

The
NEW TESTAMENT

Translation and Commentary

by
David Morsey

The Book of
Romans

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Preface

The purpose of this project is to provide the Lord's people with a thorough, easy-to-read interpretation of the Bible, verse-by-verse. With this commentary there will be a translation from the original text which will preserve simple dignity and yet eliminate the colloquial and antiquated expressions. There will also be an effort to avoid translations that make arbitrary decisions about certain texts which might be taken in several ways. For example, in the descriptions of heaven in Revelation 21:16, it says, "*The city lies foursquare.*" Now the Greek word translated "foursquare," *tetragonos*, can mean "cube" or "four-cornered." If the city is a pyramid, which is quite possible, then "four-cornered" is a good translation. But, if we use the word "cube," then we shut out the possibility of the pyramid, an arbitrary decision which we are not capable of making at this time. Accordingly, we will attempt to stay as close to the literal text as possible, without paraphrases that may take too much liberty.

Foreword

With this lesson we are beginning a chapter-by-chapter study that will encompass the entire Bible. It is our intention in these studies to show as accurately as possible what the Bible teaches. We are not trying to present a reasonable philosophy of life with a reference to the scripture as a source, but rather, we are attempting to show as faithfully as possible what the Bible teaches about life. We are not here defending the Bible, but only interpreting it. The Holy Spirit Himself must defend the Bible because, after all, it is His Word.

In order to interpret the Bible accurately, the following things are essential: (1) The presence and power of the Holy Spirit; (2) a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages, in which the Bible was written; (3) a knowledge of the history and culture of the periods in which the Bible was written; (4) a personal situation which is free enough to make it unnecessary to defend any particular theological position; and (5) enough personal experience with Christ and with the Bible to provide the high degree of sensitivity that is essential to bring out the best possible meaning among several choices.

The presentation of the truth of God, as revealed in the scripture, must be simple enough to be available to all who seek it, and yet profound enough and accurate enough to be assured that we are conveying the message as God intended it to be given. We must come to the Bible, not as a textbook to be analyzed, but rather, as a revelation from God of the meaning of life, especially as it relates to the human spirit and its identity with God. Essentially the Bible reveals to us the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of man's relationship to God. As a revelation of the nature of God, the Bible becomes a source of nourishment to the spirit which finds its source in the Bread of Life—Jesus Christ. As a revelation of the nature of man and his relationship to God, the Bible provides guidelines for living.

In this study of the Bible, we are going to provide a translation from the original text (Greek in the New Testament and Hebrew in the Old Testament) and with it, comments that will clarify the meaning of the text, providing both the spiritual nourishment and the practical guidelines that were intended from the beginning, in the revelation that God has given us.

Author's Translation will be indicated by A.T. following the Scripture reference.

An Introduction to The Study of The Book of Romans

Romans is not a theology book to be analyzed and systematized—it is a letter, to some real people. To organize its contents and attempt to outline it, would be as unrewarding as trying to outline the letter from a friend. One thought leads to another thought and to another and another. If an expert—a professor of English—should try to analyze your personal letters, he would either press it into an artificial mold or give up the job as impractical. So it will not be our purpose to give a neat outline of a book of theology, but to consider point by point, the implications of a very important and warm letter to a body of believers, beloved to him as they were to our Lord Jesus Christ.

ROME

Who were these Romans and what did Christ wish to say to them? They were a rather cosmopolitan group—citizens of the greatest empire on earth. Rome was considered “master of the Mediterranean;” dominating all nations surrounding the sea and taking tribute from them. Ultimately, the territory of Rome extended north to the Danube River of Europe and Hadreans Wall in the British Isles, which was about mid-point.

As with the earlier Greeks, the vast territory of the empire became a great boon to the spread of the gospel. Alexander the Great had spread the Greek culture throughout the Middle East, including the language, which became the vehicle through which the New Testament was communicated in all of its refined perfections.

Whereas the Greeks gave us the vehicle of the articulation of the Divine revelation, the Roman empire was the vehicle through which it was spread through the western world. The institutions and systems and inventions of Roman civilization were, no doubt, part of God’s timing for the revelation of the coming of Christ, as were the Greek institutions. There is no doubt but that the rise of the Greek and Roman civilizations was in keeping with God’s timing and purpose for the coming of Christ.

The Greek civilization, in its formulation at the time of Christ had begun simply enough in the merging of several cultural streams from the north and the east—Attic, Doric and Ionic—which had been evolving in the period around 1000 B.C. (about the time of the Trojan war), and found a focus in the age of Pericles, Archon, or ruler of Athens—in what is known as the golden age of Greece—around 500 B.C. Pericles was considered the father of modern democracy. It was then that the language and culture had reached its zenith.

At that point, after a war which virtually destroyed both Athens and Sparta (rival city states), came Alexander the Great, the son of Phillip of Macedon, to take over the beleaguered Greeks and spread their culture, with which he was enamored across the Middle East—eastward to the Indus river and south to Egypt. The city of Alexandria was obviously named after him. We call that the Hellenistic civilization, after the original name of Greece—Hellas. During the Hellenistic period the Greek language came to its fullest development, and became the vehicle for the articulation of God’s message in the New Testament. It was a very precise language and served the needs of the New Testament

message better than Hebrew, which was more suitable for narrative. Having served its purpose, the empire came to an end in the untimely (36) death of Alexander. The kingdom was divided among four of his generals, since he left no heir, and finally emerged in the Seleucid Empire, which formed the roots of modern Palestine.

Meanwhile, the Roman Empire had begun its rise. Contemporary with the rise of the Greek civilization were the Etruscans, who dominated the peninsula which is now Italy. The city of Rome emerged around 750 B.C. under the Etruscans. Later (539) it threw off the yoke of the Etruscans and moved toward an independent republic.

Around this time Aeneas, son of Priam of Troy (celebrated scene of the Trojan War), had migrated from the fallen city over to the Italian peninsula and settled in Latium, and married the daughter of the king. As legend has it, he sired two sons—Romulus and Remus, who later were raised by a she-wolf (immortalized in a statue in Rome). As legend further has it, the twins engaged in a fierce conflict from which Romulus emerged the victor. Hence, the name “Rome.”

During the same period of time, the Phoenicians on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, dominated the sea and had colonies as far west as Carthage on the northern shores of Africa, and opposite the tip of the Italian peninsula. The Phoenicians were called “the sea dogs.” After a series of battles known as the “Punic Wars” (from Poeni or Phoenicia), which extended from about 214 B.C. to the time of Julius Caesar, around 44 B.C.. The Romans were the victors and took over the Mediterranean Sea as the “Masters of the Mediterranean.” On ancient maps the sea is called “Mare Nostrum”—“our sea.” The Mediterranean was sometimes called the “Lake of Rome.”

Meanwhile, Julius Caesar was extending the empire in northern Europe as a general in the Roman army and by 44 B.C. had pushed out its boundaries to the extent of the territories it held at the time of Christ. At this point, Caesar became first, the Military Consul and subsequently, the central figure in a three-member triumvirate. After Caesar’s untimely and notorious death, his place was occupied by Octavius, or Augustus, who was emperor at the time of the birth of Christ. As of the time of Paul, the empire had fallen to the “Mad Fiddler,” Nero.

Thus the roots of the people and culture to which Paul was addressing this letter. It was a vast and cosmopolitan civilization, very much akin to our own modern urban and cosmopolitan society. Paul is not dealing here with some small provincial or tribal ethnic group, with its own narrow and proscribed religious symbols and superstitions. Well educated and widely traveled, Paul was as much a citizen of the world as he was of Rome. He knew well the people whom he addressed, both in the western world and in Asia. Rome, like Los Angeles and New York drew, its population from many parts of the world. It was appropriate that this most definitive of all letters should be addressed to its citizens. It was a universal message to a universal city. The central message of his letter is universal guilt, and universal redemption. If the disobedience of one man, Adam, brought guilt upon the whole world, the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ, made redemption available to the whole world. If participation in the sin of Adam is by natural birth, participation in the redemption in Christ is by spiritual birth. And if natural births is beyond the capacity of the conceived, so spiritual birth is beyond the capacity of the redeemed. While one is born

involuntarily in the natural birth process, by the will of the mother, one is given spiritual birth voluntarily by the will of God. This central message of Paul to the Romans is, in fact, addressed to the whole world via the Roman Empire.

At the time of Paul's writing, there was a very large Jewish community in Rome. Later they would be dispersed throughout the world and would be identified as the "Diaspora," or the "dispersed." But this very dispersion, so seemingly disastrous at the time, nevertheless eventuated in a very wide dispersing of the gospel.

And such were the ones to whom Paul addressed this pivotal epistle. The Romans were a symbol of God's universal interest in the civilization of mankind. The Jews, who had been God's appointed oracles for the revelation of God to man—and who had failed so abysmally in their task, and who had rejected God's promised Messiah, their ultimate Deliverer—were not the only ones who were the objects of God's restoration, nor were they the only ones to be indicted. On different grounds, both Jew and Gentile came in for God's pronouncement of guilt. But the pronouncement of guilt was not in order to penalize the race, whom He had created, but to conclude all are under condemnation, that He might have mercy upon all. The admission of guilt brought the grace and deliverance of God, as the acknowledgement of sickness brings the healing power of the physician. Such was the analogy that Jesus pressed in His address to the Pharisees. Since they thought that they were the consummate example of righteousness, they would not see their need for help and would not, therefore, receive it. That they were not acceptable to God, in spite of their pious claims, was the burden of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. While they kept assiduously the tenets of the Law, their heart was not right with God. Observing the letter of the Law, they violated outrageously the spirit of it. They put upon the people *"burdens grievous to be born, and would not lift one finger to help them."*

And thus, in Paul's indictment of the Jews—the keepers of the Law—they had become the judges of the world, but were themselves guilty of the same things. They thought that their heritage as Jews would give them a significant edge with God; but in truth, they had already been replaced, in the grace of God, by the Gentiles.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, had rejected God as the Creator and Sustainer of the world, and had exchanged the worship of Him as their Creator for the worship of the "creature." Ignoring the obvious evidences of the hand of God in the creation of the world, they were absorbed by their willful ignorance and gave themselves to the perversion of the noble purposes of God for mankind, descended into the pit of brutish behavior, and received the just judgment of God. But the Jews who were their chief accusers, were themselves, according to Paul, practicing the same things. If that seems strange and unbelievable, remember that even in the modern day, the more bombastic the protestations of the pious the greater the potential of personal impropriety. It seems that the tendency toward the merciless condemnation of the saints requires something of a lesson in the universal need for mercy. The Psalmist says, *"To the merciful, He shows Himself merciful."* To the Pharisees assembled in self-righteous indignation to castigate the woman taken in adultery, Jesus said, *"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone."* John plainly declared that Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17.)

And so, the message of Paul to the world through the Romans, was a searing indictment of the universal guilt and the glorious revelation of the river of Divine grace, in the recovery of the creatures whom He had created. One cannot imagine that the God of all grace would bring into being, a great mass of humans created in His image, only to remand the bulk of them to eternal destruction. But the self-righteous and pious protestors are quite willing to acknowledge that the bulk of humanity will go into destruction. That is not the message of Romans. Romans declares that guilt has been pronounced upon all, that God may immerse all in the river of His grace.

Well then, are you saying that everyone will be saved?

No indeed. There are large numbers of those who have been the oppressors and exploiters of humanity—the brutish and cruel and outrageous. They are the insolent despisers of God’s creation. Such ones seem to be the very agents of Satan—the minions of Hell.

PAUL

Paul’s conversion has always been a high water mark in the history of redemption. It is a timeless example of the power of God to intervene in the life of a human being, when it is his purpose to do so; and transform him from an avid but misguided religionist, violently opposing Jesus as the Messiah and persecuting His followers, into an intrepid soldier of Christ charging across the Western and Asian world. In fact, he counted himself as destined to death for the sake of Christ, and indeed was called upon to give up his life—executed in the Mamertine Prison.

Crisscrossing thousands of miles of mountains and seas, in days when travel was slow and tedious, he battled the elements as well as his own countrymen and his own human frailty, to spread the gospel of grace to a world in the bondage of Pagan idolatry and Jewish legalism. His message to Jew and Gentile, alike was the same—redemption and deliverance through Christ Jesus.

Paul had been a contemporary of Jesus, but as a citizen of Tarsus, a prominent city in Cilicia, had not, probably, encountered Him personally—though he may have seen Him in some visit to Jerusalem during the feast days. At any rate, he was certainly convinced that this noted, self-proclaimed rabbi and blasphemously reported to be the Messiah, was a diabolical imposter. Paul—*“Pharisee of the Pharisees”*—had thus dedicated himself to the extermination of the perverse “cult of Jesus,” and sought, thus, to have His followers executed.

It was on one of his nefarious missions to seek out Christians in Damascus, that God shattered his idiotic human illusions. There was no argument; no excuse; no self-defense—only the invincible power of God sweeping away in a moment, a lifetime of human religious folly and ignorance. Let it be said at this point that such sweeping changes do not always, or even often, occur in religious experience. But Paul was a specially prepared vessel. If his early religious training and convictions had been wanting, at least they seemed to be necessary to give Paul the edge he needed to understand the implications of both the old and new covenants. Paul had been, after all, “called,” from his mother’s womb.

After his conversion, Paul was relatively obscure for about 14 years. Three years of this had been spent in Arabia, undoubtedly receiving from God the revelation that would become the substance of his ministry and of the New Testament. As Moses had been God's anointed oracle to declare the old covenant, so Paul was the chief spokesman of the New Covenant. When he was finally sent forth by the leaders of Antioch to fulfill his ministry, he made three missionary journeys and the trek to Rome for the final chapter of his life. Almost single-handedly he had established the network of churches across Asia Minor and the Western regions of the Mediterranean.

It should be observed here, that Paul did not lay hold of Christ, but Christ laid hold of Paul. Any who may think that their service to Christ only awaits their own measure of dedication, ought to realize that no human dedication will ever avail. Paul was gripped by a power not his own, as he himself confessed to the Corinthians—“*The love of Christ compels me.*” It was not his love *for* Christ that compelled him, but the love *of* the Christ, expressing itself from within him. Human motivation invariably sends us in directions that seem right to the rational mind, but may not be what God wants. When He is ready to use us, He will send us forth.

Paul made three major missionary journeys. The first one was to the southern region of Asia Minor; the second took in the northern section of Asia Minor, as well as the expansion into Greece; the third centered in Corinth and Ephesus. He remained about a year and a half in Corinth and two years in Ephesus. It was from Corinth that he wrote his letter to the Romans. So the letter was something of a distillation of all that Paul had learned and experienced in the foregoing pursuit of Christ and His work on the earth.

THE EPISTLE

Paul probably wrote Romans from Corinth on his third missionary journey, around the year 58 A.D. It would have been some 25 years after his conversion. Fourteen of these had been spent in preparation before he actually set out with Barnabas, appointed by God, and anointed by the leaders of Antioch. By now he had been about 10 years in the work, establishing a network of churches in the mountainous regions of Asia Minor and across the Aegean Sea to the Greek Peninsula, where he had established groups of believers from Thessalonica to Corinth in the Peloponnesus at the tip of the peninsula.

He had sought to go to Rome also, but was hindered. There were many disappointments in Paul's life and ministry—many frustrations and heartaches. These were some of the things he wrestled with in his constant reference to the afflictions of the flesh. In lieu of his visit, he decided to write a letter—and what a letter it was! The disappointments and frustrations were woven into the text in a great symphony of salvation. He wrote of the wretched state of the human soul, beset by the Demonic forces that were unleashed in the tragic catastrophe of Eden. He wrote of a world drenched in the flood tide of evil that had flowed unchecked since that fateful hour in “the Garden.” He wrote of the shameful and pathetic performance of his own people, who had, “*Exchanged the truth of God for a lie,*” and “*Worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.*” When they should have been the light of the world, they were participating in the same outrageous perversions of

the pagan world. Paul's scathing denunciation—*"Therefore thou art inexcusable!"* And so the ultimate judgment of God—all the world guilty; Jew and Gentile; Pagan and religious—all guilty.

But in the depths of despair and desolation, there is the one and only hope—*"God has concluded all under guilt, that He may have mercy upon all."*

Paul wanted to show Jew and Gentile alike, that there was no way possible for them to be saved but by the sacrifice of Christ. *"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."* The depth of the human iniquity evoked the height of the Divine power and grace.

Reliance on the flesh is futile—it will never succeed in lifting itself one inch toward God, or remove one ounce of guilt. Paul cries out, *"Oh wretched man that I am—who shall deliver me from this body of death?"* Instantly comes the answer—*"I thank God, through our Lord Jesus Christ"* And then comes the victorious cry—*"There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."* *"For the law of the spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak in the flesh, God, sending His own in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh that the righteousness of God might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

The Pharisee of the Pharisees at last, had come to know that the law was only a "schoolmaster" to bring him to Christ. By the law he had come to know sin, but the law did not take away sin. The law brought him under condemnation, but could not deliver him from guilt. The law could make him miserable, but could not give him peace.

And such his message to the Romans. Not only could Christ deliver them from sin, which the law could not, but He could unite them to God forever. Not only could He save from sin, but He could totally vanquish Satan and evil, so that nothing could separate the people of God from Him. *"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things coming, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38, 39.) For a world totally immersed in evil and totally unable to save itself, comes a Savior totally able to take away sin, and totally adequate to lift the dying race to eternal life with God.

The following pages will give a translation of the text, employing the best in scientific semantics—that is, the effort to trace the language back to its roots in classical Greek as refined in the Golden Age of Greece and up through its evolution in the *Koiné* Greek of the New Testament (the dialect of common use) What did the words mean to Homer and Plato and Xenophon? And what did they mean to Paul and the apostles? And how do we integrate them with our modern language and culture? The problem today with confusion, is not what God intended. The trouble lies not with ambiguity of the text, but with inadequate training of those who presume to be teachers. In lieu of the mastery of the existing text, some would seek private revelations that will sidestep the necessity of scholarship. Some, eager to get out to the work may not take the time, as Paul himself did (14 years), to prepare for his appointed task.

God can use anyone whom he chooses, at whatever level they have progressed, but if one wants to be an authority, one must take the time to be adequately prepared. (The author of this commentary has paid his dues.)

So let us proceed to unlock the treasures of this most pivotal of all Paul's work.

Romans 1:1-7

TRANSLATION

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated unto the gospel of God which He proclaimed beforehand through His prophets in the sacred Scriptures concerning His Son, Who came from the seed of David according to the flesh; who was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of sanctification out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, from Whom we have received grace and apostleship unto the submission of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of His name; in Whom ye also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called as saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

Greetings—Paul Identifies Himself and the Believers in Rome.

The single most significant thing about Paul describes himself as a servant of Christ Jesus, an apostle called of God and separated unto the gospel. The word *doulos* can be translated either servant or slave, and Paul was perhaps a little of both. Jesus said, *“I have no longer called you servants [slaves] because the servant does not know what his Lord is doing; but I have called you friends because all things which I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you.”* As the servants, or slaves, in the Old Testament, were freed every seven years according to the law, so through the blood of Christ, we have been freed from the law and are no longer slaves to it. However, in the Old Testament, it was also true that if a servant did not want to be free but wanted to stay with his master, he was free to do that. His ear was pierced in order to indicate that he

had elected to be a voluntary servant. In a prophetic Psalm regarding the Messiah the expression was used—*“Mine ear have they pierced”*—as a symbol of Jesus’ own voluntary servitude. Paul called himself a *“bondslave”* of Christ. He never imposed this kind of position upon the body of believers in general, whose service to Christ was voluntary and not so binding. And so, for all believers there is something of the friend and something of the servant. For Paul it was the *“bondslave.”* But that was his own choice.

Not—“called an apostle”—but “a called apostle.” The word apostle is from the Greek word *apostello*, which means to “send forth.” In a sense, anyone who is sent forth on a special mission would be something of an apostle. But with Paul and the twelve, the word had a very special meaning. Many rise up today

to assume the title in a self-styled way, but the only legitimate use of the word is for one who has had a very special calling. As with the prophets, who were subject to the prophets, the designation of “apostle,” would have to be made by others who were in a position to be guided by the Spirit. Unfortunately, in today’s expression of the body of Christ, the so-called “gifts” are rather carelessly treated. It is today as it was with Paul, when he addressed the church at Corinth on the subject. People were rising up to claim the gifts for themselves, and confer them upon others without the necessary qualifications or authorization to do so. Paul was called upon to validate his apostleship to the people of Corinth. He did so by reminding them that he also had seen the Lord, as had the other apostles, and that they were, themselves the fruit of his ministry. The question of whether or not there are apostles today in the tradition of Paul, is an open one. Much depends upon one’s definition of apostleship, which is not really precise in today’s terminology. The danger always lies with the self-styled apostle who, without proper qualifications, may be responsible for the misleading of many of the Lord’s children. Nevertheless, there was certainly no doubt about Paul’s apostleship.

In addition to the process of service, which relates to the idea of apostleship, Paul also speaks of the grace which he has received. But there is far more to the idea of grace than simply the willingness of God to forgive sin. Paul regarded himself as the chief of sinners, and was naturally quite impressed by the extension to him of the grace of God. But the meaning of grace goes far beyond this. It is common for Bible teachers to define grace as “the unmerited favor of God.” But such a definition casts a pall over the idea of grace. There is a certain sense in

which the idea of unworthiness is intrinsic in the word grace, just as it is in the gift. It is understood that a gift is a gift and not something one earns, but it is not very fashionable to mention that point in the giving of the gift. Just so with Christ, it is certainly a truism that we do not merit His favor, but He does not try to remind us of that. The better definition of the word would be “the flow of Divine benevolence.” Benevolence means, of course, the goodness of God and His good wishes for us. Thus, we are really in a river of Divine goodness and mercy, which flows from Himself to His creatures on earth. That river sweeps up the sinners and carries the saints through to glory. It is the grace that puts up with our human follies and failures, and covers us all in the sacrifice of Christ. It is the grace that identifies you as part of the Lord’s family and that keeps you there, It is the grace that says, “when you have entered His family, you now belong to Him and He is not going to ‘throw you out’ for human inadequacy.” That is not to say that our behavior is a matter of indifference. It matters, and is the base on which life on the earth flows successfully. If we misbehave, we often pay a considerable price. That is not because God is trying to punish us, but in the nature of the case, unsound behavior carries with it its consequences. If it were not for the grace of God, our capacity as humans would never keep us in His favor.

Separated unto the gospel of God. To the people of Galatia, Paul declared that he had been separated from his mother’s womb. There have been those throughout the Bible who have been designated in a special way at the time of birth, as for example Samson and Samuel and Jeremiah; others from a very early age, as in the case of David. The extent to which everyone born in the world has a specific purpose, is open to speculation. According

to Romans 9, some are designated as “vessels of dishonor.” Although the extent of that designation is not clear, the idea that some people are born with a predestination of destruction has many problems. We will discuss that at length in our consideration of Chapter 9.

The word “gospel” has come into wide misuse. Like the words “faith” and “love,” it has lost its precise definition and become almost meaningless. The Greek word is *euangelion*. The English word “gospel” is from the German, which means a good story, or perhaps originally, “God’s story.” The modern translation “good news” is not strong enough, especially in its common usage. The phrase has even become part of a joke or “gag line.” Similarly, the word “gospel” itself has been used for a wide range of meanings, including musical categories and the popular expression, “the gospel truth.” And it has been applied to many offbeat or fanatical religious activities.

The historical meaning of the word is very strong, indeed. The root of the word comes over into English as “angel,” which originally meant “messenger.” Adding the prefix *eu* to it, makes it a very special messenger. In the Greek Classics, the word was used by Aeschylus in a narrative about the Trojan War. It had been agreed beforehand that, when and if the Greeks should win the war with Troy, they would communicate the victory by lighting a series of fires across the mountain tops, from Troy to the palace of Agamenon in Argos, where a watchman would be stationed on the roof continually until such word would be received. In Aeschylus’ drama, the watchman says, “May the fire with its victory proclamation flash through the gloom!” The word for victory proclamation is our word *euangelion*. So, through Christ the

living revelation, God sends His victory proclamation to the world.

In the sacred Scriptures. The word “sacred,” like its counterpart “sanctified,” means something “set apart.” The word here is *hagios*, which is used for everything that has been set apart for God, including the members of God’s family, who are called “saints” or those who are “set apart.” The use of the word “holy,” here is ambiguous and conveys many different things, including piety and “awesomeness.” The entire Bible is God’s special message to His people—a special revelation in written form so that there need be no mistake, whatever intentions for His people. The message of grace and love is not one people normally associate with deity, whom they assume looks upon them in general judgment. If the message were not written down, there would be much ambiguity, and a tendency to think in terms of mandates and retribution rather than comfort and grace and help. Rather than condemnation, we find redemption; rather than aloofness, we find the invitation to “come.”

Who came from the seed of David. As far as His human nature was concerned, Jesus was born into the world through the natural birth process; carried in the womb of Mary, providing Him the complete physiological and psychological processes of the natural man. On the other hand, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit—that is, the seed implanted in Mary’s womb was a seed of the Spirit. It was not, as with the Pagan deities, the result of some coital process of human intercourse. In Greek mythology, the deific serpent entwines himself with the earthly maiden. But Jesus, not possessing Joseph’s seed, had his lineage but not his sin nature. And thus Jesus could be the spotless sin offering, Who knew no sin. And yet, possessing the lineage of Joseph,

He was the natural heir to the throne of David.

Who was determined as the Son of God in power. That is to say, He was “precisely defined” as the Son of God. It was not that the resurrection proved Him to be the Son of God, but that it showed the precise nature of His Sonship. Remember this well—the resurrection did not prove something, it accomplished something. Proofs presented on the basis of human rationale are never adequate. Trying to prove the deity of Jesus by the resurrection, is a futile task. Those who are determined to escape the truth will find a dozen ways to do so. No matter what you bring up regarding the miracle of the resurrection, there will always be an argument. The Pharisees saw the whole process of Jesus’ life on earth,—His miracles, His crucifixion and His resurrection—and still didn’t believe. In the same vein, Jesus told the “rich man” that if they would not believe the revelation already given, they would not believe “*even if returned from the dead.*” We have only to declare the truth—not prove it. Only the Spirit can make it real to one. No amount of human debate or proof will ever avail. It is usually a trick of Satan to get one into a debate. If the individual is ready to receive the truth, the Spirit will make it real to them. So the resurrection did not prove Jesus to be the Son of God, it set the bounds, or definitions, of His Sonship. Moreover, it was the process God used to bring about the life-giving flow of His Holy Spirit, Who would replace Jesus as the companion and effective force in the lives of the believers.

Through Whom we have received grace and apostleship. The coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives, sent forth as the replacement for Jesus after His resurrection, provides for us a reservoir of

grace and a source of strength and direction for our service. It was never assumed that humans would be able to handle the gauntlet of life alone, or serve Christ out of human motivations. Paul constantly referred to the inadequacy of his flesh, either to live or to serve. To the believers in Galatia he said, “*The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.*” That was not to say faith *in* the Son of God, but the faith *of* the Son of God within himself. To the Philippians he said, “*That I may be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the flesh, but that which is of the faith of the Son of God, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*”

Unto a submissiveness of faith. The Greek word is *hupokouo*—”Submissiveness to.” There is a difference between obedience and submission. Obedience implies a willing or unwilling response to commands *per se*. It does not require any sensitivity or willingness to follow the commands. Submissiveness, on the other hand, implies a certain kind of openness which evokes a willing participation in the process which involves the commands. Thus, the submissive one says, in effect, “I participate willingly in your leadership.” The word “obey” is, in our modern parlance, a much harsher word. In today’s world we are much concerned about rights and independence, rightfully or wrongfully. The idea of obedience seems to have a rather negative connotation in our society. It is not that we are hostage to the sociological processes of modern society, but rather, that it is essential for us to recognize the cultural factors when interpreting the Scripture. If the words we are looking at mean something different in the context of Paul’s society, it is important for us to recognize that difference. What damage has been done to

the Spirit of believers in the effort to press the legalistic side of things rather than the grace side.

The submission of faith. And what does that mean? But our first question must be what does “faith” mean? Once again, like the word “gospel,” we find that faith is so widely used and misused that it means everything and nothing. And so, we continually hear the popular expressions—“keep the faith,” and “you have to have faith”—but what kind of faith are people talking about? Faith in what? Whose faith? What is the source of such faith? And how do people acquire it? How can people muster up faith when their own brain is incapable of it?

The answer lies in the definition of faith. What Paul meant by faith and what faith means in the human vernacular, are two different things. When people speak of faith, they usually mean something of human confidence. But human confidence is a product of the mind. And the mind is not reliable at all as a source of confidence, because it is subject to the vacillations of the human brain, which is affected deeply and continually by many biochemical and psychological factors. Confidence is, of course, really a matter of feelings. One feels quite confident one day and without confidence another. Some people are never confident at anything, usually because of insecurities that are part of their own accumulated patterns of thought or some inherited negative attitudes from the genes. Such feelings have nothing to do with spirituality, or of what the Bible means by “faith.” Thus, human confidence is completely related to the patterns on the cortex of the brain—which patterns are accumulated through experience or based upon genetic factors, including biochemical imbalances. In other words, the capacity to have confidence in the human sense is not

something which is normally controlled by the individual.

But faith, as the Bible defines it, is something else altogether. It really has nothing to do with human thoughts or feelings. Essentially, it is the process of Divine energy that flows through us, giving us the capacity to identify with Himself. It is the connecting link or catalyst, that binds us to God. The faith that God gives us remains constant in spite of any vacillations on the part of our human brains. The presence of God within us, and His grip upon us is not affected by what we had for breakfast. But human feelings may be. Where the brain is not adequately nourished, it may not think straight or feel right about anything. For example, students in school who come to class without breakfast may pose a considerable problem to the teacher.

But the faith that is from God is, according to Hebrews 11, the substance of reality. It is like the steel scaffolding of a high-rise building. It represents the true substance of the building, irrespective of a facade. According to the usage of faith in this passage, it is itself, the substance or reality of life. It is like the energy that flows through the copper wires. The copper is not the essence of things, but the energy that goes through it. Similarly, the energy of faith flowing through us is the reality, and all the human attitudes and feelings and thoughts have nothing to do with it.

Thus, when we pray, it is not a matter of “drumming up” feelings of confidence in our fleshly minds, but rather, relying on the process of faith within us. If we did not have a process of faith within us—the gift of God—we would not be praying to Him in the first place. According to Paul, in Romans 8, prayers are initiated by the

Holy Spirit because we do not know what to pray for. But then, what about prayers that go unanswered? Prayer is a process and not a thing to be answered or unanswered. God will do what He wants to do, and we participate with Him by prayer, but we do not move Him to change His mind about things, or to reward us for some “drummed up” feelings of human confidence that we know what He is going to do. Paul says we don’t know (8:26) and that is why we must rely on the Holy Spirit to pray through us. Don’t ever test God by whether or not He conforms to some notion that you may have of what He ought to do.

So faith then, is an energy process from God that functions in us continuously, and provides the catalyst through which we are identified with God in our spirits. Faith is not a feeling of human confidence that vacillates with our moods, but a river of Divine grace flowing continuously through us, irrespective of our human thoughts and feelings. That is the way Paul uses the term throughout his Epistles.

Beloved of God. How does God love us? Is He engaged in emotional interactions between ourselves and our human psyche? Or is there something deeper than that? Is there a process of caring that flows in our spirits, but is not always discernable in our human thoughts and feelings? The latter is certainly the case. The word for love used here, is *agapé* which means “caring” or “consideration” or “respect.” It is an interaction between two people that is much more stable and constant than the vacillations of human emotions. The word for human affection is *philé* which means “affection” and does, in fact, describe human emotions. Human emotions are not necessarily absent from the relationship between ourselves and

God, but are certainly not reliable. People often judge the love of God by how He seems to be treating them. Human love is constantly vacillating. If one is in a “flat spot” emotionally, a common phenomenon in the human process, one is inclined to question the love of God along with the love of others; as one also questions His love when He does not respond to their wishes as they think that He should. The problem with putting too much weight on human emotions in one’s relationship to God, is the potential for disappointment. It is nice to think of God’s love in the human sense “I’m in love with Jesus, and He’s in love with me”—but in doing so, one invites all the distress and turmoil that characterizes human love. The love that Christ has for us saves us from sin and death and unites us to Himself forever, but does not always provide emotional support. Striving for constancy of emotional interaction can often be frustrating, and sometimes devastating. Remember, it is not that emotions are unacceptable, but that they are unreliable.

Called saints. The word “called” is a noun and not a verb. It means “the called ones.” Paul is addressing the body of believers, whom he addresses as those who have been called of Christ Jesus. As they are the “*beloved ones*” so are they “*the called ones*.” The call is universal—“*Whosoever will, let him come*.” Responding to that call brings one into the family of “the called.”

The saints. As God’s people are “the beloved,” so are they “the called,” and so also, are they “the saints.” The word “saints” must also be examined. *Hagios* means “separated.” It does not mean holy in the sense of pious, but in the sense of set apart or sanctified. The term is applied to all believers, and not to a select few who may appear, in the human

judgment, to be especially worthy of honor. Even Jesus asked the young man “*Why do you call Me good? There is none good but God.*” To apply a special designation of piety to a human being is quite presumptuous. Moreover, it robs the rest of the believers of an identity that God Himself has given to them. We are saints because we are set apart. We are set apart because we belong to God, and not to Satan. We belong to God because of the sacrifice of Christ, and not because of any human goodness. The weakest member of the family is, thus, a saint. One is a saint because of being a citizen of the kingdom of God as one is an American because he is a citizen of America.

Grace and peace. Paul’s expression of grace and peace is not merely an idle salutation, as one may say, for example, “have a good day.” It is a genuine and viable offer from God, Who gave to Paul this writing. And it is backed by the very power of God Himself. He can offer grace and peace because He can give them. But where is the grace and where is the peace? It is essential to understand that they are resident within our spirits, as Christ is resident within us. Grace is the capacity to cling to Christ in spite of the afflictions and turbulence of human life on the earth. Peace is an attribute of the

Christ who dwells within us. “He is our peace.” As surely as we have Christ within us, we have His peace. But as He Himself says, the peace He gives is “*not that of the world.*” It is the peace that is the result of having our spirits in harmony with God. But peace in our spirits does not always result in peace in the flesh. Peace in our natural thought processes is hostage to our circumstances and behavior patterns. People often get into trouble in the flesh because they do not function properly. Many things in this world can rob one of peace of mind—overspending, overindulging, overworking, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. God did not promise to put our minds at rest no matter how we behave. But even in our human misbehavior, we still have the peace in our spirits that comes from being rightly related to Christ. He does not throw us out of His family for human weakness. In fact, He took us in when we were weak. As Paul says, in Romans 4—“*Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.*” The evidence that we still belong to Him, in spite of our misdeeds, is that we still want to belong to Him. Peace in the spirit is based upon our identity with Christ. Peace in the flesh is based upon our sound behavior.

Romans 1:8-12

TRANSLATION

First, I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ for all of you that your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, Whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son as ceaselessly I make mention of you always in my prayers, asking if by any means I may have a good journey, in the will of God, to come to you. For I earnestly desire to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift unto your strengthening; that is; to be encouraged together among you, through the faith which is among one another, both yours and mine.

COMMENTARY

Of Faith and Mutuality

Mutuality has to do with the dynamic interaction of the energy of faith from God, interacting between the members of His body. This section has to do with such a relationship between Paul and the people of Rome, even though he had not as yet seen them. In this passage he declares his keen desire to visit them, not only to impart to them some spiritual gift, but also to receive something from them as well. In the last section we discussed faith as an energy process from God, having nothing to do with human emotions, which may produce trust or confidence. Such trust or confidence is of the flesh, and is as vacillating as human emotion. Throughout the book of Romans, Paul uses the word “faith” in the sense of an energy process from God.

First, I Thank My God...For All of You. Paul is convinced that there is no salvation apart from Divine intervention. He had, himself, been a most dramatic

example. But this was in complete contradiction to the teachings of the Pharisees, who depended upon their own personal capacity to follow the Law. And thus they would take personal credit for their own salvation as well as that of their proselytes whose lives, according to Jesus, they had made wretched by the legal chains in which they had bound them.

Paul is thankful to God for their faith—not to themselves for any personal religious effort; not to the purveyors of the gospel who might have had a part in their salvation; but to God, without Whom there would be no faith. Human confidence, which is of the flesh, can only be erected on the shifting sands of self-deception, since there is nothing in this world that is worthy of such confidence. The confidence that one may have in oneself or others or circumstances, can never be absolute, and thus, always of

relative merit. The faith that is the gift of God is, on the one hand, absolutely unailing—therefore, on the other hand, cannot be in any way interfaced with human feelings, which cannot avoid being tainted with human inadequacy. Thus, Paul thanks God for the faith, and no one else. This is why Paul makes such bold statements about it throughout his Epistles. In human religious circles, doubts about salvation are invariably met with dubious appeals to human reason (with generous portions of guilt)—“It says so right here in the word of God, and it is a sin to doubt God’s Word.” The truth of the matter is that doubts as well as confidence, are part of the human mental process and as such are quite natural; and do not affect the faith of God which is resident within our spirits even as Christ is resident there. Faith is, after all, according to Galatians 5:22, a fruit of the spirit and not the flesh. Nor can it be added on by human effort, which would be like tying fruit to the branches of the tree.

But doesn’t Paul speak to the Thessalonians about their growth of faith?

You are referring to his greeting to them in which he thanks God that their “*faith is growing exceedingly.*” But notice first of all, that he thanks God for it, and secondly, that faith grows in the same sense that a plant grows. The seed is planted in our heart, or spirits, and goes through a natural growth process. There are, of course, ways that we can nourish it, as we nourish a plant, but nourishing a plant and stretching it out by hand are two different things. There are, apparently, different measures of faith, even as Paul tells the Romans that God has measured out faith to each one (12:3). So the reality of faith in our spirits and the feelings of faith in our mind, are two different things.

Proclaimed in all the world. The Greek word for “proclaim,” *katangelo*, is rooted in the word for “messenger” and means a significant declaration and not just a message of information. Nor, as we have just been explaining, does it refer to some quality of human trust in God, as though the Roman believers might be especially faithful or religious, but it was indeed remarkable that in this city so immersed in Satanic power, they should yet be triumphant in the manifestation of the power of God, as expressed by their faith.

The phrase, “*in all the world,*” is really a figure of speech. In the Greek language, “all” does not always mean “all.” That is to say, the Greek word *pas* or *pan* is only relative as indicating a very broad area. For example, in Acts 2, it says that there were people there from “*every nation under heaven.*” Obviously, there were numbers of nations on other continents that were not represented. (The expression *ouden* may be used more precisely to indicate “all,” in the sense of “not one excluded.”)

Whom I serve in my spirit...The word here for “serve” is *latreuo*, which is used specifically for service of worship. This sentence is in keeping with Paul’s statement to the Corinthians—“*You are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you*” (I Corinthians 3:16). And this also comports with Jesus’ statement to the Samaritan woman—“*They that worship the father must worship in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). He was saying to her in answer to her question about where to worship, that it is neither here nor there but within you. The tabernacle in the wilderness, designed by God and built by Moses, was the center of Jewish worship. It had a courtyard with an altar of sacrifice and a large structure within it

(about 15'x 45' in area and about 20' high). This structure was divided into two chambers—the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, with its Mercy Seat, into which went the high priest once every year on the Day of Atonement; with blood from the altar in the courtyard, which he sprinkled on the Mercy Seat to effect Divine forgiveness for all the sins of the people. In the other chamber—the Holy Place—was the Altar of Incense, kept continually burning; the Table of “Show Bread” (12 loaves); and the seven-branched lampstand (*Menorah*). The tabernacle and its furnishings were types of Christ—the propitiation (Mercy Seat) for our sins; the Light and Bread of the world, and the continual communion between man and God. Through salvation we have the presence of Christ in our spirits, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

So possessing Christ, we have in our spirits the spiritual tabernacle. We have our own worship center. And thus, whereas the tabernacle had its continual burnt offering and its altar of incense, we have our altar within us. With the eternal Spirit of God within us, the flame never goes out. Similarly, our spirit, the residence of the Holy Spirit, is an altar of worship. Whether going about our daily tasks in the work-a-day world or gathered in the name of Christ, there is a sense in which we take our temple with us, as the Jews carried the portable tabernacle of worship across the wilderness.

Ceaselessly remembering you. It was more than “mention,” really, it was “remembering.” The word *mneia* may be translated by “mention,” but the root of the word means to “remember.” In English, we have the word “mnemonic” which refers to memory devices. In fact, to the Colossians, he said, “*I pray for you without ceasing.*” That does not mean that

he prayed ceaselessly through the day, but that he did not stop praying for them. The greatest thing that any shepherd can do for the sheep for whom he is responsible, is to pray for them. Paul told Timothy that he was confident that Christ was able “to keep what he had committed unto Him against that day.” He is referring there, to his ministry and those for whom he was responsible.

If by any means I may be given a good journey in the will of God. The timing must always be God’s. We servants of God, as humans, have no idea how to win the world or solve its problems or handle God’s people. (Someone will send me a book—“How to Win the Lost.”) The task is far beyond us. Anyone who thinks he knows how to do it, does not understand the magnitude of the task. How do we really know what God wants to do with our gifts? How do we really know whom to go to and when? How do we really know how to reach the human mind in its complexity? Only God knows this. All the methods and promotions in the world will not solve the question—“What does God want with me?” In the entire span of scripture, God had his particular uses for particular servants. Some did a task and met an early death. Some lived long and did many tasks. Some were wracked with problems and failures. Some were used in ways beyond human comprehension. John the Baptist—none greater according to Jesus—spent ten months in the prison of Machaerus—a deep dark pit. Paul spent years in prison. Peter was crucified upside down. Who knows when and where and how God will use His servants? The answer lies in the simple statement—none of us knows. It is up to God to use His servants as He will. God had His timing for Paul to go to Rome. He [Paul] may have thought Satan hindered him, but as a matter of fact, Satan is no

match for God; and had God wanted Paul earlier in Rome, He would have accomplished it. In God's time He got him to Rome, and all the forces of Hell and heathendom could not keep him away. When we do not go in God's time, we go in the weakness of the flesh. When we go in God's time, we go in the fullness of His power. Paul said to the Romans, "*I am sure that when I come unto you I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.*" (15:29)

That I may impart to you some spiritual gift. The Greek word—*epipotho*—implies some very strong desire. To the Corinthians, Paul said, "*The love of Christ compels me.*" It was not love *for* Christ, but the love *of* Christ within him. The *agapé* love of Christ—the expression of the presence of Christ within us—is a compelling force that moves us to do whatever it is that God wants us to do. That force of love within us reaching out to others, does not even involve our weak human emotions. Love as a human emotion, does not have the capacity to do anything but send forth the weak signals of human sentimentality; and often becomes lost in the quagmire of disappointment and disillusionment. But the love of Christ, reaching out through us as a vehicle, is never disillusioned or disappointed. When we are doing what Christ wants us to do, we are never burdened by it. Weary, yes; drained, yes; disappointed in the flesh, yes, but we go

on, strengthened by the love and grace of Christ within, leaving to Him the fulfillment of His purpose.

Encouraged together through the faith of one another—yours and mine. And here is the mutuality. The faith that is the product of the energy of God within us, is of the same quality in one believer as in another. It is the same faith. There may be a different measure in each, but it is not like the variables of human emotional trust. And thus, whenever the believers come together, it is the same faith that flows through them and ties them together in a mutual bond. Thus, the believers could impart to Paul as he imparted to them. The verbalizing of God's truth belongs to Paul, who received the revelation of God in the Arabian Desert. But the power of the Spirit could flow from all believers, apart from the words. Thus, when believers come together, it is not so much the words that are spoken, but the flow of Divine power through them, uniting them to one another in the bonds of Christ. It is in this sense that Jesus could say, "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" Believers coming together in the name of Christ share, today His presence through the Spirit, in an even greater reality than was experienced by the disciples of old, who companied with Him in His personal presence.

Romans 1:13-17

TRANSLATION

I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, that often I purposed to come to you and have been hindered until now, in order that I may have some fruit, also among you, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. Both to the Greeks and Barbarians, to the wise and unwise, I am a debtor; so that as far as I am concerned, I am ready also to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome. For I am not without strength in the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, both to the Jew first and to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in it from faith to faith, even as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

COMMENTARY

Of Obligation, Opportunity and Omnipotence.

Paul had an irrepressible compelling to fulfill his mission as God had given it to him. Therein lies the difference between the call of God and the call of man. Large numbers of leaders in the church have ambitious programs that they would like to impose upon the congregation. Whether or not these ambitions are of God is always a question. It is very easy to fall a victim to the American success syndrome. The model seems to be—"No gain, no glory." That it is God's glory they are seeking, is not certain. To this end, the congregation is plied with motivational techniques, very similar to those used in the marketplace. The goals do seem worthy—"building bigger and bigger," It is always assumed that bigger is better, but the question is not the worthiness of the goals or the sincerity of the builders. The question is what does God want? What does He want you to do as an individual? How do you know that

what the leader wants for you is what God wants from you? However reasonable it may seem, is it right for you? "Won't you teach a Sunday school class; man the nursery; drive a bus; have a club; put on a supper?" Nothing wrong with any of these things, but is it for you?

But how do you know? Who can ever really determine what God wants?

The answer is no one. That is to say, we don't ever, in and of ourselves, determine the will of God—He determines what He wants us to do and gives us the determination to do it. The question is how keen is your compelling? Paul tells the Corinthians—"The love of Christ compels me." It was not love *for* Christ that compelled Paul, but the love *of* Christ *in* Him. The Spirit of Christ in Paul reached out to those to whom God had called him—especially the Gentiles.

Human rationale was not involved at all. Service that is compelled by Christ has no “because” in it. We do not serve *because* we love God, or love the people, or bleed for the world, or (God forbid) want some stars in our crown. It is not a matter of motivation, but inspiration. It is God breathing into us His breath, and vitalizing us to do whatever He wants us to do. When God gives us a job to do, He gives both the compelling and the capacity. It may be difficult, but it will not be a burden. When we do what others want us to do, we often become burdened by it. Remember then—if you are motivated by the Spirit, what you do for Christ will be done with heart and with willingness. And so, Paul had a strong desire to minister to the Romans as to the other Gentiles. Hindered up to this point from visiting them, he was compelled to write to them.

I have been hindered so far. Whence the hindrance? Who or what was responsible for it? Was it God or Satan, or some fleshly problem? To the Thessalonians, Paul had said *“I would have come unto you once and again, but Satan hindered me.”* The word Paul used for “hindered” in the case of Satan, is a word which means “to cut into by way of intrusion.” It is like someone cutting in front of you in a line. That word usually has a negative connotation. The other word has been used of hindrances of God. When Paul was involved in his Macedonian call, in Acts 16, he said that he was hindered from going to Asia and to other places, by the Holy Spirit. Obviously, God intended him to go to Macedonia instead. Presumably then, there was a reason why the Lord did not permit him to go to Rome, up to that point. Possibly he would have met with premature opposition or imprisonment. There came a time when the Lord allowed that, but He was not as yet ready.

But how do we know these things? How do we know what is a hindrance of God or a hindrance of Satan?

The answer again is, “we don’t.” Sometimes it may seem clear, but not always. Sometimes we just have to push on against the odds. Sometimes we are stopped dead in our tracks. Ultimately, we assume that if the Lord wants us to do something, He will make a way through for us. I have often been confronted with this problem, and usually have a sense, from the Spirit, that it is a hindrance of Satan. One way or another, God will let you know what He wants and see to it that you do it, if you really want to do what He wants.

But how do we know that we do want to do what He wants?

In the final analysis, we have to leave that to Christ. We don’t always know, but He knows. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows how to motivate us and how to stop us. All we can do is start out on a course of action and trust Him to work things out. I am sometimes suspicious of people who are too certain about things—“I just know this is what God wants.” It is more realistic to say, “I believe this is what God wants.” It is not a matter of quibbling over words, but rather, of recognizing the inadequacy of the flesh and the total dependence upon Christ to see to the conduct of our lives. In nearly half a century of experience, the author has seen many professions of certainty turn sour. This often happens in matters of marriage. “I just know the Lord has brought us together.” Later they are looking for a way out of it. If there are hindrances to what you are planning to do, it is well to stop and check it out. If you are uncomfortable with it—wait!

When it comes time to make the decision, ask the Lord to see to it that you make the right one. No amount of human reasoning will really be ultimately adequate. Don't make a decision until you make a decision, and then trust the Lord with it. Don't play "pro and con ping pong." It will only leave you in hopeless confusion. Apparently, Paul's hindrance was from the Lord and he accepted it.

To the Greeks and Barbarians; to the wise and mindless. Paul had a very special ministry to the Greeks and, in fact, elected to use their language in the writing of his epistles. But he also was committed to the ministry among all Gentiles everywhere. The term "Barbarian" was one used by the Greeks to refer to everyone who did not speak the Greek language. In many respects, the Greeks were ultimate bigots. They did, in truth, have a great culture, including a great language, but they did carry things a bit far. The word "Barbarian" was based on the syllable—"bar"—in the assumption that everyone who did not speak Greek only uttered gutturals—"bar, bar, bar." The "wise ones" were the Sophists. It was a technical category of philosophers, who spent their time engaging in the search for the meaning of the universe. The word had nothing to do with making wise choices. These were the ones whom Paul addressed in his letter to the Corinthians (Ch. 1)—"*Where is the wise one?*" He tells them that the simplest knowledge and understanding that God has, is far higher than the greatest wisdom of man. Paul is using some sarcasm in his statements about the Greeks. He says that he is called both to the Sophists and to the "mindless." It is a contrast between those who have explored the wisdom of the universe and those whom they regarded as "mindless," because they did not have such knowledge. To the Corinthians, Paul said that God elected the foolish of the

world to confound the wise. But Paul has a commitment to all of them. With God, there is no difference. The highest wisdom of man can never reach God.

I am a debtor. Paul felt this keen obligation. It was not a debt to be paid back to God for His salvation—it was rather, an obligation that he had received from God as a service. To think that one has a "debt" to God to be eradicated by service, is totally absurd. If such were a requirement, which it is not, the poor human would never be out of debt. It was an obligation born of compelling, rather than accounting.

As far as I'm concerned, I am ready. Paul exuded here, the confidence born of his commission through which he had been endowed by the Holy Spirit with the necessary gifts and preparation. However, the calling does not presume the readiness. Sometimes a great deal of preparation must take place before the vessel is truly ready. With Paul, it had been 14 years and then 10 years of experience, before writing Romans.

I am not without strength as far as the Gospel is concerned. The translation "ashamed" misses the basic impact of the word. The Greek word is made up of the word for "strength" and the simple negative. It means "not without strength." It is only related to ashamed in the sense of embarrassment, as when one is without capacity. One comes to the checkstand without enough money to pay for the groceries. One is embarrassed. Paul is saying, "*I am ready, for I am not without strength as far as the gospel is concerned; for it is the power of God unto salvation.*" I do not find myself inadequate when I confront the Godless with the gospel. To the believer it provides the adequacy to receive salvation from God.

For by it, the righteousness of God is revealed. The Greek word *dikaiosune* has to do with “that which is essentially right or true.” It has, not so much to do with piety, as with that which is straight and true. It is a matter of the right road. The English word comes from the old Anglo Saxon *riht weis*, which simply means “the right way.” It does not have to do with feelings or attitudes, but position. It is not so much a matter of behavior as of relationship. The righteousness of God has to do with His ultimate purpose and meaning for the world, in His relationship to His creatures. We are justified, or made right, when we are identified with that purpose. His purpose or process, in the world, is revealed in the gospel or the “victory proclamation.”

From faith unto faith. Faith is an energy process from God. God is a reservoir of that energy. Out of that

reservoir of His energy of faith, we are endowed with the capacity to identify with Him. “*As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God*” (John 1:12).

The just shall live by [out of] faith. Faith is the reservoir of God’s energy. Out of it, we receive the capacity to identify with God. It is not a matter of human goodness or methods or systems, but of tapping into that reservoir. We tap into the reservoir by dipping the cup in. We dip the cup in by wanting a drink. The human is no more able to produce such a reservoir, than the ecologist is able to produce water by theories of conservation. Salvation is based upon the fact of the sacrifice of Christ and not upon human theories about that sacrifice. If you want Christ in your life, dip the cup in.

Romans 1:18-23

TRANSLATION

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, inasmuch as that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God has manifested it to them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the ones who were made, even His eternal power and Godness, to the end that they are without excuse; inasmuch as having known God they glorified Him not, as God, nor were they thankful; but became futile in their reasonings and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they were made foolish [morons], and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of the image of corruptible man, and of birds and of beasts and of reptiles.

COMMENTARY

The Folly of the Atheist.

The Psalmist calls him a fool. *“The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.”* In the first place, to deny something you must know what it is that you are denying. To deny the reality of “Mickey Mouse,” one must have a commonly accepted definition of “mouse,” which, of course, we do. We know what a mouse is because we have seen all too many of them in our experience. To deny Mickey Mouse, one is not denying the existence of the kingdom of rodents, but that the humanization of the rodent, a quality which we also understand, does not comport with our experience at any point.

With God, on the other hand, the meaning of God must somewhere have crossed our experience. And there is a rather universal concept of what

constitutes the Deity. But since there is nothing in the material world that can be identified as God, there must be some universal sense of the meaning of God that has been part of God’s own revelation to man. To say then—“no God”—is what we call an oxymoron—that is, a name or statement that is contradictory within itself. Thus, for example, the common expression—“holy terror,” is completely self contradictory. Since there is no experience of God in a material way anywhere in human experience, one is really denying the existence of something for which one has no definition. The Psalmist is here saying that such a one is a fool.

But Paul intimates that there is something of a sense of God within all His

creatures. He is Himself invisible, as is the substance that holds together the atoms, which are the building blocks of the universe. In Paul's day, the atom (quite familiar to us) was invisible, and indeed, also to us today with unaided vision. Nevertheless, these invisible things have been clearly revealed to us, His creatures, to the degree that anyone who would deny the Creator of these things would be without excuse. It has often been said in the circles of the agnostic or atheist—"If God is real, let Him show me a miracle." But what greater miracle is there than the universe around us? He hung an orderly cosmos out there for all to see. What more do they want? The truth of the matter is that there is no miracle on earth that would convince one who does not want to believe. One might say, "if God is real, let Him send a shaft of light right here into this room." The shaft of light might come immediately, and yet recalling the experience later, it might be referred to as "that amazing streak of lightning." Jesus Himself said, *"Though one return from the dead, yet will they not believe Him."* Jesus' own resurrection confirmed this, as well as other recorded incidents of the raising of the dead, where the people still did not believe. The raising of Lazarus was such a miracle, and yet there is no evidence that those who viewed this spectacular event turned to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus further said, *"If one will to do His will, he shall know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God or I speak from myself."* (John 7:17) The problem of faith is the will to believe, and not the ability to believe. God has the power to overcome the doubts of any who really want to follow Him. In fact, the energy of faith from God easily cuts through the human process of thought, however skeptical. All human thought is, on the one hand tainted, with the negative effects of the "Fall" and on the

other hand, is affected by a great many factors over which one has little control. Even the tendency to skepticism is a genetic trait; and so is gullibility. Furthermore, the accumulation of knowledge and experience which also affects the ability to believe, is a process which takes place almost involuntarily. How do we know what we know? Well, that often depends on what we have been exposed to, and how. Learning is a very complex thing. Thus, it is a lot easier for some people to accept ideas than others. The cultic groups, of course, capitalize on gullibility. But gullibility is, itself, a trait that is probably genetic. And that is why Paul tells the believers in Corinth not to compare themselves with one another. He said whatever you have you have received (as a gift), so why do you act as though it were something that you had acquired by your own efforts? He said, *"I don't even judge myself."*

The bottom line is that we cannot depend upon our human mental powers even to reason our way to God. Many of the so-called "Theistic philosophers"—a term applied to those who attempted to prove God through reason—were never able to bridge the gap between human ideas and the reality of God. Thus, to try to prove to anyone that God exists, by means of human reason, is futile. It is not our place to prove God—an effort that actually would put us above God—but rather, to declare Him. It is the Holy Spirit who must convince one of the reality of God, and He does that by penetrating the barriers of human rationale and touching the inner spirit. The fact of the matter is that if we could prove God, we would in a sense, be putting ourselves above Him. This is also true of the effort to justify God. Humans have neither the right nor the power, to prove or defend God. These are the province of God, and He does it in the spirit and not in the mind, since the

mind does not have the capacity to grasp such knowledge. Usually what humans say in defense of God proves, to be more an embarrassment than anything else. How can a human possibly defend God in the tragedies and catastrophes of the world? In each individual case, God alone is able to administer comfort and grace, beyond our understanding. Ultimately, in God's overall purposes in the world, things will work out. "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Genesis 18:25) Our human words usually make things worse.

But doesn't God give us the words to speak?

He can and does, on occasion, but the implications of world catastrophes are so complex that we do not even have the capacity to convey the meaning of it all. If you are dealing with someone who is facing a tragic episode, the best you can do for them is to let them know you care, and to pray that the Lord will give them the grace. Remember, He does not give us the grace to bear their tragedies. He will give them the grace to bear it, beyond our own understanding of how He can. Remember, the realities of God are communicated through the spirit and not the mind.

But then what good is the mind?

The mind is essential as a vehicle for responding to God, and relating to our earthly situations. The musician needs an instrument, although the music is really in his soul.

Having known God, they glorified Him not as God. There seems to be in this passage, a rather sweeping implication of the Jews more than the Gentiles. Whereas it is true that God does not accept ignorance on the part of

anyone as an excuse for disregarding Him; implying in several places in the Scripture that there is a certain tendency in the heart of all His creatures to reach out to Him, yet there seems to be in this passage, a reference to the knowledge of God that would normally be ascribed to the Jews. Whereas the charges that Paul makes in this passage would not be too surprising for the Gentile world, it is almost shocking to consider them as participated in by God's people, the Jews. And yet the degree of knowledge ascribed to the subjects of this passage, seems to go quite beyond the general experience of the Gentile world.

Assuming, then, that the Jews are the ones in question here, we refer back to the numbers of words by the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well as the Minor Prophets, and refresh ourselves as to the magnitude of the apostasy of Israel. In fact, Paul summarizes their condition in Romans 3, with the same shocking charges. The final chapter of judgment is given in the book of Revelation, where "*the mother of harlots*" is "*drunk with the blood of the saints.*" The figure of the "adulteress," or "harlot," is applied to Israel in a special way because she was unfaithful to God. The book of Hosea makes this perfectly clear, as he is instructed by God to take an adulteress for a wife, in order to symbolize the adultery of His people. No Gentile power could ever occupy this position, because they were never "married" to God. There is nothing in the Revelation 17 passage that is more abominable, than the words that the prophets had concerning Israel, in the Old Testament. And so we assume that this section of Romans is addressed to the Jews, primarily, with perhaps a secondary reference to the state of the entire world.

Glorifying God and being thankful, would have been qualities ordinarily ascribed to Israel rather than the Gentiles. The nation of Israel, as a whole, had despised their very special relationship to God, were not thankful for it, and had exchanged the worship of God for the worship of the bestial realm of animals. And so, a judicial blindness fell upon Israel. Whereas they had been the oracles of God, privileged to understand mysteries of the universe that the Greek Sophists had long sought, they turned into fools. The Greek word—*maraino*—is the root of our word “moron.” They became vain (futile) in their reasoning, as befits those who go astray from the truth, and became senseless. The Greek word—*sunetos*—refers to the capacity to put things together in the mind. There is a

modern day expression—“getting it together,” which is more or less what this word means. In this case, the word is negated so it means to not have the power to put things together in the mind. In modern parlance, we might say that they lost the power to “get their act together.” The door was slammed shut on their access to God. In the province of God a remnant remained, which became the base of the followers of Jesus.

Because of their apostasy, the nation of Israel had lost its way and its touch with God, and had become the prey of the devastating forces of Satan, which had turned them into a demonic travesty of what they had formerly been, as the oracles of God.

LESSON FIVE

Romans 1:24-32

TRANSLATION

For this reason, God has delivered them in the passions of their hearts, unto the uncleanness of the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves; which ones exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature, rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen. For this reason, God has delivered them over unto dishonorable passion. For their females have exchanged the natural use unto that which is against nature; likewise also, the males having left the natural use of the female burned, in their lust for one another, male with male; working out that which is improper and receiving the recompence in themselves, which was the inevitable result of their error. And even as they did not approve of having God in their knowledge, God delivered them unto a disapproved mind, to do the things that were not proper; fulfilling all unrighteousness, evil, greed, malice; full of jealousy, murder, strife, treachery, maliciousness, tale bearers, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, ostentatious, devisers of evil, disobedient to parents, ungodly, untrustworthy, without natural affection, merciless. Which ones, knowing the just requirement of God; that they who practice such things are worthy of death, not only practice these things, but concur with those who do them.

COMMENTARY

The Ultimate Culmination of the Godless Flesh.

At the “Fall,” the human creature replete with the Spirit of God, came to utter desolation. As a result of the Spirit of disobedience which entered the race, the Spirit of God was removed, and mankind was left to the tumultuous and incorrigible devices of the godless and satanically motivated devices of the flesh. Against the total devastation and destruction of His creature, God directed toward the problem His Divine power and stayed, to a degree, the ravages of Satan.

The ever present mercy of God prevented the race from being totally overwhelmed by the enemy, into whose clutches they had fallen. And thus, all the innocent creatures, struggling against the odds, were under the general grace of God. But into the stream of human history there came, continuously, those who were defiant of God and merciless toward His creatures. These are the ones whom He gave up to the process of the flesh, to work out destruction in their own bodies.

He took away the shield of God's general grace and compassion toward humanity, and allowed them to be ravaged by the forces of the evil one.

These are the ones whom Paul is addressing, here. They are those whose will and purpose has been set against God. They are not your general species of innocent humans caught in the process of a satanic world. The prevenient grace of God has covered so broadly and graciously, the victims of the satanic world. Somehow He will get them through. But those who set themselves against God and His creatures, are delivered over unto the clutches of the Satan, to whom they have committed themselves, and whose end is total destruction.

God has given them up. So difficult to survive in a world whose master is Satan, it is totally absurd. With the intrusion of Satan, the seeds of destruction were planted in the creation of God. But the grace of God is quite adequate to handle the problem, and so He did, in the sacrificial system and the subsequent sacrifice of Christ, His only Son. Those who have elected to put themselves outside the grace of God, are those with whom Paul is contending in this book, or letter, to the Romans.

The people whom God had elected to use as His oracles through whom He chose to proclaim His purposes to the world, utterly failed Him. They disclosed the reality that no human flesh can ever be justified in the sight of God, apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, through whom He communicates with the spirit of His people.

And now comes the great indictment of human flesh. The Jews failed, and the

Gentiles, but God now shows His power completely apart from either.

Those who elected to put themselves into the turbulent stream of the demonic processes of the world, will suffer the ultimate consequences of that ill-fated decision. So now Paul undertakes to catalog the devastations which identity with Satan hath wrought. Eluding the grace of God so that they might pursue an independent course, they have fallen under the merciless aegis of Satan. They will pay dearly for this choice.

Escaping the grace of Christ in the search of independence, they have become entrapped in the network of Satan. The normal desires and indulgences of the flesh have, under the motivation of Satan, become uncontrollable immersion in the pit of evil. The natural processes of desire and fascination have become a sweeping torrent of perversion and unbridled passion. Once exalted in the worship of the Deity, they have become pitiable victims of the floodtide of Satanic evil. As with the drug culture, that which had been the liberation of desire and passion, has become the prison house of perversion and ugly addiction. The females exchanged their natural use for that which is against nature; and likewise, also the males leaving their natural ways, burned in their lust for one another. This is a very clear statement relative to homosexuality which, under the deceptions of Satan has become today a matter of rights and preference, rather than a matter of sin and perversion. The inroads of Satan into the church today, are clearly seen in the defense of that which is totally contrary to the word of God. There is no further debate. The church has ignored the plain teaching of the Scripture, and made perversion a matter of preference.

And as they found it unacceptable to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them unto a mind replete with that which is unacceptable to Him.

There follows then, the catalog of outrageous behavior which, apparently, was common in the nation of Israel. The behavior patterns here classified, reflect the ultimate in human degradation—extortion, greed, jealousy leading to

murder, strife, treachery, maliciousness, slander, God-hating, arrogance, ostentation, without natural affection and mercilessness. These things have left the mind in a state of total chaos and confusion, and unable to pull itself together. The people of God, who knew full well that such things carried with them the sentence of death, not only participated in them, but concurred with those who also practiced them.

Romans 2:1-8

TRANSLATION

Wherefore you are inexcusable, O man, everyone who judges; for whereas you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you who judge practice the same thing. For we know that the judgment of God is on the basis of truth against those who practice such things. But do you consider this, O man, who judge those who practice such things and are doing them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or the riches of His graciousness and forbearance and longsuffering do you despise, being ignorant of the fact that the grace of God leads you to repentance? But according to your hard and impenitent hearts, you treasure up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, and the revelation of the just judgment of God, Who will recompense to everyone according to His works; to those on the one hand, who, by way of patient good work, seek glory and honor and incorruption—eternal life. To those, on the other hand, who out of strife and disobedience to the truth, are persuaded of unrighteousness—wrath and anger.

COMMENTARY

Of Judgment and Wrath

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? This question by Abraham in the early days of human history, reflected an amazing perception of the meaning of Divine judgment and justice. Whereas in those days, when pagan deities abounded and the knowledge of the true God was limited on the earth, the general perception of the deities was that they were capricious and easily provoked. There was no thought whatsoever that one might find justice and mercy with them. In the mind of the people, all of mankind was a burdensome nuisance to the gods. Anything that affected their well-being beyond their own control was deemed a god. Thus, frogs were gods and grasshoppers were gods, and flies were

gods, as were rivers and mountains and thunder and fire. Thus, the significance of the Mosaic contest with Pharaoh and his magicians. Moses was able, with his rod, to control the forces that were held in awe by the Egyptians. The magicians were able by their sleight of hand, to duplicate some of Moses' deeds, but in the end, were bested by their inability to control life, itself.

And thus came God, to reveal to the people whom He chose to call His own, the truth that the true God was neither capricious nor hostile nor petty. He sits as the judge of all the earth, to be sure, but does not always condemn. There is a difference. The Jews, in their pride as people with a

special place with God, had set themselves up as judges of the world, but not only were they totally incapable of judging, but came under condemnation for it. Paul said, *“You judge [krino] the world, but you are guilty of the same things and come under the condemnation [katakrino] of God.”* In God’s administration of justice everyone is judged, but everyone is not condemned.

In Chapter 2, Paul examines the entire process of God’s justice and judgment in the world.

The word “judgment” is a fearsome word. It has been responsible for much of the travesties and tragedies of the religious world. The inevitable “cliques of condemnation” have plagued humanity from the brothers of Joseph, who cast him into the pit because they judged him as “spoiled and arrogant,” to the modern-day religious “elite,” who presume to judge America and their “fellow Christians” who do not see things in exactly the same proscribed patterns as they. Jesus said, *“Judge not that you be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.”* (Matthew 7:1, 2). In the same vein, Paul told the Corinthians not to judge one another or compare themselves with one another. He said in fact, *“I judge not myself.”* In spite of the injunctions, the church is racked with judgment of itself and others. It is one thing to evaluate and analyze the actions and attitudes of others, to approve or disapprove in terms of one’s own understanding of life and the word of God; it is quite another thing to presume that our evaluation of them requires a pronouncement of condemnation. Even of Jesus, John said, *“God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”* (John 3:17)

In the matter of judging, there is a considerable problem with the human brain and its behavior patterns. The variations and intricacies of the patterns of the brain defy an absolute analysis. In the first place, the brain functions on the basis of electrochemical processes that convey impulses within the nerve cell itself, and from one cell to another. It is like a very intricate electrical circuitry. And this electrical circuitry is transmitted through chemicals. The levels of chemicals involved greatly affect the thoughts and behavior patterns, of each individual. Many things can affect these chemicals and throw them into a state of imbalance. For example, pregnancy can upset the balance of hormones (which are chemicals) and account for disruptions in behavior patterns both before and after the birth. The expression *postpartum neurosis* or *psychosis* describes the affect on the nervous system of the process of birth. After the birth of the child, the woman may have fits of depression or anxiety. This is simply a physiological problem of hormone imbalance. In time, it levels out and things go back to normal, or one may use supplemental hormones. But during this time, one must be very careful about judging the behavior patterns that are affected.

In addition to the chemical factor, patterns of thought develop on the cortex of the brain which are affected by genetics, as well as acquired knowledge and experience. The old Indian expression—*“Don’t judge a man until you’ve walked a mile in his moccasins.”*—is, in this respect, most appropriate. It is not to say that people are not responsible for their actions, but rather, that there are many things that affect them. Nor is it to say that we are required to approve of them, but rather, that knowing how many factors can affect one’s behavior, we must exercise grace in our relationship to others. Knowing these things, we walk

among the people of the earth in grace and kindness and seek rather to help them, than to judge them. Paul makes a very pointed comment in Galatians 6:1—*“If a brother be overtaken [discovered] in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, lest you also be tempted.”* One is not obliged to like people or their actions or attitudes, but one is obliged to deal with them in the grace of Christ. The *agapé* love of Christ is the fruit of the Spirit that gives us this capacity.

Philé love is a human emotion and may or may not, accompany *agapé* love. In other words, we can care about people even though we may not like them very well.

So Paul now comes to the Jews, appalled over their attitude toward the rest of the world. As a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” and “Pharisee of the Pharisees” he was well aware of their human frailties. He was not at all impressed by their cloak of self righteousness, as also Jesus Himself often expressed. So when they undertook to stand in judgment of the world, He reminded them of their own frailty. Apropos of this matter, is the narrative of the woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. When the Pharisees brought her to Jesus demanding that He pronounce judgment on her, He said, *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone.”* As the story goes, the Pharisees, one by one, walked away. When He and the woman were alone, Jesus said, *“Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?”* She said, *“No man, my Lord,”* to which He replied, *“Neither do I condemn thee.”*

So now Paul takes up the issue of what constitutes justice and judgment. He is dealing here with the entire world—Jew and Gentile, alike. What are God’s standards of judgment?

The riches of His graciousness, and of His forbearance, and of His longsuffering. For the Jew, whose history was replete with the grace and mercy and longsuffering of God in the midst of their constant rebellion and apostasy, He castigates them for not knowing that such grace and mercy, were in order to lead them to repentance.

But isn’t Paul then judging them?

No, indeed, he is saying that they have no right to judge others. Throughout the Old Testament, there were always provisions for sin. God recognized the propensity of the human to sin and made provision to handle the problem. Even His cherished servant, David, in the midst of his most heinous sins, was nevertheless forgiven and treated with mercy.

The question is, “Who has the right to judge?” When we stand in judgment of people, we lose the capacity to help them. It is better to exercise grace and remain in a position to be of help, than to turn away in judgment and lose that opportunity. If we turn away from the sinners, who will help them? We don’t have to agree with them or like them or associate with them, if we choose not to do so, but we must be open to them in the grace of Christ. Jesus was chided by the Pharisees for His association with the sinners. In fact, He was enough with them in their celebrations that He was accused. This was, of course, a false charge, but nevertheless, reflects the fact that Jesus companied often with sinners.

Storing up wrath in the day of wrath...In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of *“laying up treasures in heaven—not on earth.”* It is the same word that Paul uses here for “storing up.” It is, of course, used in a negative way here, as it was in terms of the treasures on earth. A treasure is something “kept,” regardless

of its value or use. Apparently, for some reason, in some way, the things that we do on earth do have their impact in heaven. Thus, one may “store up” blessings or judgment.

But I thought that you said there was no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. What kind of judgment will there be for us?

Remember, in the first place, that I said that the passing of judgment does not necessarily mean condemnation. The clear teaching of Scripture is that Christ will, Himself, be our advocate, or lawyer, and will plead our ‘case. (Although it is not likely that there will be long queues of people stretching out over the heavens awaiting trial.) The whole issue of judgment will be more or less instantaneous, as will our sudden realization at the time of our glorification, of all that our lives have been in the flesh, and all that they will be throughout eternity. It is quite clear that the wrath of God will be dispensed on the ungodly in varying degrees (“*some beaten with many stripes; some beaten with few*”), and will be or will have been, remanded to their appropriate place. As far as the Christians are concerned, it is not quite clear how the status will differ. If there are tears to wipe away; if there are failures and mistakes now to realize, they will certainly not be a cause of eternal sorrow. It is quite clear that there will be an end to tears and sorrow.

But then where do the rewards and penalties come in for the Christians? Won't there be penalties for those who have not used their gifts properly, or not been faithful to the Lord in other ways? And won't there be special rewards for those who have served the Lord well?

That kind of thinking really misses the essential nature of the new position that

we have with Christ, in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Human motives were an Old Testament issue. In the New Testament, the believer is motivated by the Holy Spirit within, and not by human reason. Again, we remind you of Paul’s statement that the love of Christ compelled him to serve. Remember we said that it was the love of Christ and not love for Christ—an entirely different thing. The Spirit of Christ within Paul reached out in love to those to whom he had been called to minister. He did not go out because he had love for Christ or for humanity, but because the Spirit within, moved him beyond human reasons or causes. We do not serve God because we are going to be given a reward or because we are going to be penalized for not doing it. No human motivation is adequate, given the magnitude of the task. The pathway of service is inevitably a pathway of affliction. Paul himself ran that gauntlet. His life was a continuous battle with himself and with the forces of Satan, to the extent that he sought God’s help in removing them. But God promised him grace to handle it. “*My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*”

Human feelings of devotion or dedication are not reliable as a basis of service. They are too vacillating and too much affected by the factors that make up the behavior patterns on the cortex of the brain—genetics, accumulated knowledge and experience, and a myriad of body chemicals—all of which go to make up our individual personalities, which do not usually change in salvation. Some things change, especially where habits are involved that are not part of our essential personalities. God is not “stamping out gumdrops” or making “peas in a pod.” Many religious groups believe that when one is converted, one becomes like all the other Christians (who obviously have become like Christ, of course), and must

all be engaged in the same kind of expressions of their faith. This has produced a great deal of guilt among those whose personalities do not fit with the established human criteria of service and devotion. This does not comport with the liberty which we have in Christ. To the Romans, plagued by legalism, Paul said, *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made us free from the law of sin and death.”* And to the Galatians He said, *“Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh?”* Either salvation is free or it is not. If it is free, then there is no obligation. If it must be paid for in the currency of work and service, then it is not free. But if the service and devotion arise from the Spirit within, then the coming of Christ also provides for us the gift of service.

We have taken a considerable amount of time to go on a side trip. We were discussing the implications of “storing up” or “treasuring up” something for the future. This could be in the form of wrath, or of material things, or of things pertaining to the spirit realm. The same Greek word is used in all cases.

The obvious implication is that somehow the things that we do on earth will ultimately affect our eternal destiny. How this takes place is not quite clear, but one thing is certain—those who have taken Christ as their advocate will not be “ashamed [without strength] at His coming.”

But doesn't the parable of the talents teach us that it is a serious thing not to use our gifts?

No, it does not teach that at all. In the parable of the talents, Jesus is addressing the Jews and is speaking in terms of their commission from God to be the oracles of Divine truth to the world. In their failure, they had turned away from God and lost

their place with Him. There was a remnant that remained faithful who would be so acclaimed by Christ at His coming, but for those who had lost their touch with God—such as the Pharisees—they would be committed to the “outer darkness,” which had been prepared for the Devil and his angels. The parable could not be applied to Christians today because it really says too much. I doubt if anyone would agree that not to use one's gifts would commit one to eternal damnation. To understand the gospels correctly, one must realize that much of Jesus' teachings were directed toward the Jews, whom He was preparing for the New Covenant relationship promised by the prophets. The Holy Spirit had not yet come; they were still responsible for the Law; but were being made to realize, by Jesus, that they were incapable of satisfying its full intent; and, therefore were in desperate need of a Savior. To use the Sermon on the Mount as a standard of practice for the believers, is to misapply its ultimate meaning.

But then are the gospels of no value to Christians? Can't they be applied to us also?

They certainly have a wide universal application. They give us the whole narrative of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, our Savior. They give us God's ultimate intention for all men everywhere in the world; they give us the parameters of God's grace and peace; they give us the miracles that attest the Messiahship of Jesus; and they do give many guidelines for behavior, but these guidelines are attended by the grace that understands the human inadequacy. The Sermon on the Mount, without the grace and mercy of God to fallen humans, could only produce guilt and despair. On the other hand, in a way, that was what it was intended to produce, not to discourage

mankind, but rather, to cause them to see their need and turn to God for help.

Who will reward each one according to his works...What do we mean by works?

Didn't Paul say that salvation was "not of works, lest anyone should boast?" And did he not say to Titus—"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us?"

That is all very true, but there is no contradiction. First of all, we need to understand what is meant by "works." The Greek word—*erga*—is the root of our word "energy," and has to do with something far deeper than mere deeds or actions. In this respect the work has to do with a living process. Jesus said, *"This is the work of God that you believe on Him who sent Me."* To the Philippians (2:13), Paul said, *"Work out your own salvation...for it is God Who works within..."* The word translated by "work out" is *katergadzo*, and means to express outwardly, while the word translated "work in" is *energeo*, and means

to work inwardly. Thus Paul is saying, "Let what Christ is doing within you express itself outwardly." It does not mean that works will buy salvation. In this respect, James and Paul are in harmony. James said, *"Show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith by my works."* And Paul said that the sacrifice of Christ would *"purify us from dead works to serve the living God."* The contrast here is between dead works and living works, James accepts both. He is expressing the same thing that Paul says to the Phillipians—the presence of Christ within you will manifest itself outwardly (especially in believing on the One that God had sent). Those who are saved, want Christ to be with them. They care about Christ. They may not always perform as they would like to, but they want to perform and to please Him. The evidence of salvation is that one cares about Christ and wants to be a part of His family. Thus, those who have stored up to themselves wrath and judgment, will be remanded to perdition; while those who have reflected their faith in identifying with Christ, have eternal life.

Romans 2:9-16

TRANSLATION

Affliction and pressure [crushing] upon every soul [life] of man who works out evil, [the soul of] the Jew first, and of the Greek; glory and honor and peace to everyone who works the good, to the Jew first, and to the Greek; for there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned apart from the Law, shall perish apart from the Law, and as many as have sinned in the Law shall be judged through the Law; for not the hearers of the law shall be just with God, but the doers of the Law shall be justified. For whenever the Gentiles, not having the Law, do naturally the things of the Law, these not having the Law are a law within themselves; which ones give evidence that the work of the Law is written in their hearts, their consciences giving witness and the inner conflict of their reason either accuses or defends them, in the day when God shall judge the hidden things of men through Christ Jesus, according to my gospel.

COMMENTARY

The Basis of Divine Judgment

There is no one in the world that will escape the judgment of God. It is important to remember, however, that this judgment does not always imply condemnation. Nor is it to be assumed that the Gentiles in the world or, in a sense, all inhabitants other than Jews, who have not had the Law, are going to be judged on any other basis than the fact that they have lived up to the light of their conscience. In the words of Abraham, “*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*” We must leave the matter to Him. There are many Christians who seem eager to pronounce dire threats upon everyone in the world who has not come into some “born again” experience. There would seem to be some spirit of vengeance that wants to be sure that everyone who has not joined their own

particular ranks, will “get theirs” in the end. Not many would admit this, but they want everyone to get their “just desserts.” They may be like Jonah who, upon hearing that God was merciful to the Ninevites in spite of his pronouncements of doom, went off and sulked. There is the spirit of “elitism,” that revels in being special—in being lifted above the “herd”—and watching God exercise His wrath. It is perhaps like the satisfaction of watching the hero “beat up on” the villain.

But that, of course, is not God’s attitude. As Peter said, “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but*

that all should come to repentance.” (II Peter 3:9) And Paul said that God had concluded all under sin, that He might have mercy upon all. He further said to the Corinthians, *“As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.”* (15:22)

So does that mean that everyone in the world will be saved?

Admittedly, this is tempting, but there is too much evidence to the contrary. If that were the case, there would be no need to put so much stress on judgment. In context, the statement merely implies that, whereas death came upon the race through a man, so through a man, Christ Jesus, has redemption been made available to all. However, it must be said that there is a very, very broad application to God’s redemption. How broad, is known only to God, but it must be observed that if the bulk of the world’s population misses salvation, it would seem that Satan becomes the victor. What is the actual degree of faith or openness that is required for salvation, is beyond our own understanding.

But what about the verse that says, “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved?”

What that text is really saying is that there is no one on earth who will be saved, apart from the sacrifice of Christ. It does not define the limits of how much must be known about Christ or what kind of personal encounter with Him there must be. If, as Paul implies in Romans 2, there is a judgment of God that takes into consideration the levels of enlightenment, there could be large numbers of people that would be spared the ultimate judgment of hell on the basis of having lived up to the light that they had. But still, it is important to emphasize the fact

that God could show mercy to such ones only because of the sacrifice of Christ.

The issue of what God is going to do with the “heathen” has been around a long time. To many who have not as yet been touched by the Spirit of Christ, and therefore seeing the world through His eyes, it is a major problem with the Christian message. There are, admittedly, a great many “good” people in the world, or seemingly so, who have lived according to some moral or ethical code and been generally benevolent toward their fellow man. Could a God of love possibly consign these people to eternal torment? Or, in the case of the primitive tribes throughout the world who have never been exposed to what might be considered a phenomenon of western civilization in—“white” Deity, reflecting the values and morals of a western culture—what shall become of them? If we have too narrow a view of the meaning and process of salvation, we may find ourselves out of harmony with a God of grace and mercy. The question is not here resolved. One must remain open, and leaning more on the side of grace and mercy than of condemnation. Fortunately, we may consider it to be God’s problem and leave it ultimately to Him. It is best for humans to face such questions with appropriate reserve, as befits the inadequacies of the mind. Absolutism is often a sign of arrogance as well as ignorance. It is easier to be narrow-minded when one lacks the awareness of the many facets of a given issue. Arrogance often accompanies the attitude that, in spite of one’s inadequate knowledge of the Bible or of the issues, one has a special “pipeline” to the Deity that makes it unnecessary for one to equip oneself adequately enough to be an authority.

All of these observations are made in the light of the many aspects of Romans 2, that must in some respects, be left to the judgment of God.

Affliction and crushing...The Greek word for “crushing”—*stenochoria*—is often translated by “straitness.” In the King James Version in this passage, the word “anguish” is used. In a sense, all are possible. The Greek word has to do with passing through a very narrow defile, where one is pressed by both sides. The word is used in seaways where there is a very narrow channel. In the ugly world that evolved out of the Garden of Eden, to go without God is to pass through an increasingly narrow passageway, with no alternative, ultimately, but eternal destruction.

To every soul of man...The word “soul,” like many other religious expressions that we have discussed, has such a variety of meanings as to be almost useless. It is applied to music; to mates; and in such common expressions as “good old soul” and “upon my soul.” Its most unfortunate misuse, is interchangeably with spirit. In spite of the theological debate, the Bible makes a definite distinction between soul and spirit. It is most notably distinguished in Hebrews 4:12—“*The word of God is living and active [energizing] and sharper than a two-edged sword—piercing even unto the dividing of soul and spirit and joints and marrow.*” And Paul prays for the Thessalonians that their “*whole [complete] body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless, unto the coming of the Lord.*” There is no more important concept in the Bible for the understanding of Paul, to say nothing of our relationship to Christ, than the distinction between the flesh and the spirit. If, as Paul confessed, “*In my flesh dwells no good thing,*” where then was his spirituality? Where had the work of the

Holy Spirit taken place? To the Philippians, Paul said, “*We are they that worship God in the spirit, make our boast in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*” And though, as a Pharisee, he had reason to be confident in his religious experience, he declared that his own righteousness was of no consequence in his relationship to Christ—“*Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is through the faith of Christ—the righteousness of God on the basis of faith.*” (Chapter 3)

The soul [psyche], according to the Greeks, had to do with all the human mental processes, including intellect and emotions. Paul’s use of the word “flesh” includes all of the natural processes of God’s creatures—physical, intellectual, emotional. The flesh is not, of itself, bad; but is the residence of all in the human natural processes that is unsound. When Paul says in chapter 7, that *the good that he would like to do, he does not; but the evil that he does not want to do, he does,* the word translated “evil” does not mean evil in the sense of satanic evil, but the bad or the unsound, in the sense of natural human frailty. The evil that is the province of Satan is designated by the word *poneros*. The word Paul uses is *kakos*—that which is unsound (and thus out of harmony with Christ). From this word we get our word “cacophony,” which has to do with discordant sounds. It is akin to the jarring sounds of the orchestra tuning up. All through his epistles, Paul recognizes the inadequacy of the natural human creature to please God. And thus, of course, the need of the Holy Spirit. But where will the Holy Spirit dwell? If the flesh is intrinsically bad, how can it be the dwelling place of God? The answer is—the spirit. Christ dwells in our spirits. That is where death occurred in the fall. After Adam and Eve sinned, they did not

fall down dead. They retained their life in the fleshly, or natural, sense. But they did not retain the life of God in their spirits. The account in Genesis says that God breathed into them the “*breath of life*.” The Hebrew word is—*nishma*—which refers specifically to the breath of God. God had created man in His own “*image and likeness*.” That could not have meant the physical image of God, since He had no physical image at that time. What it referred to was a much broader aspect of His Eternal Spirit. Mankind had lost the eternal presence of God in his spirit. And thus, “death reigned from Adam to Moses.”

Salvation consists of receiving the life-giving presence of Christ within our spirits. All of the good deeds in the world will not bring life to the dead spirit. Similarly, when one receives Christ into one’s spirit, one has new life and is “reborn,” or “born again.” The coming of Christ into our spirits now restores that life and, once again, we possess the Spirit of God within us. If deeds do not accomplish the life of God within us, neither can misdeeds eradicate that Spirit. Bad behavior can create a good deal of difficulty for us in the flesh, but does not, of itself, dislodge Christ within us. Those who think so, really make Christ a coward. They assume that He runs out the back door the minute Satan appears at the front.

In the teachings of Paul, the drawing of a difference between the flesh and the spirit, allows for difficulties in the flesh with personality problems, behavior problems, and attitude problems, without negating the work of Christ in our spirits. Thus, in the process of our lives on the earth, where we struggle with many natural forces that make the way often rugged and slippery, a work of the Holy Spirit goes on continuously in our spirits,

keeping us steadfastly tied to Christ, while we wrestle with the struggles of the flesh. Not everyone who becomes a Christian is able, for example, to handle an alcohol problem or even a drug problem. Some alcoholics may lose their craving for alcohol immediately upon conversion; some may not get control of the situation in their lifetime. It is not that one is more spiritual than another, or has a greater touch with God, but that the nature of alcoholics and alcoholism varies so much from person to person. The bottom line is that one can certainly have a struggle with alcohol and yet be tied to Christ. This, of course, is true with many other human afflictions.

We have been dealing at length with a most vital distinction—the difference between soul and spirit. In this passage Paul has made reference to the soul as applied to human life. It is a Hebraism, in the sense that the Hebrew counterpart—*nephesh*—usually refers to natural life as a whole, rather than simply a facet of the human person. The Greek usage of the word *psyche* usually means, more specifically, the mental processes of the human being—the intellect and the emotions. This is in distinction from the word *pneuma* which refers to the facet of the human person that is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It was that part of man that was imbreathed by the Spirit of God, giving to him the image and likeness of God.

In short, there is a process of life and communion between our spirits and the Spirit of God, that goes on within us continuously, even while we are struggling with the human personality and behavior on the earth. It seemed necessary to deal with this issue immediately upon the use of the word soul, because it will form a major part of Paul’s concept of the relationship between

God and His people. The failure to recognize this distinction has brought great distress and guilt to Christians everywhere. Tying one's spirit to the flesh puts one's relationship with Christ on a roller coaster. Recognizing the distinction, on the other hand, allows one to be at peace with Christ, and stable in the relationship, in spite of the vacillations of the flesh. That is why Paul can say to the Philippians—*"I worship God in the spirit, but have no confidence in the flesh."* Remember, I am not saying that behavior makes no difference. It may make a lot of difference in the process of our lives on the earth. The peace we have within us as a fruit of the Spirit, is quite a different thing from the peace we have in our natural mind and emotions. The peace in our natural minds is hostage to our behavior, inasmuch as unsound behavior can result in much anxiety. If you don't pay your bills, the collection agency can give you much distress. Or if you marry the wrong person, you can have a lifetime of trouble. That does not mean you are no longer in touch with Christ, but only that you need to watch your behavior in the flesh.

The work of the Law written in their hearts...It is quite obvious that the Jews would be judged on the basis of the Law, but what about the Gentiles, who had no such Law? Paul is very clear about this. If a Gentile engages in ethical and moral behavior, he gives evidence that there is within him, some residuals of the original touch of God on the human race. It is patently true that a large number of people on the earth who are not Christians or Jews, have some code of ethics that causes them to conduct themselves with integrity. Paul says that they have a law within themselves. That is, there is something within them that regulates their actions. Paul speaks of this as their conscience. He says that

there is a conflict going on in their reasoning, or something of a struggle between right and wrong. Where did such a conflict come from? Of course, conscience is, generally speaking, something that is acquired as a learning experience. Both the Greek word *suneidesis* and the English word, which is directly from the Latin, mean "with knowledge." Conscience is whatever people have put together as a result of their acquired learning and experiences. But Paul sees something deeper than merely learning. He says that there is a law within themselves. This inner sense of right and wrong, however acquired, will be the basis of their own judgment.

But doesn't that really give them something of an edge over those who have been enlightened and have to live up to certain specific laws?

No, indeed. Remember, that they have to function in this frame of reference without Christ. That is, the conscience may direct one to function honestly or morally, and yet human weakness may succumb to the temptation. Living up to the light one has, is not all that easy.

But isn't it harder then for those who have a lot more light? Don't they have to live up to the light that they have?

The difference is that they have a lawyer. That is to say, Christ is our "advocate," who stands in our defense. The Bible certainly urges Christians not to sin, but recognizing the human frailty offers Christ as a sacrifice, to atone for these sins.

But if the heathen are going to be judged on a different basis than we, and might, therefore, find the grace of God apart from the Biblical revelation, why then do we go

over to other continents to bring more enlightenment?

That is a very good question. In the first place, and contrary to conventional thinking, the reason for any service to Christ, at home or abroad, is not so much the need itself. The need is so great, it can break one. As we indicated previously, the basis of our service is always the compelling of the Spirit to do what God wants us to do. I do not know how to save the world, and you do not know how to save the world. The task is beyond our capacity and comprehension. But God knows how to save the world, and He uses us in ways that we may not thoroughly understand or appreciate. He knows how to put the pieces together. In many aspects of society, people have tasks which they perform, often not knowing quite how their task relates to the whole. That is usually true in situations involving the national security. Tennyson expresses this idea poetically, in his famous Charge of the Light Brigade—“Theirs not to reason why; there’s but to do and die.” This is a very important point to remember in connection with “the gifts.” The effort to sort out the gifts and determine who has what, can be an exercise in futility. Many times gifts are combined, and many times there are gifts that are not obvious. It is usually assumed that all the gifts are, in

one way or another, public. That is not the case. In fact, God’s gift to the church (as Paul expresses it) may have only a moment of service. For example, the ones who have been instrumental in bringing to Christ certain evangelists and teachers that have made a considerable contribution to the world, would have served their purpose well in that one effort. By the same token, the mother who gives birth to such ones is equally a gift. The artisans who constructed the tabernacle were “gifted” by the Holy Spirit. So only a few of the multitude of gifts with which God has graced His earthly body of believers, are mentioned and classified. So one may be compelled by the Holy Spirit to perform a service, without being aware of exactly what its purpose is or what gift one is exercising. The bottom line is that “the Lord of the harvest must send forth laborers into the harvest.” Or, as Paul expressed it to the Corinthians—“*But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.*” (I Corinthians 12:18)

So the essence of this passage in chapter 2 is that God has His own way of judging the world. It is according to mercy. And it is according to His own wisdom and knowledge. “*Shall not the Judge of all of the earth do right?*”

Romans 2:17-29

TRANSLATION

If you who call yourself a Jew and rest in the Law, and glory in God and know His will and approve the things that are superior, being instructed out of the Law; being confident that you yourself are a leader of the blind, a light of those in darkness, a guide of the unlearned, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and of the truth that is in the Law. You then, who teach another do you not teach yourself? You who preach not to steal, do you steal? You who say not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you commit sacrilege? You who glory in the Law, do you dishonor God by your transgression of the Law? For the name of God is blasphemed on account of you, among the Gentiles, even as it is written. For circumcision is an advantage if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If then, the uncircumcised keeps the regulations of the Law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And the one who is by nature the uncircumcision, having fulfilled the Law, shall judge you, who through the letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law. For not the one who is in outward manifestation a Jew, nor the one who in outward manifestation is circumcised in the flesh, but the one who, in the hidden things is a Jew, and is circumcised of heart in the spirit not the letter, who is the one whose praise is not of man, but of God.

COMMENTARY

Who Is A Jew?

A question which today baffles the Jewish Knesset, is not likely to be resolved in a paragraph. Ultimately the answer is known only to God, Who “knows His own sheep.” The statement—“He knows who are His”—takes on greater meaning as the complexities of the social order multiply. Before the New Testament era, it was a rather simple matter. A Jew was

circumcised eight days after he was born and kept the Law of Moses. Some Gentiles became Jews by undergoing the right of circumcision, and by worshipping the God of Israel and keeping His Law. They were called “proselytes.” Some Gentiles chose to worship the God of Israel and keep the law, but did not become circumcised. They were called

“God-fearers.” Everyone else was simply “a Gentile.” Intermarriages were rare, but Jewish maidens were often taken into captivity and forced to submit to Gentile overlords. Thus, in many respects, the problem has always been one which only God could resolve. And the prophetic Scriptures are quite plain in the prediction that one day God would indeed separate His people out from the Gentile world. The degree to which this will be done, literally, is also known only to God.

In terms of modern anthropology, the question is even more complex. It is probably unresolvable. In the first place, the definition of “race” is too ambiguous. The anthropologists cannot agree among themselves as to what that definition should be. The school child knows immediately—black, yellow and white. But that oversimplification has been one of the main causes of what we call “racism.” The standard technical category of Caucasoid, Negroid and Mongoloid is more substantial, since it allows for great variations of color in every group. However, the universal intermixture has left very few pure strains. The question of a technical definition of race is completely open. No one really knows for sure. The most noted anthropologists cannot agree. Sterns, who wrote the textbook for the College Outline Series thinks that there are six races; while Coons, equally notable, argues for fifty. So if the experts cannot agree, the question must be left open.

The reason for this discussion is very important. It has a lot to do with the question of “What is a Jew?” People often refer to the “Semitic race.” The standard classifications consider Semitic as part of the Caucasoid or Caucasian race. It would be more technically correct to call it an ethnic group. An ethnic group is a classification of people who may or may

not have similar racial roots, but have amalgamated on the basis of what we call mores and folkways. These all have to do with customs and beliefs. On the other hand, if the category of Semitic were used, it would have to include the Arabs as well, who may be bound with the Jews in terms of source, but certainly not in the ethnology of customs and beliefs. So, ultimately the question from an anthropological point of view must be left open.

However, from the Biblical point of view, we have an altogether different picture. And that, of course, is why we took the pains to go into the subject from the secular point of view. In this second chapter of Romans, Paul makes a precise distinction between the Jew who is one outwardly, and the Jew who is one inwardly. The Jew who is one outwardly, may keep the Law as far as the “letter” is concerned, and pay lip service to God, but is inwardly violating the Law and dishonoring God. This was the precise point Jesus was making to the Pharisees. They did indeed keep the outward forms of the Law, but in their attitudes they totally ignored the spirit of the Law. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was not setting a new standard, the keeping of which would guarantee salvation, but rather, proving the need for help. He declared that it was not possible for human beings, victims of the “Fall,” to really satisfy God’s righteous requirement. One might control one’s actions, but not be able to control one’s attitudes. It was not enough to “love one’s friends” (not a problem for humans); but one must “love one’s enemies,” if one possessed the Spirit of God. It was not the act that condemned, but the attitude. To the “rich, young ruler” (the modern “yuppie”), He challenged the attitude toward money and not the money itself. The young man could not give it up, even

to gain heaven. Thus, in Paul's famous statement, it is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of money.

So Jesus shattered the illusions of the Pharisees, who thought that being circumcised and keeping the Law would make one a true Jew. The searchlight of truth penetrated the darkness in one brief statement—*“Other sheep I have who are not of this fold, them also must I bring with Me, that there may be one fold and one shepherd.”* Paul tells the Ephesians that the “middle wall of partition” was broken down by Christ, making both Jew and Gentile one in Him.

So, according to the New Testament, a true Jew is of the heart and not the flesh.

The word “Jew” comes from the tribal name Judah. Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah. He was called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” He took His royal lineage from the tribe of Judah, from whom had come the kings of the southern tribes. The ten northern tribes were called Israel, while the two southern tribes were collectively called Judah. All the kings of Judah came from the tribe of Judah. The 10 northern tribes have been lost from view, but according to the most probable interpretation of the prophecies, will ultimately be restored. Only God could possibly know who in the northern tribes would be considered a true Jew. So Judah has remained the mainstay of God's identification with His people. Now, since Jesus has a right to the throne of Judah, and is from the tribe of Judah, He has the authority to include all who are born again into His family, as true Jews or Israelites. And He has also the authority to cast out all who are imposters—that is, those who have maintained an outward facade of righteousness in keeping the Law, but are inwardly violators of the Law.

If you call yourself a Jew...The form of the verb here, allows the use of the Greek middle voice. This construction is peculiar to Greek, and an action which one takes upon oneself. It is not like the passive voice where the action is done to one by someone else. These whom Paul is referring to, are not called Jews by God or by the Gentiles, but by themselves individually. It is important to understand this, given the fact that Paul sees them as impostors.

And glory in God...The common translation—“boast”—is not really appropriate here. The Greek word—*kauchasai*—is probably a later development of an original word, which meant brass or copper, or as a metal providing a reflecting surface. Hence, as applied to God, it signifies the reflected glory of God. The Jews in question, were obviously not truly ascribing glory to God in terms of worship, but rather retaining Him or His image, as a validation of their own religious activities. It was more in the nature of what we would call today, “name dropping.”

And know His will and approve things that are superior...Once again, it is important to realize that Paul is using satire here. He did not honestly believe that they either know the will of God nor were discriminating about those things that pertain to the higher realm of religious observance. He is really saying—“you classify yourselves in this noble way, but you are phony.”

Not only did they consider themselves in this noble light, but they had confidence that they were leaders of the blind, a light in the darkness and, in general, the gurus to the world's “unwashed heathen.” But all of their moralizing and “pious pratings” served only to dishonor God,

and blaspheme His name among the Gentiles. The reason, of course, was that their flagrant hypocrisy was widely known among the Gentiles. Unfortunately, this reprehensible condition exists rather commonly in the church today. It was not so much, in Paul's mind, the problem of sin, *per se*; a common part of the human condition since the "Fall." But it was the blatant hypocrisy of those who usurped the role of judges of the world, while they themselves were equally guilty.

In the church, it is not uncommon for people to make mistakes. Even Paul provides for this in his exhortation to the Galatians, that if one be discovered in such a situation, there should be the application of grace and mercy. To exercise grace toward one's "faulty fellow man," is neither to condone the action nor minimize its error. It is merely, as Paul points out, the recognition that any human being is vulnerable to the wiles of the enemy. Show me a group that is highly critical of the rest of Christendom, and I will show you a group that has a lot of problems within itself. Doomsayers often speak out of the murky reservoir of their own personal vulnerabilities.

For circumcision is profitable if you keep the Law...Here it would be important to explain the Jewish rite of circumcision. Circumcision was a rite begun at the time of Abraham, at the command of God, to remove the "foreskin" of the male infant eight days after birth. Today it is a common practice as a health measure, but in those days, it was not generally practiced except by the Jews. At that time, it was a distinguishing marking that would instantly identify the male as Jewish. It, no doubt, had also its health function in the mind of God, who wanted His people to have the best of care. The same was true for dietary

requirements. On the one hand, those requirements would identify the Jew and set him apart, in custom, from the Gentiles. On the other hand, it too was a health measure, especially given the lack of refrigeration in those days. When Paul distinguishes between the circumcision and uncircumcision (terms applied to the persons), he is simply referring to Jews and Gentiles, with a special emphasis upon that practice which the Jews regarded as their "rite of passage," and a badge of special favor with God, irrespective of their actions or attitudes.

To Paul, the bottom line was neither circumcision nor uncircumcision; Law or no Law; but a spirit possessed by the Spirit of Christ. Those under the Law could keep perfectly, its precepts and still be damned; the uncircumcised could function apart from the Law, and yet, exercising kindness toward their fellow man, could receive the favor of God. To what extent such favor? God knows—I don't. To what extent the damnation of the Jewish hypocrites? God knows—I don't.

But if the Law is only relatively important, what is God's basis of judgment?

That is a very logical question. Paul's attitude toward the Law, which we shall see all through the book of Romans, was neither to regard it as unimportant, nor to use it as the basis of our relationship to Christ. He saw the importance of the Law as bringing human beings to the position of realizing their inadequacy and causing them to turn to God. On the other hand he made it very clear that the essence of our relationship to God is by way of the presence of the Spirit of Christ within us. Apart from the Spirit of Christ, there is no basis of integration with God. But when we receive the Spirit of Christ in us,

we become at that point, as Peter says—*“Partakers of the Divine nature.”* (II Peter 1:3) Eternal life then cannot be achieved (as Jesus pointed out to the “rich, young ruler”) through any amount or degree of good deeds. It would be like trying to become a member of a family merely by following the rules and regulations of that particular family. In the family situation, one may be adopted and become a member of that family, in which case the rules would apply, but in Christ we are more than adopted—we become imbued with His Divine nature. We have eternal life because we partake of the eternal nature of God.

Thus, the person who is “uncircumcised,” but possess the Spirit of Christ, is like a child who is the member of a family by reason of natural birth, and yet who may not subscribe to all of the rules and regulations of that family. Paul never did indicate that the observance of the Law by the uncircumcised would, apart from new birth, make one a Jew. But he did say that there was an inner state of the heart which would qualify one as a Jew.

Do you mean then, that Gentiles become Jews?

In a certain sense, that is what Paul is saying. When the Gentiles become members of the family of Christ, they become also in spirit, part of the “people of God;” and thus a “spiritual Israel.” Paul makes it clear that there is an

earthly Israel and a spiritual Israel. That is not to say that there will not be a fulfillment of the earthly promises made to Israel, and confirmed by the prophets. In a certain sense, there are two Israels. In the days prior to the United Nations charter—which allowed the forming of the nation of Israel—even the most respected Bible scholars assumed that all the scriptures, pertaining to the future of Israel were spiritual, since it seemed impossible that there would ever be again a Jewish nation. Now it is not only possible, but quite likely that there will be an earthly fulfillment of the promises to Israel.

So, in a sense, Gentiles become Jews, as members of God’s family, God began the gathering of His family in the earliest beginnings of history, and continues that process today. Jesus said, *“Other sheep have I which are not of this fold; them also, I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.”* (John 10:16) So the people of God are one—Jew and Gentile, alike who by birth have joined with Christ, the *“Lion of the tribe of Judah,”* and Heir to the throne of David.

So, in conclusion, Paul states very clearly that everyone who possesses the Spirit of Christ is a Jew in the inner part—that is in the spirit—and not by the outward letter of the Law. Such ones receive the praise *“not of man, but of God.”*

Romans 3:1-8

TRANSLATION

What then, is the advantage of the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much, in every way. Chiefly, because to them were committed the oracles of God. But what if some did not believe, would their unbelief render ineffective the commitment [to them of the oracles] of God? God forbid! Let God be true and every man a liar, even as it is written, “So that You may be justified in Your words and superior in Your judging.” (Psalm 51:4) But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness [rightness] of God, what shall we say? God is not unjust who expresses wrath, is He? I speak as a man. God forbid! Since how shall God judge the world? But if the truth of God has abounded in my falsehood unto His glory, why am I also judged as a sinner?—and not even as we have been slandered, and even as some have reported us as saying, “Let us do evil that good may come”—whose judgment is just.

COMMENTARY

The Mystery of Divine Justice

Paul has just been saying that the true Jew is a matter of the heart. He said, in so many words, “He is a true Jew who is one inwardly, and not one who has merely been circumcised or kept the Law.” Paul anticipates a strong reaction—“Then what advantage is there in being a Jew? Why did we go to all the trouble of being circumcised?” Paul’s response to that, is that they had the honor of being chosen as those who would declare the truth of God to the world. Apparently, the Jews had failed to appreciate the honor and had failed to finish the task.

Jesus expressed this truth in one of His celebrated parables. The owner of a vineyard had hired laborers at a fixed amount for the day, but at the end of the

day, the task not being finished, he hired other workers and paid them the same amount. This, of course, brought an angry response from the original workers.

But let us cast it into a modern scenario. It is harvest time and a farmer goes into town to hire laborers. He agrees to forty dollars for the day. Toward the end of the day, the task is not finished and the farmer has to go and get more laborers. He goes into town to secure them, but finds a negative response—“We’re not going out there for an hour’s wages.” The farmer raises the ante and still no takers. But he has to have the harvest finished, and in desperation he says, “All right, I’ll give you the full day’s wages.” Now he has plenty of takers. But when the paymaster

comes around to settle, the workers who had been there all day were, understandably, angry.

They had thought that they were going to receive very special treatment, because they had borne the heat of the day. The owner reminds the workers that he has a right to be generous with what is his own. The problem with the original workers had been that they failed to finish the task. That is an important part of the story. Had they done their job, he would not have had to go out and hired more. God's chosen people had failed to complete the task that He had given them; inasmuch as, at the eleventh hour, they failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah Who would fulfill God's redemptive plan. Thus, they did not bring their responsibility to fulfillment. Completing the task was not a matter of getting the word out to a larger number of people, but rather, giving to the people the complete message of God.

The case of the "five foolish virgins" was similar. They had lamps all right, but failed to take the extra oil. The lamps could be likened to God's original revelation in the Law; the oil was the ultimate coming of the Spirit of God into the heart, through Jesus the Messiah.

Again, the parable of the prodigal son has a similar message, with a slightly different emphasis. Here you have the elder son—the firstborn—faithful to the rules of the household; the irresponsible prodigal; the loving and merciful father; the restoration of the prodigal; and the bitterness of the elder son. The application is quite clear. The elder son had gone part way—he observed the rules of the household—but had not gone on to understand the ultimate message of grace and mercy. The prodigal represents "the other sheep," which Jesus speaks of in

John 10—"Other sheep have I, which are not of this fold. Them also must I bring with Me that there may be one fold and one shepherd." And, of course, we recognize in this analogy, the Gentile world. But the parables of Luke 15 all speak not just of restoration, but of rejoicing—the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. The older brother, resentful of the father's celebration over the return of the prodigal, could not stop it but went off to sulk. In that, he betrayed his failure to grasp the second half of the message—the infinite measure of God's forgiveness and restoration.

The very question of why the uncircumcised Gentile should be just as acceptable to God as the circumcised Jew, reflects the same failure to grasp the significance of the ultimate meaning of redemption—the grace and forgiveness of God. The Jews had God as their Father, but ultimately failed to grasp His Son, Jesus Christ. They had the Law on tables of stone, but failed to grasp the meaning of the Law written in their hearts, by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Would their lack of commitment render ineffective the commitment [of the oracles to them] of God?

We have here, a very interesting use of the word, usually translated "faith." But in context, we have to follow the expression in verse 2, that "*To them were committed the oracles of God.*" Actually it is the same word in Greek—*pisteuo*—usually translated by "believe." However, here in this verse, it is obviously used in the sense of commitment. The same usage was made of the word, by John—"Jesus did not commit Himself to them." (2:25) The Greek word for "faith" is from the same root. The idea of faith as "commitment" is difficult, but very important. There is a difference between

believing something on the basis of evidences, versus a conviction which goes beyond evidences. There is a point at which the brain “turns the corner of commitment.” It is the difference between mere belief or assumption, and conviction. One may believe something to be true, and yet is open to further evidence. For example, one sees an object in the distance. As the object comes closer one perceives that it is a person; and then a male person; and then a familiar figure; and then, finally, one’s neighbor. In this process, there comes a point at which the mind becomes convinced that it is the neighbor, and would testify so in court. What is the point at which the assumption becomes an absolute conviction? It is thus with God. One may assume things about God, or believe them to be true, but there comes a point at which there is an irrevocable conviction or commitment to the reality of God. In the realm of God, human reason is not adequate. It requires a touch of the Holy Spirit, Who goes beyond the reason and brings conviction to the human spirit. In the material world, the brain has its “turning point of conviction or commitment.”

However, what we call faith, as a brain function, falls far short of that which is needed for conviction about God. The belief in God which is merely a product of the accumulation of rational evidences would not have the convincing power of the Holy Spirit and would be hostage to the human mind, which is subject to vacillations between doubt and belief. Such vacillation is based upon the unreliability of the human brain. Even Christians often go through periods of doubt or question, especially when things are going very badly. The faith that comes to our spirits through the Spirit of Christ, is not affected by the uncertainties of the human brain.

Such is the meaning of faith, as Paul uses it in the book of Romans. The human spirit, touched by the Holy Spirit, has a conviction about God that goes beyond the power of the mind, to believe. Whereas the brain “turns the corner of commitment or conviction” about material things, the human spirit has turned the corner of conviction about God, as the result of the energizing of the Holy Spirit. Remember, now that we are not using commitment in the sense of human dedication, but rather, commitment in the sense of conviction which is the energizing action of the Holy Spirit bringing to the human spirit a commitment to the reality of God. Whatever the circumstance or feeling, the one who is touched by the Spirit of God, returns continually to Him.

Let God be true, and every man a liar... God is never rendered ineffective by human vacillation. God seems to be able to accomplish His purpose in spite of human inadequacy or unfaithfulness. David is a primary example of this. Holding one of the most crucial places in the history of Israel and writing one of the most crucial books in the Old Testament as regards the work of God in the spirit of the individual, David was guilty of some very heinous sins. But the fact that the Spirit of God never left him, was manifested in his later confession and repentance and plea, for the mercy of God. In context, we are dealing with the question of Israel’s apostasy and the consequent reaction of God. David dealt with this specifically, in Psalm 51, which was his soliloquy about the tragedies of his iniquity. *“So that You may be justified in Your words.”* David put himself at the mercy of God, and was open to whatever God’s judgment would be. On the basis of his penitence and humility, God dealt with him in great mercy. This episode in

the life of David is crucial to the argument in Romans. Paul uses it as evidence that human failures are not recorded against, us when we rely on the sacrifice of Christ.

If the truth of God has abounded in my falsehood unto His glory, why then am I judged as a sinner?

So now comes the main issue. If the mercy of God is more abundantly revealed in the falsehood and failure of the people, why should He then find fault with them? The human capacity for self defense (not to say alibi) is limitless. Making excuses for misbehavior is a national pastime. It is difficult even to get the authority to execute mass murderers—there is always someone else to blame for their crimes, however heinous. But God is the great “discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

The Creator knows all too well, the created. He will not let His mercy be held hostage by human reasoning. The prophet Isaiah, gives the bottom line—“*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*” (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

Whatever the causes or consequences, there is a blight on the human race and God must cure it with His limitless grace. Later on, Paul will say, “*For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all. Oh the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*” (11:32, 33).

Romans 3:9-20

TRANSLATION

What then? Do we have an advantage? In no way; for both Jews and Greeks have all been concluded under sin, even as it is written—“There is not a justified one, not even one; there is not one who understands; there is not one who seeks out God. They have all turned away; they have become useless. There is not one who practices kindness [usefulness], not even one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they practice treachery. The poison of serpents is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and wretchedness are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

For we know that whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law in order that every mouth may be silenced, and all the world may be under judgment to God. Wherefore by the works of the Law there shall no flesh be justified before Him, for through the Law is the knowledge of sin.

COMMENTARY

The Rationale of Divine Judgment.

On the surface, this seems to be an extremely harsh judgment when applied universally. Certainly there is enough evidence to recognize these potentials in the human race, generally. The continuous witness of history is that, not only this, but outrageous atrocities even beyond this, are an ever-present reality. But surely there are large numbers of people whose attitudes and conduct would not merit such severe castigation. So we must find some kind of rationale that will bring this passage into a justifiable application.

We find the clues in the original passages which Paul has used here. One of the most fundamental principles upon which all exegesis is based, is the necessity of checking the context. For this quotation, we must go back to Psalms 14 and 53. The first line of the passage which sets the stage for the rest of it is, *“The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.”* So obviously, all that follows is ascribed to “the fool.” But here, the crucial consideration is what does the word “fool” mean? The Hebrew—*nebel*—is applied more specifically to the Godless. It is not the fool in the sense of the unwise or

giddy or inane, but one who embodies all that is evil in the world. As with many English words, we are embroiled in the general ambiguities of “fool.” The word is applied generally to the unwise, and to the giddy, and to the dupe, and to the adventurous. But these definitions have absolutely no relevance to this particular word, which has most dire implications. It is used of those whose whole perception of life is corrupted by their lack of identification with God. Their spirits are void of Christ, and become rotten like foods that are void of preservatives. The prophet Isaiah describes this kind of fool in Chapter 32. The true word is obscured by the English translation, “rash.” In this passage, we are dealing with the true “fool,” who is the Godless perpetrator of evil in the world. Isaiah indicates that such ones will be restored, but meanwhile describes their condition. They are erroneously perceived as sophisticated, by the world; but practice Godless things and speak error against God. Isaiah speaks of the time when such ones will be recovered in the general restoration of Israel—*“The fool will no more be called a noble man, nor the crafty a gentleman. For the fool speaks folly and his heart does Godless things; to speak errors against Jehovah, to leave the soul of the hungry more empty, and to withhold the drink of thirsty ones. And the craft of a crafty man is evil, who devises stratagems to destroy suffering ones by lying words.”* (Isaiah 32:6-8—from Kyle and Delitsch on Isaiah.)

Thus does Isaiah describe the one who is identified in Psalm 14 as the “fool.” In the King James translation, the word is translated by “rash.” In describing this “vile personage,” Isaiah is really giving an astounding prophecy; and indeed, one that fits in with Romans 3. He is saying that, even such ones as these are not beyond God’s power. And in the latter

days, in the restoration of Israel, such ones shall also come under Divine grace. The vilest sinner is not beyond the reach of God; but the most gracious of humans, apart from the Holy Spirit, cannot reach God.

In a certain sense, that is the message of Romans 3 Paul sums up this astounding concept, in Romans 11—*“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all. Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”* (32, 33). The reservoir of iniquity is very deep within the human nature. In over 40 years of counseling, the author has tapped much of this depth. Such a simple thing as chemical imbalance in the system, especially with reference to the neurotransmitters, can expose the hidden potentials of the human heart. In a mild sense, the common experience of deficiencies in hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone, can trigger untapped potentials of aberrational behavior. Often guilt feelings are induced by conditions which are purely physiological, and should carry no more guilt than a person with a broken leg would have over the use of crutches.

The major quarrel Jesus had with the Pharisees was that they thought they didn’t need Him—*“They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”* The basic lesson of chapter 3 is that the human race is sick. God’s diagnosis of the illness only carries with it condemnation, if one does not seek the help of the physician. How often the warnings of a physician are ignored, with dire consequences. God concluded all under sin, not that He might condemn them, but rather, that they would turn to Him and be healed.

Romans 3:21-31

TRANSLATION

But now, apart from the Law the, righteousness [rightness] of God is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets—that is, the rightness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all who believe. For there is no difference—for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God—being justified as a free gift by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, Whom God has set forth as a propitiation [mercy seat] through faith in His blood; unto a showing forth of His rightness on account of the overlooking of the sins that had gone before, in the tolerance of God, toward the showing forth of His rightness at the present time, to the end that He should be just and the Justifier of the one who is of [out of] the faith of Jesus.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. Through what sort of law? Of works? No, but through the law of faith. For we consider a man to be justified by faith, apart from the works of the Law. Or is God the God of the Jews, only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, also the Gentiles, since indeed there is one God Who will justify the circumcised one out of faith, and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then render the Law ineffective through faith? God forbid; but we establish the Law.

COMMENTARY

The Fullness of Divine Justification.

The English word “justification,” like so many of our theological terms, has become something of a “catch word.” That is, it has been bandied about among the “initiated” (Christian club members), with little regard for its actual meaning—like the word “love;” and to the “uninitiated” (unwashed heathen), with a confusing array of shadowy ideas as to its content. Of course, there are always the witty one-

liners—“just as if I’d never sinned”—which may be long on wit, but short on substance. The kernel of truth hidden therein usually remains, alas, in the seed stage. But since the word is such an integral part of Paul’s message to the Romans, it is important for us here, to come to terms with it.

The Greek word is *dikaios*. Translated often in the English versions by “righteous,” it really means to “make straight” or “right.” The English word “righteous,” usually conveys with it some sense of purification or piety. It is as though the act of God in justification provides also a reservoir of moral/ethical behavior patterns or “spirituality.” It is certainly true that the coming of Christ into the spirit does bring a change in attitudes and interests, but it is certainly not true that everyone who is justified or “saved” undergoes a radical behavioral change. The question—“How can you be a Christian and do such things?”—indicates a failure to grasp the true meaning of justification. To be justified in the sense of *dikaios*, means basically to be “lined up” on the right side. A modern-day analogy would be in the field of printing. The printer “justifies” the columns of type by lining them up or making them straight. The opposite would be what the printer calls a “ragged right,” which would be much like a typewritten page. The right-hand margin is only kept within a reasonable uniformity. In another example, one may be going to a certain city and taking the right road, but have many problems in transit—flat tires, engine trouble, etc. Eventually one will get to the city in spite of the difficulties. On the other hand, if one takes the wrong road, one may have no problems whatsoever and yet never arrive at the destination.

Thus, in the Greek concept of *dikaios*, our position before God is one of acceptance by Him. We have come over to His side, which is the right one; and left the wrong side, which is that of Satan. In a certain popular sense, we have come to God “bag and baggage,” but the contents of the baggage may need much attention. A young couple once came to a meeting of mine, who had past ties with the crime

syndicate. After the meeting, they said to me, “We would like to accept Christ, but we’re afraid we have too much in our lives that would complicate it.” I said to them, “Why don’t you just come to Christ and bring your baggage with you, and let Him deal with it. It will all have to be taken care of eventually, but let’s first come to Christ and let Him help you.” They took me up on it and, in time, did get things straightened out. Their justification depended on coming to Christ, and not on getting their lives straightened out. It is not that behavior is unimportant, but that justification is based on the sacrifice of Christ and, not on “*works of righteousness which we have done.*”

Even the English word “righteous,” has undergone some semantic shifts. It is actually from two old Anglo-Saxon words—*riht* and *weis* which mean “the right way.” In modern usage, the word has taken on the implications of “piety” or “goodness”—elements not part of the original word.

Here again, it is most important to consider the distinction between flesh and spirit. With Paul, this is absolutely essential. To the believers at Philippi, he said, “*We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit, make our boast [find our glory] in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*” (3:3) And to the Romans, he said, “*For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing.*” (7:18) And, of course, this is the clear teaching of Romans 8—“*For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.*” (8:3, 4) It must be here observed, that the last clause—“*who walk not after the flesh, but after the*

spirit—is a qualifying phrase applied to all believers, since that is our position in Christ. Paul says later—“*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*” He is not in any way making a distinction between the so-called “spirit-filled” believers and those who are not. We will go into that in considerable depth when we come to chapters 7 and 8.

With this distinction between flesh and spirit, it is understandable how one may possess the Spirit of Christ and be justified before God, and yet have behavior problems in the flesh to deal with. *And possessing the Spirit of Christ in our spirits, we possess also the fruit of the Spirit, such as love and joy and peace.* (Galatians 5:22) These are attributes of Christ, and we have them in our spirits because Christ is in our spirits, and not because we cultivate them. However, what we possess in our spirits does not always express itself in our flesh. For example, we have peace in our spirits because Christ is our peace. But peace in the flesh is hostage to our behavior patterns. Carelessness in money matters, for instance, can bring us anxiety. We still have peace with Christ in our spirits, but we are troubled in the flesh.

We have gone into this matter, again, of flesh and spirit in order to clarify the meaning of justification. Through the sacrifice of Christ and the grace of God, we are made right with Him and accepted in His family, but are not necessarily made pious or good. After we have been made members of God’s family, there are many ways in which He helps us with our life on the earth, but changing behavior patterns is not the condition of justification.

Apart from the law, the rightness of God is manifested. God represents in the universe, all that is good and right

and straight and real. When Jesus said, “I Am the truth,” He referred to this. The Greek word—*aletheia*—means that which is real and genuine. Truth is the verbalization of reality. Jesus, as the projection of God, was the revelation of all in the universe that is real. I prefer to use the word “rightness,” to eliminate the uncertainty of the word “righteousness.” It is the rightness and straightness of God that is manifested by the Law and the Prophets. The kingdom of God is ruled by that which is right and straight and true. That rightness was made known by the Law and the Prophets, but they were only the instruments of the true revelation of God, which was Jesus Christ. Through the energy of faith, Christ was projected into the world as the living revelation of God. But though the will of God was made known to man, man was not capable of living up to God’s standards. It was therefore necessary for God to bring His creatures into His kingdom, in spite of their inadequacy, on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ which, like the animal sacrifices of old, would atone for their sins.

Being justified, freely, by His grace. The word “freely”—*dorean*—means “as a gift.” We are justified by God, not because we are right, but in spite of our not being right—apart from the Law—by the grace of God and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Whom God has set forth as a Mercy Seat. The Greek word—*hilasterion*—is usually translated by “propitiation.” A propitiation is something of a redress of grievance—a satisfaction for offenses. The true meaning of the word is “mercy seat.” In the Old Testament “tabernacle,” the mercy seat was the place at which the offenses toward God were satisfied by the sprinkling of blood. In the previous chapter we discussed the tabernacle and

its furnishings. The mercy seat was part of the Ark of the Covenant, which was in the Holy of Holies. The Ark of the Covenant was a chest, encrusted with gold, in which were the pot of manna and the rod of Aaron and the tables of stone. On either end of the Ark were cherubim, and on top was the mercy seat. It was here that the offenses toward God were satisfied by the sprinkling of blood, which the high priest brought in once a year on the Day of Atonement. This mercy seat was a type of Christ, Who became the meeting place between God and man in the covering of sins by the sprinkling of His own blood. The blood of Christ was adequate for the covering of all sins past, present and future, and thus opening the way for access to God forever.

Through faith in His blood. It is not a human mental attitude of trusting that the blood of Jesus is adequate to save us. It is rather, faith as an energy process from God, affecting the spirit with an irrevocable conviction that God has accepted the blood of Christ as a suitable sacrifice for the eliminating of God's case against man. Trust or confidence that is born of human mental process is not capable in any way, of this kind of conviction.

That He may be just and Justifier. We are accustomed to the word just and justify and justification. So that must, in some ways, be accommodated in the translation. However, to cover the sin of man does not make God just in the legal sense of that term. Justice, in the sense of fairness, has nothing to do with this matter. Similarly, the word justify in English, usually accepts an action as within a person's rights. We are not talking here, about rights or justice in the legal sense. God is not justifying humans as having the right to be what they are. He is rather, giving to them the spirit of

understanding to see themselves as He sees them; to see sin, and Satan, and the world, as He sees them. And thus, to seek His mercy and forgiveness; and, therefore, to be drawn into the realm of the right and the real, from the realm of the wrong and the false. This exercise of Divine grace is made possible by the sacrifice of Christ, Who received in His own body, the just retribution of God for whom the inevitable result of sin must be death.

Out of the faith of Jesus. The capacity to receive this truth and to participate in it, can only come from the limitless reservoir of the faith of Jesus Christ. The revelation of the human condition is the province of God, who has spent many thousands of years making that known. The revelation of God and His grace was the province of Jesus, Who came as a living revelation to the world. The will to recognize the human condition and to tap the reservoir of the faith of Christ is the province of the human. All the world is guilty before God; all the world is entitled to the grace of God; all the world will be judged by a just God; therefore, all the world is without excuse.

The law of works...The law of faith. What is meant by the word "law?" It is used constantly through the scriptures from the books of Moses to the writings of the apostles. Actually, it has several different meanings. It is important to distinguish between them. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is *Torah* and is used either specifically of the law code given to Moses in Sinai or of the books of Moses which are known collectively as the "Torah." In the New Testament, the Greek word is *nomos* and is more broadly used either of the Law of Moses or the books of Moses, collectively; the will of God, generally; a principle or standard; or the civil law.

Here, in Romans 3, it is used in the sense of a principle or standard. It is used in the same sense as the laws of physics or chemistry. It is something that partakes of the very essence of the matter. Hence, we have here, a contrast between the law of works and the law of faith. The law of works would be something akin to a bartering system—a trade off. Good deeds are offered as a means of earning salvation. Paul describes such deeds as “dead works.” (Hebrews 9:14) It was exactly the kind of system for which Jesus denounced the Pharisees. Their “good works” were not the result of a heart full of faith toward God. They were hypocritical, religious efforts engaged in to demonstrate religious fervor—to accredit themselves as worthy of the power which they held over the people. It is doubtful that they were really seriously concerned about the favor of God. Actually, they were more like agents of Satan. And, of course, Jesus Himself made that judgment. The problem with works or good deeds as a means of obtaining salvation, is that human goodness is not enough. If good deeds might, of themselves, be meritorious, they do not bring life to the doer of them. There can be no salvation apart from the life of Christ, breathed into dead spirits by the Spirit of Christ. Works are not the “coin of the realm.” It is as useless as counterfeit money. Nor can works be used as a maintenance fund for the redeemed. For some, works are a sort of “pay later plan.” Such ones will agree that salvation is free, but once you are saved you have a lifetime of indebtedness. It is like the sales gimmick of giving away the basic equipment free so that one will be forced to buy the special kind of refills. The kind of works that James talks about (who is not at all in conflict with Paul), are the reactions and expressions generated by the spirit of Christ within. *“I will show*

you my faith by my works.” He is not suggesting one should do the works to prove the faith, but rather that, having faith, certain works will naturally ensue.

The law of faith, on the other hand, is the essential principle upon which faith functions. Faith, as a gift of God is the energizing force that brings us into union with God. When the Holy Spirit enters the human spirit, belief in God is the effectual expression of that faith. When a conductor of electricity is attached to an energy source, the effectual result is electric current. The ultimate usage of that current may take a great many forms: light, heat, power, etc. To engage in works merely as an obligation of faith would be like attaching a candle to an electric wire, and lighting it to prove that there was energy coming through that wire. Or, in another figure, like tying fruit to the branches of a tree. Paul and James are very much in agreement on this principle.

Christians are often very much concerned about the adequacy of their works. (And so are the leaders, who want to succeed.) “Is my credit card payment enough?” The truth of the matter is that the very fact that they care about it is, itself, part of the “Works” both Jesus and James are talking about. Jesus said, *“This is the work of God that you believe on Him Who sent Me.”* (John 6:29)

But shouldn't we be doing more than we are doing?

You mean can we reduce the debt by making a larger payment? No, because you will never pay enough to reduce the debt. If you receive a gift, it is certainly unfashionable to ask if you can make payments on it. If God wants you to do more than you are doing, He will tell you—and not only tell you, but give you

the compelling and the capacity. But all of this has to do with the law of faith. According to the law of faith, we are charged with the energy of God to believe, and equally charged with the same energy of faith to serve. You do not owe God for salvation; you express salvation in your responses to God. And the way of expressing salvation is as varied and individual as the persons who express it.

Out of faith...through faith. God justifies the Jews who are the circumcised ones out, of the reservoir of faith already supplied for them, but which they now must tap for their salvation. But He justifies the uncircumcised—the Gentiles—by the supply of a stream of faith which they never had.

Do we then render the Law useless? God forbid; but we establish the Law. It is of vital importance to understand that God never rescinded the Law—not even of the sacrifices. The truth of the

matter is that Christ is not the replacement of the Law, but the fulfillment of the law. We still offer the daily sacrifice, but that sacrifice is Christ. Our spirits have become the worship center. Christ within us, is the Tabernacle and the Furnishings—the Incense of prayer; the bread of life; the Light of the world; and above all, He is the Mercy Seat. In short, all that made up the Jewish worship is resident within us in Christ, the fulfillment of the types and symbols of worship. To the woman at the well in Samaria, He said, *“Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father...but the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:21-24)

Romans 4:1-5

TRANSLATION

What then, shall we say that Abraham who is our forefather according to the flesh, had found? For if Abraham had been justified by works, he has a boast, but not with God. For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness [rightness].” But to the one who works the reward is not accounted according to grace, but according to debt; but to the one who does not work, but believes on the One who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness [rightness].

COMMENTARY

Abraham and David—Examples of Justification By Faith Apart From Works.

So who was Abraham? Abraham appeared on the scene about 2,000 B.C. He was born and raised in Ur of Chaldees, which was on the Euphrates River just north of the Persian Gulf and southeast along the river, from the site of ancient Babylon. As a comparison of the time frame, it would be well to remember that Babylon was in its heyday about 1,500 years later, when Nebuchadnezzar was in power; the Jews were in captivity and Daniel interpreted for him the celebrated dream of the great image. At this period of history, Ur was the prominent commercial and cultural center of the region. The ships came up the river from the Persian Gulf bringing precious metals and woods and gems, which were turned into exquisite works of art, including a plethora of idols. From Ur to Canaan (present day Palestine), goods were transported by caravan up the Mesopotamian valley and down into Syria—a region known as the Fertile

Crescent—which was selected because of its water supply and vegetation. It was a trek of over 1,000 miles. Below the Fertile Crescent was the forbidding and impassable Arabian Desert. It is important to mention that the King of Babylon was known as the “King of the North.” The reason, of course, is that any connection with Babylon had to be down through Syria. As far as the people of Canaan knew, anyone who came from Babylon came from the north.

One of the important reasons to realize this, is that, in the prophecy of Ezekiel 38, the “power from the north” does not need to refer to anything north of the Caucasus Mountains. Failure to recognize this point has caused many to make assumptions about the so-called “power from the north” that are not really true.

So Abraham came from a city which was the cultural and commercial center of the

region. In the nature of the case, it was also a center of Paganism and idolatry. It is remarkable that God should lift one from this region to be the progenitor of His eternal family. It is even more remarkable when, according to Joshua (24), Abraham's father, Terah, was himself, an idolater.

From this unlikely milieu, came Abraham, to be the "father of many nations;" the possessor of the lands of Canaan; and the progenitor of God's people, Israel. He was obviously a believer in the monotheistic God of Noah, and the original descendants of Adam and Eve. Whence did he come by such knowledge? How did this knowledge penetrate eastern cultures over 1,000 miles away? We are given no details. If details were available, the important point is the fact that, apart from any cultural conditioning, God chose to touch Abraham with the energy of faith which, apart from his own mental processes, was sufficient to tie him to the one true God.

Two thousand years later, Paul will make a point of this in using Abraham as an example of the kind of faith that functions, apart from the works of the Law, inasmuch as Abraham had no Law by which to identify with God.

Abraham, thus, became the example to all believers who identify with Christ, completely apart from the Mosaic Law. It is thus, that the circumcised and uncircumcised alike, receive the gift of faith as illustrated in the life of Abraham.

After some delays, Abraham finally arrived in Canaan and settled in the area of Bethel. On his way through to Bethel, he had paused in a mountainous region where God promised to give him the land "as far as his eye could see," which from his vantage point was a vast area. He also

promised to make of him a great nation, and that in him "all nations of the earth would be blessed." Subsequently, he received the right of circumcision and performed it on all of his people. The promise came, however, prior to his circumcision. He thus became the progenitor of all the people of God—both Jew and Gentile; both circumcised and uncircumcised.

To place Abraham in the process of redemption, he was the father of Isaac—a child promised him in his old age as one that would extend his progeny so that they would be like the "sands of the sea shore." Through Isaac, came Jacob—renamed Israel or "prince with God"—who fathered the twelve sons known as the twelve tribes of Israel. And, of course, through one of the sons—Judah—came the line through which Jesus was born.

Thus the significance of Abraham, whom Paul now uses as the grand example of "faith apart, from works." In the history of Abraham we are given no clues whatsoever, as to how he acquired his knowledge of God in the midst of a pagan society, where even his father was an idolater. The significance of this, is that the true source of his faith was God. It could not have been in the nature of human trust in God, acquired through exposure to a special revelation, as given to Moses. And, of course, this is in keeping with the basic definition of faith, which is distinguished from human trust as an energy process from God. This is Paul's main point in drawing upon the experience of Abraham. God had singled out Abraham in a pagan society, imbued him with the Divine energy of faith, and removed him to Canaan, where he would be for all time the foundation of the family of God—both Jew and Gentile.

It was thus that Abraham's faith was accounted as righteousness or "rightness." The rightness consisted not of any unflawed behavior on the part of Abraham, who was involved in a number of unfortunate episodes. It was based on his determination to follow God, even though he was compelled to go out "not knowing whither he went." He thus identified himself with God, and rejected the paganism of his forbears.

Abraham was justified, apart from any good deeds. In another sense, however, he did satisfy the conditions that James sets forth—I will show you my faith by my works. Good deeds, as such, would be in the category of what the book of Hebrews called "dead works." They would be works as the basis of salvation, or as "bartering chips" with God. James is speaking of "living works"—that is the expressions of a faith that already exists. Abraham expressed his faith, not so much in good deeds, but in the act of obedience—of believing the promises of God and acting upon them. And this was the kind of "works" that Jesus spoke of when He said, *"This is the work of God—that ye believe on Him who sent Me."*

There were some unsavory episodes in Abraham's life, as there were in David's, and they would each pay a considerable price for their misdeeds; but they were the expression of the human nature, as yet unperfected, and did not result in a loss of their relationship with God. In Paul's development of the concept of "faith apart from works," he does not ever imply that behavior is unimportant. He has a good deal to say about the conduct of Christians, but at the same time recognizes the weakness of the flesh, and

distinguishes it from the process of redemption in the spirit. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil [kakos, unsoundness] which I would not, that I do. Now if I do what I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law that when I would do good, evil [unsoundness] is present with me. For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.* Paul then goes on to express his wretchedness as a result of this state of things and suggests that, ultimately, deliverance will be in Christ. But that deliverance is not assumed to come before our final state of perfection. Present-day imperfections in the flesh, which cannot be denied even by the most careful follower of Christ, are exactly what Paul is talking about here. The word "evil" is an unfortunate mistranslation because it really is not the πονηρος (poneros) of the nature of Satan, which Paul no longer possesses, but rather, the unsoundness of action which is the fruit of sin in the human nature.

Thus, in justification, we are made right—brought into the orbit of God—by the gift of faith which comes to us through the energy of God. Abraham is the classic example of this kind of faith. Such faith is not based on good deeds, but rather, after the example of Abraham, merely identifies with God. The evidence of that faith is the desire to follow Him.

Romans 4:6-12

TRANSLATION

Even as also David speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God accounts righteousness apart from works—“Blessed are they whose lawlessnesses have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered, blessed is the man concerning whom the Lord does not account sin.”

Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised one or the uncircumcised? For we say faith was accounted to Abraham for rightness. How then, was it accounted? While he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the rightness of faith which is in uncircumcision, to the end that he may be the father of all who believe through uncircumcision, unto the accounting to them of rightness; and the father of circumcision to those who are not only of circumcision, but also to those who walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham, which was in uncircumcision.

COMMENTARY

David—Prime Example of Forgiving Grace.

Almost everyone knows about David. He is something of a universal symbol of human folly and weakness. He is perhaps known more widely for his sin than for his sovereignty as the king of Israel. Had it not been for his lurid life, he certainly would not have been the subject of so many novels and movies. On the other hand, this very notoriety puts him in a position of being the symbol of something quite majestic—the willingness and capacity of God to enter into a forgiving relationship to His creatures on the earth.

And that is exactly where David fits into the epistle to the Romans. If Abraham is the symbol of the uncircumcised, albeit noble, David enters into the role of the circumcised and ignoble. Abraham had his questionable episodes, but was, on the whole, a man of integrity and faith. David was a man of faith, but was often involved in episodes that brought out the brutish side of man. He was the sovereign ruler and the warrior. He engaged in many bloody battles in defense of God's people. So stained were his hands with blood that he was presumably unqualified to build the temple. But he will be more

heinous yet. He will take the wife of one of his chief warriors and instigate the warrior's death. How could God tolerate such a man? He tolerated him because he had a heart for God. "*David is a man after Mine own heart.*" (Acts 13:22) How could he be such a bestial man and be a man after God's heart? Strictly because of the limitless grace of God. How could God condone such a person? He did not condone his actions, nor did David go without severe punishment, but He recognized the quagmire unto which the human race had fallen—hostage to the virulent violence and wretchedness of the humans on the earth.

The warfare of David was actually directed by God against the demonic forces of the surrounding nations, hostage to Satan and bent on Israel's destruction. In the New Testament, the warfare against Satan is a spiritual one—"*Our warfare is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the supraheavens.*" (Ephesians 6:10) The word "supra" implies a realm that goes beyond anything in the material universe. It is a spirit realm occupied both by God and Satan and their respective angels or agents. On the other hand, in David's time the capacity for the understanding of spiritual forces was lacking, since the followers of God did not possess His Spirit within, as in the New Testament era. David's warfare was then a physical one, not in the nature of simple wars of attrition against neighboring nations, but against nations which were provinces of Satan in the world. His wars were then in the nature of object lessons or types, which would later be understood as warfare against Satan at the spiritual level.

If David, the warrior, was the agent of God in the warfare against the arch enemy—Satan—David, the sinner, was engaged in the inner warfare between the flesh and the spirit. In the episode of his outrageous behavior with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, the basest element in the human flesh is symbolized. There is no excuse, no defense, no modification of the heinous nature of his crimes. For his sins he should have been stoned to death, as the Law provided. However, at the same time David becomes the symbol of the infinite grace of God, Who did not overlook his sins or modify them or excuse them, but dealt serious judgment upon his household as a result of them. On the other hand, he did not cut David off nor turn a deaf ear to his abject humiliation and pleas for mercy.

But did not David receive special favor? By no means. There is no indication whatsoever in the Old Testament. But episodes in the New Testament indicated that God would have been gracious to anyone who sought His forgiveness. For example, witness the episode of the woman taken in adultery, brought to Jesus by the hypocritical Pharisees (John 8). According to the Law, she should have been stoned, but Jesus, teaching one of the great lessons of the gospels—there is no one without sin—forgave her and sent away her accusers in shame.

The lesson of David is manifold: 1) We are confronted with an unvarnished presentation of the weakness and wretchedness of a man who was, nevertheless, a man of great faith, and a remarkable servant of God. 2) This is typical of the entire Bible—there is no effort to cover up human weakness wherever it is found. 3) God is able to use His people to accomplish His purposes, in spite of their weaknesses. 4) There must be an attitude of repentance and

humility, before God can respond in forgiveness. 5) The vilest sinner is not beyond the reach of Divine grace. 6) God's forgiveness carries with it also, the capacity to receive the forgiveness and come to peace with God. 7) The forgiveness of God does not necessarily abolish the penalty. David paid a considerable price for his sins, in the subsequent disasters to his family.

Romans 4 must be taken in the light of the foregoing comments. Rising "Phoenix-like" from the ashes of his own degradation and desolation, David writes magnificently in the Psalms of the forgiving grace of God.

Blessed are they whose lawlessnesses are forgiven. In the first place, we confront the word "blessed." What does it really mean? It is used for everything from the noble Beatitudes to the ignoble "sneeze." The Greek word is μακαριος (*makarios*). This is also the word that is used in the "Beatitudes." It is a different word than the one used in Ephesians, for example—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Tracing it back to its classical roots, it meant "touched by the gods." To the Christian, that would really mean "lucky" or "fortunate," but not touched by the true God. Some translators have used the word "happy," which in its old English usage, also meant lucky or fortunate. In the old English usage, the word for luck or fortune was "hap." Thus we get our words "happy," "happen," and "hapless." As Jesus used the word in the Beatitudes, it had no such meaning at all. Carried over into the New Testament usage, *makarios* meant "touched by the True God." This fits much better with the spirit of what Jesus was trying to convey. So David is saying, *Touched by God are they whose iniquities [lawlessnesses] are forgiven.*

David was a significant example, because the nature of his sin plumbed the depths of human degradation. It might otherwise be easy for one to say—"Surely my sin is beyond the reach of God's grace." The key is not the magnitude of the sin, but the magnitude of God's grace. It is not the extent of one's sin, but the openness of one's repentance. The evidence of God's forgiveness in spite of the magnitude of David's sin, was the fact that David received it. The Spirit witnessed to him that he was forgiven. The very desire for forgiveness is the guarantee of its accomplishment. Only the Holy Spirit can turn the heart toward God for such forgiveness. David wanted forgiveness, and he was forgiven. The Holy Spirit both inspired him to ask for it and convinced him of its reality.

Peter, in the New Testament, had the same experience. It would be hard to imagine a more heinous offense against God than the threefold and willful denial of Christ. But in the touching story of Jesus on the beach after His resurrection, Peter jumped out of the boat and splashed through the surf to come to Him. The forgiveness was complete. The guarantee that we have forgiveness, is the very desire for it. We would not care to be forgiven if the Spirit of Christ within us did not inspire it. It is not that the Lord ignores our sin, but that He does not put it to our account. Jude tells us that we are "presented faultless"—blameless—before Him. "*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from failing, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.*" (Jude 24) We are not flawless, but faultless. There is a difference. "*who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies.*" (Romans 8:33)

It might be well to observe here, that the forgiveness we experience in the spirit

which keeps us clinging to Christ, is not always experienced in the flesh. Mistakes or misdeeds in the flesh may bring remorse which is not so easily dismissed. The consequences of the misdeeds may follow us for some time. One has often heard the expression—"I can never forgive myself." What they are really saying is "I can never forget this," which may indeed be a possibility. To such a one I will always respond—"Who gave you the right to forgive yourself anyway?" Only Christ can forgive us, and His forgiveness is experienced in our spirits as we continue to relate to Him. Dealing with memories is quite another matter. The best advice is to accept the circumstances which cannot be reversed and get on with one's life. Some things will never go back in quite the same way. But we can seek ways to minimize the damage. Forgiveness with God is always there for the penitent; restoration is also there, but it is limited by factors which may prevent recovering things as they were.

Was this blessedness then, on the basis of circumcision or on the basis of uncircumcision?

Paul plainly declares that Abraham was placed in a right relationship to God on the basis of faith. The faith that he had was a gift of Divine energy within him. It was not the result of religious exercises or feelings of trust. The question then arises—Was it on the basis of the Jewish rite of circumcision? If it was, he would be the father of the Jews, but not of the Gentiles. Paul points out that historically, Abraham received the special promise from God before he was circumcised, which meant that circumcision was not the basis of the promise. It would follow, therefore, that Abraham was the father of both Jews and Gentiles—of all peoples on earth who would join with God in receiving from Him the same gift of the energy of faith, apart from any religious rites or regulations. As Paul points out so repeatedly, the Law can only reveal the inadequacy of God's creatures to satisfy Him, but it can never give them the power to be right with Him.

Romans 4:13-16

TRANSLATION

For not through the Law, is the promise to Abraham or to his seed that he should be the heir of the world, but through the rightness that is through faith. For if they who are of the Law are heirs, our faith is empty and the promise ineffective. For the Law works out wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there a trespass. For this reason it is of faith, that it may be on the basis of grace to the end that the promise may be confirmed to all the seed, not to the ones who are of the Law only, but also to the ones who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

COMMENTARY

Abraham—Heir of the World Through Faith.

We have defined the word “Law” in terms of the general will of God for the world. But what about the Law in its technical sense as the Law of Moses? What is it specifically? What was its place with the Jews originally, and at the time of Christ? And what is its place now? Has it been totally obliterated?

Technically speaking, the Mosaic Law was the specific revelation given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai, and is set forth in the five books of Moses, which are known as the “Torah”—the Hebrew word for learning—or the “Pentateuch,” which is the Latin designation for the five books of Moses. So the Mosaic Law was a very specific collection of instructions from God, for His people Israel. These Laws had been expanded and interpreted over the centuries by the scribes and lawyers into the Talmud. When Jesus addressed the Pharisees, it was not the Law of Moses, *per se*, but the expansion of the

Law into such detail as to become a heavy burden to the people of God. The Pharisees were at that time the religious leaders of the Jews, and were more keepers of the traditions than keepers of the Law of God. The original Law of God given to Moses, was certainly not something intended to be burdensome, but rather, enlightening and protective as well as regulatory. The “traditions of the Pharisees” were more in the nature of keeping the people under their control.

The battle has been raging from the days of Paul to the present hour over the place of the Law in the new order of things that was ushered in by the coming of the Holy Spirit. What is the place of the Law in the new order? To what degree has it been rescinded? Here in the book of Romans Paul has been making some very plain and bold statements about it. Salvation comes as a result of the gift of faith from

God. In this respect it has nothing to do with the Law, as such.

So then what of the Law? Has it been annulled? Is it of no further use?

To these questions Paul gives a very decided “No! By no means!” But rather, he says, We fulfill the Law. And herein lies the resolution of the matter. An attempt has been made to separate between the “moral” Law and the “ceremonial” Law. Such an effort reveals a lack of understanding of the fulfillment of the Law in the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament the Law was written on tables of stone; in the New Testament it is written in the heart. And this is the testimony of all the prophets. *“But this shall be the covenant that I will make to the house of Israel: after those days,” sayeth the Lord, “I will put My Law in their inward parts and write in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people.”* (Jeremiah 31:33) Although there is ultimate fulfillment yet to come in the case of Israel, the essence of these prophecies were fulfilled in Christ in the coming of His Holy Spirit to dwell within. He is our justification and sanctification and righteousness. In the end, the believers are said to be clothed in “fine linen, which is the righteousness of the saints.”

In addition to the moral implications of the Law, Christ is also the fulfillment of the ceremonial Law. The sacrifices were never rescinded. They were fulfilled in Christ—the Eternal Sacrifice. All of the elements of Old Testament worship were types of Christ. He is the Tabernacle, and the Altar of Sacrifice, and the Altar of Incense, and the Lampstand, and the Table of Showbread, and the Mercy Seat. In short, we have a worship center within us. Possessing Christ, we possess all the elements of the Law of sacrifice and

ceremony, fulfilled in us. To the woman of Samaria, Jesus said, *“They that worship the father must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”* And, like the altar of incense, our worship is lifted to God continuously, originating in our spirits through the Holy Spirit within us.

But what of our expressions of praise and worship? What of our choirs and singing and music and prayers? Are they of no value?

There is certainly nothing wrong with these outward forms of worship. For many people these are high-water marks in their Christian experience. However, they are not all there to worship, and they are often motivated more in the flesh realm than the spirit. Most people like music so it is, of itself, no indication of motivation by the Holy Spirit. In the presence of Christ within our spirits we are, in a sense, worshipping all day long through the vehicle of the spirit, who keeps continuous touch with Christ. Whatever is going on in our lives outwardly, there is that continuous inner worship.

Life today is a highly complex thing. Our day is filled with activities that are often unavoidable. The mother has scarcely a moment’s time to herself in the constant pace of child-care. The business people and professional people are often pressed to the wall to accomplish their tasks. It is comforting to know that the altar of worship within us keeps up its steady flow in spite of all. In reality, we do not carry Christ with us—He carries us with Him once He has taken possession of our spirits. The complexities and frustrations and anxieties of daily living in the modern world are in His care, and He sustains us by His daily river of grace. We do not survive because of our religious understanding and commitment, but

rather, because of the presence of Christ within us. In one sense, He is like a gyroscope that keeps our life in balance. Outwardly, things may seem chaotic and frustrating and futile, but through it all the power of Christ in our inner spirits sustains us.

And it is in our inner spirits that the Law is fulfilled in us. Possessing Christ within we possess also His attributes—“*love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*” (Galatians 5:22) These qualities are not always evident in the flesh, but they are manifested through us. Jesus said that love was ultimately the greatest commandment and the fulfillment of the Law. Taken as an example of the ways in which the Law is fulfilled within us, everyone who possesses Christ possesses also His love. It is important, however, to understand what love means. The Greek word *agape* has to do with a “caring consciousness.” It has not to do with human feelings and affections with liking and acceptance but with concern for Christ and for others. In the nature of the case, we can care about people for whom we have no personal feelings of affection. It is in this sense that Christ can mandate the love of enemies. We don’t have to associate with enemies or accept them, but if they are in trouble, we care enough to help them. The Good Samaritan was a primary example from Jesus. He extended the necessary help, but there is no indication of any personal relationship that developed between them. He left the man at an inn, with money for his care, and went his way. There is much difficulty in Christendom, as well as in the secular world, over this distinction. Caring is the inevitable expression of the spirit within us; feeling is an expression of the human psyche (or mental process).

The Law could not produce love, even though it had definite restrictions on one’s relationship to others. Paul made a special point of the human problem in his discussion of the Law in Chapter 7. The Law said, “Thou shall not covet.” The apostle said this is what tripped him up. He had no control over such feelings.

So in Romans 8, he spells it out—“*What the Law could not do in that it was weak in the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh that the righteousness of God might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.*” Again, in Philippians 3, he expresses his total lack of confidence in the flesh, and then having outlined his Jewish pedigree, he says, “*What things were gain to me I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ; the righteousness which is of God by [on the basis of] faith.*” (Philippians 3:7-9)

So then where does the Law fit in?

On the one hand, the Law is fulfilled in us in the presence of Christ. But on the other hand, Paul regards the Law as something of a pedagogue—a schoolmaster—to lead us to Christ. Had it not been for the Law, Paul would not have recognized his own weakness. But the Law had lead him to complete bondage. He said that he was free without the Law before he really was aware of it. But after the Law came to his attention, he saw himself as a sinner and worthy of death. He concludes his own

self analysis with the woeful cry—“*Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:24) When he turned to Christ he, found peace and deliverance, not because he was himself any more righteous, but because he found a new vitality in Christ. “*Though our outward man perish, yet is our inward man renewed day by day.*” He was still as weak as ever, but found his peace in the strength and grace of God. To the Corinthians, he said that he had sought deliverance from his weakness, but instead was assured by God of His own grace and strength. “*My grace is sufficient for thee for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*” And Paul said “*Most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my weaknesses, for when I am weak then am I strong.*”

So the Law is useful in showing us the human weakness that drives us to Christ.

For not through the Law was the promise to Abraham or his seed, that he should be the heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith. So it was not in any way in the keeping of the Law that Abraham received his promise from God. And what a promise! That he should be the heir of the world! And not only Abraham but also the Jews, and not only the Jews but also the Gentiles. If the promise were only to

those who are of the Law, then the whole issue of faith is of no value, whatever. So goes the argument of Paul.

For the Law works out wrath. In the Law, Paul saw only judgment and condemnation—indeed, the very wrath of God. The glory of the new covenant was freedom from wrath and judgment. “*God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*” (John 3:17) And the words of Paul to the Romans—“*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...*” (8:1) For Abraham there was no trespass, because there was no Law. So the promise came strictly by grace through faith and, as we have been saying, that faith was itself a gift of God. And thus, having been given prior to the Law and prior to the trespass; and having been given as a pure gift of grace from God, it is valid for those who are not of the Law ,as well as to those who are of the Law.

So Abraham is the father of us all—Jew and Gentile; circumcised and uncircumcised; apart from the Law or of the Law. And all of us are heirs of the world with Abraham, and joint-heirs with Christ Who, in the flesh, could also trace His lineage back to Abraham.

Romans 4:17-25

TRANSLATION

Even as it is written, “I have set [destined] you as the father of many nations;” confronted with which, he believed God Who gives life to the dead and calls the things that are not, as things that are. Who, contrary to expectation, believed on the basis of expectation to the end that he would become the father of many nations according to that which was spoken, “So shall your seed be.” And not being in a condition of weakness with respect to his faith, he considered his own body now dead (being almost 100 years old) and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; and did not waiver at the promise of God in unbelief, but was empowered in respect of faith, giving glory to God and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to do. Wherefore, it was accounted to him for righteousness [rightness]. Nor was it written for his sake alone, that it was accounted to him but also for our sakes, to whom it is going to be accounted—to us who believe on the basis of the One Who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus, Who was delivered up for the sake of our trespasses and was raised for the sake of our justification.

COMMENTARY

The Nature of Abraham’s Faith.

Again the question arises—Whence came Abraham’s faith? The bold statements made about Abraham might have been made about the apostle Paul. And yet we have no indication whatever, that Abraham was in any way or by any means schooled in the subject of faith. He never wrote a line, and as far as we know never, communicated a tradition of teachings that might be ascribed to him. Nor have we any knowledge whatever of the source of Abraham’s understanding of the subject. The simple statements in the first verses of this chapter are now expanded into a high-level participation

in the process of the divine-human interaction, including the remarkable events of the conception and birth of Isaac to parents who were quite beyond the normal age of reproduction. More remarkable still, is the fact that the achievement of faith in these proportions, came not through his father, Terah, who was a known idolater. And Abraham’s “altar” was probably not “mother’s knee.” What then? We have no clues. But neither had we any clues to the origin of Melchizedek, who was either a type of Christ or an actual appearance. If he had been a type only, the absence of genealogy

would have been a significant omission. The likelihood is that Abraham, on the other hand, was a type of the redeemed whose salvation is based not on human efforts to reach God, but rather, God's own intervention in the lives of fallen humanity with a gift of the Divine energy of faith. In such a case, the omission of details as to any effort on the part of Abraham is significant.

As far as we know, God chose Abraham purely out of grace; as with Jacob, whom Paul discusses later on (9) as also the recipient of an election by grace while he was yet in the womb of his mother. The same may be said of David, who, on the other hand, received the grace of God in spite of his overt misconduct. All of these examples point to the ultimate intention of God for His fallen creatures—to recover by His own energy of faith, what could not be recovered by human efforts, which had shown thousands of years of failure. Herein lies, perhaps, a major reason for the delay in the appearance of Christ. All of the centuries of God's tolerance in His dealings with His people, had still not availed to bring about recovery. Nor had severe penalties had any effect. It is like the case that sometimes occurs with children—neither love nor punishment seems to work. The only way that God could secure eternal salvation for His creatures was by sending His own son, with the power to accomplish the task through His own sacrifice and resurrection. The subsequent implanting of the energy of His Holy Spirit within the human, has produced the needed result.

In view of the foregoing facts, it is impertinent as well as utterly foolish, for Christians to function as though so much depended on their own faithfulness or goodness or service. The introduction of systems of salvation and service—presented through endless lectures and

literature—has lent credence to the idea in some circles that, while salvation may be free, once one has received it there is a very complex set of rules of the game which obscure, if not cancel out, all claims to the grace and power of God. The constant leverage is—“You owe God.” On that basis, given the magnitude of God's “gift,” the debt can never be repaid. It is tantamount to receiving a priceless gift from a friend and responding by asking—“Can I make payments?”

If the energy of God within us is the only power adequate for our salvation, it is the only power adequate for our service. In other words, the One Who saves you is the only One Who can motivate you to fulfill His purpose for you on the earth. But in much of Christendom, guilt becomes the instrument of leverage for a leadership which, like the Pharisees, wants to retain its hold over the people. In this view, if believers are having difficulty of any kind, it's their own fault. Or, if they are not assisting the leaders in accomplishing the goals of a given club or society, it is due to failure on the part of the member. It never occurs to some that what they are asking of the people is not necessarily what God is asking of them. All three of the examples given here might very well have been excommunicated by the church of today. No doubt Paul would have joined their company.

The reason for the detailed and, perhaps, repetitious discussion, is to pinpoint the fact that all that we have and are and do, is ultimately motivated by the Spirit of Christ within, and not by human motivations.

But if we don't motivate people (who are all lazy) how will we ever get the work of the Lord done?

You mean how will you get your “work of the Lord” done? How do you know that what the Lord wants you to do is what He wants everyone else to do? It is tragic that so many believers are put under a great burden of guilt because they are not motivated to do what someone else thinks that they ought to do. If we do what others motivate us to do we may obscure what the Lord wants us to do. If He has enough energy to create a universe and enough energy to save everyone, is it so hard to think that He has the energy to motivate His people to do what He wants them to do? The problem is that some leaders are eager for success and need recruits for their programs.

All that we have in the way of gifts and the motivation to use them, is from Christ. Paul confronted the problem of motivation in Corinth. To the Corinthians, who were engaged in a similar judging of one another, he said, *“What do you have that you have not received [as a gift], and why do you boast as though you had not received it?”* This comes in a chapter 4, where Paul is discussing the practice of believers judging one another. Paul asks, *“Should I be judged by you? I don’t even judge myself. The Lord is the One who judges me.”* If the Lord has a service for you, He will let you know. It is not up to others to judge the matter.

But what has all of this to do with Abraham’s faith?

It has a lot to do with it in the whole matter of who gave Abraham his faith in the first place. And who motivated him to root up his family and cross over to the other side of the Arabian Desert to a place that he had no knowledge of? But let us consider the nature of his faith.

Confronted with which [promise], he believed God...But on what basis could he believe God? What did he have to go by? And yet, here was a staggering promise—that a childless couple, quite past the age of conception, should not only bear a son but should be the progenitors of “many nations.” In the book of Hebrews, the progeny of Abraham and Sarah was described as being as numberless as *“the stars in the heavens and the sands of the seashore.”* Such faith was not even possessed by Jesus’ disciples 2,000 years later. And that was in keeping with the fact that Abraham had a special gift of faith which the disciples as yet had not received, since “Pentecost” had not yet come. Throughout the Old Testament, such gifts of faith as Abraham’s were given to special agents of God in the process of redemption. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came as a universal gift.

So Abraham believed God on the basis of the faith that was given him. Whether or not he did have teachers cannot be certainly known. But the omitting of such information leads us to the conclusion that faith is strictly a gift of God. And indeed, Paul makes this clear—*“By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8)

Who, contrary to expectation, believed on the basis of expectation...The Greek word ἐλπίς (elpis)—usually translated by “hope”—is better translated by “expectation.” The English word “hope” touches only a small corner of the definition of the Greek word. The English word has mostly the implication of uncertainty—“I sure hope so.” Sometimes we use it in a more positive way. The Indians are attacking a wagon train; a small band is about to be

overcome. Suddenly the bugle sounds of the United States Cavalry—there is hope! That is the only sense in which the English word “hope” comes close to the Greek word. In chapter 5, Paul speaks of the grace “in which we stand and glory, in hope of the glory of God.” (5:2 AV) How much better to use the word “expectation” in place of “hope.” Generally speaking, this could be done throughout the New Testament where the word “hope” is used. So, what Abraham experienced was more than mere hope; it was expectation. But whence came this expectation? We must conclude that it came from God as an outward expression of the inner energy of Divine faith.

Not being in a condition of weakness with respect to his faith, he considered carefully his own body...It was not that Abraham ignored the condition of his body (as the AV indicates), but that he weighed the matter and still acted in faith. The Greek word translated “consider”—κατανοεω (*katanoeo*)—means not only to think, but to think deeply. But as he considered the matter deeply, Abraham did so in a strength of faith that was itself a gift of God.

He did not waver [doubt] in respect to unbelief but was empowered in respect of faith, giving glory to God...The word for waver—διακρινω (*diakrino*)—means to hesitate between two options. There was evidently a clear word from God as to what he should do. The call of God is effectual. That is, if the Lord wants us to know something or do something, it is up to Him to make it known to us. There is no chance in the world for humans to “outguess” God. If we think we know how to find the will of God, we probably don’t. And yet, there are thousands and thousands of books written on “how to find the will of God.”

The truth of the matter, is that whatever the religious exercises we engage in or human cogitations we pursue, how does anyone really know what God wants? We think we know; we speculate; we gamble; but in the end, the only way a human will ever have the will of God, is for God to see to it that the human has the will of God. Therefore, our ultimate prayer should be—“See to it, Lord, that I do what you want.” If this may seem to be an evidence of the lack of “spiritual vigor,” one may have failed to plumb the depths of human weakness. Spiritual pride has led many to wander around in the buck brush of imagined “voices from God,” and tragically mislead others. The first step in finding the will of God, is to acknowledge that we do not know how to find the will of God.

Empowered with respect to faith...the translation—“strong in faith,” is a very weak one. It gives the impression that Abraham is to be commended for his strength. The truth is that we humans have no strength in the area of faith. The disciples who companied with Jesus Himself might have been expected to have the strongest reason in the world for faith, but they were constantly chided for their lack of it. Abraham was empowered—ενδυναμαι (*endunamai*) in respect to his faith. He was empowered by God and did not accumulate any human resources of faith. He understood that (which many teachers today do not), and gave the glory to God.

And being fully persuaded...Confirming the above concept, the Greek word, here—πληροφορεω (*plerophoreo*)—means to bring one’s confidence to fulfillment, or perfection. It is impossible for humans to develop that kind of perfection. However, if the confidence is something inspired of the Spirit within, we partake of God’s

energies which are limitless. And such fullness of faith as an expression of the energy of God, was accounted to Abraham for righteousness—for being on the right track.

It was not written for the sake of him only, that it was reckoned to him. The

ultimate end of the entire discussion, is that we who have joined with Christ, 2,000 years later, receive our faith from the same source and in the conviction that Christ justifies us too, by the gift of His grace; our faith is accounted to us for righteousness, or being right with God.

Romans 5:1-5

TRANSLATION

Having therefore been Justified by [out of] faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom also, we have received access into this grace in which we have taken our stand; and find our brightness in our expectation of the glory of God. And not only so, but we also find brightness in our afflictions, knowing that affliction works out endurance; and endurance, approval; and approval, expectation; and expectation does not leave us without strength because the love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us.

COMMENTARY

The Fruits of Justification

In some sectors of Christendom, there is a frequently used phrase—"mere justification." The implication is that unless one moves on into "higher levels" of experience, one has stayed at the "bottom rung of the ladder," so to speak. The "higher levels" vary considerably from group to group—but all of them requiring some special efforts of the human to prove one's worthiness, or fervency or spirituality, as a prerequisite (purchase price) for God's real favor. It is as though justification simply allows one the privilege of striving for the real prize. In a sense, it is like a passport to return to the land of the Law.

In chapter 5, Paul dispels such an absurd notion. In truth, justification provides peace with God; access to His grace; the brightness of His glory; a meaning to afflictions; an expectancy that banishes weakness, and the pouring out of the love of God through His Holy Spirit. What

more do we want? To consider that as only the first step would be a grave effrontery to God.

In countless Christian circles there is a heart-breaking struggle to achieve by human effort, a place with God to which He has already granted access; a presence within, which He has already accepted; strength in afflictions, which He has already guaranteed; and a fullness of His love, which is already ours by His Own presence. The problem lies in faulty expectations of outward manifestations in the flesh—manifestations of graces already ours by the coming of Christ into our spirits; and this He grants at the very moment we have asked Him to come in. Remember, the Holy Spirit is not a "thing" that Christ gives to us. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, Who has already come in. Sadly, in circles where the "second blessing" is taught, it is referred to in just such an impersonal

sense—“Have you received it—tongues; the baptism; sanctification; the filling?”—etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Paul once asked the Corinthians (in another context), “Is Christ divided?” Does Christ come in only part way at justification? Does He come in, but leave His real gifts outside? Or perhaps, He stands at the door and says, “I will save you, but I won’t really come in until you satisfy the conditions.” The absurdity of the whole thing is obvious.

When Christ comes in, He comes in with all that He is and all the power that He has, to perform His work within us. Paul said to the Philippians—“*Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” (1:6) And in Hebrews 13:20, 21—“*The God of peace...make you perfect [restore you], working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.*” John tells us in his first epistle that we have “the seed of God” in us. And David says that we are like “*trees planted by the river.*” (Psalm 1) All that we ever have and are is through the energy of God within us, in His very presence. To think that anything we have is the result of our own religious effort or faith or perseverance, is a complete misunderstanding of the message of the Bible. Many “proof texts” are quoted in defense of the “second blessing” concept, but the misuse of such texts renders them as useless as corks bobbing on the water. The tragedy of such teaching is that it consigns the believers to endless searching and striving, guilt and turmoil, frustration and disappointment, and a focus on the flesh which is a constant “roller coaster” of emotional vacillation. But let us turn now to what Paul is really saying.

Having been justified by [out of] faith, we have peace with God...To

Paul, peace with God is the inevitable result of justification. There is no uncertainty about it; nor are there any conditions. Remember that justification really means that we have been put on the right track, and that we are entitled to all of the benefits that come from being right with God; nor is faith used here as a human effort to reach out to God with a feeling of trust or confidence. When such human faith is used as a precondition to salvation, it leaves the poor sinner in a sorry state. Because he is a sinner he has no faith, and yet he is required (in some quarters) to exercise faith before he can receive salvation. The argument goes something like this—“It says so right here in God’s Word, and if you don’t have faith in God’s word you can’t be saved.” Of course, the same argument is used when it comes to all the gifts and benefits that belong to the believer. “If you don’t have faith you can’t receive the Holy Spirit, or the power, or tongues, or the gifts.”

So once again, we must understand faith as an energy process from God in our spirits, and not as a kind of human confidence which one must “work up” in order to get help from God. The expression *ἐκ πίστεως* (*ek pisteos*), means literally “out of faith” as a resource. The energy of God is a limitless reservoir out of which all His creatures may draw their strength to come to Him.

And having received His gift of justification, our peace with Him is assured. But what is the nature of that peace? It certainly is not evident in the world at large; nor in the circumstances of large numbers of believers. Where is the peace? Here we must recall the discussion of the difference between the flesh and the spirit. The peace of Christ dwells in our spirits. It is manifested in our insistence that we do, indeed, want to belong to Him, and are at liberty to pray

to Him and regard Him as our Father. This inner assurance prevails in spite of how we may assess the levels of our own “spirituality.” We may not be sure of how He really thinks of us or what He will do for us, but our sense of identity with Him prevails within us. We may, at times, be uncertain about Him or the effectiveness of our prayers, but we can’t walk away from Him. There seems to be a deep, subterranean river of His grace and love that flows beneath the rocky surface of our circumstances, and refreshes the roots of the tree that David uses to describe the condition of those who have in them, the seed of God [as an established possession].

But what of all the turmoil and distress and frustration and affliction, that causes us to feel anxious and anything but peaceful?

What you describe here is the condition of the flesh. We must understand the difference between peace in the spirit and peace in the flesh. Peace in the flesh has to do with human feelings, and is continually hostage to our behavior patterns and our circumstances. Much of this we bring upon ourselves by misbehavior and unsound decisions. Some of it, as in the case of Job, is allowed by God as a “testing.” Some circumstances are merely the result of our place as victims in a world ravaged by Satan and evil. It is quite natural for humans to go through these things. It is quite natural for us to have feelings of doubt and anger and frustration. Such feelings really have nothing to do with the inner sense of our identity with God. It is even common for frustrated humans to feel anger or bitterness or resentment at God. We are like children who cannot see the ultimate implications of life. God sees the end from the beginning, but we only see a small segment of what appears to be to us

unfairness or indifference. But, like parents who understand these feelings in their children, He does not expel us from His family for such unguarded feelings. He presides over the “cosmic sandbox” with grace and mercy. *“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”* (Psalm 103:13, 14)

So peace in the spirit is as eternal as God, Who dwells there. Peace in the flesh is as fluctuating as the human condition. It may reflect a lack of human confidence since humans cannot always tell just how God is going to deal with their circumstances, but it does not reflect a lack of faith since, the spirit remains tied to God in spite of all. And therefore, *“Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Through Whom also we have [as an established possession] access to God. This is what the whole process of redemption is all about. And not only access—in itself, an incomprehensible thing—but access with a “face-to-face” quality of closeness. The preposition *προς* (*pros*) attached to the verb form, implies the same quality of nearness that is implied in John 1:1 *“The Word was with God.”* The preposition *pros* is used here of the relationship between Christ and God, and it is part of the Greek word for “face”—*προσωπον* (*prosopon*). The word “with” in the sense of simple togetherness, is a different word.

And not only do we have such access, but it is something that is permanently established. The simple verb form—“to have”—is extended to a kind of permanence by the form in which the verb appears.

Tenses in Greek are very important. The

perfect tense, which is used here, implies an action that is fixed. Used in connection with the Scripture, for example, it means “it stands written.” Our access to God, established in the redemptive work of Christ, remains our permanent privilege. This access is by faith—once again, a process initiated by the energy of God. Our access is not based on how we feel about Him or what we think He feels about us. No matter what your situation is or how you feel about things, you always have an entry to the heart of God. You have only to come to Him. Come, with your doubts and fears, and cares and misgivings. Yes, come to Him even with your feelings of anger or resentment or bitterness. Just come. The fact that you want to come is, the guarantee that His Spirit is with you.

Into this grace, in which we have taken our stand...The flow of grace into which we have entered, is the aura or the river of Divine benevolence toward His creatures. When we have received the Spirit of Christ into our spirits, His love and power not only permeate our spirits, but surround us. In Ephesians 1, where Paul is describing the nature of our relationship to Christ, he uses an expression that is often translated by “accepted in the Beloved” (v. 6). It is more accurately translated by “surrounded with grace in the Beloved One.”

And we have our brightness in the expectation of the glory of God. In the process of “scientific semantics,” we often find that not only have words undergone certain shifts in meaning, but also shifts in the formation of the letters in the word. Thus, in Old Testament Hebrew, certain vocalic shifts took place that changed the word *migdol*—tower—into *magdal*. As for example, the name Mary Magdalene really meant Mary from Migdol. It is such a shift that seems likely

to have taken place with the word, which we have translated by “brightness”—*καυχος* (*kauxos*). It has an alternate spelling in the word for shiny metals—*χαλκος* (*chalkos*)—copper and brass, for example. In the history of the usage of the word, it came to mean “to glory in” and then, ultimately, “to boast in.” The latter expression is totally inappropriate here. And the word “glory” confuses the other word for “glory,” which has to do with the “grandeur of God.” The idea of “brightness” which is reflected from shiny metals, fits the context much better.

The word often translated “hope” we have discussed before. Our English word conveys too much uncertainty to be acceptable here. It should be translated by “expectation.” And so the translation—“We find our brightness in the expectancy of the glory of God.”

We also find brightness in our afflictions...This is not the “Pollyanna” or euphoric illusion that “every cloud has a silver lining” (with due respect to the songwriter), but in the more realistic thought, that afflictions can have a positive effect on our growth and development. Apart from God, many of the afflictions of life would be meaningless and unbearable. With Christ, everything has its purpose. We may not often fully understand that purpose, but the grace of Christ which surrounds us, makes the affliction bearable. We don’t always like it, but we can handle it.

The word “affliction,” really means “pressure.” The word is often translated “tribulation,” which is less definitive. In John 16:33, Jesus says, “*These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation [affliction]: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*” What

Jesus is really saying is, “In Me—peace; in the world—pressure.” The submarine is constructed to have the same amount of pressure within, as the pressure of the ocean without. The balance of pressure keeps it from being crushed like an eggshell. Thus, Christ within us equalizes the pressure of the hostile world around us.

Affliction works out endurance...The word in Greek—*υπομονε* (*hupomone*)—often translated by “patience,” really means “to remain under.” In the testing of concrete, for example, it is not only a matter of how much weight it can bear, but for how long. We have the grace to endure afflictions—to “remain under the load.” The English word “patience” involves the emotions—how we feel about the matter. Thus, when Christians are going through difficult times, they may feel guilty about the fact that they are distressed or anxious. But the emotions are not that easily controlled. The important thing is that we “hang in there,” in spite of our feelings. The evidence that we are enduring, is not how we feel, but that we stay with Christ. (Although it is really a matter of His staying with us.) As I have often said, “It is not how we feel but how we deal with how we feel, that makes the difference.” This is what Paul meant when he said to

the Corinthians—“*God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.*” (I Corinthians 10:13)

Endurance, approval; and approval, expectancy...The continuing desire to identify with Christ in the midst of the afflictions, is the evidence of the passing of the test. Life for the believer, is a “gauntlet.” Satan is constantly “after us.” In Daniel 7, we are told that he tries to “wear out the saints.” But we are victorious by simply “standing fast.” Indeed as Paul says, “*Christ will make you stand,*” although in Ephesians, Paul speaks of putting on the armour of God and standing fast. But the armour is Christ. Having taken Christ, we have put on the armour because each piece reflects Him. We are no match for Satan in ourselves, but Satan is no match for Christ. The approval is really for our sakes more than for the sake of Christ. He already knows we’re going to stand, but we do not always know. Thus, having successfully passed the test, we then have our sense of peace and expectation. We find our brightness in the realization that, through Christ, we are able to stand the test.

Romans 5:6-11

TRANSLATION

For while we were yet weak, at the right, time Christ died on behalf of the ungodly. For with difficulty one might die on behalf of a just person; for it is possible that on behalf of a good person one might even dare to die. But God demonstrated His own love for us because, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much rather then, having been justified [made right with God] now by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much rather, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, we are those who find our brightness in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom now we have received reconciliation.

COMMENTARY

The Divine Side of Reconciliation

If the religionists (or should I say the entrepreneurs of religion) did not put so much weight on the human side of reconciliation they might lose some of their leverage, to say nothing of their support. One wonders why else would there be such an emphasis on what the human must do, in spite of the plain teaching of the word of God. The foregoing passage seems clear enough. The human is bankrupt. He has no strength; he does not even care for God or want Him involved in his life. He starts at ground zero. He is dead. How then does he get help? He asks for it—he says, Help! S.O.S.! Mayday (from the French—*m'aider*)! Why does he ask for help? He comes to the end of himself. He has nowhere else to go. When we finally know that we are helpless, we then look up to God. We bring nothing to God except the cry for help. One does not understand

Christ or sin or salvation. To talk of five steps or ten steps or any steps as a requirement, is to talk foolishness. The sinner does not know he is a sinner until he sees the Savior. He only knows he needs help. If we present a formula or steps for salvation, we might as well be asking the unborn fetus to fulfill certain requirements before it can come to birth. All it can do is start kicking. Christ comes to the one who wants Him. Jesus told the Pharisees that He came only to help the sick. The Greek word He used is the very same one that we have here—“*While we were weak, (sick) Christ died for the ungodly.*” The criterion is sickness—“*I came not to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance.*” The only requirement is weakness. The contrast is emphasized—Christ died not for “good people” but for sinners.

Much rather then, having been justified [made right] by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him...Wanting His help, He takes us across the borders of Satan's realm, and brings us into His own. We are safe! Neither sin nor Satan can, any more have dominion over us—that is, to pull us back to death. And we will not share in the wrath and judgment that befalls Satan and his angels.

If while we were enemies...Make no mistake about it. We came to Him as enemies. But He responded to us in grace. And if He responded to us in grace while we were His enemies, He will certainly save us from the wrath that is to be meted out to Satan and his cohorts.

We shall be saved by His life...The death of Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrifices. Death merely eradicated the barrier of sin that existed between God and man. But it was the resurrection of Christ that lifted us into a position of eternal life. By His death, we were absolved from sin. By His life, the

Spirit of Christ became a part of our spirits and we became partakers of the nature of God. His death gave us access to God; His life gave us the very presence of God within. By the death of Christ we had the restoration to God's favor. By the life of Christ we have the necessary energy to give us an eternal identity with Himself.

We find our brightness in God...There is nothing in us that commends us to God or shines brightly in the process of natural life. But in Christ, we have the very light of life within us. To the Corinthians Paul gave one of the pivotal statements in all of scripture as to our relatedness to God. *"But God, Who commanded the Light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the presence of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us."* (II Corinthians 4:6, 7) The vessel must be clay, that the glory may be God's.