/what-is-hyper-calvinism>

Unfortunately, the label *Hyper-Calvinist* is used frequently in our day to insult or ridicule anyone who is more Calvinistic than oneself. As far as the Pelagians are concerned, semi-Pelagians are hyper-Calvinists. As far as semi-Pelagians are concerned, Arminians are hyper-Calvinists. As far as Arminians are concerned, four-point Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists. As far as four-point Calvinists are concerned, five-point Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists. Depending on where you find yourself on the theological spectrum, everyone (except the Pelagian) is a hyper-Calvinist. Oh yes, and as far as authentic hyper-Calvinists are concerned, everyone else is just confused! Perhaps we should use the label with more of a historical awareness of its origin and application. That which historically has separated biblical Calvinism from hyper-Calvinism is the denial by the latter of the external gospel call. Hyper-Calvinism, explains David Engelsma, is the denial "that God, in the preaching of the gospel, calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe. It is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching. It is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe. It manifests itself in the practice of the preacher's addressing the call of the gospel, 'repent and believe on Christ crucified,' only to those in his

audience who show signs of regeneration, and thereby of election, namely, some conviction of sin and some interest in salvation" (David Englesma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980], pp. 10-11).

This view was held by several Congregational and Baptist ministers in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is not to say, however, that no one embraces this view today. Included among these were Joseph Hussey (1660-1726), Lewis Wayman (d. 1764), and John Brine (1703-65). For additional historical information, see Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967). It has been customary to place the name of John Gill (b. 1697) at the head of this list as the paradigmatic hyper-Calvinist. This charge may need to be re-examined in the light of certain conclusions reached by Thomas J. Nettles in his book, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), pp. 73-107, 385-91.

According to hyper-Calvinism, *the extent of preaching is determined by the extent of regeneration*. Only those who show evidence of the latter are proper recipients or objects of the former. The principal difficulty with this is that Scripture sanctions no such restriction on the proclamation of Christ and the call to repent and believe. Jesus left his disciples with clear and unequivocal marching orders, to wit, that "repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

When the apostle Paul preached on Mars Hill he made no effort to distinguish between those he thought were or

were not elect, and therefore regenerate. Such knowledge belongs to God alone. Rather, Paul's gospel took the form of an indiscriminate and universal proclamation: "*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent*" (Acts 17:30).

I can only conclude that the external call of the gospel is a vital element in biblical Christianity. To deny it is to deviate from true Calvinism in a most serious way. However, for the sake of clarity (and even charity) perhaps we ought to drop the label *hyper-Calvinist* and simply refer to those who hold that view as *wrong*. Related to this issue is the question of regeneration and human responsibility. If regeneration is wholly a work of God and therefore the ground and cause of faith, what becomes of a man's individual responsibility to believe the gospel? John Murray's comments are most helpful in answering this question: "The causal priority of regeneration is no excuse for our unbelief and no alibi for sloth or indifference or despair. We may never plead our own depravity as any reason for not believing, nor our inability as any excuse for unbelief. To argue that we should not repent and believe until we are generated is to introduce confusion in the relation that regeneration sustains to our responsibility. We never know that we are regenerated until we repent and believe. The gospel of grace addresses itself to our responsibility in the demand for repentance and faith. Just as the unknown purposes of God are not the rule of our conduct nor the grounds upon which we act, so the inscrutable operations of God are not the rule or ground of our action, but his revealed will. The rule for us in every case is the revealed will presented to our consciousness. Our belief, our knowledge that we have been regenerated is never the ground upon which we exercise faith in Christ, even though the fact of regeneration is always the source

from which issues the exercise of faith and repentance" ("Regeneration," 188-89).

VI. "Free Will"

Jerry Nelson

We all know that we have the ability to make choices. We call that freedom or free will. But if we investigate the concept a little more carefully, we understand there are limitations to our free will. We usually define free will as the ability to choose with absolute indifference—under no compulsion of any kind (internal or external).

This would suggest that the human will is "inclined to neither good nor evil but it exists in a state of moral neutrality." (Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 131)

But that is contrary to what the Bible teaches. The Bible says we are not morally neutral, we are limited. We are influenced in our choices. The Bible says we are influenced by sin—we are captive to sin, we are dead in our sins.

In fact we are influenced by the strongest inclination at the moment. R.C. Sproul illustrates it this way: We want to lose weight and decide to diet. We do well until hunger becomes a stronger inclination than our desire to lose weight. We choose based on inclination. (ibid) We are free to make choices but our choices are limited.

Think of it this way: Does God have free will? Of course, he does. God is totally free. But even God is limited; he is morally unable to sin. He is free, but only for goodness. He has no desire or inclination to sin. And yet we would say he is totally free.

So it is with the unregenerate, the non-Christian. He is totally free to do what he is capable of. And the Bible says that he is incapable of doing anything righteous. And

judged by God's holy standard, the unsaved person is able only to sin. He is free but only within the bounds of his moral nature. Yes we have free will, freedom, but only within the range of options available to us. The non-Christian is not free to follow God, nor does he want to. It will take the supernatural intervention of God's Spirit through regeneration and effectual calling to give the non-Christian the ability to believe and follow Christ.

See Piper below from a sermon delivered on Nov 3, 2002
"When I entered seminary I believed in the freedom of my will, in the sense that it was ultimately self-determining. I had not learned this from the Bible; I absorbed it from the independent, self-sufficient, self-esteeming, self-exalting air that you and I breathe every day of our lives in America. The sovereignty of God meant that he can do anything with me that I give him permission to do. With this frame of mind I entered a class on Philippians with Daniel Fuller and class on the doctrine of salvation with James Morgan. In Philippians I was confronted with the intractable ground clause of chapter 2 verse 13: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure," which made God the will beneath my will and the worker beneath my work. The question was not whether I had a will; the question was why I willed what I willed. And the ultimate answer—not the only answer—was God.

In the class on salvation we dealt head on with the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace. Romans 9 was the watershed text and the one that changed my life forever. Romans 9:11-12 said, "Though they [Jacob and Esau] were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.'" And when Paul raised the question in verse 14,

"Is there injustice on God's part?" He says, no, and quotes Moses (in verse 15): "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." And when he raises the question in verse 19, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" He answers in verse 21, "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?"

Emotions run high when you feel your man-centered world crumbling around you. I met Dr. Morgan in the hall one day. After a few minutes of heated argument about the freedom of my will, I held a pen in front of his face and dropped it to the floor. Then I said, with not as much respect as a student ought to have, "I dropped it." Somehow that was supposed to prove that my choice to drop the pen was not governed by anything but my sovereign self.

But thanks be to God's mercy and patience, at the end of the semester I wrote in my blue book for the final exam, "Romans 9 is like a tiger going about devouring free-willers like me." That was the end of my love affair with human autonomy and the ultimate self-determination of my will. My worldview simply could not stand against the scriptures, especially Romans 9. And it was the beginning of a lifelong passion to see and savor the supremacy of God in absolutely everything."

VII. Does God's Choice of us nullify our choice of God and the necessity of our faithfulness to him?

From John Piper, December 8, 2002 sermon:
"Before we look at the rest of the text (Romans 9) let me make sure you are not jumping to unwarranted and

unbiblical conclusions. This teaching of Romans 9 does not contradict the truth that Jacob and Esau and you and I make choices in life and will be held responsible for those choices. If Jacob is saved he will be saved by faith. And if Esau is finally condemned, he will be condemned for his evil deeds and unbelief. Our final judgment will accord with the way we have responded to the gospel in this life. Which means that our final entry into heaven or to hell is not unconditional. To be finally saved we must have believed. And to be lost we must have sinned and not believed. No one will stand on the precipice of hell and be able to say, "I don't deserve this."

Just one text to show this: Romans 2:7-8, "To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." In other words, unconditional election does not contradict the necessity of the obedience of faith for final salvation, or the necessity of the disobedience of unbelief for damnation. What unconditional election does is knock from underneath salvation every ground of human boasting, and replaces it with the unshakable electing love and purpose of God (v. 11b).

The will to believe is saving, and the will not to believe is damning. We are held responsible for both. But underneath both is God's free and unconditional election of who will be saved and who will not. The elect believe. The non-elect do not believe. We are not sovereign, self-determining, autonomous beings. Only God is. How God renders certain the belief and unbelief of men without undermining our accountability I do not fully understand. If this stretches your mind to the breaking point, better that your minds be broken than that the scriptures be broken. And even better yet would be to let your mind and heart be enlarged rather

than broken, so that they can contain all that the Scriptures teach.

VIII. FREEDOM OF THE WILL

by R.C. Sproul

<http://www.doctrine.net/freedomofthewill.htm> from "One Holy Passion"

Does God's foreknowledge eliminate human freedom? Does the immutability of God and the omniscience of God mean the end of all human freedom? If free human actions were not known in advance by God, then when He learned of them, He would undergo a change in His knowledge; He would learn something new. Here both immutability and omniscience would be compromised. If human actions are known by God in advance, is it not certain that they will come to pass exactly as God has foreknown them? If God knows today what I will do tomorrow, then there is no doubt that when tomorrow comes, I will do what God already knows I will do. With respect to the mind of God my future behavior is absolutely certain. But, does that mean that my future actions are absolutely determined or coerced by God?

God can know the future in more than one way. He can know the future because He has determined the future, or He can know it as a spectator. Consider the following analogy. Suppose you are standing at the corner of the roof atop a five story building. As you look down to the street directly below, you see two runners on the sidewalk. One of them is approaching the edge of the building below you from south to north. The other runner is approaching the edge from west to east. They cannot see each other because their view is obscured by the building. From where you are standing you can see that the two runners are going to collide. You want to shout for them to stop, but you know it is too late. They are a split second away from crashing into each other. All you can do is stand helplessly

waiting for the collision.

The analogy suggests a human way of knowing the future without causing or forcing the future to happen. (Of course, like any analogy, it is far from perfect. It is possible that one of the runners will step into a manhole just before he reaches the corner, or one might be vaporized by a laser gun at the last second. Our knowledge of the future in this case is not really certain.) The point of the analogy though, is simply to illustrate that we can have knowledge of future events without causing those future events.

Some have approached the subject of God's foreknowledge from a different perspective. Their argument is based on God's relationship to space and time. The idea is this: God is eternal; He is above space and time. God sees all things from the vantage point of the present. There is no past or future with God. He sees all things as present. If God sees all things as present, then how He does it is completely beyond our comprehension. What God's ultimate relationship to time is remains a highly speculative matter. If what is future to me is present to God, then we know His knowledge of our future is perfect and that future is absolutely certain. God can make no errors in His observations.

It is one thing to say that God causes or coerces all things. It is quite another to say that God foreordains all things. If God forces or coerces all things, then He would have had to coerce the fall of man. If this were so, then God would be the cause, indeed the guilty perpetrator of sin. Not only would God be guilty of sin but His coercive actions would destroy the freedom of man.

To aid understanding we need to consider two models, two images of God, which lead to serious distortions of the

divine character. First is the image of God as a *puppeteer*. Here God manipulates the strings of marionettes. The feet and the arms of the puppets jerk and dance as God pulls the strings. Puppets have no will. They have no heart or soul. Their bodies are filled with sawdust. If God were like this, not even the Wizard of Oz could make us truly free. The second image of God is of the *spectator*. Here God sits on the sidelines of world history. He observes the game closely. He makes careful notes about the action and will turn in a scouting report. He is the ultimate armchair quarterback. He second-guesses the plays that are called. He roots for His favorite team. However, He is powerless to affect the outcome of the game in any way. The action is on the field, and He's not playing. This model of God destroys His sovereignty. The spectator God is a God who reigns but never rules. He is a God without authority. He observes history but is not Lord over history. Neither of these images does justice to the biblical view of God. They serve merely to alert us to the pitfalls that lurk in the shadows. They represent borders over which we must not go.

We must be careful not to so zealously maintain the sovereignty of God that we end up denying human freedom and responsibility. At the same time we must be careful not to so zealously preserve human freedom that we reduce God to an impotent spectator of world affairs. The correct approach is to insist that God foreordains all things and that all future events are under His sovereignty. The future is absolutely certain to God. He knows what will take place, and He foreordains what will take place. Foreordain does not mean coerce. It simply means that God wills that something take place. He may will future events through the free choices of creatures. This is the great mystery of providence—that God can will the means as well as the ends of future events. God can even will good through the

wicked choices of men.

The greatest event of human history was at the same time the most diabolical. No greater shame can be tacked to the human race than that a human being delivered up Jesus to be crucified. Judas betrayed Christ because Judas wanted to betray Christ. The Pharisees pressed for His death because the Pharisees wanted Jesus killed. Pilate succumbed to the howling crowd, not because God coerced him, but because Pilate was too weak to withstand the demands of the mob.

Yet the Bible declares that the Cross was no accident. The outcome of God's eternal plan of redemption did not hinge finally on the decision of Pontius Pilate. What if Pilate had released Jesus and crucified Barabbas instead? Such a thought is almost unthinkable. It would suggest that God was only a spectator in the plan of redemption, that He hoped for the best but had no control over the events. God did more than hope for the Cross. He willed the Cross. He sent His Son for that very purpose. Before Jesus was brought before Pilate, He pleaded with the Father for a different verdict. He begged that the cup might pass. Before Pilate ever raised his Roman scepter, the gavel had fallen in Gethsemane. The verdict was in. Jesus was delivered by the determinate forecounsel of God.

Augustine said that "In a certain sense God wills everything that comes to pass." He ordains things with a view to human freedom. He does no violence to our wills by His sovereign ordination. He is not a spectator and we are not puppets. His knowledge is certain, and our actions are free. How the providence of God works out these matters of concurrence is mysterious but not contradictory. There is nothing that is rationally incompatible about God's sovereignty and human freedom. Scripture clearly teaches

that God is sovereign and that man is responsible. Neither teaching is false. I am not proposing that freedom and sovereignty are not contradictions simply because the Bible teaches both. I am saying that the two concepts are not contradictory because they are not mutually exclusive concepts. Divine sovereignty and human autonomy would be mutually exclusive. If God is sovereign man could not be autonomous. If man is autonomous God could not be sovereign.

God is sovereign. Man is free. Man's freedom is limited, however, by God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty is not limited by man's freedom. This is simply to say that man is not God. God is free and man is free. But God is more free than a man. Man's freedom is always and everywhere subordinate to God's freedom. If we reverse these we pass from theism to atheism, from Christianity to humanism, from Christ to Anti-Christ.

IX. "The Myth of Free Will"

by Walter Chantry

<http://www.the-highway.com/Myth.html>

MOST PEOPLE say that they believe in "free will." Do you have any idea what that means? I believe that you will find a great deal of superstition on this subject. The will is saluted as the grand power of the human soul which is completely free to direct our lives. But from what is it free? And what is its power?

THE MYTH OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL FREEDOM

No one denies that man has a will—that is, a faculty of choosing what he wishes to say, do, and think. But have you ever reflected on the pitiful weakness of your will? Though you have the ability to make a decision, *you do not have the power to carry out your purpose.* Will may devise

a course of action, but will has no power to execute its intention. Joseph's brothers hated him. They sold him to be a slave. But God used their actions to make him a ruler over themselves. They chose their course of action to harm Joseph. But God in His power directed events for Joseph's good. He said, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen 50:20).

And how many of your decisions are miserably thwarted? You may choose to be a millionaire, but God's providence is likely to prevent it. You may decide to be a scholar, but bad health, an unstable home, or lack of finances may frustrate your will. You choose to go on a vacation, but an automobile accident may send you to the hospital instead. By saying that your will is free, we certainly do not mean that it determines the course of your life. You did not choose the sickness, sorrow, war, and poverty that have spoiled your happiness. You did not choose to have enemies. If man's will is so potent, why not choose to live on and on? But you must die. The major factors which shape your life cannot thank your will. You did not select your social status, color, intelligence, etc.

Any sober reflection on your experience will produce the conclusion, "*A man's heart deviseth his way: but THE LORD DIRECTETH his steps*" (Prov 16:9). Rather than extolling the human will, we ought to humbly praise the Lord whose purposes shape our lives. As Jeremiah confessed, "*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jer 10:23).

Yes, you may choose what you want, and you may plan what you will do; but your will is not free to accomplish *anything contrary to the purposes of God*. Neither have you any power to reach your goals but that which God allows you. The next time you are so enamored with your own

will, remember Jesus' parable about the rich man. The wealthy man said, *"This I WILL do: I WILL pull down all my barns, and build greater: and there I WILL bestow all my fruits and my goods. . . But God said unto him. Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee"* (Luke 12:18-21). He was free to plan but not free to accomplish; so it is with you.

THE MYTH OF ETHICAL FREEDOM

But freedom of the will is cited as an important factor in making MORAL decisions. Man's will is said to be free to choose between good and evil. But again we must ask, from what is it free? And what is man's will free to choose? The will of man is his *power to choose between alternatives*. Your will does decide your actions from a number of options. You have the faculty to direct your own thoughts, words, and deeds. Your decisions are not formed by an outside force, but from within yourself. No man is compelled to act contrary to his will, nor forced to say what he does not wish. Your will guides your actions. Yet this does not mean that the power to decide is free from all influence. You make choices based on your understanding, your feelings, your likes and dislikes, and your appetites. In other words, your will is not free from *yourself*! Your choices are determined by your own basic character. The will is not independent of your nature, but the *slave* of it. Your choices do not shape your character, but your character guides your choices. The will is quite partial to what you know, feel, love, and desire. *You always choose on the basis of your disposition. according to the condition of your heart.*

It is just for this reason that your will is NOT free to do good. Your will is the servant of your heart, and your heart is evil. *"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that EVERY imagination of the thoughts of*

his heart was ONLY evil CONTINUALLY" (Gen 6:5). *"There is NONE that doeth good, no, not one"* (Rom 3:12). No power forces man to sin contrary to his will, but the descendants of Adam are so evil that they always choose the evil.

Your decisions are molded by your understanding, and the Bible says of all men, *"And their foolish heart was darkened"* (Rom 1:21). Man can only be righteous when he desires to have fellowship with God, but, *"There is NONE that seeketh after God"* (Rom 3:11). Your appetites crave sin, and thus you cannot choose God. *To choose good is contrary to human nature.* If you chose to obey God, it would be the result of external compulsion. But you are free to choose and hence your choice is enslaved to your own evil nature.

If fresh meat and tossed salad were placed before a hungry lion, he would choose the flesh This is because his nature dictates the selection. It is just so with man. The will of man is free from outside force, but not from the bias of human nature. That bias is against God. Man's power of decision are free to choose whatever the human heart dictates; *therefore there is no possibility of a man choosing to please God without prior work of divine grace.*

What most people mean by free will is the idea that man is by nature neutral and therefore able to choose either good or evil. This simply is not true. The human will and the whole of human nature is bent to ONLY evil CONTINUALLY Jeremiah asked, *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil"* (Jer. 13:23). It is impossible. It is contrary to nature Thus do men desperately need the supernatural transformation of their natures, else their wills are enslaved to choosing evil.

In spite of the great praise that is given to "free will," we have seen that man's will is not free to choose a course contrary to God's purposes nor free to act contrary to his own moral nature. Your will does not determine the events of your life nor the circumstances of it. Ethical choices are not formed by a neutral mind but always dictated by your personality makeup.

THE MYTH OF SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Nevertheless many assert that the human will makes the ultimate choice of spiritual life or spiritual death. They say that here the will is altogether free to choose eternal life offered in Jesus Christ or to reject it. It is said that God will give a new heart to all who choose by the power of their own free will to receive Jesus Christ.

There can be no question that receiving Jesus Christ is an act of the human will. It is often called "faith." But how do men come to willingly receive the Lord? It is usually answered, "Out of the power of their own free will." But how can that be? Jesus is a PROPHET—to receive Him means to believe all that He says. In John 8:41-45 Jesus made it clear that you were born of Satan. This evil father hates the truth and imparted the same bias into your heart by nature. Hence said Jesus, "*Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.*" How does the human will jump out of man to choose to believe what the human mind hates and denies?

Further, to receive Jesus means to embrace him as a PRIEST—that is, to employ and depend on him to sue out peace with God by sacrifice and intercession. Paul tells us that the mind with which we were born is hostile to God (Rom 8:7). How can the will escape the influence of human nature which was born with a violent enmity to God? It would be insane for the will to choose peace when every

bone and drop of blood cries out for rebellion. Then too, receiving Jesus means to welcome Him as a KING. It means choosing to obey His every command, to confess His right of rule and to worship before His throne. But the human mind, emotions, and desires all cry out, "*We will not have this man to reign over us*" (Luke 19:14). If my whole being hates His truth, hates His rule and hates peace with God, how can my will be responsible for receiving Jesus? How can such a sinner have faith?

It is not man's will but God's GRACE that must be thanked for giving a sinner a new heart. Unless God changes the heart, creates a new spirit of peace, truthfulness, and submission. man will not choose to receive Jesus Christ and eternal life in Him. A new heart must be given before a man can believe, or else the human will is hopelessly enslaved to evil human nature even in the matter of conversion. Jesus said. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye MUST be born again" (John 3:7). Unless you are, you will never see His kingdom.

Read John 1:12 & 13. It says that those who believe on Jesus have been "born, not of the will of man, but of God." As your will is not responsible for your coming into this world, it is not responsible for the new birth. It is your Creator who must be thanked for your life, and if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation (II Cor. 5:17). Who ever chose to be created? When Lazarus rose from the dead, he then could choose to answer the call of Christ, but he could not choose to come to life. So Paul said in Ephesians 2:5, "*Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).*" Faith is the first act of a will made new by the Holy Spirit. Receiving Christ is an act of man just as breathing is, but God must first give life.

No wonder Martin Luther wrote a book entitled *The Bondage of the Will* which he considered one of his most important treatises. The will is in the chains of an evil human nature. You who extol the free will as a great force are clinging to a root of pride. Man, as fallen in sin, is utterly helpless and hopeless. The will of man offers no hope. It was the will choosing the forbidden fruit that brought us into misery. The powerful grace of God alone offers deliverance. Cast yourself upon God's mercy for salvation. Ask for the Spirit of Grace that He may create a new spirit within you.

Appendix H

(old appendix I)

1. **"Compatibalism"** by John Frame
2. **"Free Will"** by John W. Hendryx
3. **"Freedom of the Will"** by R.C. Sproul
4. **"Are There Two Wills in God?"** by John Piper
(*Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved.*)

1. John M. Frame on "Compatibalism"

(God's determining and Man's free will are compatible)

Compatibilism maintains that people are free to do what they desire to do. "Adam before the Fall acted according to his desires, which then were godly. After the fall, sinners act according to their desires, but those desires are. The redeemed are enabled by God's grace, and, to desire things which are excellent; and they are free to act according to those desires. The glorified saints in will have only pure desires, and they will act in with those..." "If we have difficulty here, it may be because we fail to the nature of the sinner's bondage. It is a moral and spiritual bondage, not a metaphysical, physical or psychological. If, as in my robot-machine illustration, someone is forced to do something he doesn't want to do, then of course his bondage removes his responsibility for the act. With his "deed," the person would have a valid excuse: "I couldn't help it; I was physically forced to do it." But imagine

someone coming before a human judge and saying, to excuse of a crime, "I couldn't help it, your honor; I was forced to do it by my nature. Since birth I've just been a rotten guy!" there is something ironic about appealing to depravity to depraved acts! If our defendant really is a "rotten guy," , far from being an excuse, which is all the more reason to him up! My point, then, is that although physical (and some other kinds of) bondage can furnish valid excuses for otherwise actions, moral bondage is *not* such an excuse. I can't anyone disputing that proposition once they understand."

John M. Frame

http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1993FreeWill.htm

One of the best statements on compatibilism is from John Calvin:

"...we allow that man has choice and that it is self-determined, so that if he does anything evil, it should be imputed to him and to his own voluntary choosing. We do away with coercion and force, because this contradicts the nature of the will and cannot coexist with it. We deny that choice is free, because through man's innate wickedness it is of necessity driven to what is evil and cannot seek anything but evil. And from this it is possible to deduce what a great difference there is between necessity and coercion. For we do not say that man is dragged unwillingly into sinning, but that because his will is corrupt he is held captive under the yoke of sin and therefore of necessity will in an evil way. For where there is bondage, there is necessity. But it makes a great difference whether the bondage is voluntary or coerced. We locate the necessity to sin precisely in corruption of the will, from which follows that it is self-determined.

(John Calvin from *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, pg. 69-70)

2. John W. Hendryx on "Free Will"

"Many persons naturally assume that man has a free will. But what do they mean by this? You may want to ask them to define terms by asking, "Free from what?" "Free from sin?", "Free from God's decree?" No, neither. So what do people actually mean when they claim man has a free will? Perhaps many persons mean to say that man is free from external coercion. In this we all can agree, but just because someone is free from coercion does not mean his will is free. There are other ways in which man's will is not free. If the natural man make choices BY NECESSITY then he also lacks a kind of freedom. We might want to consider whether the Bible uses the expression 'freedom' to describe any fallen man. And the answer is no, not UNTIL Christ sets us free (Rom 6). Jesus says that prior to grace, persons are 'slaves to sin'. And, last time I looked, a slave is not free. If man is in bondage to a corruption of nature, as the Scripture attests, then he is not, in any sense, free as the Bible defines it. That is, until the grace of God in Christ sets him free. It would be correct to say man HAS A WILL and that his choices are VOLUNTARY (not coerced) but this does not make the choices free. Fallen man chooses sin of NECESSITY due to a corruption of nature, and this is just as much a form of bondage of the will from which we need to be set free by Christ, and a more properly biblical way of expression. Just because we make these choices, of necessity, does not alleviate our responsibility. If we borrow \$5 million and squander it in a week of wild living in Las Vegas [like our condition of debt after the fall], our inability to repay the debt does not alleviate us of any responsibility to do so (see Rom 3:20). So I contend that whenever speaking about the concept of "free will," because of the confusion surrounding it, we should only define freedom as the Bible does: that man's will is not free, but rather is in bondage to sin. Clearly the Bible affirms that apart from a supernatural and merciful work of the Holy Spirit to change

our naturally hostile disposition to God, no person would ever receive Christ (John 6:65). And Just as water does not rise above its source, so unspiritual men do not think or act spiritually (1 Cor 2:14).

http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Free-Will/Essays/

3. Freedom of the Will by R.C. Sproul

"Does God's foreknowledge eliminate human freedom?
Does the immutability of God and the omniscience of God mean the end of all human freedom?

If free human actions were not known in advance by God, then when He learned of them, He would undergo a change in His knowledge; He would learn something new. Here both immutability and omniscience would be compromised.

If human actions are known by God in advance, is it not certain that they will come to pass exactly as God has foreknown them? If God knows today what I will do tomorrow, then there is no doubt that when tomorrow comes, I will do what God already knows I will do. With respect to the mind of God my future behavior is absolutely certain. But, does that mean that my future actions are absolutely determined or coerced by God? God can know the future in more than one way. He can know the future because He has determined the future, or He can know it as a spectator. Consider the following analogy. Suppose you are standing at the corner of the roof atop a five story building. As you look down to the street directly below, you see two runners on the sidewalk. One of them is approaching the edge of the building below you from south to north. The other runner is approaching the edge from west to east. They cannot see each other because their view is obscured by the building. From where you are standing you can see that the two runners are going to

collide. You want to shout for them to stop, but you know it is too late. They are a split second away from crashing into each other. All you can do is stand helplessly waiting for the collision. The analogy suggests a human way of knowing the future without causing or forcing the future to happen. (Of course, like any analogy, it is far from perfect. It is possible that one of the runners will step into a manhole just before he reaches the corner, or one might be vaporized by a laser gun at the last second. Our knowledge of the future in this case is not really certain.) The point of the analogy though, is simply to illustrate that we can have knowledge of future events without causing those future events.

"Some have approached the subject of God's foreknowledge from a different perspective. Their argument is based on God's relationship to space and time. The idea is this: God is eternal; He is above space and time. God sees all things from the vantage point of the present. There is no past or future with God. He sees all things as present. If God sees all things as present, then how He does it is completely beyond our comprehension. What God's ultimate relationship to time is remains a highly speculative matter. If what is future to me is present to God, then we know His knowledge of our future is perfect and that future is absolutely certain. God can make no errors in His observations.

"It is one thing to say that God causes or coerces all things. It is quite another to say that God foreordains all things. If God forces or coerces all things, then He would have had to coerce the fall of man. If this were so, then God would be the cause, indeed the guilty perpetrator of sin. Not only would God be guilty of sin but His coercive actions would destroy the freedom of man.

"To aid understanding we need to consider two models, two images of God, which lead to serious distortions of the divine character. First is the image of God as a *puppeteer*. Here God manipulates the strings of marionettes. The feet and the arms of the puppets jerk and dance as God pulls the strings. Puppets have no will. They have no heart or soul. Their bodies are filled with sawdust. If God were like this, not even the Wizard of Oz could make us truly free. "The second image of God is of the *spectator*. Here God sits on the sidelines of world history. He observes the game closely. He makes careful notes about the action and will turn in a scouting report. He is the ultimate armchair quarterback. He second-guesses the plays that are called. He roots for His favorite team. However, He is powerless to affect the outcome of the game in any way. The action is on the field, and He's not playing. This model of God destroys His sovereignty. The spectator God is a God who reigns but never rules. He is a God without authority. He observes history but is not Lord over history. Neither of these images does justice to the biblical view of God. They serve merely to alert us to the pitfalls that lurk in the shadows. They represent borders over which we must not go.

"We must be careful not to so zealously maintain the sovereignty of God that we end up denying human freedom and responsibility. At the same time we must be careful not to so zealously preserve human freedom that we reduce God to an impotent spectator of world affairs. The correct approach is to insist that God foreordains all things and that all future events are under His sovereignty. The future is absolutely certain to God. He knows what will take place, and He foreordains what will take place.

"Foreordain does not mean coerce. It simply means that God wills that something take place. He may will future

events through the free choices of creatures. This is the great mystery of providence—that God can will the means as well as the ends of future events. God can even will good through the wicked choices of men.

“The greatest event of human history was at the same time the most diabolical. No greater shame can be tacked to the human race than that a human being delivered up Jesus to be crucified. Judas betrayed Christ because Judas wanted to betray Christ. The Pharisees pressed for His death because the Pharisees wanted Jesus killed. Pilate succumbed to the howling crowd, not because God coerced him, but because Pilate was too weak to withstand the demands of the mob.

“Yet the Bible declares that the Cross was no accident. The outcome of God's eternal plan of redemption did not hinge finally on the decision of Pontius Pilate. What if Pilate had released Jesus and crucified Barabbas instead? Such a thought is almost unthinkable. It would suggest that God was only a spectator in the plan of redemption, that He hoped for the best but had no control over the events.

“God did more than hope for the Cross. He willed the Cross. He sent His Son for that very purpose. Before Jesus was brought before Pilate, He pleaded with the Father for a different verdict. He begged that the cup might pass. Before Pilate ever raised his Roman scepter, the gavel had fallen in Gethsemane. The verdict was in. Jesus was delivered by the determinate forecounsel of God.

“Augustine said that “In a certain sense God wills everything that comes to pass.” He ordains things with a view to human freedom. He does no violence to our wills by His sovereign ordination. He is not a spectator and we are not puppets. His knowledge is certain, and our actions are free.

"How the providence of God works out these matters of concurrence is mysterious but not contradictory. There is nothing that is rationally incompatible about God's sovereignty and human freedom. Scripture clearly teaches that God is sovereign and that man is responsible. Neither teaching is false. I am not proposing that freedom and sovereignty are not contradictions simply because the Bible teaches both. I am saying that the two concepts are not contradictory because they are not mutually exclusive concepts. Divine sovereignty and human autonomy would be mutually exclusive. If God is sovereign man could not be autonomous. If man is autonomous God could not be sovereign.

"God is sovereign. Man is free. Man's freedom is limited, however, by God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty is not limited by man's freedom. This is simply to say that man is not God. God is free and man is free. But God is more free than a man. Man's freedom is always and everywhere subordinate to God's freedom. If we reverse these we pass from theism to atheism, from Christianity to humanism, from Christ to Anti-Christ." (Sproul from *One Holy Passion*)

4. Are There Two Wills in God?

Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved

Download:

By John Piper January 1, 1995

My aim here is to show from Scripture that the simultaneous existence of God's will for "all persons to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4) and his will to elect unconditionally those who will actually be saved is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion. A corresponding aim is to show that unconditional election therefore does not contradict biblical expressions of God's compassion for all people, and does not nullify sincere offers of salvation to

everyone who is lost among all the peoples of the world. 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, and Ezekiel 18:23 might be called the Arminian pillar texts concerning the universal saving will of God. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 Paul says that the reason we should pray for kings and all in high positions is that this may bring about a quiet and peaceable life which "is good, and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wills (*thele*) all persons to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." In 2 Peter 3:8-9 the apostle says that the delay of the second coming of Christ is owing to the fact that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. *"The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not willing (boulomenos) that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* And in Ezekiel 18:23 and 32 the Lord speaks about his heart for the perishing: "Do I indeed delight in the death of the wicked, says the Lord GOD, and not rather in his turning from his way that he might live? . . . I do not delight (*ehephaz*) in the death of the one who dies, says the Lord; so turn and live" (cf. 33:11).

It is possible that careful exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:4 would lead us to believe that "God's willing all persons to be saved" does not refer to every individual person in the world, but rather to all *sorts* of persons, since the "all persons" in verse 1 may well mean groups like "kings and all in high positions" (v. 2). It is also possible that the "you" in 2 Peter 3:9 ("the Lord is longsuffering toward you, not wishing any to perish") refers not to every person in the world but to "you" professing Christians among whom, as Adolf Schlatter says, "are people who only through repentance can attain to the grace of God and to the promised inheritance."

Nevertheless the case for this limitation on God's universal saving will has never been convincing to Arminians and likely will not become convincing, especially since Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 33:11 are even less tolerant of restriction. Therefore as a hearty believer in unconditional, individual election I rejoice to affirm that God does not delight in the perishing of the impenitent, and that he has compassion on all people. My aim is to show that this is not double talk. The assignment in this chapter is not to defend the doctrine that God chooses unconditionally whom he will save. I have tried to do that elsewhere and others do it in this book. Nevertheless I will try to make a credible case that while the Arminian pillar texts may indeed be pillars for universal love, nevertheless they are not weapons against unconditional election. If I succeed then there will be an indirect confirmation for the thesis of this book. In fact I think Arminians have erred in trying to take pillars of universal love and make them into weapons against electing grace.

Affirming the will of God to save *all*, while also affirming the unconditional election of *some*, implies that there are at least "two wills" in God, or two ways of willing. It implies that God decrees one state of affairs while also willing and teaching that a different state of affairs should come to pass. This distinction in the way God wills has been expressed in various ways throughout the centuries. It is not a new contrivance. For example, theologians have spoken of sovereign will and moral will, efficient will and permissive will, secret will and revealed will, will of decree and will of command, decretive will and preceptive will, *voluntas signi* (will of sign) and *voluntas beneplaciti* (will of good pleasure), etc.

Clark Pinnoch refers disapprovingly to "the exceedingly paradoxical notion of two divine wills regarding salvation."

In Pinnock's more recent volume (*A Case for Arminianism*) Randall Basinger argues that, "if God has decreed all events, then it must be that things *cannot* and *should* not be any different from what they are." In other words he rejects the notion that God could decree that a thing be one way and yet teach that we should act to make it another way. He says that it is too hard "to coherently conceive of a God in which this distinction really exists" In the same volume Fritz Guy argues that the revelation of God in Christ has brought about a "paradigm shift" in the way we should think about the love of God—namely as "more fundamental than, and prior to, justice and power." This shift, he says, makes it possible to think about the "will of God" as "delighting more than deciding." God's will is not his sovereign purpose which he infallibly establishes, but rather "the desire of the lover for the beloved." The will of God is his general intention and longing, not his effective purpose. Dr. Guy goes so far as to say, "Apart from a predestinarian presupposition, it becomes apparent that God's 'will' is always (sic) to be understood in terms of intention and desire [as opposed to efficacious, sovereign purpose]."

These criticisms are not new. Jonathan Edwards wrote 250 years ago, "The Arminians ridicule the distinction between the secret and revealed will of God, or, more properly expressed, the distinction between the decree and the law of God; because we say he may decree one thing, and command another. And so, they argue, we hold a contrariety in God, as if one will of his contradicted another."

But in spite of these criticisms the distinction stands, not because of a logical or theological deduction, but because it is inescapable in the Scriptures. The most careful exegete writing in Pinnock's *Case for Arminianism* concedes the

existence of two wills in God. I. Howard Marshall applies his exegetical gift to the Pastoral Epistles. Concerning 1 Timothy 2:4 he says, "To avoid all misconceptions it should be made clear at the outset that the fact that God wishes or wills that all people should be saved does not necessarily imply that all will respond to the gospel and be saved. We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and both of these things can be spoken of as God's will. The question at issue is not whether all will be saved but whether God has made provision in Christ for the salvation of all, provided that they believe, and without limiting the potential scope of the death of Christ merely to those whom God knows will believe.

In this chapter I would now like to undergird Marshall's point that "we must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and [that] both of these things can be spoken of as God's will." Perhaps the most effective way to do this is to begin by drawing attention to the way Scripture portrays God willing something in one sense which he disapproves in another sense. Then, after seeing some of the biblical evidence, we can step back and ponder how to understand this in relation to God's saving purposes.

Illustrations of Two Wills in God

The Death of Christ

The most compelling example of God's willing for sin to come to pass while at the same time disapproving the sin is his willing the death of his perfect, divine Son. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas was a morally evil act inspired immediately by Satan (Luke 22:3). Yet in Acts 2:23 Luke says, *"This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan (boule) and foreknowledge of God."* The betrayal was sin, and it involved the instrumentality of

Satan; but it was part of God's ordained plan. That is, there is a sense in which God willed the delivering up of his Son, even though the act was sin.

Moreover Herod's contempt for Jesus (Luke 23:11) and Pilate's spineless expediency (Luke 23:24) and the Jews' "*Crucify! Crucify him!*" (Luke 23:21) and the Gentile soldiers' mockery (Luke 23:36) were also sinful attitudes and deeds. Yet in Acts 4:27-28 Luke expresses his understanding of the sovereignty of God in these acts by recording the prayer of the Jerusalem saints:

Truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever thy hand and thy plan (boule) had predestined to take place.

Herod, Pilate, the soldiers and Jewish crowds lifted their hand to rebel against the Most High only to find that their rebellion was unwitting (sinful) service in the inscrutable designs of God. The appalling death of Christ was the will and work of God the Father. Isaiah wrote, "We esteemed him stricken, *smitten by God...It was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief*" (Isaiah 53:4,10). God's will was very much engaged in the events that brought his Son to death on the cross. God considered it "*fitting to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings*" (Hebrews 2:10). Yet, as Jonathan Edwards points out, Christ's suffering "could not come to pass but by sin. For contempt and disgrace was one thing he was to suffer."

It goes almost without saying that God wills obedience to his moral law, and that he wills this in a way that can be rejected by many. This is evident from numerous texts: "*Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter into*

the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will (thelema) of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). *"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother"* (Matthew 12:50). *"The one who does the will of God abides forever"* (1 John 2:17). The "will of God" in these texts is the revealed, moral instruction of the Old and New Testaments, which proscribes sin. Therefore we know it was *not* the "will of God" that Judas and Pilate and Herod and the Gentile soldiers and the Jewish crowds disobey the moral law of God by sinning in delivering Jesus up to be crucified. But we also know that it *was* the will of God that this come to pass. Therefore we know that God in some sense wills what he does not will in another sense. I. Howard Marshall's statement is confirmed by the death of Jesus: "We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen."

The War Against the Lamb

There are two reasons that we turn next to Revelation 17:16-17. One is that the war against the Son of God, which reached its sinful climax at the cross comes to final consummation in a way that confirms what we have seen about the will of God. The other reason is that this text reveals John's understanding of God's active involvement in fulfilling prophecies whose fulfillment involves sinning. John sees a vision of some final events of history:

And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled (Revelation 17:16-17). Without going into all the details of this passage, the relevant matter is clear. The beast "comes out of the abyss" (Revelation 17:8). He is the personification of evil

and rebellion against God. The ten horns are ten kings (v. 12) and they “wage war against the Lamb” (v. 14).

Waging war against the Lamb is sin and sin is contrary to the will of God. Nevertheless the angel says (literally), “God gave into their [the ten kings'] hearts *to do his will*, and to perform one will, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (v. 17). Therefore God willed (in one sense) to influence the hearts of the ten kings so that they would do what is against his will (in another sense).

Moreover God did this in fulfillment of prophetic words. The ten kings will collaborate with the beast “until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (v. 17). This implies something crucial about John's understanding of the fulfillment of “the prophecies leading up to the overthrow of Antichrist.” It implies that (at least in John's view) God's prophecies are not mere predictions which God knows will happen, but rather are divine intentions which he makes sure will happen. We know this because verse 17 says that *God is acting* to see to it that the ten kings make league with the beast “until the words of God shall be fulfilled.” John is exulting not in the marvelous foreknowledge of God to predict a bad event. Rather he is exulting in the marvelous sovereignty of God to make sure that the bad event comes about. Fulfilled prophecy, in John's mind, is not only prediction, but also promised performance.

This is important because John tells us in his Gospel that there are Old Testament prophecies of events surrounding the death of Christ that involve sin. This means that God intends to bring about events that involve things he forbids. These events include Judas' betrayal of Jesus (John 13:18; Psalm 41:9), the hatred Jesus received from his enemies (John 15:25; Psalm 69:4; 35:19), the casting of lots for Jesus' clothing (John 19:24; Psalm 22:18), and the piercing

of Jesus' side (John 19:36-37; Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20; Zechariah 12:10). John expresses his theology of God's sovereignty with the words, "*These things happened in order that the scripture be fulfilled.*" In other words the events were not a coincidence that God merely foresaw, but a plan which God *purposed* to bring about. Thus again we find the words of I. Howard Marshall confirmed: "We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen."

The Hardening Work of God

Another evidence to demonstrate God's willing a state of affairs in one sense that he disapproves in another sense is the testimony of Scripture that God wills to harden some men's hearts so that they become obstinate in sinful behavior which God disapproves.

The most well known example is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. In Exodus 8:1 the Lord says to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me."' "In other words God's command, that is, his *will*, is that Pharaoh let the Israelites go. Nevertheless from the start he also willed that Pharaoh *not* let the Israelites go. In Exodus 4:21 God says to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in your hand; but *I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*" At one point Pharaoh himself acknowledges that his unwillingness to let the people go is sin: "*Now therefore forgive, I pray, my sin*" (Exodus 10:17). Thus what we see is that God commands that Pharaoh do a thing which God himself wills not to allow. The good thing that God commands he prevents. And the thing he brings about involves sin.

Some have tried to avoid this implication by pointing out that during the first five plagues the text does not say explicitly that God hardened Pharaoh's heart but that it "was hardened" (Exodus 7:22; 8:19; 9:7) or that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15,32), and that only in the sixth plague does it say explicitly "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart" (9:12; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:4). For example R.T. Forster and V.P. Marston say that only from the sixth plague on God gave Pharaoh "supernatural strength to continue with his evil path of rebellion" But this observation does not succeed in avoiding the evidence of two wills in God. Even if Forster and Marston were right that God was not willing for Pharaoh's heart to be hardened during the first five plagues, they concede that for the last five plagues God does will this, at least in the sense of strengthening Pharaoh to continue in the path of rebellion. Thus there is a sense in which God does will that Pharaoh go on refusing to let the people go, and there is a sense in which he does will that Pharaoh release the people. For he commands, "Let my people go." This illustrates why theologians talk about the "will of command" ("Let my people go!") and the "will of decree" ("God hardened Pharaoh's heart").

The Exodus is not a unique instance of God's acting in this way. When the people of Israel reached the land of Sihon king of Heshbon, Moses sent messengers "with words of peace saying, Let me pass through your land; I will travel only on the highway" (Deuteronomy 2:26-27). Even though this request should have lead Sihon to treat the people of God with respect, as God willed for his people to be blessed rather than attacked, nevertheless *"Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him; for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as at this day"* (Deuteronomy 2:30). In other words it was God's will

(in one sense) that Sihon act in a way that was contrary to God's will (in another sense) that Israel be blessed and not cursed.

Similarly the conquest of the cities of Canaan is owing to God's willing that the kings of the land resist Joshua rather than make peace with him. *"Joshua waged war a long time with all these kings. There was not a city which made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites living in Gibeon; they took them all in battle. For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses"* (Joshua 11:19-20). In view of this it is difficult to imagine what Fritz Guy means when he says that the "will of God" is always to be thought of in terms of loving desire and intention rather than in terms of God's effective purpose of judgment. What seems more plain is that when the time has come for judgment God wills that the guilty do things that are against his revealed will, like cursing Israel rather than blessing her.

The hardening work of God was not limited to non-Israelites. In fact it plays a central role in the life of Israel in this period of history. In Romans 11:7-9 Paul speaks of Israel's failure to obtain the righteousness and salvation it desired: "Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, *"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day."* Even though it is the command of God that his people see and hear and respond in faith (Isaiah 42:18), nevertheless God also has his reasons for sending a spirit of stupor at times so that some will not obey his command. Jesus expressed this same truth when he explained that one of the purposes of speaking in parables to the Jews of his day was to bring

about this judicial blinding or stupor. In Mark 4:11-12 he said to his disciples, *"To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven."* Here again God wills that a condition prevail which he regards as blameworthy. His will is that they turn and be forgiven (Mark 1:15), but he acts in a way to restrict the fulfillment of that will.

Paul pictures this divine hardening as part of an overarching plan that will involve salvation for Jew and Gentile. In Romans 11:25-26 he says to his Gentile readers, *"Lest you be wise in your own conceits, 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."* The fact that the hardening has an appointed end—"until the full number of the Gentiles comes in"—shows that it is part of God's plan rather than a merely contingent event outside God's purpose. Nevertheless Paul expresses not only his but also God's heart when he says in Romans 10:1, *"My heart's desire and prayer to God for them [Israel] is their salvation."* God holds out his hands to a rebellious people (Romans 10:21), but ordains a hardening that consigns them for a time to disobedience.

This is the point of Romans 11:31-32. Paul speaks to his Gentile readers again about the disobedience of Israel in rejecting their Messiah: "So they [Israel] have now been disobedient *in order that* by the mercy shown to you [Gentiles] they also may receive mercy." When Paul says that Israel was disobedient "in order that" Gentiles might get the benefits of the gospel, whose purpose does he have in mind? It can only be God's. For Israel did not conceive of their own disobedience as a way of blessing the Gentiles or

winning mercy for themselves in such a round about fashion. The point of Romans 11:31 therefore is that God's hardening of Israel is not an end in itself, but is part of a saving purpose that will embrace all the nations. But in the short run we have to say that he wills a condition (hardness of heart) which he commands people to strive against "*Do not harden your heart*" (Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7).

God's Right to Restrain Evil and His Will Not To

Another line of Biblical evidence that God sometimes wills to bring about what he disapproves is his choosing to use or not to use his right to restrain evil in the human heart. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hands of the Lord; he turns it wherever he wishes." An illustration of this divine right over the king's heart is given in Genesis 20. Abraham is sojourning in Gerar and says to king Abimelech that Sarah is his sister. So Abimelech takes her as part of his harem. But God is displeased and warns him in a dream that she is married to Abraham. Abimelech protests to God that he had taken her in his integrity. And God says (in verse 6), "*Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her.*"

What is apparent here is that God has the right and the power to restrain the sins of secular rulers. When he does, it is his will to do it. And when he does not, it is his will not to. Which is to say that sometimes God wills that their sins be restrained and sometimes he wills that they increase more than if he restrained them.

It is not an unjust infringement on human agency that the Creator has the right and power to restrain the evil actions of his creatures. Psalm 33:10-11 says, "*The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nought; he frustrates the*

plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

Sometimes God frustrates the will of rulers by making their plans fail. Sometimes he does so by influencing their hearts the way he did Abimelech, without them even knowing it. But there are times when God does not use this right because he intends for human evil to run its course. For example, God meant to put the sons of Eli to death. Therefore he willed that they not listen to their father's counsel: "Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. And he said to them, '*Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord's people circulating. If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?*' But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death" (1 Samuel 2:22-25).

Why would the sons of Eli not give heed to their father's good counsel? The answer of the text is "*because* the Lord desired to put them to death." This only makes sense if the Lord had the right and the power to restrain their disobedience—a right and power which he willed not to use. Thus we must say that in one sense God willed that the sons of Eli go on doing what he commanded them not to do: dishonoring their father and committing sexual immorality.

Moreover the word for "desired" in the clause, "the Lord *desired* to put them to death," is the same Hebrew word (*haphetz*) used in Ezekiel 18:23,32 and 33:11 where God asserts that he does not *desire* the death of the wicked.

God desired to put the sons of Eli to death, but he does not desire the death of the wicked. This is a strong warning to us not to take one assertion, like Ezekiel 18:23 and assume we know the precise meaning without letting other scripture like 1 Samuel 2:25 have a say. The upshot of putting the two together is that in one sense God may desire the death of the wicked and in another sense he may not.

Another illustration of God's choosing not to use his right to restrain evil is found in Romans 1:24-28. Three times Paul says that God hands people over (*paredoken*) to sink further into corruption. Verse 24: *"God handed them over to the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves."* Verse 26: *"God handed them over to dishonorable passions."* Verse 28: *"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God handed them over to a base mind and to improper conduct."* God has the right and the power to restrain this evil the way he did for Abimelech. But he did not will to do that. Rather his will in this case was to punish, and part of God's punishment on evil is sometimes willing that evil increase. But this means that God chooses for behavior to come about which he commands not to happen. The fact that God's willing is punitive does not change that. And the fact that it is *justifiably* punitive is one of the points of this chapter. There are other examples we could give, but we pass on to a different line of evidence.

Does God Delight in the Punishment of the Wicked?

We just saw that God "desired" to put the sons of Eli to death, and that the word for desire is the same one used in Ezekiel 18:23 when God says he does not "delight" in the death of the wicked. Another illustration of this complex desiring is found in Deuteronomy 28:63. Moses is warning of coming judgment on unrepentant Israel. What he says is

strikingly different (not contradictory, I will argue) from Ezekiel 18:23. *"And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you."*

Here an even stronger word for joy is used (*yasis*) when it says that God will *"take delight over you to cause you to perish and to destroy you."* We are faced with the inescapable biblical fact that in some sense God does not delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18), and in some sense he does (Deuteronomy 28:63; 2 Samuel 2:25).

How Extensive Is the Sovereign Will of God?

Behind this complex relationship of two wills in God is the foundational biblical premise that God is indeed sovereign in a way that makes him ruler of all actions. R.T. Forster and V.P. Marston try to overcome the tension between God's will of decree and God's will of command by asserting that there is no such thing as God's sovereign will of decree: "Nothing in Scripture suggests that there is some kind of will or plan of God which is inviolable." This is a remarkable claim. Without claiming to be exhaustive it will be fair to touch on some scriptures briefly that do indeed "suggest that there is some kind of will or plan of God which is inviolable."

There are passages that ascribe to God the final control over all calamities and disasters wrought by nature or by man. Amos 3:6, *"Does evil befall a city, unless the LORD has done it?"* Isaiah 45:7, *"I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create woe, I am the LORD, who do all these things."* Lamentations 3:37-38, *"Who has commanded and it came to pass, unless the Lord has ordained it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come?"*

Noteworthy in these texts is that the calamities in view involve human hostilities and cruelties that God would disapprove of even as he wills that they be.

The apostle Peter wrote concerning God's involvement in the sufferings of his people at the hands of their antagonists. In his first letter he spoke of the "will of God" in two senses. It was something to be pursued and lived up to on the one hand. *"Such is the will of God, that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men"* (1 Peter 2:15). "Live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men but for *the will of God*" (4:2). On the other hand the will of God was not his moral instruction, but the state of affairs that he sovereignly brought about. *"For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong"* (3:17). *"Let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator"* (4:19). And in this context, the suffering which Peter has in mind is the suffering which comes from hostile people and therefore cannot come without sin.

In fact the New Testament saints seemed to live in the calm light of an overarching sovereignty of God concerning all the details of their lives and ministry. Paul expressed himself like this with regard to his travel plans. On taking leave of the saints in Ephesus he said, *"I will return to you if God wills,"* (Acts 18:21). To the Corinthians he wrote, *"I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills"* (1 Corinthians 4:19). And again, *"I do not want to see you now just in passing; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits"* (1 Corinthians 16:7).

The writer to the Hebrews says that his intention is to leave the elementary things behind and press on to maturity. But then he pauses and adds, *"And this we will do if God*

permits"(6:3). This is remarkable since it is hard to imagine one even thinking that God might not permit such a thing unless one had a remarkably high view of the sovereign prerogatives of God.

James warns against the pride of presumption in speaking of the simplest plans in life without a due submission to the overarching sovereignty of God in whether the day's agenda might be interrupted by God's decision to take the life he gave. Instead of saying, *"Tomorrow we will do such and such...you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that'"*(James 4:15). Thus the saints in Caesarea, when they could not dissuade Paul from taking the risk to go to Jerusalem "ceased and said, ' *The will of the Lord* be done'"(Acts 21:14). God would decide whether Paul would be killed or not, just as James said.

This sense of living in the hands of God, right down to the details of life was not new for the early Christians. They knew it already from the whole history of Israel, but especially from their wisdom literature. *"The plans of the mind belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord"*(Proverbs 16:1). *"A man's mind plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps"*(Proverbs 16:9). *"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established"*(Proverbs 19:21). *"The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the LORD"*(Proverbs 16:33). *"I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps"*(Jeremiah 10:23). Jesus had no quarrel with this sense of living in the hand of God. If anything, he intensified the idea with words like Matthew 10:29, *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."*

This confidence that the details of life were in the control of

God every day was rooted in numerous prophetic expressions of God's unstoppable, unthwartable sovereign purpose. *"Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'"* (Isaiah 46:9-10; cf. 43:13). *"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing; and he does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What does thou?'"* (Daniel 4:35). *"I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted"* (Job 42:2). *"Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases"* (Psalm 115:3).

One of the most precious implications of this confidence in God's inviolable sovereign will is that it provides the foundation of the "new covenant" hope for the holiness without which we will not see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). In the old covenant the law was written on stone and brought death when it met with the resistance of unrenewed hearts. But the new covenant promise is that God will not let his purposes for a holy people shipwreck on the weakness of human will. Instead he promises to do what needs to be done to make us what we ought to be. *"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live"* (Deuteronomy 30:6). *"I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances"* (Ezekiel 36:27). *"I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me"* (Jeremiah 32:40). *"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,*

for it is God who is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure"(Philippians 2:12-13).

In view of all these texts I am unable to grasp what Forster and Marston might mean by saying, "Nothing in Scripture suggests that there is some kind of will or plan of God which is inviolable" (see note 26). Nor can I understand how Fritz Guy can say that the "will of God" is always a desiring and intending but not a sovereign, effective willing (see note 12). Rather the Scriptures lead us again and again to affirm that God's will is sometimes spoken of as an expression of his moral standards for human behavior and sometimes as an expression of his sovereign control even over acts which are contrary to that standard.

This means that the distinction between terms like "will of decree" and "will of command" or "sovereign will" and "moral will" is not an artificial distinction demanded by Calvinistic theology. The terms are an effort to describe the whole of biblical revelation. They are an effort to say "Yes" to all of the Bible and not silence any of it. They are a way to say Yes to the universal, saving will of 1 Timothy 2:4 and Yes to the individual unconditional election of Romans 9:6-23.

Does It Make Sense?

I turn now to the task of reflecting on how these two wills of God fit together and make sense—as far this finite and fallible creature can rise to that challenge. The first thing to affirm in view of all these texts is that God does not sin. *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory."*(Isaiah 6:3). *"God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself does not tempt anyone"*(James 1:13). In ordering all things, including sinful acts, God is not sinning. For as Jonathan Edwards says, "It implies no contradiction to suppose that an act may be an evil act,

and yet that it is a good thing that such an act should come to pass... As for instance, it might be an evil thing to crucify Christ, but yet it was a good thing that the crucifying of Christ came to pass." In other words the Scriptures lead us to the insight that God can will that a sinful act come to pass without willing it as an act of sin in himself.

Edwards points out that Arminians, it seems, must come to a similar conclusion.

All must own that God sometimes wills not to hinder the breach of his own commands, because he does not in fact hinder it...But you will say, God wills to permit sin, as he wills the creature should be left to his freedom; and if he should hinder it, he would offer violence to the nature of his own creature. I answer, this comes nevertheless to the very same thing that I say. You say, God does not will sin absolutely; but rather than alter the law of nature and the nature of free agents, he wills it. He wills what is contrary to excellency in some particulars, for the sake of a more general excellency and order. So that the scheme of the Arminians does not help the matter.

This seems right to me, and it can be illustrated again by reflecting directly on 1 Timothy 2:4 where Paul says that God wills all persons to be saved. What are we to say of the fact that God wills something that in fact does not happen. There are two possibilities as far as I can see. One is that there is a power in the universe greater than God's which is frustrating him by overruling what he wills. Neither Calvinist nor Arminian affirms this.

The other possibility is that God wills not to save all, even though he is willing to save all, because there is something else that he wills more, which would be lost if he exerted his sovereign power to save all. This is the solution that I

as a Calvinist affirm along with Arminians. In other words both Calvinists and Arminians affirm two wills in God when they ponder deeply over 1 Timothy 2:4. Both can say that God wills for all to be saved. But then when queried why all are not saved both Calvinist and Arminian answer that God is committed to something even more valuable than saving all.

The difference between Calvinists and Arminians lies not in whether there are two wills in God, but in what they say this higher commitment is. What does God will more than saving all? The answer given by Arminians is that human self-determination and the possible resulting love relationship with God are more valuable than saving all people by sovereign, efficacious grace. The answer given by Calvinists is that the greater value is the manifestation of the full range of God's glory in wrath and mercy (Romans 9:22-23) and the humbling of man so that he enjoys giving all credit to God for his salvation (1 Corinthians 1:29).

This is utterly crucial to see, for what it implies is that 1 Timothy 2:4 does not settle the momentous issue of God's higher commitment which restrains him from saving all. There is no mention here of free will. Nor is there mention of sovereign, prevenient, efficacious grace. If all we had was this text we could only guess what restrains God from saving all. When free will is found in this verse it is a philosophical, metaphysical assumption not an exegetical conclusion. The assumption is that if God wills in one sense for all to be saved, then he cannot in another sense will that only some be saved. That assumption is not in the text, nor is it demanded by logic, nor is it taught in the rest of Scripture. Therefore 1 Timothy 2:4 does not settle the issue; it creates it. Both Arminians and Calvinists must look elsewhere to answer whether the gift of human self-

determination or the glory of divine sovereignty is the reality that restrains God's will to save all people.

The Calvinists which I admire do not claim to have simple, easy solutions to complex Biblical tensions. When their writing is difficult this is because the Scriptures are difficult (as the apostle Peter admitted that, in part, they are, 2 Peter 3:16). These Calvinists are struggling to be faithful to diverse (but not contradictory) scriptures. Both Calvinists and Arminians feel at times that the ridicule directed against their complex expositions are in fact a ridicule against the complexity of the scriptures.

I find the effort of Stephen Charnock (1628-1680), a chaplain to Henry Cromwell and non-conformist pastor in London, to be balanced and helpful in holding the diverse scriptures on God's will together. God doth not will [sin] directly, and by an efficacious will. He doth not directly will it, because he hath prohibited it by his law, which is a discovery of his will; so that if he should directly will sin, and directly prohibit it, he would will good and evil in the same manner, and there would be contradictions in God's will: to will sin absolutely, is to work it (Psalm 115:3): "*God hath done whatsoever he pleased.*" God cannot absolutely will it, because he cannot work it. God wills good by a positive decree, because he hath decreed to affect it. He wills evil by a private decree, because he hath decreed not to give that grace which would certainly prevent it. God doth not will sin simply, for that were to approve it, but he wills it, in order to that good his wisdom will bring forth from it. He wills not sin for itself, but for the event. Similarly Jonathan Edwards, writing about 80 years later comes to similar conclusions with somewhat different terminology.

When a distinction is made between God's revealed will and

his secret will, or his will of command and decree, "will" is certainly in that distinction taken in two senses. His will of decree, is not his will in the same sense as his will of command is. Therefore, it is no difficulty at all to suppose, that the one may be otherwise than the other: his will in both senses is his inclination. But when we say he wills virtue, or loves virtue, or the happiness of his creature; thereby is intended, that virtue, or the creature's happiness, absolutely and simply considered, is agreeable to the inclination of his nature. His will of decree is, his inclination to a thing, not as to that thing absolutely and simply, but with respect to the universality of things, that have been, are or shall be. So God, though he hates a thing as it is simply, may incline to it with reference to the universality of things. Though he hates sin in itself, yet he may will to permit it, for the greater promotion of holiness in this universality, including all things, and at all times. So, though he has no inclination to a creature's misery, considered absolutely, yet he may will it, for the greater promotion of happiness in this universality.

Putting it in my own words, Edwards said that the infinite complexity of the divine mind is such that God has the capacity to look at the world through two lenses. He can look through a narrow lens or through a wide-angle lens. When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin for what it is in itself and he is angered and grieved. "I do not delight in the death of anyone, says the Lord God" (Ezekiel 18:32). But when God looks at a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it. He sees it in all the connections and effects that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic, with all its (good and evil) parts he does delight in (Psalm 115:3).

God's emotional life is infinitely complex beyond our ability to fully comprehend. For example, who can comprehend that the Lord hears in one moment of time the prayers of ten million Christians around the world, and sympathizes with each one personally and individually like a caring Father (as Hebrews 4:15 says he will), even though among those ten million prayers some are broken-hearted and some are bursting with joy? How can God weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice when they are both coming to him at the same time—in fact are always coming to him with no break at all?

Or who can comprehend that God is angry at the sin of the world every day (Psalm 7:11), and yet every day, every moment, he is rejoicing with tremendous joy because somewhere in the world a sinner is repenting (Luke 15:7,10,23)? Who can comprehend that God continually burns with hot anger at the rebellion of the wicked, grieves over the unholy speech of his people (Ephesians 4:29-30), yet takes pleasure in them daily (Psalm 149:4), and ceaselessly makes merry over penitent prodigals who come home?

Who of us could say what complex of emotions is not possible for God? All we have to go on here is what he has chosen to tell us in the Bible. And what he has told us is that there is a sense in which he does not experience pleasure in the judgment of the wicked, and there is a sense in which he does.

Therefore we should not stumble over the fact that God does and does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. When Moses warns Israel that the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon them and destroying them if they do not repent (Deuteronomy 28:63), he means that those who have rebelled against the Lord and moved

beyond repentance will not be able to gloat that they have made the Almighty miserable. God is not defeated in the triumphs of his righteous judgment. Quite the contrary. Moses says that when they are judged they will unwittingly provide an occasion for God to rejoice in the demonstration of his justice and his power and the infinite worth of his glory (Romans 9:22-23).

When God took counsel with himself as to whether he should save all people, he consulted not only the truth of what he sees when looking through the narrow lens but also the larger truth of what he sees when all things are viewed through the wide-angle lens of his all-knowing wisdom. If, as Calvinists say, God deems it wise and good to elect unconditionally some to salvation and not others, one may legitimately ask whether the offer of salvation to all is genuine. Is it made with heart? Does it come from real compassion? Is the willing that none perish a bona fide willing of love?

The way I would give an account of this is explained by Robert L. Dabney in an essay written over a hundred years ago. His treatment is very detailed and answers many objections that go beyond the limits of this chapter. I will simply give the essence of his solution which seems to me to be on the right track, though he, as well as I, would admit we do not “furnish an exhaustive explanation of this mystery of the divine will.”

Dabney uses an analogy from the life of George Washington taken from Chief-Justice Marshall's *Life of Washington*. A certain Major André had jeopardized the safety of the young nation through “rash and unfortunate” treasonous acts. Marshall says of the death warrant, signed by Washington, “Perhaps on no occasion of his life did the commander-in-chief obey with more reluctance the stern

mandates of duty and of policy." Dabney observes that Washington's compassion for André was "real and profound". He also had "plenary power to kill or to save alive." Why then did he sign the death warrant? Dabney explains, "Washington's volition to sign the death-warrant of André did not arise from the fact that his compassion was slight or feigned, but from the fact that it was rationally counterpoised by a complex of superior judgments...of wisdom, duty, patriotism, and moral indignation [the wide-angle lens]."

Dabney imagines a defender of André, hearing Washington say, "I do this with the deepest reluctance and pity." Then the defender says, "Since you are supreme in this matter, and have full bodily ability to throw down that pen, we shall know by your signing this warrant that your pity is hypocritical." Dabney responds to this by saying, "The petulance of this charge would have been equal to its folly. The pity was real, but was restrained by superior elements of motive. Washington had official and bodily power to discharge the criminal, but he had not the sanctions of his own wisdom and justice." The corresponding point in the case of divine election is that "the absence of volition in God to save does not necessarily imply the absence of compassion." God has "a true compassion, which is yet restrained, in the case of the...non-elect, by consistent and holy reasons, from taking the form of a volition to regenerate." God's infinite wisdom regulates his whole will and guides and harmonizes (not suppresses) all its active principles."

In other words, God has a real and deep compassion for perishing sinners. Jeremiah points to this reality in God's heart. In Lamentations 3:32-33 he speaks of the judgment that God has brought upon Jerusalem: "*Though he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance*

of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men." The word "willingly" translates a composite Hebrew word (*milibo*) which means literally "from his heart" (cf. 1 Kings 12:33). It appears that this is Jeremiah's way of saying that God does will the affliction that he caused, but he does not will it in the same way he wills compassion. The affliction did not come "from his heart." Jeremiah was trying, as we are, to come to terms with the way a sovereign God wills two different things, affliction and compassion.

God's expression of pity and his entreaties have heart in them. There is a genuine inclination in God's heart to spare those who have committed treason against his kingdom. But his motivation is complex, and not every true element in it rises to the level of effective choice. In his great and mysterious heart there are kinds of longings and desires that are real—they tell us something true about his character. Yet not all of these longings govern God's actions. He is governed by the depth of his wisdom expressed through a plan that no ordinary human deliberation would ever conceive (Romans 11:33-36; 1 Corinthians 2:9). There are holy and just reasons for why the affections of God's heart have the nature and intensity and proportion that they do.

Dabney is aware that several kinds of objections can be raised against the analogy of George Washington as it is applied to God. He admits that "no analogy can be perfect between the actions of a finite and the infinite intelligence and will." Yet I think he is right to say that the objections do not overthrow the essential truth that there can be, in a noble and great heart (even a divine heart), sincere compassion for a criminal that is nevertheless not set free. Therefore I affirm with John 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:4 that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires

the salvation of all men. Yet I also affirm that God has chosen from before the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin. Since not all people are saved we must choose whether we believe (with the Arminians) that God's will to save all people is restrained by his commitment to human self-determination or whether we believe (with the Calvinists) that God's will to save all people is restrained by his commitment to the glorification of his sovereign grace (Ephesians 1:6,12,14; Romans 9:22-23).

This decision should not be made on the basis of metaphysical assumptions about what we think human accountability requires. It should be made on the basis of what the scriptures teach. I do not find in the Bible that human beings have the ultimate power of self-determination. As far as I can tell it is a philosophical inference based on metaphysical presuppositions. On the other hand this book aims to show that the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation is taught in Scripture. My contribution has simply been to show that God's will for all people to be saved is not at odds with the sovereignty of God's grace in election. That is, my answer to the above question about what restrains God's will to save all people is his supreme commitment to uphold and display the full range of his glory through the sovereign demonstration of his wrath and mercy for the enjoyment of his elect and believing people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1580_Are_There_Two_Wills_in_God

From *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*. Thomas Schreiner/Bruce Ware, editors (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). Desiring God highly recommends this excellent work. This article is now an appendix in *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* by John Piper (Sisters: Multnomah, 2 ed., 2000).

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Appendix I

Additional Notes Corresponding with Chapter Nineteen

"Jesus For Jews" – Romans 11

- I. **James Boice, *Romans* 1368**
- II. ***The Last Things*, Chapter 2-What About Israel, G.E. Ladd**
- III. ***The Approaching of Christ*, Alexander Reese**
- IV. **Sermon- *All Israel Will Be Saved*, John Piper**
- V. **Pastor Duncan sermon on Romans 11:23-27**
- VI. **Sermon-*Israel, Palestine and the Middle East*, John Piper**

I. James Boice

I think the late James Boice captured well the teaching of Romans 9-11 in these few statements:

"God's historical purposes have not failed because all whom God has elected to salvation are or will be saved.

(Romans 9:6-24)

God's purposes have not failed, because God had previously revealed that not all Israel would be saved and that some Gentile would be. (Romans 9:25-29)

God's purposes have not failed, because the unbelief of the Jews was their own responsibility, not God's. (Romans 9:30)

-10:21)

God has not failed because some Jews (Paul himself was an example) have believed and have been saved.

(Romans 11:1)

God has not failed because it has always been the case that not all Jews but only a remnant has been saved.

(Romans 11:2-10)

God's plan has not failed, because the salvation of the Gentiles, which is now occurring, is meant to arouse Israel to envy and thus be the means of saving some of them.

(Romans 11:11-24)

Finally, God's historical purposes toward the Jewish nation have not failed, because in the end all Israel will be saved, and thus God will be seen to have honored his promises toward Israel nationally.

(Romans 11:25-32)."

From Boice, *Romans*, 1368

II. The Last Things by G.E. Ladd

As to the future ethnic Israel see:

Chapter 2 "What About Israel" in G.E. Ladd's *The Last Things*.

III. The Approaching Christ by Alexander Reese

"Historic" Premillennialism is distinguished from

"Dispensational" Premillennialism.

Historic Pre-Millennialism

<http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Last%20Things/hispremil.html>

Until the second quarter of the nineteenth century general agreement existed among pre-millennial advocates of our Lord's Coming concerning the main outlines of the prophetic future: amidst differences of opinion on the interpretation of the Apocalypse and other portions of

Scripture, the following scheme stood out as fairly representative of the school.

(1) The approaching Advent of Christ to this world will be visible, personal, and glorious.

(2) This Advent, though in itself a single crisis, will be accompanied and followed by a variety of phenomena bearing upon the history of the Church, of Israel, and the world. Believers who survive till the Advent will be transfigured and translated to meet the approaching Lord, together with the saints raised and changed at the first resurrection. Immediately following this Antichrist and his allies will be slain, and Israel, the covenant people, will repent and be saved, by looking upon Him whom they pierced.

(3) Thereupon the Messianic Kingdom of prophecy, which, as the Apocalypse informs us, will last for a thousand years, will be established in power and great glory in a transfigured world. The nations will turn to God, war and oppression cease, and righteousness and peace cover the earth.

(4) At the conclusion of the kingly rule of Christ and His saints, the rest of the dead will be raised, the Last Judgment ensue, and a new and eternal world be created.

(5) No distinction was made between the *Coming* of our Lord, and His *Appearing*, *Revelation*, and *Day*, because these were all held to be synonymous, or at least related, terms, signifying always the one Advent in glory at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.

(6) Whilst the Coming of Christ, no matter how long the present dispensation may last, is the true and proper hope of the Church in every generation, it is nevertheless conditioned by the prior fulfillment of certain signs or events in the history of the Kingdom of God: the Gospel has first to be preached to all nations; the Apostasy and the Man of Sin be revealed, and the Great Tribulation come to

pass. Then shall the Lord come.

(7) The Church of Christ will not be removed from the earth until the Advent of Christ at the very end of the present Age: the Rapture and the Appearing take place at the same crisis; hence Christians of that generation will be exposed to the final affliction under Antichrist.

Such is a fair statement of the fundamentals of Premillennialism as it has obtained since the close of the Apostolic Age. There have been differences of opinion on details and subsidiary points, but the main outline is as I have given it.

These views were held in the main by Irenaeus, the "grand-pupil" of the Apostle John, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and the primitive Christians generally until the rise of the Catholic, political Church in the West, and of allegorical exegesis at Alexandria (Harnack).

The Approaching Advent Of Christ. Alexander Reese. Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975. Pages 17-18. Reprinted from Marshall, Morgan and Scott edition 1937.

For many more articles on "Historic Premillennialism go to: http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Eschatology/Historic-Premillennialism/

Election of two kinds:

Personal Election: Spoken of throughout Romans 9-10.

Corporate Election: The main topic of Romans 11 although references to personal election are included. Paul is an example of personal election, as are the remnant in Paul's day. But Israel as a people, an ethnic group, is still being used by God to accomplish his purposes without it meaning that every one of the Jews is personally chosen by God. An illustration of blessing on the unsaved because of the saved: Unsaved Brits and unsaved Americans have been part of blessed people even though they personally have

not responded to Christ. God can choose to bless an entire people even though not all are Christians. Likewise God chose to bless Israel even though many of them were not following him. Much of the OT testament is testimony to that phenomenon.

Old Testament texts that probably refer to this future for Israel:

Hosea 1:10 *"Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"*

Zechariah wrote following the restoration of Israel after the Babylon captivity and thus could not have been predicting that event:

Zechariah 12:1-9 *"On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place. The LORD will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem."*

Zechariah 12:10 *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."*

Zechariah 13:1 *"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."*

Nothing like this has ever happened yet—it is future.

See Charles Hodge's arguments for a future restoration for ethnic Israel in *Romans*, 333-334. (not printed here)

IV. John Piper on why he believes the Israel of this passage is ethnic Israel and not just the church:

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/10/164_All_Israel_Will_Be_Saved/

1. I think the term "Israel" in verse 25 and 26 most naturally refer to the same thing.

Verse 25: *"Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel..."* That must refer to the nation as a whole from generation to generation. He continues, *"...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved."* I don't think the meaning of Israel changes between verse 25 and 26. The hardened Israel (the nation as a whole) will be the saved Israel (the nation as a whole).

2. The reference in verse 26 to banishing ungodliness from Jacob fits with the national view of "all Israel."

Verse 26: *"And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.'"* This seems most naturally to be a picture of Christ's return at the second coming, and banishing ungodliness from Jacob refers most naturally to the removal of the hardening referred to in verse 25. "Jacob" is not a natural or typical reference to the elect remnant of Israel. The hardening lasts until the full number of the Gentiles comes in (the climax of world missions), and

then Christ comes and lifts the veil and removes the hardening—he banishes ungodliness from *Jacob*, from “all Israel.”

3. The parallel between the two halves of verse 28 point to all Israel as the nation as a whole. Verse 28: “*As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake.*” Now that half of the verse surely refers to the nation as a whole—they are enemies of God. So the second half of the verse surely refers to the nation as a whole as well: “*But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.*” The point of this verse is to show that even though Israel now is a covenant-breaking, unbelieving nation, that is going to change. The nation that are enemies now, will be converted later because of election and love.

4. The parallels in verse 12 point in the same direction. Verse 12: “Now if their [the Jewish nation's] trespass means riches for the world [salvation for the Gentiles], and if their [the Jewish nation's] failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion!” Here “*their* full inclusion” most naturally refers to the same nation as “*their* trespass” and “*their* failure.” So “their full inclusion” refers to the salvation of “all Israel” and is national.

5. The same thing is true about the parallels in verse 15. “For if their [Jewish nation's] rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their [Jewish nation's] acceptance mean but life from the dead?” The nation now rejected will be accepted. So the “acceptance” of the Jewish nation most naturally refers to the salvation of “all Israel”—the salvation of the nation as a whole some day. “Now how is this going to happen? I don't know the details, but it seems to me that Paul does mean that in connection

with the second coming of Christ there will be a great turning of Israel to Christ. Just how it works, I don't know. But I find certain prophecies very suggestive. For example, Zechariah 12:10, *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."* And Isaiah 6:8, *"Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children."* And Matthew 23:39, where Jesus says to the hardened nation: *"I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*

I don't want to go beyond what is clear. So I say that I am not sure about the precise when and how of Israel's conversion. But that it is coming and that it will be given by Jesus Christ, the deliverer who banishes ungodliness and forgives sins—of that I feel sure.

V. Differing Views on the teaching of Romans 11

Pastor Duncan of the Jackson, MS PCA church:

"Those of you who are students of the Bible will know that these verses are the occasion of much debate and discussion and disagreement in the Christian church. More than one phrase in this passage has provoked rigorous analysis. The phrase for instance, *all Israel will be saved*, what does it mean? There are some that believe that phrase means that one day the nation of Israel itself will be re-instituted and every member thereof will be a believer in God through Jesus Christ. Others believe that that phrase, *all Israel will be saved*, refers to a future generation when

before the end, God will bring a tremendous influx of the Jewish people into His kingdom believing in Jesus Christ. And it will be, as it were, life from the dead, from the church that will be floundering under persecution and will gain new light from this influx of Jewish believers and Jewish participation in the kingdom of God. Others believe that this verse simply states that God will continue to deal with the people of Israel generation after generation and that once we have gotten to the end of time we will look back and we will see this great cumulative work that God has done amongst His ancient people in all generations. And still others look at this passage and say, 'Well really, it doesn't give us any hope at all for Israel in the future. Paul is really just saying that all the church will be saved. Both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians and that this isn't speaking necessarily to some future for ethnic Israel.'" From sermon on Romans 11:23-27 available at "monergism" online.

VI. John Piper from a sermon March 7, 2004

"Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East"

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/10/165_Israel_Palestine_and_the_Middle_East/

Romans 11:25-32

"Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'; 'and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.' As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are

irrevocable. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all."

Today I would like to address the issue of Israel's relation to the "Promised Land" in the Middle East. This is not primarily an expository message from Romans 11, but an effort to draw out implications of Romans 11 and the rest of Scripture for a very vexing problem in the world today. The existence of Israel in the Middle East and the extent of her borders and her sovereignty are perhaps the most explosive factors in world terrorism and the most volatile factors in Arab-Western relations.

The Arab roots and the Jewish roots in this land go back for thousands of years. Both lay claim to the land not merely because of historical presence, but also because of divine right. I won't try to lay out a detailed peace plan. But I will try to lay out some biblical truths that could guide all of us in thinking about peace and justice in that part of the world. What we think about this, and what we say, does matter, since politicians are influenced by their constituents in these religiously super-charged situations. And we need to know how to pray. And we need to know how to talk to others in a way that honors the truth. So for all those reasons, and for the reason that God is very much involved in this situation, we should talk about it in the context of Romans 11.

What we've seen in Romans 11 is that Israel as a whole—that is, as an ethnic, corporate people enduring from generation to generation—has a root in the covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants. Verse

16b: "If the root is holy so are the branches." We interpreted that picture in the light of verse 28: *"As regards the gospel, they [Israel] are enemies of God for your [Gentile] sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers."* The "forefathers" here correspond to the root in verse 16. So the promises to the forefathers imply that some day the whole tree, with all its branches, will be saved.

Some day. Because verse 28 says, for now "they are enemies." Verse 28a: "As regards the gospel, they [Israel] are enemies of God for your sake." In other words, they are rejecting their Messiah and thus putting themselves against God. This is what Jesus said to Israel in John 8:42: *"If God were your father you would love me."* Jesus is the litmus test whether anybody's religion is worship of the true God. But Israel does not love Jesus as God's son and her Messiah. So they are, for now, "enemies of God."

So when verse 16 says, *"If the root is holy so are the branches,"* we take it to mean: "If God chose the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for himself, and set them apart and made to them covenant promises, then someday (after this present time of enmity and hardening are over) their descendants are going to return to God through Jesus Christ, and become God's set-apart, holy people. Unbelief and ungodliness will be banished from Jacob forever (v. 26).

So now we ask, is the so-called "Promised Land" part of the inheritance and salvation that "all Israel" (v. 26) will receive? And if so, what does that say about the rights of Israel today to the Land? In developing the answer to this question I would like to maintain seven truths which are based on Scripture.

1. God chose Israel from all the peoples of the world to be his own possession. Deuteronomy 7:6, *"The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."*

2. The Land was part of the inheritance he promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. Genesis 15:18, *"On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.'" Then in Genesis 17:7-8 God says to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."* Then God confirmed the promise to Jacob, Abraham's grandson, in Genesis 28:13, *"And behold, the Lord...said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.'" And when Jacob was dying he called Joseph to him and said (in Genesis 48:3), "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you and . . . will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.'"*

This, of course, creates a huge cleavage between the Islamic view of God's covenant and the Jewish and Christian view of God's covenant. But we believe that this is God's word, confirmed by the Lord Jesus, and so we say, The land is destined to be Israel's land. But it's not that simple. This is not an issue that can be dealt with in soundbites.

3. The promises made to Abraham, including the promise of the Land, will be inherited as an everlasting gift only by true, spiritual Israel, not disobedient, unbelieving Israel. This was the point of Romans 9. When Paul grieved over the lostness of so many Jews who were rejecting Jesus and were perishing, he said in verses 6-7, *"It is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring."* In other words, the promises cannot be demanded by anyone just because he is Jewish. Jewish ethnicity has a place in God's plan, but it is not enough to secure anything. It does not in itself qualify a person to be an heir of the promise to Abraham and his offspring. Romans 9:8 says it clearly: "It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring." Being born Jewish does not make one an heir of the promise—neither the promise of the Land nor any other promise.

This was plain in the Old Testament, and it was plain the teachings of Jesus (which we will see under truth #4). For example, in the terrible list of curses that God promised to bring on the people if they broke his covenant and forsook him was this: *"And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it"* (Deuteronomy 28:63). Throughout the history of Israel, covenant breaking and disobedience and idolatry disqualified Israel from the present divine right to the Land. (See also Daniel 9:4-7; Psalm 78:54-61.)

Be careful not to infer from this that Gentile nations (like Arabs) have the right to molest Israel. God's judgments on Israel do not sanction human sin against Israel. Israel still has *human* rights among nations even when she forfeits

her present *divine* right to the Land. Remember that nations which gloated over her divine discipline were punished by God (Isaiah 10:5-13; Joel 3:2). So the promise to Abraham that his descendants will inherit the Land does not mean that all Jews inherit that promise. It will come finally to the true Israel, the Israel that keeps covenant and obeys her God.

4. Jesus Christ has come into the world as the Jewish Messiah, and his own people rejected him and broke covenant with their God. When Jesus asked his disciples, *"Who do you say that I am?"* Peter answered, *"You are the Christ [that is, the Jewish Messiah], the Son of the living God."* And Jesus responded to him, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 16:16-17). *And when the high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus answered, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."* (Mark 14:61-62).

But even though Jesus was the Messiah and did many mighty works and taught with great authority and fulfilled Old Testament promises, nevertheless the people of Israel as a whole rejected him. This was the most serious covenant-breaking disobedience that Israel had ever committed in all her history.

This is why Jesus told the parable of the tenants who killed the Landlord's son when he came for his harvest, and ended that parable with these words to Israel in Matthew 21:43, *"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."* And it's why he said in Matthew 8:11-12, after seeing the faith of a Gentile centurion and the unbelief of

Israel, *"Many [Gentiles] will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* Israel has broken covenant with her God and is living today in disobedience and unbelief in his Son and her Messiah. That is why Paul says in Romans 11:28, *"As regards the gospel [the good news of the Messiah] they are enemies of God."*

5. Therefore, the secular state of Israel today may not claim a present divine right to the Land, but they and we should seek a peaceful settlement not based on present divine rights, but on international principles of justice, mercy, and practical feasibility. This follows from all we have said so far, and the implication it has for those of us who believe the Bible and trust Christ as our Savior and as the Lord of history, is that we should not give blanket approval to Jewish or to Palestinian actions. We should approve or denounce according to Biblical standards of justice and mercy among peoples. We should encourage our representatives to seek a just settlement that takes the historical and social claims of both peoples into account. Neither should be allowed to sway the judgments of justice by a present divine claim to the land. If you believe this, it would be helpful for your representatives to know it.

We are not whitewashing terrorism and we are not whitewashing Jewish force. Nor is there any attempt on my part to assess measures of blame or moral equivalence. That's not my aim. My aim is to put the debate on a balanced footing in this sense: neither side should preempt the claims of international justice by the claim of present divine rights. Working out what that justice will look like is still a huge and daunting task. I have not solved that problem. But I think we will make better progress if we do

not yield to the claim of either side to be ethnically or nationally sanctioned by God in their present conflict.

6. By faith in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, Gentiles become heirs of the promise of Abraham, including the promise of the Land.

In the words of Romans 11:17, *"You [Gentile], although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree"*—that is, they become part of the redeemed covenant people who share the faith of Abraham. The reason, as Paul put in Romans 4:13, is that *"the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith."* So all who are united to Christ, Abraham's Offspring, by faith are part of the covenant made with him and his offspring.

Here's the most sweeping statement of this truth—Ephesians 2:12, *"Remember that you [Gentiles] were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ....So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."*

Therefore Jewish believers in Jesus and Gentile believers will inherit the Land. And the easiest way to see this is to see that we will inherit the world which includes the Land. Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians will not quibble over the real estate of the Promised Land because the entire new heavens and the new earth will be ours. 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, *"All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's,*

and Christ is God's. "All followers of Christ, and only followers of Christ, will inherit the earth, including the Land.

7. Finally, this inheritance of Christ's people will happen at the second coming of Christ to establish his kingdom, not before; and till then, we Christians must not take up arms to claim our inheritance; but rather lay down our lives to share our inheritance with as many as we can.

You recall that all-important word that Jesus spoke to Pilate in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Christians do not take up the sword to advance the kingdom of Christ. We wait for a king from heaven who will deliver us by his mighty power. And in that great day Jew and Gentile who have treasured Christ will receive what was promised. There will be a great reversal: the last will be first, and the meek—in fellowship with the Lamb of God—will inherit the Land.

Therefore, come to the meek and lowly Christ while there is time, and receive forgiveness of sins, and the hope of glory.

Appendix J

(old appendix K)

- I. Randy Alcorn from “The Purity Principle” p**
- II. Thomas Chalmers from “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” P**
- III. A Living Sacrifice – the story of Maximillian Kolbe p**
- IV. A Brief commentary on the words of Romans 12:1-2 p**
- V. “27 Dresses” review by “Pluggedinonline” p**

I. From *The Purity Principle*

by Randy Alcorn

<http://afajournal.org/2003/september/903purity.asp>

Suppose I said, “There’s a great-looking girl down the street. Let’s go look through her window and watch her undress, then pose for us naked, from the waist up. Then this girl and her boyfriend will get in a car and have sex—let’s listen and watch the windows steam up!”

You’d be shocked. You’d think, “What a pervert!”

But suppose instead I said, “Hey, come on over. Let’s watch Titanic.”

Christians recommend this movie, church youth groups

view it together, and many have shown it in their homes. Yet the movie contains precisely the scenes I described.

So, as our young men lust after bare breasts on the screen, our young women are trained in how to get a man's attention.

How does something shocking and shameful somehow become acceptable because we watch it through a television instead of a window?

In terms of the lasting effects on our minds and morals, what's the difference?

Yet many think, *Titanic? Wonderful! It wasn't even rated R!*

Every day Christians across the country, including many church leaders, watch people undress through the window of television. We peek on people committing fornication and adultery, which our God calls an abomination.

We've become voyeurs, Peeping Toms, entertained by sin.

Normalizing evil

The enemy's strategy is to normalize evil. Consider young people struggling with homosexual temptation. How does it affect them when they watch popular television dramas where homosexual partners live together in apparent normality?

Parents who wouldn't dream of letting a dirty-minded adult baby-sit their children do it every time they let their kids surf the channels. Not only we, but our children become desensitized to immorality. Why are we surprised when our son gets a girl pregnant if we've allowed him to watch hundreds of immoral acts and hear thousands of jokes with

sexual innuendos?

But it's just one little sex scene.

Suppose I offered you a cookie, saying, "A few mouse droppings fell in the batter, but for the most part it's a great cookie—you won't even notice."

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13). When we're being entertained by evil, how can we hate it? How can we be pure when we amuse ourselves with impurity?

God warns us not to talk about sex inappropriately:

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity... because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place" (Ephesians 5:3-4).

How do our favorite dramas and sitcoms stand up to these verses? How about Seinfeld and other nightly reruns? Do they contain "even a hint of sexual immorality" or "coarse joking"? If we can listen to late night comedians' monologues riddled with immoral references, are we really fearing God and hating evil?

Jesus, the radical

Consider Christ's words:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your

whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:27-30).

Why does Jesus paint this shocking picture? I believe He wants us to take radical steps, to do whatever is necessary to deal with sexual temptation.

Now, the hand and eye are not the causes of sin. A blind man can still lust and a man without a hand can still steal. But the eye is a means of access for both godly and ungodly input. And the hand is a means of performing righteous or sinful acts. We must therefore govern what the eye looks at and the hand does. If we take Jesus seriously, we need to think far more radically about sexual purity.

Doing what it takes

The battle is too intense, and the stakes are too high to approach purity casually or gradually. So ... if you can't keep your eyes away from those explicit images, don't ever go to a video rental store. *Come on. Everybody goes into those stores.*

No. If it causes you to sin, you shouldn't. Period. Do your thoughts trip you up when you're with certain persons? Stop hanging out with them. Does a certain kind of music charge you up erotically? Stop listening to it. Do you make phone calls you shouldn't? Block 900 phone sex numbers so you can't call them from your home.

If these things seem like crutches, fine. Use whatever crutches you need to help you walk. Some men fall into mental adultery through lingerie ads, billboards, women joggers in tight pants, women with low cut blouses or short skirts, cheerleaders or dancers, movies, TV shows, and commercials of the beer-and-bikini variety. Some men's weakness is the Sunday newspaper's ad inserts or nearly any magazine. So, stop looking. And then stop putting yourself in the position to look!

If you have to get rid of your TV to guard your purity, do it. If it means you can't go to games because of how dancers or cheerleaders dress and perform, so be it. If it means you have to lower your head and close your eyes, so be it. If you're embarrassed to do that, stay home.

Tell your wife about your struggles. Or if you're single, tell a godly friend. If you need to drop the newspaper because of those ads, fine. If you need your wife to go through it first and pull out the offending inserts, ask her.

Romans 13:14 instructs us to "*make no provision for the flesh*" (NASB). It's a sin to deliberately put ourselves in a position where we'll likely commit sin. Whether it's the lingerie department, the swimming pool, or the workout room at an athletic club, if it trips you up, stay away from it. Proverbs describes the loose woman meeting up with the foolish man after dark (see Proverbs 7:8-9). We must stay away from people, places, and contexts that make sin more likely.

If it's certain bookstores or hangouts, stay away from them. If cable or satellite TV or network TV, old friends from high school, the Internet, or computers are your problem, get rid of them. Just say no to whatever is pulling you away from Jesus. Remember, if you want a different outcome, you must make different choices. If you can't be around women wearing swimsuits without looking and lusting, then don't go on vacation where women wear swimsuits. If that means not going water-skiing or to a favorite resort, fine. If it means being unable to go on a church-sponsored retreat, don't go.

Sound drastic? Compare it to gouging out an eye or cutting off a hand!

"But..."

But there are hardly any decent TV shows anymore. Then stop watching TV. Read books. Have conversations.

But all the newer novels have sex scenes. Then read the old novels. Read fiction from Christian publishers.

But I've subscribed to Sports Illustrated for thirty years, back before they had the swimsuit issue. They have it now. So drop your subscription. And tell them why.

But it's almost impossible to rent a movie without sex and offensive language. There are Christian movie review sites that can help you make good selections for family viewing. There are also services which offer edited movies, television adaptors which edit profanity, and DVD software that cuts offensive scenes from movies.

But suppose there were no decent movies – what then? I enjoy good movies, but the Bible never commands us, "Watch movies." It does command us, "Guard your heart."

It's a battle—battles get bloody. Do whatever it takes to walk in purity!

A friend wrote a daily contract that asks these questions: "Are you willing to do whatever's necessary to protect your sexual sobriety? Ask God for help? Call on others? Go to meetings? Read literature? Set boundaries and not cross them? Be brutally honest?"

Too radical?

But you're talking about withdrawing from the culture. What you're saying is too radical.

No, what I'm saying is nothing. Jesus said, "If it would keep you from sexual temptation, you'd be better off poking out

your eye and cutting off your hand.” Now that’s radical. Many claim they’re serious about purity, but then they say, “No way; I’m not going to give up cable TV,” or “I’m not going to have my wife hold the computer password.” Followers of Jesus have endured torture and given their lives in obedience to Him. And we’re whining about giving up cable?

When Jesus called us to take up our crosses and follow Him (see Matthew 10:38), didn’t that imply sacrifices greater than forgoing Internet access?

How sold out are you to the battle for purity? How desperate are you to have victory over sin? How radical are you willing to get for your Lord? How much do you want the joy and peace that can be found only in Him? Purity comes only to those who truly want it.

Controlling the Internet

- Use family-friendly Internet service providers. Install a pornography-filtering program on your computer, realizing it can’t screen out everything. Ask someone else to hold the password. Ask someone to regularly check your Internet usage history.
- Use family-friendly Internet service providers. Install a pornography-filtering program on your computer, realizing it can’t screen out everything. Ask someone else to hold the password. Ask someone to regularly check your Internet usage history.
- Move computers to high-traffic areas. Unless you have a proven history of going on-line safely, don’t log on to the Internet if you’re alone. Be sure the monitor always faces an open door, where others can see what you’re looking at (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- If you’re still losing the battle, disconnect the Internet—or get rid of the computer.

Taking charge of the TV

- Consult a schedule to choose appropriate programs. Channel-surfing invites temptation.
- Keep your television unplugged, store it in a closet, or put it in the garage to prevent mindless flip-on. Use the “off” switch freely. Use the remote quickly when temptation comes. Have a safe channel ready to turn to.
- Don’t allow young children to choose their own programs. As they get older they can choose, but parents have veto power. Avoid multiple TVs that split the family and leave children unsupervised. Don’t use television as a babysitter.
- Spend an hour reading Scripture, a Christian book, or participating in a ministry for each hour you watch TV. Even when television isn’t bad, it often keeps us from what’s better.
- Drop cable, HBO, your satellite dish, or your TV if it is promoting ungodliness in your home. (This isn’t legalism—it’s discipleship.)
- Periodically “fast” from television for a week or a month. Watch what happens; see if you like what you can do with all that time (including feeding your passion for Christ).

II. Excerpts from “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection”

By Thomas Chalmers

Find the full document at: <http://www.monergism.com/directory/category.php?action=top Rated>

“It is not enough, then, that we dissipate the charm, by a moral, and eloquent, and affecting exposure of its illusiveness. We must address to the eye of his mind another object, with a charm powerful enough to dispossess the first of its influences, and to engage him in

some other prosecution as full of interest, and hope, and congenial activity, as the former...

"It is seldom that any of our tastes are made to disappear by a mere process of natural extinction. At least, it is very seldom, that this is done through the instrumentality of reasoning. It may be done by excessive pampering—but it is almost never done by the mere force of mental determination. But what cannot be destroyed, may be dispossessed and one taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its, power entirely as the reigning affection of the mind. It is thus, that the boy ceases, at length, to be the slave of his appetite, but it is because a manlier taste has now brought it into subordination - and that the youth ceases to idolize pleasure, but it is because the idol of wealth has become the stronger and gotten the ascendancy and that even the love of money ceases to have the mastery over the heart of many a thriving citizen, but it is because drawn into, the whirl of city politics, another affection has been wrought into his moral system, and he is now lorded over by the love of power. There is not one of these transformations in which the heart is left without an object. Its desire for one particular object may be conquered; but as to its desire for having some one object or other, this is unconquerable...

"The love of the world cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness. But may it not be supplanted by the love of that which is more worthy than itself? The heart cannot be prevailed upon to part with the world, by a simple act of resignation. But may not the heart be prevailed upon to admit into its preference another, who shall subordinate the world, and bring it down from its wonted ascendancy?...

"This, we trust, will explain the operation of that charm which accompanies the effectual preaching of the gospel.

The love of God and the love of the world, are two affections, not merely in a state of rivalry, but in a state of enmity—and that so irreconcilable, that they cannot dwell together in the same bosom. We have already affirmed how impossible it were for the heart, by any innate elasticity of its own, to cast the world away from it; and thus reduce itself to a wilderness. The heart is not so constituted; and the only way to dispossess it of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one. Nothing can exceed the magnitude of the required change in a man's character—when bidden as he is in the New Testament, to love not the world; no, nor any of the things that are in the world for this so comprehends all that is dear to him in existence, as to be equivalent to a command of self-annihilation.

"But the same revelation, which dictates so mighty an obedience, places within our reach as mighty an instrument of obedience. It brings for admittance to the very door of our heart, an affection which once seated upon its throne, will either subordinate every previous inmate, or bid it away. Beside the world, it places before the eye of the mind Him who made the world and with this peculiarity, which is all its own—that in the Gospel do we so behold God, as that we may love God. It is there, and there only, where God stands revealed as an object of confidence to sinners and where our desire after Him is not chilled into apathy, by that barrier of human guilt, which intercepts every approach that is not made to Him through the appointed Mediator. It is the bringing in of this better hope, whereby we draw nigh unto God—and to live without hope, is to live without God; and if the heart be without God, the world will then have all the ascendancy. It is God apprehended by the believer as God in Christ, who alone can dispossess it from this ascendancy. It is when He stands dismantled of the terrors which belong to Him as an

offended lawgiver and when we are enabled by faith, which is His own gift, to see His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and to hear His beseeching voice, as it protests good will to men, and entreats the return of all who will to a full pardon and a gracious acceptance of it is then, that a love paramount to the love of the world, and at length expulsive of it, first arises in the regenerated bosom. It is when released from the spirit of bondage with which love cannot dwell, and when admitted into the number of God's children through the faith that is in Christ Jesus, the spirit of adoption is poured upon us - it is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires, in the only way in which deliverance is possible. And that faith which is revealed to us from heaven, as indispensable to a sinner's justification in the sight of God, is also the instrument of the greatest of all moral and spiritual achievements on a nature dead to the influence, and beyond the reach of every other application...

"Salvation by grace—salvation by free grace—salvation not of works, but according to the mercy of God—salvation on such a footing is not more indispensable to the deliverance of our persons from the hand of justice, than it is to the deliverance of our hearts from the chill and the weight of ungodliness. Retain a single shred or fragment of legality with the Gospel, and we raise a topic of distrust between man and God. We take away from the power of the Gospel to melt and to conciliate. For this purpose, the freer it is, the better it is. That very peculiarity which so many dread as the germ of antinomianism, is, in fact, the germ of a new spirit, and a new inclination against it. Along with the light of a free Gospel, does there enter the love of the Gospel, which, in proportion as we impair the freeness, we are sure to chase away. And never does the sinner find within himself so mighty a moral transformation, as when

under the belief that he is saved by grace, he feels constrained thereby to offer his heart a devoted thing, and to deny ungodliness. To do any work in the best manner, we should make use of the fittest tools for it. And we trust, that what has been said may serve in some degree, for the practical guidance of those who would like to reach the great moral achievement of our text—but feel that the tendencies and desires of Nature are too strong for them.

We know of no other way by which to keep the love of the world out of our heart, than to keep in our hearts the love of God - and no other way by which to keep our hearts in the love of God, than building ourselves up on our most holy faith. That denial of the world which is not possible to him that dissents from the Gospel testimony, is possible even as all things are possible, to him that believeth. To try this without faith, is to work without the right tool of the right instrument. But faith worketh by love; and the way of expelling from the heart the love which transgresseth the law, is to admit into its receptacles the love which fulfilleth the law.”

III. A “Living Sacrifice”

From The Body by Colson and Vaughn; Other details to be found at <http://www.auschwitz.dk/Kolbe.htm>

Pastor Maximilian Kolbe was 45 years old when the Nazis invaded Poland—his home country. Kolbe had begun a para-church ministry that had over 700 workers with a vision of global evangelization. At that same time, another man was thinking expansionist thoughts—Adolf Hitler and his Nazis were invading Austria and Czechoslovakia. Pastor Kolbe knew that trouble lay ahead and he was right: Poland was next on the Nazi invasion route. And by September 19, the German army arrived at the headquarters of the mission and arrested Kolbe and the others. They were loaded into

trucks and then cattle wagons as they were taken to Amtitz—a prison camp. There, amidst horrible conditions, Kolbe went from person to person praying for and encouraging them.

Within a few weeks the entire group was released and Kolbe was more determined than ever to carry on their work. On a blackboard one day he wrote the formula $w = W$. And he said the little w stands for my will and the capital W stands for God's will. Let your will be identified with the will of God. To the Nazis, the Jews and the Slavic peoples were subhuman. As for the pastors of the country the edict was this: "They will preach what we want them to preach. If any pastor acts differently we shall make short work of him. The task of the pastors is to keep the Poles quiet, stupid and dull-witted."

Pastor Kolbe couldn't obey that wish. And on February 17, as he prayed over the globe of the world in his office, the Gestapo came. He was sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp where he was assigned to a timber detail—carrying loads much too heavy for his, by then, weakened body. On one occasion when he fell under the load, he was kicked into a ditch and left for dead. Other prisoners secretly got him to the prison hospital where he miraculously recovered. When he was released from the hospital he was assigned to another work crew and there he did as before - he went from man to man during the nighttime hours to listen to them, pray for them, and hug them as he told them of Christ's love and his.

By the end of that year Auschwitz was working like a well-oiled killing machine with 8000 people being put to death each day. The only problem for the guards was the occasional escape attempt. And on one July night a man escaped from Barracks 14 where Kolbe was housed. The

next morning all the prisoners were lined up in the sun and made to wait all day in the sweltering heat while the escapee was hunted. The camp rule was that 10 men would die for one who escaped. One man, who was selected to die, cried out "My poor wife, My poor children, what will they do?" At that Pastor Kolbe broke out of the ranks and approached the Commandant—a thing unheard of. Though he had a revolver in his hand, the Commandant didn't shoot but demanded, "What does that Polish pig want of me?" The frail pastor spoke calmly that he wanted to die in the place of the man who had just been condemned. Surprising everyone, the Commandant nodded OK.

And as the other prisoners were dismissed to return to the barracks the reprieved prisoner, who lived until 1995, passed by Kolbe with a look of astonishment that had not yet turned to gratitude. "But Kolbe wasn't looking for gratitude. If he was to lay down his life for another, the fulfillment had to be in the act of obedience itself. The joy must be found in submitting his small will to the will of the One more grand." The condemned men were placed in what was called the death box—a place of no food or water until they dried up and died.

As the hours and days passed, the camp became aware of a very unusual sound coming from the death box. Instead of the usual screaming and attacking of one another, the sounds of hymns wafted from the box as Pastor Kolbe shepherded his flock through the valley of the shadow of death. A prisoner named Bruno who survived Auschwitz had been ordered to clean out the death box and when he entered days later they found only three others and Pastor Kolbe alive. The other three were unconscious and were quickly killed with an injection by a doctor.

Pastor Kolbe was sitting up against a wall with his head inclined a bit to the left, his eyes with a faraway vision in them and a faint smile on his lips. The doctor repeated his procedure and in a moment Pastor Kolbe was dead. Why did the pastor volunteer to lay his life down for another prisoner? What he did resulted from a decision he had made years earlier and a decision, which he ratified over and over again in the daily-ness of life right up to the end.

IV. Brief Commentary on the verses

By Dr. Jerry Nelson

NIV: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

KJV: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

"Therefore" = in light of all Paul has written thus far.

This marks a major change in the book. Paul set forth the case for a relationship with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Now he will pick up again on the themes he began in Romans 6-8—living out this new relationship we have with God.

Theology is highly practical! What you believe determines

how you live.

Chapters 1-11 tell us what **God** did.

Chapters 12-16 tell us what God wants **us** to do because of what God did.

“In view of God’s mercies”

Mercy is not God’s response to our right living;

Right living is our response to God’s mercy.

Orthodoxy (correct thinking) is driven by Grace

Orthopraxy (correct action) is driven by Gratitude

Theology is grace, Christian living is gratitude (for that grace). Grace and gratitude, in the Greek language come from the same root.

“I urge you”

Not merely a request and not quite a command.

Not a request because that is too weak—a response is called for; not responding is unimaginable.

Not quite a command because what is called for is to be from the heart, not forced.

“Offer your bodies”

The response is not a private religion but a public deportment derived from a heart relationship with God.

It is how our faith is lived out in speech, action and reaction. This is a choice we make and it usually is made somewhere in our teens or early 20s but is also a choice we ratify every day of our lives—usually more consciously when other offers are made to us. God doesn’t just want your heart (invite Jesus into your heart); God wants all of you, including your body! Give Jesus your heart and keep the rest of your body for yourself? Not your body as beautiful and meriting his favor but your body offered freely, willingly to him, to use for his purposes and glory.

Romans 6:13 *"Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to*

God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."

Romans 6:19 *"I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness."*

"Sacrifices"

No longer literal bloody sacrifices as in the OT. But now 1 Peter 2:5 "offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ And Hebrews 13:15 "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name

"Living"

This is not martyrdom but healthy, living bodies offered to God's service for as long as he gives us physical life here on this earth.

Holy, "Set apart" for God's effective and productive use rather than for profane, irrelevant uses that have no value but in fact devalue the human life.

"Pleasing to God"

A living and holy sacrifice is pleasing to God—it honors God and aids in accomplishing God's gracious purposes in this world. This is your spiritual act of worship. Not just reasonable as in logical but spiritual as from the heart and true to God. And it is this, rather than hollow ritual, that worships God. Bears do what bears do. Sparrows do what sparrows do. Humans were made to imitate and worship God.

How do we get to the place where we think and act like verse 1 (offering our bodies as living sacrifices)? Answer: Verse 2

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world"
Our "world" is schizophrenic in that it is made up of the best and worst.

"The heavens declare the glory of God." (Psalm 19)

"We are fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139)

"Every good and perfect gift is from above." (James 1)

There is much we are privileged to enjoy and use for the benefit of others. BUT this world has also been devastated by sin—sin and death dominate as a result of the Fall and our sins. The world now has a bias, which is against God. Romans 6 emphasized our need to be sanctified—changed from what was our natural bent.

"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
Present tense—go on being transformed—a continuing process.

There are two primary forces that shape your thinking and life—the world and God. Which is the most powerful in you?

"mind" is your moral consciousness. Adjust your way of thinking. Our minds have a mind of their own; captured and captivated by sin. Our minds must be changed. Do you evaluate actions and ideas based on a Christian worldview or a secular worldview?

How is our mind renewed?

The Spirit of God using the Word of God in the context of the People of God. The Word is the objective authority and the Spirit is the active applier. Not every situation in life is specifically addressed in the Bible; we need the Spirit and

his people to help us understand its application in each situation. God now entrusts his people to his Spirit and Word. We aren't just rule followers; we are active responders to the Spirit living within us.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will
So instead of being conformed to the pattern of this world, you will be able to live out God's will.

"test and approve"—understanding and agreeing with God about what is the right thing to do and then doing it.

"good, pleasing and perfect will"

"perfect" not without imperfection but wholly for God.

V. "27 Dresses" movie, reviewed by

PluggedIn Online

<http://www.pluggedinonline.com/movies/movies/a0003600.cfm>

Sexual Content

Kevin and Jane have an apparent sexual encounter in a Volvo when they get stuck in a rainstorm. They kiss passionately and try to take off one another's clothes as they tumble into the back seat. They kiss at other times during the film, too, as do George and Jane.

When Tess comes back from her first date with George, she suggests to Jane that it wasn't all just drinks and smiles. We later see Tess and George making out in Jane's apartment.

Tess, Jane and other women wear clothing that exposes

lots of leg and/or cleavage. Jane changes clothes several times in the back of a cab and, while audiences don't see anything below her bare shoulders, the cab driver takes a peek every now and then. (Jane tells the man that each look'll cost him \$20.)

A boy who's about 11 years old tells George that Tess looks "hot." But it's Jane's friend, Casey, who is the movie's fount of sexual shockers. She says, for instance, that the only reason to put on one of those ghastly bridesmaid dresses is the thought that, later, a willing groomsman might "rip it to shreds with his teeth." When Jane receives flowers from a secret admirer, Casey says, "I spent two days in bed with a guy and *you* get flowers. Great." She jokingly encourages Jane to seduce her boss and have an "accidental pregnancy, a shotgun wedding and a lifetime of bliss." And about being appreciated, she quips, "What good is it if no one is naked?"

A colleague wonders why Kevin isn't "getting laid," what with all the romantic copy he writes. Jane sarcastically tells someone she's OK with not getting married before her little sister because that allows her to have "hate sex" with random men. And there are other scattered crudities revolving around sexual anatomy and predicaments.

Violent Content

Three Stooges style, Casey slaps Jane to knock her out of a twitterpated reverie over George. Jane slaps Kevin for being a jerk. Tess throws cleaning sponges at Jane for embarrassing her. Jane and Kevin hydroplane off a wet road in a Volvo. Tess, as a girl, is shown in a slideshow tormenting a cat by holding it upside down. Kevin tells Jane that she's repressing her emotions and is just one party away from shooting herself.

Crude or Profane Language

There are two might-as-well-go-ahead-and-say-it near-uses of the f-word. Jane pairs the obscenity with "mother" (and we hear pretty much everything but the "k"). In another, a bride *starts* saying the word.

Nearly 10 s-words and an unhealthy smattering of milder cusswords, including "a--" and "b--ch," are stirred into the stew. And God's name is misused nearly two-dozen times. (After listening to one bride swearing up a storm, Jane—as a little girl—assures her it's OK. "We have cable," she says confidently.)

Drug and Alcohol Content

Kevin and Jane get good and drunk one rainy night and belt out a rollicking version of Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets" while standing on top of the bar. Jane and Casey are shown drinking, presumably, mixed beverages at a nightclub. Jane says she gives couples memberships to a "Wine of the Month Club" as wedding presents, adding that she occasionally gets free Gewürztraminer out of the deal.

Appendix K

Additional Notes on Romans 12:3,6

In verse 3 Paul has not yet introduce the concept of "gifts." He is setting the stage for it, to be sure, but think he is first of all laying out some ground rules for the discussion: namely that humility is a necessary prerequisite for being transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is of course also a prerequisite for understanding our role in the use of God's gifts to serve others.

"Think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." Paul has used this word "faith," thus far in Romans, consistently to refer to our basic response to the gospel. For him to now suggest that God gives some people more of this kind of faith than others doesn't make any sense. And if Paul already has in mind the differing gifts that God gives to his people (not introduced until v6) then "grace" not "faith" would be a better way of saying that. "Measure" ("metron") can mean the measuring device (the standard) or the amount. So we could translate it this way: "Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the(amount) of faith God has given you" (meaning that you recognize that the faith you have is a gift from God, regardless of how much faith you have, and thus not a source of pride)

OR

"Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the(standard) of faith God has given you,"(meaning that the faith you have is the same faith any other Christian has (faith is the measure, the faith measure) and it is from God and thus no reason for boasting).think the second is better, we are to judge ourselves by the grace common to all of us whereby we are Christians. But it is interesting that ends up

making the same point way. The prerequisite is humility.

Verse 6: *"let him use it in proportion to his faith"*

"proportion" or "in right relationship" are both equally valid translations.

As in verse 3 it could be a reference to an "amount" of faith, but I think more likely it means in relationship to your faith—remembering that it is all of God. So Paul's instruction is not about an "amount" of faith but that the prophet's words should be consistent with his faith in Jesus.

Again, regardless of the technicalities of these different possible interpretations, the point is the same, we are to live with an awareness that all we are and have is by grace (even our faith is by grace) and we are to use any "gifts" God has given us to help others because we belong to each other.

Ways To Humble Yourself

1. Routinely confess your sin to God. (Luke 18:9-14) All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. However, too few of us have a routine practice of rigorous self-honesty examination. Weekly, even daily, review of our heart and behavior, coupled with confession to God, is an essential practice of humility.
2. Acknowledge your sin to others. (James 3:2, James 5:16) Humility before God is not complete unless there is also humility before man. A true test of our willingness to humble ourselves is being willing to share with others the weaknesses we confess to God. Wisdom, however, dictates that we do so with others that we trust.
3. Take wrong patiently. (1 Peter 3:8-17) This has been a difficult one for me. When something is unjust I want to react and rectify it. However, patiently responding to the unjust accusations and actions of others demonstrates our

strength of godly character and provides an opportunity to put on humility.

4. Actively submit to authority...the good and the bad! (1 Peter 2:18) Our culture does not value submission; rather it promotes individualism. How purposely and actively do you work on submission to those whom God has placed as authorities in your life? Doing so is a good way to humble yourself.

5. Receive correction and feedback from others graciously. (Proverbs 10:17, 12:1) In the Phoenix area, a local East valley pastor was noted for graciously receiving any negative feedback or correction offered. He would simply say "thank you for caring enough to share that with me, I will pray about it and get back to you." Look for the kernel of truth in what people offer you, even if it comes from a dubious source. Always pray, "Lord, what are you trying to show me through this?"

6. Accept a lowly place. (Proverbs 25:6,7) If you find yourself wanting to sit at the head table, wanting others to recognize your contribution or become offended when others are honored or chosen, then pride is present. Purpose to support others being recognized, rather than you. Accept and look for the lowly place; it is the place of humility.

7. Purposely associate with people of lower state than you. (Luke 7:36-39) Jesus was derided by the Pharisees for socializing with the poor and those of lowly state. Our culture is very status conscious and people naturally want to socialize upward. Resist the temptation of being partial to those with status or wealth.

8. Choose to serve others. (Philippians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Matthew 23:11) When we serve others, we are serving God's purposes in their lives. Doing so reduces our focus on ourselves and builds the Kingdom of God instead of the Kingdom of self. When serving another costs us nothing, we should question whether or not it is really servant hood.

9. Be quick to forgive. (Matthew 18: 21-35) Forgiveness is possibly one of the greatest acts of humility we can do. To forgive is to acknowledge a wrong that has been done us and also to further release our right of repayment for the wrong. Forgiveness is denial of self. Forgiveness is not insisting on our way and our justice.

10. Cultivate a grateful heart. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) The more we develop an attitude of gratitude for the gift of salvation and life He has given us, the more true our perspective of self. A grateful heart is a humble heart.

11. Purpose to speak well of others. (Ephesians 4:31-32) Saying negative things about others puts them "one down" and us "one up"...a form of pride. Speaking well of others edifies them and builds them up instead of us. Make sure, however, that what you say is not intended as flattery.

12. Treat pride as a condition that always necessitates embracing the cross. (Luke 9:23) It is our nature to be proud and it is God's nature in us that brings humility. Committing to a lifestyle of daily dying to self and living through Him is the foundation for true humility. Alfred Ells, M.C. in "What does the Bible Say about Humility"

Appendix L

Additional Notes

See "Tale of Two Citizenships" Special Topics at
www.soundliving.org

On Civil Disobedience

By John Piper from a sermon delivered on July 10, 2005
"So today the question is twofold: 1) What is the evidence from the Bible that God sometimes approves of his people not submitting to the very authority he had put in place? That is, what is the evidence for God-approved civil disobedience? And 2) when is such civil disobedience right, and what should it look like? These are huge questions and whole books have been written on them. But if that stopped us from preaching, we would preach on nothing worth thinking about.

Biblical Examples of Disobedience to Civil Authorities

Consider a few texts on disobedience to civil authorities. I referred last week to Acts 5:27-29 where Peter and the apostles say, "We must obey God rather than men." In other words, even though God said to submit to the men in authority, he does not mean: Obey them when they forbid what I command or command what I forbid. The command to submit to man does not make man God. It gives man authority *under* God, and qualified *by* God. So let's turn to some examples where that qualification leads to disobedience.

Daniel 6:6-10 Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "*O King Darius, live*

for ever! All the presidents of the kingdom . . . are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. . ."Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Notice how blatant Daniel's disobedience is. It is, as we say, in your face. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house, where he had *windows* in his upper chamber—*upper* chamber!—opened toward Jerusalem. And he got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously. This was an open act of disobedience to the civil authority. It was a public act of putting God before the king's decree. He took his place at an upper window, so he could be clearly seen. And for it he was thrown to the lions. Which he did not resist. Keep in mind that there is no explicit commandment that one must pray on one's knees at an open window three times a day. This was Daniel's conviction about God's will, not an explicit command in the Bible.

Daniel 3:9-18 The case of Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, was slightly different. The decree was made that all should bow down before the king's image. In other words, Daniel was forbidden to do a thing, and his friends were commanded to do a thing. They would not. Instead, they said: "*O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God*

whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."

This was civil disobedience on the basis of religious conscience. And for it they were thrown into the furnace. And they did not resist.

Exodus 1:15-20 *"Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives... 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birth stool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live...."* So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong. The midwives disobeyed the king's order to kill the babies.

One response to these last two texts is that they portray disobedience to a command that requires sin. What about civil disobedience to laws that are not requiring you to do anything. They are just forbidding you from doing something that you feel morally bound to do.

Besides the case of Daniel, the Bible gives several other examples (e.g., Kings 18:4,13; Joshua 2:3-4). For example, Queen Esther is honored for disobeying the law against unsolicited approach to the king. King Ahasuerus had decreed that Jews were to be annihilated young and old, women and children (Esther 3:13). Mordecai, Esther's uncle asked Esther to intervene for the Jews to save their lives.

Esther's response was to remind Mordecai that any unsolicited approach to the King was against the law. She

could be killed (4:11-12), unless the king had mercy on her and raised his scepter. Mordecai answered that Esther may well have come to the kingdom for such a time as this (4:14). So Esther calls for a three-day fast. Finally she resolves, *"I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish"* (4:16). The effect of her intervention was that the Jews were spared.

There are at least three features of Esther's disobedience that stand out: 1) The law Esther broke did not require any active evil of her. It only stood in the way of trying to save the Jews. 2) There was no guarantee that her disobedience would be successful. It might have only galvanized the king's opposition to the Jews. She risked it because so much was at stake. 3) Her act of disobedience to the state is not incidental to the main point of the book. It is the heart of her sacrificial faith: "If I perish, I perish!"

But even if there were no explicit instances of civil disobedience in the Bible we would have to ask some tough questions: Is it morally right to jay walk to stop a rape? Is it morally right to break the speed limit to rush a dying wife to the hospital? Is it right to break into a neighbor's house to put out a fire—or save a child?

Under what conditions, then, might civil disobedience be morally called for? One could say with the apostle Peter: Obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). In other words, if the law commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands then you must break the law. But the problem with that simple guideline is that much of the civil disobedience in history has involved doing things that are not clearly commanded by God. Sitting down on the sidewalk in front an abortion clinic in 1989 was not explicitly commanded by God in the Bible. Eating in a white-only restaurant in St. Augustine, Florida in 1964, and

marching and praying in Montgomery, Alabama in 1965 were not commanded explicitly in the Bible. In other words, some Christians have come to the point in history where they believed laws were so unjust and so evil, and political means of change had been frustrated so long, that peaceful, non-violent, civil disobedience seemed right. What factors should we take into consideration to decide if we should do that kind of civil disobedience? It seems to me that it would be a combination of at least these four things.

The grievousness of the action sanctioned by law. How atrocious is it? Is it a traffic pattern that you think is dumb? Or is the law sanctioning killing? The *extent* of the unjust law's effect. Is it a person affected here or there? Or is it millions? Does the law have an incidental inconsistency? Or is it putting a whole group of people into bondage because of their ethnic origin? The potential of civil disobedience for clear and effective witness to the truth. This is the question of strategy, and there will certainly be room here for differing judgments about whether a particular act of civil disobedience will be a clear and effective statement of what is just.

The movement of the spirit of courage and conviction in God in people's lives that indicates the time is right. Historically, there appears to be a flash point of moral indignation. An evil exists for years, or perhaps generations, and then something strange happens. One person, and then tens of thousands of people, can no longer just get up and go to work and say, "I wish it weren't this way." A flash point is reached, and what had hung in the air for years as tolerable evil explodes with an overwhelming sense that this state of affairs simply can no longer be! So if and when that time comes, how should civil disobedience be carried out? What should it look like?

Non-Resistance and Active Love for Your Enemy

Let's look at the demands of love in Matthew 5:38-48.

These are tough paragraphs about non-resistance and active love for your enemy. First, Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who asks from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. (vv. 38-42)

All of those verses are intended to show compliance to one who mistreats you or asks you for something. This looks like the opposite of resistance. Now here comes something a little different in verses 43-48: active love rather than non-resistance. You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. . . . You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (vv. 43-48)

Here a different note is struck. The emphasis falls on seeking the good of the enemy. Love your enemy. Pray for your enemy—presumably that he would be saved and find hope and life in Christ. Do good to your enemy the way God does with rain and sunshine. So in verses 38-42 the note of compliance is struck (don't resist, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile). But in verses 43-48 Jesus strikes the note of positive actions for the good of your enemies with a view to their blessing.

Now this raises the question whether the non-resistance and compliance of verses 38-42 is always the best way to love others and do them good as in verses 43-48. One focuses on passivity—don't retaliate, be willing to suffer unjustly. The other focuses on activity—seek to do good for your enemy. Is passivity always the best way to do good? The answer becomes more clear when we realize that in most situations of injustice or persecution we are not the only person being hurt. For example, how do you love two other people if one the criminal and the other is the victim—if one is hurting and the other is being hurt? Is love passive when it is not just your cheek that is being smacked but someone else's—and repeatedly?

Or what about the command to give to the one who asks. Is it love to give your coat to a person who will use it to strangle an infant? And how do you go the extra mile (lovingly!) with a person who is taking you along to support his bloodshed? Do you go the extra mile with a person who is making you an active accomplice to his evil? The point of these questions is this: In these verses Jesus is giving us a description of love that cuts to the depth of our selfishness and fear. If selfishness and fear keep us from giving and going the extra mile, then we need to be broken by these words. But Jesus is not saying that passive compliance in situations of injustice is the only form of love. It can be a form of cowardice. When love weighs the claims of justice and mercy among all the people involved, there can come a moment, a flash point, when love may go beyond passive, compliant non-resistance and drive the money changers from the Temple (Mark 11:15).

Guidelines for How Christians Should Engage in Civil Disobedience

What guidelines are there, then, for how a Christian will perform civil disobedience? The words of Jesus rule out all

vindictiveness and all action based on the mere expediency of personal safety. The Lord cuts away our love for possessions, and our love for convenience. That's the point of Matthew 5:38-42. Don't act merely out of concern for your own private benefit, your clothes, your convenience, your possessions, your safety.

Instead, by trusting Christ, become the kind of person who is utterly free from these things to live for others (both the oppressed and the oppressors; both the persecuted and the persecutors; both the dying children and the killing abortionists). The tone and demeanor of this Christian civil disobedience will be the opposite of strident, belligerent, rock-throwing, screaming, swearing, violent demonstrations.

We are people of the cross. Our Lord submitted to crucifixion willingly to save his enemies. We owe our eternal life to him. We are forgiven sinners. This takes the swagger out of our protest. It takes the arrogance out of our resistance. And if, after every other means has failed, we must disobey for the sake of love and justice, we will first remove the log from our own eye, which will cause enough pain and tears to soften our indignation into a humble, quiet, but unshakeable, NO. The greatest battle we face is not overcoming unjust laws, but becoming this kind of people.

Appendix M

A Summary of Romans

By Dr. Jerry Nelson

The Theme of the Book:

Romans 1:16-17 *"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.' "*

Humanity's Problem:

1:20-21 *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."*

1:25 *"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator."*

2:5 *"because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed."*

3:9-11 *"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.' "*

3:23 *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of*

God..."

God's Remedy

3:21-24 *"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."*

3:28 *"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."*

4:4-5 *"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."*

The Great Results: Peace with God

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

5:8-9 *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"*

Freedom from the controlling power of sin

6:1-2 *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"*

6:3,6 *"don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? For we know*

that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."

6:14-15 *"Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."*

8:5,9 *"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... You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit..."*

We are Adopted into God's Forever Family

8:15-17 *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. We will be resurrected from the dead."*

8:18-23 *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

We are now under God's constant care

8:28-30 *"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."²⁹ 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.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. God guarantees his love."

8:38-39 "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."

We are chosen by God's Mercy!

9:16 "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

What about the Jews?

10:16 "not all the Israelites accepted the good news."

11:1 "Did God reject his people? By no means!"

11:5 "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace."

11:25-26 "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved."

Our Response to Grace

12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."

12:17 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do

what is right in the eyes of everybody."

13:1 *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."*

13:9 *"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."*

14:13 *"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way."*

Benediction

16:25-27 *"Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."*

Appendix N

Christians and Priests

A Section from The Contemplative Pastor

Christians and Priests:

In Romans 15:16 does Paul give warrant for calling ministers, “priests?”

A priest is “One authorized to perform the sacred rights of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God.” (Miriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary)

In the Bible the word “priest” is related to the Hebrew word for “one who stands” before God.

The OT priest represented the people to God through the sacrifices.

Exodus 28:1 *"Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests."*

Leviticus 9:7 The priest is instructed: *"Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded."*

The priests were also to proclaim the word of God to the people.

Malachi 2:7 *"For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty."*

But in the NT the role of the priest is superseded by Christ who is final and infinite priest fulfilling all the purposes of the OT priests and the sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:11-12 *"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."*

Hebrews 10:11-12 *"Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."*

Unfortunately, within a couple of hundred years of the beginning of the church, the idea of church ministers being called priests developed. The whole idea grew from copying both the cultures around them and the OT priesthood. A special class of Christians, the ministers, wore more and more elaborate clothing. They began calling the communion table an altar. They began to think of the bread and wine of the Lord's Table as the literal body and blood of Jesus and thus offered them time after time as a sacrifice. But all of this was contrary to what God teaches us in the book of Hebrews and elsewhere.

Remember, a priest is a mediator. But now the only mediator between God and man is Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

Hebrews 9:14-15 *"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself*

unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! ¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance."

We believe it is misleading and thus improper to refer to a Christian minister as a priest. And there is no altar at the front of our churches. The ultimate altar was the real cross on which Jesus died. The Lord's Table is not an altar. I want to suggest that the only altar remaining is the human heart. Romans 12:1 *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*

See a lengthy but helpful article at <http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/catholicscandal.htm>

It is titled "*The Scandal of the Catholic Priesthood*

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The primary role of a pastor to preach/teach the Word of God

The church's word to its pastor: "We want you to be responsible for saying and acting among us what we believe about God and kingdom and gospel... We believe that the invisible is more important than the visible at any one single moment and in any single event that we choose to examine... We need help in keeping our beliefs sharp and accurate and intact. We don't trust ourselves; our emotions seduce us into infidelities. We know we are launched on a difficult and dangerous act of faith in life, and there are strong influences intent on diluting or destroying it. We want you to give us help... Be a minister of the Word... (Let God speak through you into all the different parts and stages of our lives)--in our work and

play, with our children and our parents, at birth and death, in our celebrations and sorrows, on those days when morning breaks over us in a wash of sunshine, and those other days that are all drizzle.

This isn't the only task in the life of faith but it is your task. We will find someone else to do the other important and essential tasks. This is yours: Word and Sacrament. One more thing: We are going to ordain you to this ministry, and we want your vow that you will stick to it. This is not a temporary job assignment for you but a way of life that we need lived out in our community. We know you are launched on the same difficult belief venture in the same dangerous world as I am. I know your emotions are as fickle as ours and your mind is as tricky as ours. That is why we are going to extract a vow from you. We know there will be days and months, maybe even years, when we won't feel like believing anything and won't want to hear it from you. And we know there will be days and weeks and even years when you won't feel like saying it. It doesn't matter. Do it. You are ordained to this ministry, vowed to it...

Promise right now that you won't give in to what we demand of you. You are not the minister of our changing desires or our time-conditioned understanding of our needs, or our secularized hopes for something better.... There are many other things to be done in this wrecked world, and we are going to be doing at least some of them, but if we don't know the foundational realities with which we are dealing—God, Kingdom, Gospel—we are to going to end up living futile, fantasy lives. Your task is to keep telling the basic story, representing the presence of the Spirit, insisting on the priority of God, and speaking the biblical words of command and promise and invitation."

(Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 137-9)

