

# Romans 5:12-14

## TRANSLATION

*Wherefore even as through one man sin entered the world and through sin, death—and thus, death passed on all men [persons] on the basis of the fact that all have sinned. For until the Law, sin was in the world; but sin was not accounted as such, there not being a law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even upon those who had not sinned in a way similar to the trespass of Adam who was a type of things that were coming.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Human Predicament

But whence came this predicament—the whole world writhing in wretchedness? Paul seems to give the answer. “It was that scoundrel Adam—he was to blame. If the world needs a scapegoat, there’s one for you! All of our ills can be laid on his shoulders. Every sin and sorrow and murder and mayhem since the beginning of man, is his fault.” But stay a moment. Is that what Paul was really trying to say? Was that his ultimate intention? Read on. If death indeed came through one man—Adam; so also came life through one—Jesus Christ.

But what is the story of Adam? How could such wretchedness engulf the world through one careless action? It is necessary to go back a long way and dig deeply for some answers. The answers are neither easy nor absolute. They are buried deep in the mysteries and mists that accompany human origins. They are further obscured by the limitations of the human mind. For some, the insistence on being right overcomes the pursuit of

truth. To even approach the truth of this great mystery, it is vitally important to come in humility and openness. What do we really know for sure about things that are beyond us? Probably the most we can hope for is functional truth—the knowledge that God chooses to reveal things to us on the basis of our “need to know.”

The very fact of the confusion and debate that persists, is an evidence of the limits that God has placed on the subject. Who can really fathom the mind of God? Ultimate truth must always be left to God. The revelation of that truth may only be in our spirits, as Christ Who is the truth, dwells there. The declaration of that truth must always be limited by the instruments that declare it. And thus, we come to some observations about Adam and sin and human origins.

The author urges an open mind in the recognition that there are great problems in any position or system of belief. We

will only know with certainty what God wants us to know with certainty. All that is needed for our understanding of redemption is quite clear. There are many things that must be left to that time when “*we shall know as we are known.*” Now we can only “*see through the glass darkly.*”

One of the things we do not have the capacity to know, is what happened before the space/time *continuum*. The first word in the Bible is the Hebrew word *b’ereshith*—“in beginning.” That is a time-word, and back of it we know nothing, even to speculate. The millions of words that have been written and spoken claiming direct revelation from God, apart from the Bible, can only be taken with appropriate skepticism. How can anyone know the validity of these revelations?

So what can we know? We can only know what we can glean from the Bible on the basis of “scientific semantics.” That is, words must be traced back to their origins, and interpreted in terms of the laws of grammar and exegesis. Any effort to sidestep this process by revelations and private interpretations, is contrary to the word of God itself. Peter makes a very clear statement about this in his second epistle—“*No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*” (II Peter 1:20) In the last days, about which so many so-called “prophets” love to speak, there will be a great many arising to make their claims, including the antichrist (the false messiah); and then, as now. One’s only safety will be in staying close to the text of God’s original revelation to us. Let all the self-styled “prophets” and purveyors of private revelations supposedly from God, give heed to this point. Until one has mastered the revelation God has already given us, it is folly to seek and to teach private revelations. (Of course, the latter is far easier—inspiration is chosen over perspiration.)

But now, what can we know for sure about the origin of man and of Adam and of sin? We can know the following:

- 1.) God made the universe.
- 2.) He made humans in His own image.
- 3.) He gave certain specific instructions for them to follow.
- 4.) The instructions were not followed and the result was death.
- 5.) The process of decay and death entered the human body.
- 6.) The Spirit of God departed from the human spirit.
- 7.) Corruption invaded the human race and brought it to its present wretched state.
- 8.) Deliverance can only come from God Himself.

These are the simple truths. They are enough for salvation. We need to know that we were made by God in His image, however He did it; that we lost our place with Him through disobedience and fell into a sinful state, however it happened. God does not blame us for this condition, but offers us a way of escape through Jesus Christ.

But there are many difficult questions—as for example, the chronology of events; the antiquity of the earth; the existence of ancient fossils that seem to pre-date Adam; the existence of ancient civilizations; and the apparent harshness of the Divine judgment. Some think the story of Adam is allegorical. Some think the trees represent ancient civilizations (Ezekiel 28, 31), and that the disobedience was a series of events. Some think that there was an earlier existence of the earth, of an unknown age, allowing for the geologic ages; and that there was a great cataclysm and upheaval, and a renewing of the Creation by God. This is called the “reconstruction theory.”

The Genesis account is sketchy, to be sure. It is important for us to keep an open mind and be willing to work with science where there are hard evidences, to piece together the origins of life and the development of human civilization. One thing is certain, man is in a predicament and God has offered deliverance.

*But all of this seems a bit confusing to me. Is it necessary to understand it in order to be saved?*

By no means. All that is really necessary is to understand that; somehow, the race got into its present wretched state; that we are all somehow involved (though not responsible); that recovery is only through the sacrifice of Christ; and that we participate in the recovery on an individual basis, through the accepting of the sacrifice of Christ and receiving Him within.

*But it still doesn't seem fair for God to make demands on us when we are not responsible for the predicament.*

Well, actually He doesn't make any demands on us except to receive His gift.

*But aren't there things that we must do?*

What things?

*Don't we have to have faith and confess our sins and confess Christ to others?*

Well, remember—we are bankrupt. Christ died for us when we were without strength. All we can really do is cry for help. When we decide we need help, He will help us.

*But what about faith?*

When we decide we need help, He provides the faith necessary to receive it.

When He provides the faith, then and only then, can we really understand what sin is all about. Only as we see Christ, can we truly see ourselves. To confess to being a sinner simply because somebody was disobedient thousands of years ago, does not make sense. If there are pre-conditions to salvation, other than asking for help, where do we get the strength to fulfill the conditions? If we have the strength to fulfill the conditions, why do we need Christ? We are dead because of a situation we had no control over; we are saved by a process we have no control over. The response to God's offer of salvation is not—"Therefore I will do this and this and this." The response is simply, "Thank you." After Christ comes in—after the seed of life is planted—He will do within us whatever He desires. He will not do within us whatever someone *else* desires. No matter what conditions religious groups may require for membership in their "club," membership in the family of Christ requires only, "Thank you, I want that."

So whatever God did that may seem unjust, He offers a universal recovery that is free and unconditional.

**Death reigned from Adam to Moses, and upon those who had not sinned...**Where there is no Law there is no violation. There was no trespass because there was no Law to trespass against. Nevertheless, the spectre of death invaded the process of life. Whatever happened with the ill-fated pair in the Garden of Eden, the result was death. However unfair it may seem, it was, nevertheless real. No further evidence is needed of the decadent state of the race of mankind. Despite all the efforts of the humanists to prove the nobility of man, he finally makes his bed with the worms. If he leaves his footprints "on the sands of time," they

inevitably vanish with the tides.

But what else could one expect of a sub-microscopic particle of energy in the vastness of the universe?

However high humans may lift themselves, their lives are but moments, in the endless reaches of time. Whatever the facts of human origin; whatever the process of evil that engulfed the race; we humans, who are but specks in the vastness of space, have been lifted by the

energy of God to share an eternal place with Him. In fact, by that same miracle we have been so imbued by His Spirit, that we have been given the absolute conviction that we are able to communicate with the Source of all life and energy.

And indeed, our spirits within us do transcend all the restrictions of our material cocoon and dwell with God in His Spirit Kingdom, even as He dwells within our earthly frames.

# Romans 5:15-21

## TRANSLATION

*But it was not as with the trespass, so with the gift; for if by the trespass of one the many have died, much rather the grace of God, and the free gift by the grace of the one Man—Jesus Christ—has abounded unto the many. And it is not as through one who sinned is the gift; for the judgment is of one unto condemnation, but the gift is of many trespasses unto justification. For if by the trespass of one, death reigned through the one, much rather they who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life through the One—Jesus Christ. Therefore then, as through one trespass judgment came on all men [persons] unto condemnation, so also through one righteous deed justification came unto all men, unto life. For even as through the disobedience [unsubmissiveness] of the one man, the many are established as sinners; so also, through the submission of one Man, the many are established as justified. For the Law entered, that the trespass may abound; but where sin abounded, grace superabounded. In order that even as sin reigned in death, so also grace may reign through righteousness unto life eternal, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Divine Deliverance

If we are wretched humans caught in a world we never made, and devastated by a sin we never committed, where is the fairness? Where is the justice? Where is the hope? If the devastation of the race seems brutish, the restoration of the race is glorious. If we have been drawn by one man into the quagmire of sin, we have been lifted by one Man onto the mountaintop of salvation. If we have been destined for death by the disobedience of one man, we have been delivered from the decree of death by the sacrifice of one

Man. The assurance of life is as certain as the sentence of death.

**For if by the trespass of one, the many died, much rather the grace of God...has abounded unto the many by the one Man Jesus Christ...**However devastating to the race was this intrusion of sin, the grace of God is adequate to handle it. However universal the corruption, the grace of God is wider still.

**If by the trespass of one death reigned...they who receive the abundance of grace...shall reign in life...**Death reigned over all the creation as a result of the trespass of one. There is no choice—we were all born into this world under the sentence of death. We had no choice. However, in the matter of life, we do have a choice. The grace of God and the gift of righteousness [rightness] belong to those who receive it.

*But didn't Paul himself say, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive?"*

You are referring to the passage in I Corinthians 15. Paul is not discussing "who," but "how." Being part of the death of Adam comes by natural birth. Being part of the life of Christ comes by spiritual birth. To participate in the death of Adam, one has only to be born into the world by natural parents. To participate in the life of Christ, one must be "born again" by the Spirit of God. To those who receive it, there is an abundance of the grace of God, and a free gift of justification or "rightness." And such ones will "reign in life." That is to say, it will not be a matter of existence over ultimate non-existence, but an overcoming of the curse of death, that has ravaged the world. *"Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, except he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (I John 5:4, 5) Remember that this faith is not an exercise in human confidence, but rather, the energizing power of God within us.

**Through the submissiveness of one, the many shall stand as justified ones...**The Greek word here, often translated by "obedience," is ὑπακουω (*hupakouo*). Obedience involves actions,

but submissiveness involves a state of mind. In the case of Jesus, He did not simply obey God in a series of actions, but His whole life was given to doing the will of God. By contrast, Adam was in a state of unsubmissiveness—παρακουω (*parakouo*). This would confirm our previous discussion of what it was that brought about the ultimate devastation of the race. Was it one simple act or a process of defiance, which brought about God's ultimate judgment? Had he, like Cain after him, and Lot, participated in a godless society to his own ultimate corruption? Is it possible that Eve first became involved in a curiosity about other lifestyles? This, of course, will be seen as a radical departure from tradition, but is certainly feasible, given other data that we have available. But may I say, again, that if one feels very strongly about the traditional views and is willing to accept the problems, I certainly do not regard the allegorical alternative as absolute. However, the presenting of such an alternative might eliminate unnecessary barriers to one's pursuit of the faith; nor is there any disservice done to the whole process of redemption. The disobedience is there; the sentence of death; the grace of God; and the offer of redemption through sacrifice, are there. Whatever the physiological and chronological elements that took place in the process of creation, there was certainly a point in time when God entered into a direct interaction with a specific pair whom He created. He made specific demands of them; was defied in His demands; and brought judgment upon them and the progeny that followed. He then made provision for the restoration of them and the entire race of mankind. As there was one man—Adam—who unleashed the forces of evil in the world, so there was one Man—Jesus Christ—who effected a process of restoration for all of God's creation.

**Law entered [came on the scene] in order that the trespass might abound...**In the beginning with Adam, there was no law, as such. That is, there was nothing written down or “codified,” as in the case of the Mosaic Law. Theoretically, where there was no law there was no trespass. Although, of course, the mandate that God gave to Adam was binding. And the penalty was equally binding. Nevertheless, even apart from any Law as such, death prevailed over all. So what was the purpose of the Law? It was imposed by God in order to make abundantly clear the desperate state into which the race had fallen and the inadequacy of humans to meet the requirements of God.

**But where sin abounded, grace abounded over and above...**Whatever the reach of human degradation, the grace of God is totally adequate to cover it.

**So also, that grace may reign through righteousness unto life eternal,**

**through our Lord Jesus Christ...**When Satan was in session, death reigned from Adam to Moses, or until God made known His will in the Law of Sinai. There were many barriers to the identity of the individual with God. When God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, the revelation of His will for mankind, there began a process which would ultimately bring each individual into oneness with God. Begun in the regimen of the Torah, it was fulfilled in Christ; and all of mankind was given entry into the presence of God, and brought into harmony with Him. The Law was the first step. It too, proved ultimately inadequate to change the inner self and bring about a oneness with God, in the Spirit.

This was effected in the sacrifice and subsequent resurrection, of Christ. If the sacrifice brought deliverance from the penalty of sin, the resurrection brought the deliverance from the destiny of death. So we who are destined to death, have now been imbued with the Spirit of Christ, and made to participate in the destiny of eternal life of God.

# Romans 6:1-5

## TRANSLATION

*What then shall we say? Shall we remain in sin in order that grace may abound? God forbid. We who have died with respect to sin, how shall we yet live in it? Or are you ignorant that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We have been buried together with Him through baptism, into death, in order that even as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also, we may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also of His resurrection.*

## COMMENTARY

### Dead, Buried and Risen

The conventional wisdom is that we are dead...so long as Satan doesn't dig up the corpse to add to his collection of "zombies"—that is, dead people who are yet vulnerable to the curse and power of sin. In this view, it is as though illicit dreams in the grave may cause us to spring to life again in Satan's kingdom. Hamlet, in his famous soliloquy, was stayed in his contemplation of suicide by his fears that "in the sleep of death, what dreams may come?" It seems difficult for some to believe that "dead is dead." But if Satan is the "lord of death," Christ is the "Lord of Life." We were not crucified with Christ in order to become subjects of Satan. We were delivered from the "nether" world of death, and thus, from the power of its lord and master—Satan. We cannot be "reburied" and raised again to be part of his kingdom. We are subjects of the kingdom of life and subjects of Christ, and so Paul plainly states—"*Death shall no more have lordship over you.*" So, done

to death in the realm of sin and Satan and raised to life in the kingdom of Christ, how is it that we can become ever again, the denizens of death and subjects of Satan?

The great battle that rages in the interpretation of this passage is over the issue that even though we have died with Christ, we can still make a choice to live for Satan or live for God. And so Paul says, "*How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" "*If we have died with Christ, we shall live with Him.*" Can we be crucified with Christ and raised again by Satan? But many Bible teachers probing for ways to motivate through guilt, go so far as to teach that somehow in this sleep of death we can dream things that will bring us to life by the hand of Satan, and put us again under his dominion. We went to the cross with Christ in order to be free from the control of Satan. Does He then allow Satan to be



the ultimate “grave robber?” Does Satan snatch us from death and put us again under his control?

A good deal of the problem has to do with the misconceptions about the word “sin.” In the New Testament the word that generally covers the human condition of alienation from God is *αμαρτια* (*hamartia*). The word means literally, “to miss the mark.” It indicates the loss of our spirit-identity with God, and causes us to “come short of” His glory. It is confusing, because there are times when the behavior that is a result of the original alienation is also described as *hamartia*. Generally speaking, however, the word used for human misconduct is *παραπτωμα* (*paraptoma*) which conveys the idea of “stumbling” or “falling.” It has more to do with the expressions of human weakness and error.

On the other hand, a word that is used primarily of the godless or unbelievers is *ανομια* (*anomia*). It means “lawlessness.” John uses the word in his first epistle as “lawlessness.” “*Sin is lawlessness.*” Later in the chapter, he says that when the seed of God is in us we cannot sin. The problem is resolved when we use the word as John uses it to mean “lawlessness.” The statement then makes sense. “He that has the seed of God in him cannot be lawless.”

There is a difference between lawlessness and “breaking the law.” Breaking the law in traffic matters, for example, is not an uncommon experience, even with people who normally regard themselves as law-abiding citizens. But violating a traffic law does not necessarily mean that one is indifferent to that law. It is one thing to be guilty of a violation and quite another to be indifferent to or disrespectful of that law. If we have the seed of God in us, we cannot be indifferent to His Law, even

though we may transgress it in a moment of weakness.

In chapter 6, Paul uses the word in two ways. In the first place he uses it to identify our original alienation from God, and in the second place as the process of evil that was the result of it. The sacrifice of Christ delivered us from the guilt and penalty of that sin; the resurrection of Christ unleashed the energy of eternal life that was thus made available to all who would desire it. When we take our place with Christ in the crucifixion, we become dead as far as the effect of original sin is concerned. It can no longer exercise the power of death over us. It is most important to understand that, while death frees us from the power of sin as regards eternal separation from God, it does not free us from human weakness and trespasses.

It is in this connection that John uses the word *hamartia*, in chapters 1 and 2 of his first epistle. “*My little children, these things I am writing to you that you may not sin. And if one sin, we have an advocate [paraclete, Christ as handling our case] with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just One, and He is a propitiation [Mercy Seat] for our sins...*” (2:1, 2) Here the word *hamartia* is clearly applied to the believers who are urged not to sin, but are given an outlet of grace if they do.

The word “advocate” is from the Latin, which means essentially the same thing as *παρακλητος* (*paraclete*)—“One called on for help.” John is even more specific about the issue of sin in the believer, when he says in chapter 1—“*If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*” (8) But he goes on to say, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse [purify] us from all unrighteousness.*” (9) The use of the plural

here takes it out of the category of sin as a general state, and brings it into the realm of individual offenses. It is obvious then, that there is a dual usage of the word. We must rely on the context to make the proper application. It is also obvious that Christians may be guilty of offenses or sins, and still possess the seed of God. Remember that John's usage of the word in chapter 3, is in the general sense of "lawlessness." *"Everyone who has been born of God does not practice lawlessness because His seed remains in him and he is not able to be lawless because he has been begotten of God."* (3:9). This translation (which is quite legitimate) resolves a serious contradiction in chapters 1 and 2.

It is also true that the transgressions or sins of the believer, on the other hand, do not in any way indicate that one is a "slave" of Satan. There is a mistaken notion in some sectors of Christendom, that "unless Christ is Lord of all, He is not Lord at all." The British monarchy gives us a good example of the fallacy of this statement, a statement which implies a certain state of sinlessness or perfect obedience. One may certainly be a subject of the kingdom and the monarchy, even though one may, from time to time, not abide by the laws of the realm. The Lordship of Christ must be seen in a context of grace where the problems of human weakness do not constitute a denial of that Lordship.

Thus, in Romans 6, the term *hamartia* must be understood in the sense of the general state of sin, which is a state of death. When we have been crucified with Christ and raised again from the dead with Him, we are completely free from the bondage of Satan and his realm of unrighteousness so that he no longer has dominion over us, nor are we subject to eternal death. In another analogy,

travelling in a foreign country would not make us the citizens of or subjects of that government. We would certainly be expected to observe the laws and to be liable to penalties if we did not. But violating the laws of another country would not deprive us of citizenship in our own country. We who have been crucified with Christ and raised again to new life in His kingdom, are now subjects of that kingdom. Participating in sins which are certainly exports of the kingdom of Satan, does not deprive us of our citizenship in the kingdom of Christ.

**We who have died with respect to sin, how shall we yet live in it?** This is the essence of the chapter. It is a matter of life and death. Paul is not making a case for trying not to "live in sin." Dead is dead. Christians might indeed commit sins, but are no longer citizens of the kingdom of Satan, and therefore, not touched by the destiny of death which is the result of the original sin.

**We who are baptized In Christ Jesus were baptized Into His death...** Baptism is here clearly presented as symbolizing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. That, of course, is why a number of church groups believe that only immersion properly depicts this symbolism. Others believe that the symbolism is satisfied by sprinkling. In lands where water is at a premium, this is a reasonable view. After all, if the entire system of Jewish sacrifices and ceremonies was fulfilled in Christ, perhaps the simple symbol of sprinkling may fulfill the implications of baptism.

Moreover, from these strong statements in Romans 6, some have assumed that, apart from the ritual of baptism, there is no salvation. That, too, is tempting. However, weighed against this is the limited discussions of the matter in the

New Testament. Remember the principle—"Make much of that which God makes much of." Had the symbolism been that vital, it would be natural to assume that more space would be given to it in the New Testament. However, the whole thrust of the New Testament is spiritual—the culminating of all religious symbols in the person of Christ, who dwells in our own spirits which are the temples of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, the ceremonies of worship are certainly fulfilled in Christ. Jesus said to the woman of Samaria—"*They that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*" Actually, the temple of worship is within us. The altar of incense is a continuously burning communion with the Father. New Testament baptism is regarded by some as extremely vital. And there is certainly a good deal of evidence to support that conclusion. On the other hand, if the ceremonies of the Old Testament were superseded by Christ, it is hardly unreasonable for one to assume that baptism was a spiritual matter.

*But didn't Peter say that we must be baptized and repent if we would be filled with the spirit?*

You are referring, of course, to Acts 2:38—"Repent and be baptized..." but Peter here, is speaking to the Jews, who were required to be baptized "unto repentance" in order to identify with the apostasy of Israel, and seek forgiveness on behalf of their brethren. Throughout the rest of the scripture, where baptism was practiced, it was subsequent to, and not prior to, salvation. For the Jews, this matter had to be cleared up before they could participate in salvation. For the Gentiles, it was never an issue.

The true impact of the statement is symbolic. It was, of course, a very

common practice in the church, from the beginning. It is obviously very important and very meaningful. Some accommodate the symbol by sprinkling, and some by immersion. A great debate has raged within the church over that issue for centuries. If it were more vital as a literal ritual, it would have been given more attention in the New Testament. The principle is precise, but not the practice. To assume that all those who have not practiced the actual ritual are lost, is an overemphasis on the material aspects of the spiritual symbolism. Some have not had the opportunity or capacity to engage in the ritual (as e.g., the thief on the cross). To say that they are lost, is a harshly unwarranted judgment by limited human perceptions.

The symbolism is quite obvious. Being crucified with Christ is merely a matter of recognizing that we ought to be up there instead of Him. It is recognizing the total devastation of sin and the inability of the human to overcome it. The sacrifice of Christ was God's permanent provision and the basis of His forgiveness and acceptance of His creatures. As in the case of the symbolism of communion, it is most important, but not an ultimate condition of salvation. The issue of baptism with reference to children is handled by Jesus—"Permit the little children to come to Me and forbid them not, because of such is the kingdom of Heaven." Children are already a part of the kingdom of God. When they are able, they must make their own choice.

The early church practiced both modes of baptism assiduously. If the actual ceremony made that much difference, one would have expected God to have made much more of it, in the revelation of the New Testament. Perhaps the bottom line is that the people who have not engaged in the ceremony of baptism, seem to be as

much committed to and blessed by Christ as those that have. The author's personal view is that baptism is an important thing, but he can hardly de-Christianize those that have not engaged in that ceremony.

The important thing is that, apart from the ceremony, the believer has identified with the death of Christ, and consequently has also experienced His resurrection life. The symbolism is unmistakable. We have indeed died with Christ and been resurrected to become members of His kingdom. And whereas we may be drawn into episodes that are characteristics of Satan's kingdoms, these episodes do not expel us from the kingdom of Christ nor put us under the dominion of Satan. If we have died to sin, we shall surely not live in its dominion.

**In order that even as Christ was raised from the dead...so also we may walk in newness of life.** "In order that we may walk." The Greek subjunctive mood here does not in any way suggest an obligation—"We *should* walk." It is a fact arising out of resurrection life, and not a condition of favor with God. The grammatical structure here is not indefinite. It would be illustrated by the English statement—"We have adopted you in order that you may be our son." They would not be saying, "We have adopted you in order that you might become our son," or "that you should become our son." But this statement is commonly translated in that light, which adds more weight on the side of the human factor and minimizes the energy of God. We do walk in newness of life in the same sense that a child adopted, walks in a different world than the orphanage. The guarantee is the resurrection of Christ. As Christ was raised, so are we raised. And Paul verifies this in Ephesians 1:19—"The energy with

*which God raised Christ from the dead, has also energized us.*" (The Greek word is—ενεργεω (*energeo*)—our English word, "energy.") Some fear Satan as the demonic "grave robber." "In spite of our resurrection life, will Satan come and "dig us up" to smuggle us back into his kingdom?" The absurdity is obvious.

*But what about Paul's statement, "if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature?"*

You are referring to II Corinthians 5:17—"If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away, behold they have become new." The meaning both here and in Romans, is clearly a reference to the resurrection life which has lifted us from Satan's realm into the kingdom of Christ. It is certainly not a matter of leverage—"You have become a member of a new order, so therefore try to behave better." We have had a new birth. We are indeed of a new nature—we possess now the Spirit of God and that has equipped us to function in His eternal and infinite Spirit realm. It is a matter of the nature of our being and not the adoption of a new set of regulations and codes of conduct. The idea that "You are a Christian, so you must act like one," misses the point entirely. Behavior is certainly important, but following a certain code of conduct does not change one's nature into a spirit being, any more than infractions of that code of conduct would return one to the state of non-spirit, or reverse the process of new birth. It would be as absurd as to presume that the failure to follow a certain code of conduct would reverse the process of natural birth.

Walking in newness of life is not a matter of obligation but germination. The central issue is not conduct, but a new state of being.

**For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, but we shall be also of His resurrection.** The Greek word for planted *συμφυτος*—(*sumphutos*)—means “planted so as to grow together.” It does not mean buried, in the sense of treasure. There is a seed planted within us by the Holy Spirit that becomes the energy source for our spiritual growth. The process of God’s energy within us is not in any way held hostage to the natural cocoon or prison of our bodies. Like the blade of grass that breaks through the sod and even the paving to reach out for light and growth, our spirits are drawn to God as to a magnet.

Jesus spoke of the drawing power of the Father. The amazing thing is that the little speck of energy implanted in us humans, so expands in our spirit nature,

as to be able to interact with the Infinite Deity. Paul caught the sense of this in his letter to the Corinthians—“*But God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath 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 miracle is that we humans so completely accept this. How could we ever imagine that we can communicate with the Creator of the universe, any more than an ant could imagine talking to a human being. It is the energy of God within us that gives us this sensitivity. The fact that we have it, is the evidence that God, in very truth, has chosen to enter into communion with us.

# Romans 6:6-14

## TRANSLATION

*Knowing this that our old man has been crucified in order that the body of sin may be rendered Ineffective, to the end that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died has been justified [put-on the right side] from sin. And if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live together with Him, knowing that Christ has been raised from the dead, He no longer dies—death is no longer lord over Him. For in that He died, He died with respect to sin once; but in that He lives, He lives to God. So also, you reckon yourselves to be dead, indeed, with respect to sin, but living with respect to God by Christ Jesus.*

*Do not then, let sin reign in your mortal bodies, to the end that you should be submissive to its desires, neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as living from the dead and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be lord over you; for you are not under law but under grace.*

## COMMENTARY

### Of Dominion and Death

What is the nature and extent of Satan's dominion over those who have been crucified with Christ? Can he actually snatch us away from Christ and take control? There are some who think so. However, to believe that certainly diminishes the power and authority of Christ and puts the believer at great risk. If our salvation is dependent on our human efforts, then why did Christ have to die? Or if our spiritual life and growth is dependent on our human strengths, then we have little hope of success. But Paul said to the Galatians—*“Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made*

*perfect in the flesh?”* (Galatians 3:3) There would certainly be little assurance in salvation, if our human inadequacy could make us vulnerable to being recaptured by Satan, from whose dominion we had been supposedly rescued by Christ. It is essential then, that we follow very closely the text, in order to resolve this apparent inconsistency.

**Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified together with [Christ]...** So what is this “old man?” Could the term possibly be applied to young people? If it cannot be applied to

young people, could it then simply be applied to actions prior to salvation? Obviously it has a deeper significance. The Greek word is—παλαιος (*palaios*)—which means “ancient.” It is the basis of the word “paleontology,” which deals primarily with ancient fossils. So the phrase “old man” is obviously a reference to an inner nature which is inherited from antiquity. It refers then, to the nature which all humans inherited from Adam. There are only two other passages in the New Testament where the phrase is used. Paul tells the Colossians not to “*lie to one another, since they have put off the old man with his deeds...*” (3:10) To the Ephesians he says, “*Put off according to your former way of life, the old man who is corrupt according to the desires of delusion...*” (4:22) So if the “old man” has been crucified with Christ, why the necessity of urging them to put it off? That is one of the most crucial questions of the New Testament. If we have been crucified with Christ and we are dead, why do we yet have to contend with temptation and sin? Or if we are struggling with temptation and sin, are we then not crucified with Christ and therefore not saved?

Paul himself is responsible for some of the confusion. (Or should we say that the way that we have interpreted Paul is responsible for confusion?) It is probably the latter that is true. Paul says specifically in Romans 7, “*In my flesh dwells no good thing.*” But if some say that this was Paul’s experience before his conversion, or his “filling with the Spirit”—remember that he also said to the Philippians in his later years—“*I have no confidence in the flesh.*” In the same chapter he speaks of “*Being found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ...*” But the strongest statements

occur in Romans 7—“*The good that I would, I do not; and the unsoundness that I would not, I do*” (for example). Some who think this was Paul’s experience before conversion have misused Romans 8:1 in support of it—“*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.*” To use the last clause, however, to qualify a special group of believers, overlooks the point which Paul makes later on in the chapter—“*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*”

In short, all of the New Testament epistles, especially Paul’s, make it clear that the followers of Christ, having been crucified with Him as far as the natural or “old man” is concerned, are now of another or new nature—the Spirit nature of Christ—and belong to His spiritual kingdom. So where then does the “old man” come in? It is obviously a reference to our natural being as evolved from Adam. To the Colossians, Paul says, “*Set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth, for you are dead and your life is hid with Christ, in God.*” And to the Romans, he said, “*You that are dead to sin, how shall you live any longer therein?*” So how dead is dead?

It really comes down to a question of citizenship—the kingdom of the dead, which is the kingdom of Satan and sin, versus the kingdom of the living, which is the kingdom of Christ. When we have died with Christ, we have also risen with Him and become citizens of His kingdom. Neither death nor Satan nor sin can have dominion over us, as Paul points out later on in the chapter. But if Satan does not have dominion over us, how then do we sin? It is a simple matter of citizenship. One does not lose one’s citizenship in a country merely by breaking the law

(except under very special circumstances). Similarly, if one is in another country and breaks the law, one may be prosecuted and penalized for breaking the law in that country, but does not lose one's citizenship in one's own country. Thus, we do not become citizens of the "kingdom of Satan" simply by committing a sin, even though sin is, of itself, a product of Satan's kingdom.

So Paul's discussion in the sixth chapter of Romans may be summarized as follows:

- 1.) Those who have identified with Christ in His death, shall also be with Him in His resurrection.
- 2.) Those who are thus alive with Christ are members of His kingdom.
- 3.) Those who are members of His kingdom are thus out of the reach of the law of sin and death.
- 4.) Satan has no more dominion over them—they are no longer his servants.
- 5.) Christ now has dominion over them—they are servants of righteousness.
- 6.) Even though they are no longer under the dominion of Satan, they may do things in the flesh unworthy of their citizenship.
- 7.) These things are still called sins because they are remnants of the original Fall, and therefore, ultimately, a product of Satan.
- 8.) They are unsound and cause problems in the flesh, but they are forgiven upon confession.
- 9.) So believers do, in fact, engage in sins from time to time, but are not regarded therefore as the slaves of sin or citizens of the kingdom of death.
- 10.) Our eternal life with God is secured by the sacrifice of Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and not by any measure of human righteousness or piety.

**In order that we should no longer serve (be slaves of) sin...** Whatever may be said about submission to Satan, the decision to identify with Christ is binding—we have already presented ourselves to Him "as instruments of righteousness" and can no longer be indentured by Satan. Some people have the "zombie" complex, assuming that even while they are dead with Christ, they can walk about as "moonlight mercenaries" of Satan. The body of sin has been rendered powerless and we are no longer the slaves of sin.

**So also you, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin...**The Greek word—λογίζω (*logidzo*)—has to do with an accounting procedure—consider it an established fact—on the account book (you can take it to the bank). It is not a matter of taking it into consideration.

**Do not then, let sin reign In your mortal bodies...**Again the question arises—If we are dead with Christ, and under His Lordship, why then must we be urged not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies? Of course, the answer lies in the word "mortal." The interaction that takes place between God and humans, as far as the roots of sin or evil are concerned, take place in our spirits. The human spirit is purged of the evil effects of the Fall and becomes the abode of Christ through His Spirit. It becomes a "citadel of faith," which cannot be penetrated by Satan; and so Paul has been saying all along—"*Sin shall not have dominion over you.*" We belong now to the domain of Christ, and are under His eternal protection.

But the mortal flesh is quite another thing. To the Colossians, whom Paul has clearly identified with the death and resurrection of Christ, so that they are now "*hidden with Christ in God,*" he said



also that they should “*put to death the members (of their bodies) which are upon the earth*” (more about this in chapter 7). It is clear, then that while Satan cannot penetrate our spirits, which are under the guardianship of Christ, he can affect our natural human persons. He not only affects the body (as with Job) but also affects the mind in its thoughts, attitudes and emotions (as with Peter). Thus Satan brings dissension in the various groups of believers. He is the author of doubts and discouragements, as well as anger and criticism, and a host of other things that divide the believers. These things are not of the spirit, but of the flesh.

Any group of believers, which promotes doubt and dissension and division, is liable to be an instrument of Satan.

*So what do we do about that? Are humans ever free of it?*

That is a good question. On the one hand, we are never really free of its possibilities as long as we are on the earth. But as for what to do about it? The most basic response lies in the recognition of the source of these things. In other words, when people are critical or contentious or out of sorts with one another, it is obviously Satan who is responsible for such lapses. So we treat it through the “armor of Christ,” as Paul outlines it in Ephesians 6. Putting on the armor of Christ means, in another sense, relying on His presence within us to counteract the enemy. The first question to ask is, “is this from Christ?” Have you prayed about your attitude? Have you asked the Lord what He thinks of that brother or sister or that situation? What some people call “righteous indignation” can be shown up in prayer as pride and self-righteousness. Paul is very explicit about criticism of one another. He tells the Corinthians not to “judge one another.” Judgments which

are born of fleshly misunderstandings are always biased, and of negative value.

Believers tend to have a great penchant for “straightening out” one another. The tragedy is the ineptitude with which they go about it. Many Christians have been hurt by unsound “counsel” from amateur believers, who think that it is their duty before Christ to tell everybody what to do. In simple terms, we ought to leave each other alone. The assumption that every idea we have about others is automatically from Christ, is audacious and presumptuous, and unworthy of the spirit of humility that Christ possessed and urged upon us. But these are areas where Satan seems to ride roughshod over the body of believers. It is an illustration of the fact that, while Satan cannot possess our spirits because Christ is there, he can wreak havoc in our flesh. Our defense against him is always Christ, to Whom we bring the areas of problem for His just judgment and dealings. When Satan comes knocking, send Christ to the door. That Christ does, in fact, exercise Lordship over all who are His, we have discussed in the foregoing sections.

**Submission to its desires...** The Greek word—*επιθυμία* (*epithumia*)—is not well translated by the word “lust.” That word in our English language has taken on a specific meaning that is oriented to the area of sexual misuse. The Greek word, on the other hand, is applied to the general area of human desire licit and illicit—legitimate and illegitimate. It can be used of the fleshly desires that pertain to the world of the flesh. The obvious implication here is that it refers to things that are not, in one way or another, wholesome.

When believers allow Satan to use them in some negative way against themselves or against others, they become, in that

sense, “instruments of unrighteousness.” Unfortunately, this happens all too often among the people of God. However, the distinction between believers and non-believers is that the believer does not willingly and knowingly present himself to Satan for service. In that sense, believers are not willing instruments of

Satan, and do show their identity with Christ, in the fact that misdeeds, when known are usually followed by repentance and remorse. We do not want to make mistakes, as members of the family of Christ, but in our flesh we do make mistakes and do what we must to receive forgiveness.

# Romans 6:15-23

## TRANSLATION

*What then? [Shall we say], “Let us sin because we are not under Law but under grace?” God forbid. Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as servants unto submission, His servants you are to whom you have submitted yourselves—whether of sin unto death or submission unto righteousness? But thanks to God that you were servants of sin, but you have submitted yourselves from the heart unto that which was delivered to you as a form of teaching. Having been freed from sin, you have become servants to righteousness. I speak from a human point of view on account of the weakness of your flesh. For even as you have presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to lawlessness unto lawless [behavior], so now you have presented your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification. For when you were the servants of sin, you were free with respect to righteousness. What fruit then did you have in those things concerning which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, having been made free from sin and having become servants to God, you have your fruit in sanctification, and the end—eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## COMMENTARY

### **Subjects of the Kingdom of the Dead or the Kingdom of the Living?**

Chapter 6 has been a most difficult chapter because it seems to have some major inconsistencies within itself, as well as within the teachings of Paul. On the one hand, we are said to be dead as far as this natural person is concerned, but on the other hand, still responsive to temptation and sin. Further, we are said to be free from bondage to the kingdom of Satan, and on the other hand, urged not to be subjects of that kingdom. More puzzling still is the idea that Paul—the

great expounder of liberty in Christ and deliverance from the flesh through the energy of Christ—seems now to be saying that it is a matter of choice, even after conversion. So how do we resolve these apparent contradictions? Are we free or not free? Are we living in the power and faith of Christ, or are we still prisoners of human weakness and sin? Is our place with Christ, after all achieved by human effort and determination? And if so, are

we any better off than those who were under the Law?

The answer lies in a very close examination of the meaning of the words. An old theologian once said, “When in a mental fog, attend to definitions.” In this passage (verses 15-23) we are given some crucial options relative to submission to Satan or submission to God; submission to lawlessness or submission to righteousness. The key words are “present;” “submit (obey);” “servants (slaves);” “sin (lawlessness);” “righteousness,” and “sanctification.”

#### **To whom you present yourselves...**

The Greek word—*παραστανετε*—(*parastanete*)—is from—*παριστημι* (*paristemi*)—which means, literally, “to stand before.” It is a term that would be used of standing before a monarch, for example, or a court of law. If one were seeking to be naturalized as a citizen of the United States, for example, one would present oneself to the court to be sworn in. After one has been sworn in, one would not then wonder whether or not to present oneself for citizenship in another country. This is the crux of what Paul is saying. If we have presented ourselves to Christ for citizenship in His kingdom, we would not then wonder whether or not we ought to present ourselves to Satan for citizenship in his kingdom. Nor would it be conceivable that a member of the kingdom of Christ would then decide to present himself for service to Satan. It is quite conceivable that one who has become a citizen of one country might inadvertently or in a moment of weakness, render service to another country, but that would be quite different than presenting oneself for citizenship.

**Servants unto submission...** The word for servant here—*δουλος* (*doulos*)—is often translated by “slave.” It is certainly

true that one who is in the kingdom of Satan is in bondage to him. On the other hand, whereas Paul makes a point of submission to either sin or righteousness, the use of the word “slave,” in terms of the members of the kingdom of Christ, which he does for the sake of the analogy, would not be in keeping with the concept of freedom, which both he and Jesus expressed—“*If the Son therefore shall make you free you shall be free indeed.*” (John 8:36)

Similarly, the word “submit” or “obey,” must be examined. There is another word in Greek which is more properly translated by “obey.” The difference between these two words has caused much distress. The word here is *ὑπακουω* (*hupakouo*) which means “to submit”—a much more general term.

Applied in this passage, we are not talking about an “either/or” lordship. One may have presented oneself to Christ in submission to Him, as well as to righteousness and sanctification, and yet fail from time to time without nullifying one’s commitment to submission. By the same token, one may be a citizen of Satan’s kingdom and still engage in acts of charity that would not be normally expected in that kingdom. Actually the Greek word *hupakouo* means, basically, to “put oneself under the hearing of.” That is to say that one agrees to pay serious attention to the demands of another, so as to fulfill them where it is possible to do so. Obviously, submission to Christ requires a higher degree of commitment.

#### **Whether of sin unto death or submission unto righteousness...**

The word “sin” in the singular, usually refers to the process of evil as evolved from Satan in the “Fall of man.” “Sins” in the plural, usually refer to the effects of that

“Fall” in human misdeeds. Submissiveness to sin means, therefore, a commitment to the kingdom of Satan and to the acceptance of the natural processes of life on the earth which are, themselves, rooted in the evil which Satan brought upon the earth. Thus, to be submissive unto that process of evil is to be submissive unto death. Conversely, to be submissive unto Christ is to be submissive unto righteousness, which means simply the right course for humans to follow. The ultimate end of submissiveness to Satan and the process of evil, is death. Submissiveness to Christ brings us into the way of truth and rightness, which is the way of eternal life.

**But thanks to God, that when you were the servants of sin...** All the things which Paul has said concerning those who are the members of Satan’s kingdom, do not apply to the Roman believers. Whatever their problems—and there were many—Paul identifies them as members of the body of Christ and therefore, those who have “from their heart,” followed the implications of salvation.

**Having been freed from sin, you are the servants of righteousness...** Literally, bond slaves of righteousness. In this matter, Paul says that he speaks in a human sense. They are not really slaves; but, by analogy, if they had been under the lordship of Satan, they are now under the Lordship of Christ—a type of bondage of servitude. It is not really bondage because they are, in fact, free. *“If the Son shall therefore make you free, you shall be free indeed.”* But, in the human sense, to be freed from the process of evil does make one rather enmeshed in the process of righteousness. All who have joined with Christ in His death have been raised to newness of life, which incurs a certain

“servitude” to righteousness, but not in the sense of legal bondage.

**Slaves to uncleanness and to lawlessness unto lawless behavior...**

A type of sin which is relevant here, is “lawlessness”—ἀνομία (*anomia*)—which refers specifically to indifference to the Law of God. It does not mean an infraction of the Law, but an indifference to the Law. Submissiveness to the kingdom of Satan evolves a lawlessness which is not true of the members of the kingdom of Christ. One way that believers may certify their faith, is their concern for the “Law of God.” If the Spirit of Christ were not in them, they would not be so concerned. Thus, if one has selected a commitment to lawlessness, one has obviously not been identified with Christ. By the same token, if one has selected a course that is committed to respect for the will of God in the world, one has obviously not presented oneself to the kingdom of Satan.

**So now, present your members as servants of righteousness unto sanctification...**

On the surface, it may seem that one has been asked to make an irrevocable commitment to piety and holiness. But this is a misunderstanding of the words. As we’ve already indicated, righteousness really means being on the right track, more than being “pious.” If one gets on the train to New York, for example, one is committed to that destination, but is not committed to special behavior patterns on the way. Similarly, sanctification, from the Greek—ἁγιαζω (*hagiazō*)—“to set apart”—means simply to be identified with God so as to be separated unto Him, and not unto Satan. One belongs to Him, as the sanctified vessels of the temple belong to Him.

**But now, having been made free from sin, and having been made servants of God...** Paul sees this as an accomplished fact. He believes that those to whom he is writing, even though they may need instruction and encouragement, are nevertheless, decidedly in the kingdom of God. They are no longer in bondage to Satan but are tied to God for eternity. Their fruit is unto "sanctification." Although often failing in the flesh, they still regard themselves as part of God's kingdom and desire to have it so.

**The wages of sin is death...** Again, we are dealing with that intrusion of evil that brought to Adam the pronouncement of death, and doomed the creatures of God to mortality. Paul is not saying that trespasses and individual sins will bring death. If that were so, who would be alive?

**The gift of God Is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord...** Eternal life is a gift. It is, therefore, not something to be earned or procured by human effort. It has been offered by Christ and paid for by Him with His own death. It is ours not for the striving, but for the asking.

# Romans 7:1-6

## TRANSLATION

*Or are you ignorant brethren, for speak to those who know the Law, that the Law has dominion over the man as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by the law to her living husband; but if the husband die, she is released from the law of her husband. Therefore, then while the husband is living, she shall be called an adulteress if she becomes involved with another man; but if her husband dies, she is free from the Law, so that she is not an adulteress if she becomes involved with another man. Then, my brethren, you also have thus died to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you belong to another, to the One Who has been raised from the dead, in order that you may bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh the passions of sins, which were through the Law, were energized in our members so that we bore fruit to death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died in the things by which we were held, so that we would serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not the oldness of the letter.*

## COMMENTARY

### **Freed From the Law to Become the Bride of Christ**

For three chapters now, Paul has been trying to drive home the point that the sacrifice of Christ has freed us forever from the bondage of sin and Satan. We have been released from citizenship in the kingdom of Satan and made citizens of the kingdom of Christ, “to walk in newness of life.” Walking in newness of life is not a charge or goal, it is a reality. The message is crystal clear—the Law has no more hold over us—we belong to another—to Christ. In trying to make his point, Paul has used the analogies of death and life; and slavery and marriage. How much more specific can he be? And yet, from Paul’s day to ours, large numbers of believers cannot get it

through their heads. They refuse to be “charity cases”—they insist on paying their own way. We have come to believe, in our cynical society, and not without reason, that you can’t get something for nothing, even from God. But this, of course, ignores the fact that we are bankrupt. We must get it through our heads that “dead” is dead, and “living” is living, and “free” is free, where the word of God is concerned. To the people of Colossae, Paul said—“*You are dead!*” There follows then a list of offenses which the Colossians seem to have been troubled with, but Paul never said to them, “You ought to be dead.” Their behavior was unacceptable; changes

needed to be made; but never once did Paul indicate that somehow the nefarious “grave robber” had brought them back to life to roam “zombie-like” in the graveyard of perdition. They were bad, like naughty children, and possibly needed to be chastened, but they were yet alive (see Colossians 3).

*But doesn't Paul say that we should “put these things to death?”*

It is very difficult to have analogies that are complete in every respect. What the expression does not mean, is that we have lost our status of death as far as sin and Satan are concerned. In another kind of analogy, Paul likens putting to death the members of ones fleshly body, to discontinuing the practices that have been spawned in the evil realm of Satan.

And, living is living. We have been raised with Christ by the power of God. To the people of Ephesus, he said, *“The energy with which God raised Christ from the dead, has also raised us.”* (Ephesians 1:29 A.T.) Our life in Christ is not dependent upon our good behavior. Imagine a deep sea diving team. The diver is 300 feet below the surface. He is attached to the crew with a lifeline. In a moment of distress he makes an uncomplimentary comment to the crew. The crew immediately shuts off the equipment and pulls his lifeline. “But that is absurd,” you say. Yes, but no more absurd than the assumption that for misconduct, Christ will cut off our lifeline.

Free is free. Jesus said, *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”* Freeing us from Satan is an exercise of the Spirit of God. It is not likely to be governed by human inadequacies. By the power of Christ, we have been made free from Satan; from the law of sin and death; from the lordship of

Satan. We are not made free depending on our capacity to cope with this world; we are not made free depending on our willpower to avoid sin; we are free from the ultimate dominion of Satan. We are free from the death that had doomed us to eternal separation from God. We are free from the dominion of Satan. He cannot again bring us to life in his kingdom. He cannot again make it inevitable that we should sin. We are totally free, and all the failures in the flesh—the inadequacies of the human capacity—cannot again bring us under Satan's dominion. We might perhaps partake of the exports of his pernicious realm—here and there succumbing to temptations in the flesh—but that does not mean we are under his lordship any more than partaking of the exports of another country would make us a citizen of that country.

So now comes the ultimate analogy of marriage. We are married to Christ. But to be married to Christ, we must be freed from our previous relationship to the Law. As long as the Law was in force, we were not free to be given to Christ. But, now the bonds have been broken; the previous contract is cancelled; we are released from the Law.

**The married woman is bound by the law to the living husband...** There is no doubt here, that a separation has taken place—a separation by death, and not by divorcement. The action is irreversible; there is no going back. And the consequent release from the legal status opens the way for a new relationship—marriage to another. The old husband is dead. A new one takes his place. There is an unmistakable teaching here. The Law, as such, is annulled. The new husband is Christ. In any marriage relationship there may be disagreements and offenses. But these do not annul the relationship.



In keeping with the analogy, it may be further observed that the same principles of successful marriage, would be valid in the new relationship as in the old one. The difference is the binding nature of these principles. That is, the woman, released from the old husband, is no longer under his jurisdiction or his application of the principles. The principles of the Law of Moses had not been abrogated by the coming of Christ. It is just as wrong to steal, for example, as it was under the Law. But the application of the Law has been changed. Under the jurisdiction of Christ, the Law no longer has the power of death in it. (The wife would not be executed for disobeying the rules). Actually, the execution has already taken place. Christ was executed on our behalf and we identify with Him in His death. It is a union of death that produces life. For even as we have died with Him, so also we are joined to the One Who was raised from death. So our marriage to Christ is through death, unto life.

**We have our fruit unto God...** That is, the produce on the tree of life is of the nature of God. The fruit of the Spirit of Christ within us is outlined in Galatians 5:22. *“The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, graciousness, goodness, faith, openness [to one another], inner strength...”* These are not qualities that Christians ought to strive for. They are qualities we already possess, in the indwelling presence of Christ. He is our love and joy and peace and faith, etc. If we examine the deepest meaning of these terms, we find that they are already ours. They are attributes of Christ in our spirits, even though they may not always be properly expressed in the flesh. In the matter of faith, for example, faith must be understood as an energy process from God in our spirits, by which we relate to Him (without which we would not even

communicate with Him); it is not a matter of the human feeling of trust or confidence, that is a product of the mind. Thus, the faith of Christ exists in our spirits, even though there may be a considerable vacillation in the human feelings that we have in our minds. A further example is in the matter of love. Many assume that love is something that must be cultivated as a Christian virtue. However that may be in terms of the natural mind and behavior, there is a deeper sense in which we possess the love of Christ by possessing Him. “God is love.” When we have Him within us in the person of the Holy Spirit, we have also His love. But it must be understood that the love that the Bible talks about in terms of the fruit of the Spirit, is *agape* love. It is the love of caring, considerateness, respect. It does not necessarily involve the emotions, which are expressed in *phile* love—the love of family or friends. Thus, love as a fruit of the Spirit, is what we possess in the presence of Christ; love as an emotional interaction with others, is not commanded but is, on the other hand, something that can be cultivated.

In summary, we have been freed from the Law (the old husband) by death, and joined to Christ (the new Husband) by life. Possessing Christ within us, we also possess His attributes in measure—(love and faith. e.g.). However, these attributes are resident within our spirits and do affect our lives, but are not always expressed properly by our fleshly minds. We know that we possess Christ within, because we care about Him—we want to possess Him within. If His spirit were not at work within us, we would not even care about our relationship to Him.

**The passions of sins...** Bearing fruit unto death... With the Spirit of Christ in us, we bear fruit to God. However, when

we were under the law of death, we were energized by the passions—the unchecked emotional patterns of sins as individual deeds. Hence, we understand that such sins are resident within the natural flesh, but not in the spirit.

**We have been released from the Law...so that we may serve in newness of spirit.** It is evident from the text, that whereas such deeds may continue after the coming of Christ, we are not under the dominion of the Law; and therefore, not subject to death by them. That is not to say that these sins are acceptable, but that they are dealt

with on a different basis. The presence of the Spirit of Christ in us does modify our behavior, especially as a result of the reorienting of our spirits, and the subsequent change of attitude that takes place. However, while there may be a number of changes in our behavior, there is no guarantee of a sweeping personality change. The importance of this statement is that, whereas one may think that because of behavior problems one may not be saved, the evidence of our salvation is not so much by changes of action, as by changes of attitude. The fact that we want to make changes, is the evidence of the work of the Spirit within us.

# Romans 7:7-13

## TRANSLATION

*What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? God forbid; but I had not known sin except through the Law, for I would not have known illicit desire except that the Law said, "Thou shalt not have illicit desire." And sin, finding its impetus through the commandment, brought out in me all illicit desires; for apart from the Law, sin is dead. And I was alive apart from the Law, then; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment which was unto life, was found to me unto death. For sin, having taken its impetus through the commandment, deceived me and through it slew me. So then the Law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.*

*Did that which was good then become death to me? God forbid; but sin, in order that it may appear as sin, through the good, wrought out death in me, in order that sin may become exceedingly sinful through the commandment.*

## COMMENTARY

### **The Impact of the Law**

Once again, the issue is raised of the place of the Law in God's ultimate purpose. Once abrogated, has it no meaning to the New Testament believer? Paul makes it quite clear that for all of its inadequacy to effect any Changes in the behavior of the individual, it has a very important impact in making known to mankind the standards which God has set before His creation, as well as the inability of mankind to meet that standard apart, from the direct interaction of Christ dwelling within. To that effect, the Law will always be an essential part of God's revelation to the world. There are standards. There are ways that the human person was

intended to function that will make for satisfaction in life, and the violation of which will lead to dissatisfaction and grief. Since the "Fall," however, God's creatures have not been able to function fully as they were intended. The human spirit has been divested of the "Breath" of God, and while there are yet many remnants of the image of God within—certain vestiges of human kindness and virtue—God's creatures have not been able to live up to His expectations.

Paul has just said that the Law has been annulled, and the lordship of the Law replaced by the Lordship of Christ. We have become married to another. But the

principles of the Law are still valid. We still need to live wisely in this world according to God's standards and, indeed, we desire to do so.

**I had not known sin, except through the Law...** According to Paul, the ultimate meaning of the Law is the demonstration of human failure and weakness, and the consequent need of God's strength. If there were no Law—there were no sin. If there were no sin—there were no human weakness.

**I had not known illicit desire, except the Law had said—thou shalt not have illicit desire...** ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*) is the Greek word for desire. It does not mean desire that is intrinsically evil, nor does it necessarily mean covetousness. In context, the quotation from the Law says "*Thou shalt not desire thy neighbor's wife or house or things.*" Since Paul does not complete the statement, we have elected to use the idea of illicit desire, which means "unlawful desire." It is not correct to quote Paul as saying that all desire is wrong. It is not correct to say that the word *epithumia* means always, "to covet." Referring to the Law, Paul is saying that it is wrong to desire that which belongs to another. Apparently, he had such desires, and realized that even though as a Pharisee his keeping of the Law was "blameless," he found himself in the same category as the Pharisees whom Jesus castigated. Even if he kept the Law outwardly, he was inwardly unable to control his desires and, therefore, realized that he was not, after all, keeping the Law as God intended it. Nor was he able to.

**The Law, taking impetus through the commandment, wrought in me all illicit desire...** Had the Law not identified his desires as illicit, he would not have seen himself as a sinner. In the world that was outside the Law, the only law was survival of the fittest. One could have what one could get and keep—no matter to whom it belonged. The Law changed all that, and forbade preying upon another. Personal possessions became sacrosanct.

And yet the Pharisees, of all people, were guilty of victimizing the people of God in the interest of selfish greed and power. Jesus was not deceived. All of the self-righteous pratings of the Pharisees did not fool Him. He knew where their hearts were. And Paul classified himself as having been one of them, when he was "a Pharisee of the Pharisees." It was this egregious misconception of the Law—ultimately doing Christians to death—which caused him to call himself "the chief of sinners." If God could recover him, He could recover anyone.

When he fully realized this at the moment of the cataclysmic vision on the Damascus road, he was, himself, done to death. All his own self-righteousness was shattered and he languished in blindness.

The Law was of itself, Holy and just and good; and in the brilliant light of its purity and truth, Paul saw himself as rotten and wretched and chained to a dead man. "*Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?*" (V. 24)

# Romans 7:14-25

## TRANSLATION

*For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, sold under sin. For not what I will, do I practice but what I reject—this I do. But if what I do not will, I do, I consent to the Law that it is good. But now it is no longer I doing it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that there does not dwell in me, that is in my flesh, a good thing. For to will is present with me, but the working out of the good is not. For it is not what I will—the good—that I do, but what I do not will—the unsound—this I do. But if what I do not will, this I do, it is no longer I who work it out, but the indwelling sin that is within me. I find then, the Law with reference to my willing to do the good—the unsound is present with me. For I consent to the Law of God according to the inner man; but I see another law in my members warring against the Law of my mind and bringing me into captivity in the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man, I; who shall rescue me from this body of death? Thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, then I myself with my mind, serve the Law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Earthly Odyssey of the Flesh

In ancient times throughout the Middle East (and sadly enough, in the not too ancient times in America), captives were brought from distant conquests and sold as slaves in the marketplace. This is the impact of Paul's expression—**sold under sin**. The tragedy of Eden had put God's creation "on the block," and they became slaves to another master—to the archenemy of God. Not only had the captives themselves been sold, but their progeny after them would, unless freed, serve the rest of their lives in bondage. From the distant past, a transaction had taken place with Adam and Eve that

would doom their progeny for all time—unless freed. Paul saw himself as a victim of this woeful wrong, which left its marks on him and which, though happily freed by Christ, continued to plague his earthly existence.

*But don't some people think that this was either before Paul was converted or before he had moved on to a more victorious condition?*

The best answer is the simplest. There is no indication of this. Surely if Paul wanted the people to go on to a "higher"

experience, he would have said so. It is significant that he uses the present tense all the way through. In chapter 6, he makes it very clear that the believers had once been plagued by Satan but now were the servants of Christ. In chapter 7, he does not say, “I was once plagued by the flesh, but now I am free of it.”

*But doesn't he say at the end of the chapter—"I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ?"*

Yes, you are right, he does say that. But what was he referring to? He was referring to the same thing he was discussing in the rest of the chapter—the pesky human frame, with which we are all saddled as long as we are upon the earth. Shakespeare calls it—“the mortal coil.” But this is clearly the “outer man.” Paul says, *“If our outer man perishes, but also our inner man is renewed day by day.”* (2 Corinthians 4:16) So also to the Ephesian, he says, *“We are strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man...”* (Ephesians 3:16) And thus, through all our foibles and follies: fallacies and failures: there runs the thread of the Spirit, energizing us and fulfilling His work in our spirits. *“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.”* (Philippians 1:6) So in this Chapter, Paul is merely expressing the undeniable weakness that is the common experience of all believers as long as they are on the earth.

**Not what I will—do I do this; but what I reject—this-I do...** The contest is between the will and the emotions; what I will and what I want. Unfortunately, human willpower is no match for desire, when it is strong enough. The will is no match for an adequate motive, but by the same token it

is no match for a strong enough desire. The author of Hebrews puts the contest between willful and willing. In Hebrews 10:26, the King James text says, *“If we sin willfully after coming to the knowledge or the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.”* The word translated “willfully” is *εκουσιως* (*ekousios*), “willingly,” an entirely different thing. The one who has the seed of God in him is an unwilling victim of human passion, even though passion implies very strong desire. Does the believer want to displease God and go the way of the flesh defiantly? No, decidedly not. Does he like to do some of the things that he does that are of the flesh? Decidedly yes. To sin willingly means that one has no concern about what God wants. To sin willfully means that one goes ahead with sins that one really doesn't want to commit, but one is caught in the treacherous rapids of human passion. Such human failure is not acceptable, but is certainly forgivable. Nor does it escape the consequences of human folly. There is always a price to pay. If you can't handle the rapids, stay on the shore. If you go for the rapids, don't be surprised if the canoe capsizes. But, is this grounds for dismissal—grounds for being “thrown out of the kingdom?” According to Paul, apparently not. To the Galatians, he said, *“The flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would.”* Of course, here, he is talking to Christians.

**In me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing...** If the Spirit pervaded also the flesh, as some seem to believe, then Paul could not say that in his flesh was no good thing. The truth of the matter is that, while the Spirit may have His effect upon the flesh and evoke a difference of attitude and interest, the Spirit does not inevitably alter personality or resolve

human weaknesses. Some believe that the expression—“A new creature in Christ,” means that the truly committed Christian will undergo radical change in habits and temperaments that will render every Christian “lovely to be with.” The hard lessons of experience indicate otherwise. Or conversely, if one does not undergo changes in temperaments and become “lovely to live with,” in their view, that one is either wanting in conversion or in some additional requirements of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. In a great many decades of ministry, the author has discovered that people are pretty much the same everywhere. Those who are engaged in the intense pursuit of grand experiences and labor under endless rules and obligations, struggle with personality problems, fleshly desires, and human failures, like everyone else.

**The unsoundness that I would not, I do...** The word *κακος* (*kakos*), often translated by “evil,” really means only “unsoundness.” The word for evil is *πονηρος* (*poneros*), and has to do with the satanic process in the world. It is much too strong a translation for *kakos*, which has to do with human failure and folly. The lives of all believers dwelling in the world are replete with human failures. Who has not reviewed the experiences of one’s life with some regrets. The common cry is—“If only I had...” Wall Street calls it the “shoulda-coulda-woulda” lament. The old adage—“hindsight is better than foresight”—is trite but all too true. Coupled with this, are unsound human desires and emotional quagmires. In other words, the human flesh is unreliable and often uncontrollable. This obviously produces much distress and sorrow and regret, but it is the way of human life.

*So where does the Holy Spirit come in?  
Can't He change all this?*

If He can, it does not seem to be His purpose to do so. Perhaps it is necessary for us to wallow through the human morass, in order to recognize our complete dependence upon Him. The universal human attitude is that, if everything is going well, it is because of our own wisdom; if everything is going poorly, it is because God has not been helping us. If God were to correct all the ills in the world over night, the humans on earth would not assume that they must thank God; but rather, that they had at last learned how to handle life and didn’t need God any more. If God were to sprinkle some “Tinkerbelle gold dust” on us, and we should all become angels, then we would be only puppets or marionettes, unable to make choices of our own. It is certainly to the glory of God that His people—caught in the maelstrom of a world governed by Satan and his demonic forces, yet make their choices on God’s side. It is not that they always do what is right, but they want to do what is right. That is the force of the Holy Spirit within us. Paul puts it poignantly, in verse 25—*With the mind I serve the Law of God but with the flesh the law of sin.* More about that later.

**I find then, the Law—while willing to do the good, unsoundness is present with me...** From his experiences, Paul educates a law of life—while he wants to do what is good, he is continually plagued by human unsoundness. Unsoundness does not perfectly translate *kakos*, but it’s the best we can do. Evil is too harsh a word; badness is too limited. Unsoundness takes in all the human foibles and follies; mistakes and mischief; as well as offenses to God and man. We cannot get away from this reality of life on the earth.

**I consent to the Law of God according to the inner man...** The fact

that he wants to do what is good and does not want to do what is unsound is, to Paul, the evidence that the Spirit of Christ is dwelling in him. The inner man is, of course, the region where the Holy Spirit resides. It is pure and unaffected by Satan. Our spirits, possessed by Christ, are like bastions or fortresses of faith. Satan may grievously affect our outer, or fleshly, region, but he cannot penetrate the Spirit, else we should have to conclude that Christ was not strong enough to preserve His own domain. The idea that Christ could ever yield His throne in our spirits to Satan, is absurd. Christ certainly doesn't depart out the back door when Satan comes knocking. Satan cannot penetrate the fortress, though he might wreak havoc in the exterior landscape.

The single thread that runs through the chaos of our lives (or the artesian spring running beneath the arid surface), is the power of the Holy Spirit Who, according to Paul, "*strengthens us with might through His Spirit in the inner man.*" How can Satan wrest from Christ the domain He occupies within us? The egregious error in some quarters of Christendom is that it is up to humans to preserve their own spirits. If a weak human is all that stands between Satan and salvation, we are in deep trouble. It is a major fallacy to link the flesh and the spirit in such a way that whatever happens in the flesh, affects the spirit. What happens in the flesh may affect the communion between the Holy Spirit and the flesh; it may dull our hearing to guidance; it may rob us of peace in the emotional sense; and it may cause us problems in our daily lives. That is no doubt what is meant by Paul in "quenching the Spirit." By careless action we may dull our sensitivity to the Spirit, but we don't "put out the fire" in our own spirits. But fleshly failures will not

dethrone Christ from our spirits.

**Taking me captive in the law of sin, which is in my members...** But how can we be taken captive if Christ is in control of our spirits? The same way that soldiers can be taken captive outside the fortress, even though the fortress is, itself, secure. It is a matter of our "members" (our fleshly functions) which are vulnerable. Many Christians are "slaves" to habits that certainly do not reflect the grace of Christ. Does that mean they are no longer Christians? By no means. It simply means that one of our members has been taken captive. We are in a war with Satan. And so Paul's previous statement, "*I see another law in my members warring against the Law of my mind.*" Paul uses *noos* here, to designate the mind insofar as it is the domain of the Spirit. There seems to be a dual usage of the word, but when Paul refers to the fleshly aspect, it is clear from the context, as in this passage. Paul uses the word "members" to designate the natural element of the body—brain and nervous system together with the parts of the physical body that give expression to the brain—extremities, organs, glands, etc. He makes a very clear separation between what he wants to do as far as his spirit is concerned, and what takes place in his natural human functions.

In Colossians 3, he declares very specifically that the believers in the church at Colosse are indeed dead as far as the law of sin is concerned, and are hidden with Christ, in God. Nevertheless, in verse 5, he has to warn them about their natural members upon the earth, which have yet to be put to death. These "members" are obviously parts of their natural or human persons—physical and mental—which do not come automatically under the dominion of their "spirit" selves. Thus, you have Christians



who engage in fleshly pursuits—often unsound and offensive—and yet are still regarded as crucified with Christ and risen with Him, as far as their spirits are concerned, and citizens of His kingdom.

Understanding this can give the believer some much-needed relief from the constant badgering of Satan, to say nothing of fellow believers and church leaders who want to use guilt as a leverage to motivate performance. Jesus said—“*Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.*” He said that in the context of His discussion about the Pharisees, who had driven the poor sheep to exhaustion. “*And beholding the crowd He had compassion concerning them because they were beaten [flayed] and driven about, as sheep not having a shepherd.*” (Matthew 9:36) In this “age of anxiety,” when we are a” victims of a stress-producing society, there is great need for a church which brings solace and strength. Instead we have a church which is among the leading producers of stress in the world. Were Jesus to walk the earth again today, He might have similar words for the modern-day church leaders as He had for the Pharisees of old.

It is not that human behavior patterns are always acceptable, but rather, that they are understandable and forgivable. And above all, they are dealt with by Christ in a context of compassion. Is not the Holy Spirit our Paraclete—our Comforter and Strength?

**O wretched man, I; who shall rescue me from this body of death.** Some have assumed, falsely, that Paul is talking about present deliverance from the problems of the flesh. But the Greek word *ρυσμα* (*ruomai*) means rather “to drag one from danger.” It has an obvious future reference to the time when Christ

shall take our spirits out of the chains of this earthly body, and out of the madness of this wretched world, to dwell with Him in eternity.

*But where is the joy and gladness? Doesn't Paul always tell us to rejoice in everything?*

You are quite right. He said it most emphatically—“*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice.*” James said, “*Count it all joy when you fall into various testings.*” (1:2) And Jesus said, “*These things I have spoken unto you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be fulfilled.*” (John 15:11) So how do we resolve this apparent contradiction?

The answer lies both in definitions and in the differences between the flesh and the spirit. Once again we are confronted with a word that has been much abused. The Greek word *χαρα* (*chara*) is from the same root as the words “grace,” “gift,” and “thanksgiving.” In the deepest essence of its meaning, it denotes a flow of benevolence. It is like the artesian spring that we have spoken of—an endless flow far beneath the often arid and barren surface. Jesus spoke of joy on the way to the cross. The disciples spoke of joy in suffering persecution. Paul spoke of the people as his joy. But he also spoke of joy as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). So we must distinguish between joy as an expression of the natural mind or emotion, and joy as originating in the spirit. Actually, what we have in our spirits is the “joy of the Lord”—“*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*” (Nehemiah 8:10) The joy that is in our spirits is there because the presence of Christ is there; and it is an endless stream of His grace. But what we feel in terms of human emotion is something that can lead to bliss or sometimes euphoria. It is as vacillating and unreliable as the human

mind. It comes and goes with the circumstances.

Paul's state of wretchedness was based upon the problem of being human. It was his constant daily struggle with the flesh. His expression of it, in Romans 7, was obviously related to his human weakness. He was buffeted and badgered by Satan. *"When we came into Macedonia I had no rest whatsoever in my flesh, but in everything we were afflicted; without were fightings, within were fears."* (2 Corinthians 5:5) Notice that he says that the distress was in his flesh. Apparently some of his problems were chronic. In the classic passage on his weakness in 2 Corinthians 12, he speaks of a *"thorn in the flesh—a messenger of Satan,"* which would seem to be something like a demon presence that continuously troubled him. Like a thorn, it was not a fatal wound, but a constant aggravation. It was something that kept him humble. It was, therefore, not likely to be a physical disability that he was referring to, because those who overcome physical disabilities and go on with their work are more likely to be tempted to pride. Many things occurred in the life of Paul (including a prison term) that tended to keep him off of the "idol" list. It would have been easy to idolize Paul in those days, as it seems to be today, because of his key position in the building of the church. But the continual stream of afflictions and misfortunes greatly minimized this tendency.

So Paul had a river of true joy in his spirit, which was the energy of the Spirit of Christ within him. It was a stable constant in his life, and held him steadfast. But that did not prevent him from feeling wretched—chief of sinners, frustrated by circumstances and adversaries and agitations of all kinds. His life was certainly not tranquil and

peaceful in the accepted sense of the word.

The outward expressions of joy in the human emotions are usually what people mean when they talk about joy and gladness. They expend a great deal of energy trying to duplicate in the flesh, what is only true of the Spirit of Christ within us. It usually turns out to be a cheap imitation and is more of a pain than a blessing, since it produces a great deal of stress in the search for it. Believers often think that if they do not have these outward expressions of the flesh there is something wrong with them. This becomes a source of great discouragement. Seeing others around them expressing great exuberance, they are unaware of the artificial and fleshly nature of it.

It would be better to focus on the peace and satisfaction that comes in resting in the energy of Christ to fulfill His work within us. *"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."* Even if there may be surface feelings of discontent with others, or even with Christ, there is that deeper sense of satisfaction in being identified with Him and His family. That is the fruit of the Spirit. The examples are endless of the ways in which humans can work up surface excitement—sports events, rock concerts, parades and celebrations. Humans have a great capacity for dropping a veil over the miseries and joining in exuberance. This may be appropriate in a ball park, but it is questionable in the assembly of believers. The world is wracked with chaos and catastrophe. The people of earth suffer such heartache and tragedy. It is part of the daily context of life. It is possible to carry a deep burden on one's heart, as Paul did—feeling continual

sorrow—and yet have the deep sense of satisfaction in one’s identity with Christ. This satisfaction can be expressed in many ways that are part of worship. But dropping a veil over the sufferings of the world and engaging in exuberant celebrations just for the sake of personal enjoyment, smacks of an unwholesome euphoria that is inappropriate for people who are sensitive to the world’s needs. The victory celebrations will indeed come; the enemy will be completely vanquished; Christ will emerge as the Victorious Conqueror. But for now, if we are not callous to the world’s afflictions, a more appropriate expression of the presence of the Spirit within us will be a subdued satisfaction in our relationship with Him; a tranquility in the security of His presence; and an awareness of the wretchedness of the human estate, at this time.

*But are we not allowed human emotions? Does everything have to be stark reality?*

That is a most important and legitimate question. I not only would not but cannot rule out the emotions. They are as inevitable as breathing. And there is also a vital need to shield ourselves from overburdening intensity. The danger lies in mistaking human emotion for spiritual devotion.

The problem with human emotions is that they are often misleading and unreliable. Emotional exuberance can be mistaken for spiritual devotion. Somehow there is a

mistaken notion that the noisier the meeting the more spiritual it is. People think that weeping is a sign of the Holy Spirit. Some think that quiet people lack a touch of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, someone misled by human feeling of sympathy or misfortune, can respond to appeals for help on the basis of feelings, rather than a leading from the Holy Spirit. The world is in such a chaotic state that human beings cannot possibly know just what to do specifically to make a difference. Only the Holy Spirit can guide us into the service He may want us to perform. If we respond to emotional appeals, we can be easily overburdened with the vastness of the need. There are hundreds of thousands of organizations—maybe millions—looking for support for their humanitarian projects. It is essential that we are doing what God wants and not what some human organization wants. How do we know? We don’t. We just have to trust the Lord to see to it that we do what He wants us to do, apart from our emotions.

So emotions are neither unacceptable nor undesirable—they are only unreliable and misleading. They are expressions of the natural mind and do not necessarily reflect the state of the spirit. Thus, Paul may have felt wretched and miserable at times (“If there is no after life, we are of all men most miserable”), and full of sorrow for his people, but rejoiced continuously in the liberty which he had in Christ, and in the ministry with which Christ had entrusted him.

# Romans 8:1-4

## TRANSLATION

*There is, therefore, now not any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus; for the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and of death. For the inability of the Law in its weakness through the flesh [was such that] God having sent His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteousness of the Law may be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

## COMMENTARY

### **The Law of the Spirit of Life**

Paul continually refers to the conflict between the law of death and the law of life. He presses the point that whereas the Law of God and, of course, the Law of Moses, was “holy and just and good,” it was quite inadequate to recover the human spirit, which had been done to death by the tragic failure in the Garden of Eden. There was nothing wrong with the Law as a standard of behavior; it simply wasn’t possible for fallen humans to keep it. It would be tantamount to a civil law, which would require that one not only refrain from killing one’s neighbor, but also pledge never to think unkindly thoughts about him. Of course, this is what Jesus brought out in His commentary on the Law, although He extended it even further. He said that not only must one love one’s neighbor, but also one’s enemies. It is a mistake to assume that Jesus was setting a universal standard in His Sermon on the Mount. He was rather, showing that it was impossible for humans to keep the real spirit of the Law, even if they were able to observe the letter of it. For the

average human, it is not an irresistible temptation to commit murder or to steal. But to be in constant control of one’s emotions is quite another thing. On the other hand, Jesus is not suggesting that, if you’re going to think it you might as well do it. He is only saying that human thoughts indicate the deep reservoir of perversity that lies within.

*So what did the coming of Christ and His Spirit really do for us? Where are we any different?*

We are different in our spirits. The coming of the Holy Spirit into our own spirits purified the reservoir, so to speak. The Spirit of Christ within us has produced “a river of living water.” The Spirit of Christ within us has made the difference. He is our justification and righteousness and sanctification.

*But what about all the unsoundness that Paul struggled with? Did he not say that he did not do the good that he wanted to, but was caught in the unsoundness of the*

*flesh?*

That is certainly true, but notice that it was the unsoundness of the flesh and not the spirit. He never said that the flesh was purified. Quite the contrary, he said that in his flesh “there dwelt no good thing.”

*Was he then just quibbling with words?*

Certainly not. The righteousness of Christ within our spirits is what justifies us with God. The very thing that the Law could not do—the change of attitude—is done by the Holy Spirit. The fact that we want Christ in our spirits and want to do what is right, and are distressed and penitent over wrongdoing, is the evidence that Christ is within us and that a change has taken place in our innermost being. Of course, this is what Jesus said would happen in the coming of the Holy Spirit—*“On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. The one who believes on Me, even as the scripture has said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He said concerning the Spirit, which those who believed on Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet here, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”* (John 7:37-39)

**There is, therefore, now not any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...** The Greek word οὐδεν (*ouden*) means “not one.”

*No condemnation? To anyone?*

None whatsoever, to those who are in Christ Jesus.

*But is that possible? I find that hard to believe.*

Believe it. It’s a plain statement in the Word of God.

*But what about the conditions?*

What conditions?

*“Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

Is that a condition or a description? Actually, one could not be in Christ without having the Holy Spirit. And whereas those who were under the Law were walking in the flesh—striving to observe the Law with human determination—those who are in Christ are walking in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Later on in the chapter Paul says that *“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this one is not of Him.”*

*So then what is the need of this qualifying phrase, if those who are in Christ are already walking in the Spirit? Does freedom from condemnation apply only to a special category of Christians?*

Unfortunately, some think so. Some think that chapter 8 represents a period in Paul’s life when he had come into a special experience that lifted him beyond the conflicts of chapter 7. The problem with that idea is that Paul does not make such a distinction. If he had meant to say that, he should have been more clear about it. He could at least have said, “We must go on now to a higher experience.” On the contrary, he put all believers in the same category—freed from the Law; freed from its condemnation; and walking instead in the power and grace of Christ. Far from identifying himself with a new position of strength, he continually decried his own weakness. The passage in II Corinthians 12, is rather conclusive—*“Most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ*

*may settle down upon me...for when I am weak, then am I strong...*" (II Corinthians 12:9, 10) And of course, in Philippians 3, he drew a sharp contrast between his blameless observance of the Law as a Pharisee, which did not free him from condemnation, and the righteousness of Christ within him, which, in spite of his lack of perfection, did free him from condemnation.

A further point to observe, though not to press too strongly, is that in the earlier and more reliable text, not available to the translators of the King James version, the qualifying phrase was not there. Perhaps it had been added later by earnest translators, who wanted to make a special point. It should be observed that God has allowed increasing accuracy in the uncovering of older and more reliable manuscripts, so that changes in the text do not diminish it but add to the wonder of its preservation.

But even so, whether that phrase is there or not, the great truth that Paul is expressing here, is that deliverance from the condemnation of God is not through human efforts of "spirituality," but the fact that the New Testament believers do have the continual presence of the Holy Spirit, assuring them of their peace with God.

**The likeness of sinful flesh...** In what way did Jesus take on the likeness of human flesh? To what degree did He participate in human nature? The human mind has certainly not been capable of fully understanding this phenomenon of the Deity. But we have some clues. In Philippians 2, we are told that Christ *"emptied Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant..."* The Greek word is from *κενος* (*kenos*), which involves "complete emptiness." The verb means "to bring to nothing." What he was divesting

himself of, was the Divine power that He shared with the Father in the ages of eternity past. What He did not divest Himself of, was His own eternal Spirit. Later on in the chapter, Paul will identify the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God as one and the same.

*So then what was His status on the earth? Where did He get the power to work miracles?*

His status on the earth was a vessel of clay, as other humans; and His power came from God as the source, working through Him as a human vessel. This is the plain teaching of Jesus Himself—*"Do you not believe that I Am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words which I speak to you I speak not from Myself; but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works."* (John 14:10) In the fleshly sense, Jesus took the place of the human vessel, or channel, through which the power of God was exercised in the world. He was ever mindful of the fact that as long as He was upon the earth, the glory was God's. That He was divested of His original glory and had to be restored to it later is obvious from His prayer in John 17—*"Glorify thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the foundation of the world."* (John 17:5) Christ became a channel of glory, even as we. He became a vessel of clay that the glory may be God's. John speaks of this in his first epistle—*"As He is, so are we in this world."* By His own volition, he became a channel of glory, rather than a reservoir.

But didn't He say, *"I do always those things that please Him?"* Can we ever be like that? He was not referring to "being good." He was referring rather, to the fact that He only moved as God gave direction. And that is our position as well. *"The God of peace...make you perfect [restore you] in every good thing, to the*

*end that you may do His will, doing in you that which is well-pleasing before Him, through Jesus Christ to Whom be the glory forever, Amen.*" (Hebrews 13:20, 21, A.T.) The Greek word, usually translated "make you perfect" is *καταρτιζω (katartidzo)*, which means "to mend" or "restore." It is the same word used of the disciples, who were "mending their nets." There is no perfection, as we understand it, implied here. A broken vase may be mended and restored to use, but is not perfect. So we are restored in every good thing while He does within us what is well-pleasing before Him. It is the same word used of Christ, when He said, *"I do always those things that please Him."* We are shaped by the Potter's hand to serve Him as He sees fit. It does not mean that we will always be "good" and never make any mistakes. The vessel pleases the Father when it accomplishes the purpose which He intended for it, even though, as "mended," it is not yet perfect.

Now what has all of this to do with Jesus? It has everything to do with the implications of His being made "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He emptied Himself of His own personal glory, which He had with the Father "before the world began," and became submissive to His will, functioning only as God functioned through Him. Thus, He became like us who have had no glory of our own, but receiving the Spirit of God within us, have become channels of God's power. There is a very significant statement in Luke 5:17—*"The power of God was there to heal."* Even Jesus could heal only as God expressed His power through Him.

There is an erroneous assumption on the part of some, that when God gives them a gift they become repositories of His power, and exercise it at will. The truth is that they are merely channels, and can

only exercise the gift when and if God elects to work through them. The promotional materials often put out by people with gifts of healing, for example, give the impression that they have now become "healers," with the focus on themselves, instead of being "clay pots," who have nothing in themselves but emptiness. God will fill them as He chooses. However, whereas Christ took upon Him a human form and functioned as a human being possessing no power within Himself, He was not born with the corruption of human flesh from the "Fall". Else He could not have been the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He rather, took sin upon Himself in the sense of a cloak, or in the sense that the Old Testament priest laid hands on the "scapegoat," symbolically transferring to it the sins of Israel.

*So then, how could Jesus be tempted if He could not sin?*

In the first place, temptation is not sin, of itself. Sin comes only in succumbing to the temptation. One can experience the whole range of human desires without sinning, unless one succumbs to the temptation and becomes involved in something that is expressly forbidden by the word of God. So Jesus could feel the force of human desire and therefore know what humans go through, without committing a sinful act. A person of integrity could be under great pressure, because of business problems or financial difficulties, to do something shady. As a person of integrity he is able to resist the temptation, but he certainly knows what people feel under the same conditions.

So Jesus emptied Himself of His original glory; went through the human birth process; and became a complete human being. He experienced the desires and feelings of the human flesh, and yet did

not commit any sinful deeds. He died the death humans die, and was raised from the dead and restored to glory, as His followers one day shall be.

**Condemned sin in the flesh...** The Greek word κρινω (*krino*) means “to judge,” or make a judgment about something, either positively or negatively. κατακρινω (*Katakrimo*) comes from the same root, but adds a preposition which casts it into a completely negative light. Thus, it means to “pass sentence on,” and not merely to evaluate. So what was the sentence as far as the flesh is concerned? The sentence was that the flesh would no longer be the basis of judgment as far as our relationship to God is concerned.

**That the righteousness of the Law may be fulfilled in us...** There is that in the world which is right, and that which is wrong. The touchstone is the Law. And

that is what the righteousness or “rightness” of the Law is all about. It was God’s intention for His creation, which was beyond their capacity after the “Fall” had eviscerated their spiritual heritage, which was from God. Now that intention would be fulfilled in Christ, not by a new legacy of human piety, but by the indwelling presence of Christ, who would become the righteousness of God dwelling within the human, in the presence of His Holy Spirit.

**Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit...** The whole implication of the Law comes to its consummation within us, through the presence of His Holy Spirit. Those who are “born again” have the Holy Spirit within them. And thus, they are indeed walking according to or “in the mode of” the Spirit.



# Romans 8:5-11

## TRANSLATION

*For they who are according to [in the mode of] the flesh, have their mind-set in the things of the flesh; but they who are in the mode of the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind-set of the flesh is at enmity with God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, for neither is it able to be. But they who are in the flesh are not able to please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if one does not have the Spirit of Christ, this one is not of Him. For if Christ is in you, the body is dead on account of sin, but the Spirit is life on account of righteousness. But if the Spirit of the One Who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He Who raised Christ from the dead, shall give life also to your mortal bodies through the indwelling of His Spirit Who is in you.*

## COMMENTARY

### **The Relationship Between the Flesh and the Spirit**

It is obvious that throughout his letter to the Romans, Paul presses a prominent theme—the defining of the functions of the flesh and the spirit. Without a clear understanding of this division, it is difficult for Christians to live at peace with themselves and with God, in the earthly realm in which we are all reluctant prisoners. Confusing these two has caused immeasurable stress in the minds of believers.

We are living in what might be termed “the age of anxiety.” In all of human history there has never been a period of time more saturated with stress-producing elements. These sources of stress are both direct, as in such matters as conflicts and circumstances; and indirect, as in the undercurrents of

modern society—those things that are germane to our civilization. There are hosts of subtle elements, such as the myriad of technologies in our daily lives, usually not even considered. In addition, we are faced with the information explosion and the undercurrent of threats implied by it, as well as the decision-making stress of limitless numbers of choices that our modern society has evolved. In this “age of anxiety,” the church ought to be the greatest source of relief from stress and anxiety. Instead, it has become one of the prominent producers of stress. In fact, the very faith which should be the stock-in-trade of the church as an antidote to anxiety has become, through the abuse of it, one of its chief instruments in producing anxiety. In part, the reason for this is a complete

misunderstanding of faith, itself; but, in part, it has to do with a misunderstanding of the difference between the flesh and the spirit.

First, the problem of anxiety has often been viewed by the church as a problem of faith—"If you had more faith, you would not have this anxiety." This is the general teaching of the church, in which all anxiety is categorically identified with lack of faith. Now, how does one attain the necessary faith? In the teachings of the church, generally the acquiring of faith is a human responsibility. Lack of faith is usually attributed to the lack of some spiritual effort—prayer, Bible study, commitment, service. And so the stress is measurably increased by the guilt feelings and the pressure to perform. In the common teachings of the church, the help of God is always tied to human conditions. It is an absurd cycle—one has anxiety because one does not have faith, and one does not have faith because one has too much anxiety.

In the second place, the misunderstanding of the relationship between the flesh and the spirit puts anxiety as a spiritual problem instead of a fleshly one. Tying spiritual vitality to human thoughts and emotions imprisons it on a "mental roller coaster." It puts God on the sidelines, observing the "carnival" activity and waiting for some high point of feelings or attitudes before entering the situation. Meanwhile, the poor "rider" can only "hang on for dear life" and hope the trolley will not jump the tracks. Anxiety itself swamps the effort to get help. How does one stop the rushing tide of feelings?

Another area of problem in the approach of the church to anxiety, is rationalization. "One should not have anxiety because..." Here is perhaps the most persistent source of guilt. "I ought to

be able to handle this." The "because" are myriad. "God is on His throne;" "God loves you;" "God has taken care of you until now;" "Other people have it worse;" "God is telling you something." The list is endless but it all adds up to the same thing—"Quit feeling, and start thinking." A great idea if you could do it. Can you stop the ocean tide? Can you stop the world?

*So what is the answer? This is exactly how I feel, but what can I do about it?*

The answer lies in the understanding of faith and in the understanding of the relationship between the flesh and the spirit. First of all, with reference to faith, suffer a bit of repetition. Faith is basically an act of God—not of humans. Faith is an energy process of God by which He comes into touch with humans and provides for them, the dynamic connection between Himself and His creatures. It is like the electric current by which we all function with our modern devices. Connect a bulb to the current and you have light. Connect with God and you have faith. That is to say, asking for faith is like turning on a switch or plugging in a light cord. It has nothing to do with human preconditions. The idea that we have to go through certain steps to receive God's help is more human, pharisaical tradition. John says, "*As many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, to those who believe on His name.*" (John 1:11)

*But isn't it only to those who believe on His name?*

Yes, indeed, but where does one get the faith to believe on His name? It is a gift of God to those who ask for it. "*For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest anyone should boast.*"

(Ephesians 2:8) It is absurd to think that bankrupt humans should be required to fulfill preconditions before receiving help from God.

*But don't you make salvation too easy?*

No, not just easy—free. Asking for faith cannot be based on mustering up faith. What are often expressed as conditions are really only the results of the faith God gives us.

In this light, faith must be seen as a process of the spirit, and not an activity of the mind or flesh. What goes on in the mind is rather, human trust, which is often confused with faith but is quite another thing. Human trust is a product of the mind and is merely an emotional feeling. Such feelings may or may not accompany the true faith, which is in the spirit. Thus, God can often work in situations where we may be quite uncertain of what He is going to do and, therefore, have little of human confidence. The faith that is in our inner spirits supersedes human uncertainty. It is this faith that has been functioning in our very praying. If the faith of Christ were not within us, we would not have the interest in prayer at all. It is most important to understand that our true faith rests upon Christ, and not upon our feelings. That faith continues ceaselessly within us, in spite of our anxieties and vacillating human feelings.

*But isn't it true that if we had more faith we wouldn't be anxious?*

No, that is not true at all. And that is why we need to understand the second point—the difference between the flesh and the spirit. Anxiety belongs to the area of the flesh—the human intellect and emotions. These processes are strictly a product of the mind and, therefore, subject to the

things that affect the mind. There are many factors that produce anxiety in the mind—biochemical, as well as psychological. Thus, anxiety may be a product of physical factors such as hormone imbalance (a result of P.M.S., for example) or physical changes within the body (as for example, surgery), or changes in health care. Anxiety may be the result of improper diet—excessive sugar or caffeine, for example. The answer to one's anxiety may be the same as the answer to one's physical problems—a thorough physical examination.

*So then, we are not always to blame for our anxieties? It isn't just a matter of more faith or more spirituality?*

No more than a broken arm or gallbladder attack.

*Then we really don't have to feel guilty about it?*

Certainly not. And that is why we have to mention the third factor with which the church often responds to the problem of anxiety—guilt. The response goes something like this—“It is a sin to worry. You must ask the Lord to forgive you for your worry and promise to trust Him more.” Of course that is another of those erroneous traditions. The Bible never said that it is a sin to worry. Even Paul confessed to “*fightings without and fears within.*” The truth of the matter is that there are many reasons why one may be suffering anxiety, for which one could not be held responsible. Anxiety, as we have stated above, can be a purely physical problem which is resolved by the medical procedures with which we approach other physical problems. Even the tendency toward anxiety or vulnerability to it, is often a matter of genetics.

So you can see the cycle of stress-producing responses to the problem of anxiety. The misapplication of faith; the misunderstanding of the difference between flesh and spirit; and the unfortunate pronouncement of guilt, have all had their place in producing stress among the believers.

*So then, what do we do about our anxieties?*

That is a very complex question and one that would require more of a book than a paragraph. Our purpose in discussing the matter here, is to relieve the additional stress of misunderstanding and guilt. If anxiety can be tied to problems of the mind rather than the spirit: it can be dealt with in the same way that we deal with mental and physical problems. We have the liberty of believing that we are at peace with Christ in the spirit, even if we are struggling with problems in the flesh. We have the relief of knowing that lack of confidence or trust in a given situation does not reflect lack of faith. In fact, if it were not for the faith of Christ within us, we would not even be concerned about our relationship to Christ. It is the very fact that we care about Him enough not to want to offend Him, that causes us concern in the first place.

Knowing that we are at peace with Christ frees us to focus our attention on the problem itself, rather than the added complexity of “spirituality,” where spirituality implies intensity of religious pursuits. That is to say, if anxiety implies some kind of spiritual lack, it merely adds to the burden. On the other hand, where there is no threat of the loss of Divine favor, one is willing to admit one’s weakness, and thus, is in a position to receive strength from God. *“My grace is sufficient for thee for My strength is made*

*perfect in weakness.”* And Paul says, *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, for when I am weak, then am I strong.”* (I Corinthians 12:8-10)

This entire discussion was occasioned by the problem of recognizing the difference between the flesh and the spirit. It is a major area of problem among believers. Failure to recognize this difference on the part of the leadership has made them prime purveyors of stress, as they try to link human anxiety with inadequate faith and spirituality.

Once we have eliminated the guilt factor and recognized anxiety as a normal human problem, we can begin to deal with it in the same way we address other physical and psychical human problems. The causes of anxiety are many and intricate, but in general they fall under two major categories—physical and psychological. Many anxieties are purely physical—biochemical imbalances and genetics. Many are psychological, based on thought processes and behavior patterns that have been established over a period of years. And these are often the product of circumstances beyond our control, especially occurring in the early years.

In the 8th chapter of Romans, Paul has made it abundantly clear that the grace of Christ and the coming of His Holy Spirit to dwell within us has delivered us from the law of sin and death and its consequent burden of guilt. And yet, throughout Christendom the most prevailing message to saint and sinner alike is guilt and condemnation. It seems that one can never do enough to satisfy the religious demands of the leadership. It is that problem that evoked the preceding paragraphs discussing the fact that religion has been one of the most stress-producing elements in society, from

the beginning of human history. Whereas Christ came with a message of peace and strength and comfort for the beleaguered souls of the world, religious leaders everywhere, like the Pharisees, have turned it into a message of oppression and guilt. The result is that very few believers today have really enjoyed the peace that is their rightful heritage. The root of the problem, as we have been showing, is the failure to distinguish between the prevailing presence of Christ within our spirits, and the weaknesses and failures of the human flesh. The bottom line is that we can be at peace with Christ in our spirits even as we struggle with the weaknesses of the flesh.

**For they who are in the mode of the flesh, have their mind-set in the things of the flesh.** The word often translated by “after” or “according to” is the Greek word *κατα* (*kata*), which means “in the manner of” or “in the mode of.” In the book of Acts, it is said that the believers met *κατοικον* (*kat’oikon*), which meant in the manner of meetings in the home. Or in the mode of home gatherings, rather than gatherings in the synagogue. This expression in Romans 8, does not mean that Christians might sometimes be in the flesh and sometimes in the spirit—a common misunderstanding. Once Christ has entered our spirits, we are no longer “flesh people,” but “spirit people.” That is to say, we have left the mode of the flesh and entered the mode of the spirit. And consequently, our “mind-set” is a spirit mind-set, rather than a flesh mind-set. A mind-set means of course, the prevailing process of thought within us. It does not mean that one with a “spirit mind-set” will never think fleshly thoughts, any more than it would be true that one with a “flesh mind-set” would never think a religious thought. It has to do with a state of being, rather than a changing condition.

**“For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the spirit is life and peace”...** Whatever the precise meaning of the words we have been discussing, Paul makes it very clear that, those who are in that condition of flesh are subject to death; are the enemies of God; and are unable to be subject to Him. Whereas, those that are in the condition described as the “mode” or “mind-set” of the spirit, have life and peace. Whatever their problems in the flesh, the believers are at peace with God in their spirits.

**But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you...** Whatever the debate about the meaning of the previous verses, one thing is abundantly clear—those that have the Spirit of Christ in them are not in the condition described as “being in the flesh.” And indeed, if one does not have the Spirit of Christ in Him, “he is none of His.”

*But how can we really be sure that we have the Spirit of Christ in us, especially if we are having problems in the flesh?*

I have said it many times, but I will repeat it—you know that you have His Spirit in you because you want Him in you. Without the Spirit of Christ, you would have no desire to have Him in your life. It would be impossible to be saved and not have the Spirit of Christ in you. And it is absurd to assume that you can have part of the Spirit in you at salvation, and another part later on in some subsequent religious experience. You may be more open to the work of the Spirit in your natural life, but as far as your spirit is concerned, Christ is the reigning sovereign. He is the Lord of your life, even though your flesh may not always reflect that fact.

If the previous paragraphs may seem pedantic and wearisome in overstating the case, remember that, in the last several chapters, Paul has, himself been making his points with great detail and repetition. If it is difficult for believers today to grasp these concepts, it was doubly difficult for the Jews of Paul's day, who were brought up under the strictures and pedantry of the Law.

**If Christ is in you, the body is dead on account of sin, but the spirit is life on account of righteousness...** Once again, we confront the "dead body." The reader is referred to the extensive discussion in chapter 6, but the essential meaning is that the natural life is going through its decaying process, and is subject to the putrefaction of it, but all the while the vitality of the believer is in his spirit. And if his earthly life be filled with chaos and distress and failure, yet will his resurrection be glorious.

*"But if the Spirit of the One Who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He*

*Who raised Christ from the dead shall also make your mortal bodies alive through His indwelling Spirit which is in you."* To the Corinthians, Paul said concerning the body—*"It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."* (I Corinthians 15:42-44)

So the Spirit of God is the continual lifestream that flows in us, even while the body is in a process of weakness and decay while it is on the earth. In Romans 7, Paul cries out, *"Who shall deliver us from this body of death?"* In Romans 8, he answers it fully, *"It is Christ Himself."* But that deliverance is not yet. The day will come when we will "shuffle off this mortal coil." We shall be freed, forever, from our fleshly prison. And we hear John's cry echoing through the ages—*"It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* (1 John 3:2)

# Romans 8:12-17

## TRANSLATION

*Therefore then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live in the flesh mode, for if you live in the flesh mode, you are going to die; but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the children of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again, unto fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba Father. For the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. And if children, also heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ, if indeed we have suffered together in order that we may also be glorified together.*

## COMMENTARY

### **Heirs Together, Sufferers Together, Glorified Together**

Once again, a sharp contrast between death in the flesh and life in the spirit. The word “debtor” refers to those who have not yet received the Spirit. *“The recompense of sin is death; the gift of God is eternal life.”* The gift is there to cover the penalty. Those who have not accepted the gift are still debtors. It does not mean that believers have an obligation because Christ died for them, to renounce all fleshly pursuits and vow to live spiritual lives on the earth. We confront again that pesky, word “because.” “We ought to be good “because” we owe it to Christ, Who died for us.” The mind-set to please Christ is accomplished through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and not through any determination of the human will. Willpower has never been a reliable characteristic of the flesh. This, according to Paul—*“What I will to do, I don’t do; what I will not to do, I do.”*

**If, by the spirit you put to death the**

**deeds of the body, you shall live...** It is not a matter of determining not to practice the deeds of the body, but a pronouncement of death upon the body. Paul says in many places that those who are in the Spirit have, therefore, given the death sentence to the flesh. Because of the pronouncement of death, the body is in a decadent state. Sometimes people who have a terminal illness will try to cram as much into their lives as possible before they finally expire. And that is our condition. We have the sentence of death in us. The body has a terminal illness. But in its dying state, it still responds to fleshly desires.

**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the children of God...** Once again, we are talking about a state of being and not a pattern of behavior. Having received the Holy Spirit into our spirits, we are now, *de facto*, followers of Christ. We may not always

please Him, but we are nevertheless identified as His followers if we have received His Spirit. The word often translated by “sons,” is merely a generic form which includes both sons and daughters.

**For you have not received the spirit of bondage again, unto fear...** Under the Law, the children of Israel were admittedly in a state of bondage. Their relationship to God was based on fear—“Do this, and live.” In the New Testament it is rather “live, and do this.” There was not the vitality of a personal relationship, as between father and child. In the New Testament, the relationship is familial—father to child; husband to bride; and brother to brother. In terms of penalties, there is a vast difference. If a daughter takes her mother’s favorite necklace and wears it to a party without her approval, there may be some disciplinary action taken. If, however, a stranger takes the necklace, it is punishable by the law. In the new relationship, the children may be disciplined for misdeeds, but not executed or separated from God. Sin is forgivable and restoration available. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

**But you have received the spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba Father...** By adoption we are placed in the family of God. By the Spirit we also partake of the nature of God. An adopted child can become the heir of a family, but never possess the genes of that family. Through the Spirit of Christ, the seed of God is planted in our spirits, and we are forever partakers of His nature. An adoption may be legally dissolved and the child no longer regarded as a member of the family. But the natural child can never be regarded as no longer a member of the family. Rights and privileges may

be withdrawn; but the bloodline remains.

It is important to understand here, the nature of God’s fatherhood. Many believers become confused and disappointed because they tend to apply the same criteria to the Fatherhood of God as they do to the earthly father. In His infinite wisdom, God may allow things in our lives based upon His eternal purpose and design that a father would not be expected to do. If an earthly father, for example, has within his power to prevent injury or death, he will surely do so. But God has a much larger purpose, and sometimes must function more as a general than a father. In the end, it all fits into a grand design which is beyond the comprehension of finite beings.

**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God...** The assurance that we belong to Christ comes not from any number of human reasons or Biblical promises. It is the Spirit Himself who gives to us the desire to have Christ within us, in spite of our vacillating human emotions. Whatever the doubts and fears and uncertainties that the human may conjure up, the one inescapable reality is that it matters to us. The very question—“Am I really saved?”—is its own answer. If you were not saved, you would not be concerned to have Christ in you. It is absurd to assume that someone could want Christ, but be unable to have Him because of the inability to conform to certain religious conditions. The helpless can only cry for help. *“They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”* Whatever problems you may have; whatever weaknesses; whatever misdeeds, the fact that you care about Christ is the witness of the Holy Spirit that He is within.



**Heirs together... sufferers together... glorified together...** Romans 8, is the great chapter of “togetherness.” It begins with our togetherness as children and heirs and ends with the magnificent statement that nothing, whatsoever, shall separate us from the love of Christ. This togetherness is more readily seen in the Greek text, where the Greek preposition *sun* (together with) repeatedly occurs. Christ is the Heir of the limitless substance of God and we are joint-heirs (heirs together) with Him. Possessing the seed of God within us, we are partakers of all that He is and all that He possesses.

But if, indeed, we share such an inheritance, we share also His sufferings. The Greek word *πάσχω* (*pascho*) has a variety of meanings ranging from fleshly passions to sensitivity and suffering. The basic meaning of the word is “to feel.” When Christ emptied Himself of His Divinity, He took on a nature that included the emotions. He experienced the depths of human feelings. And thus, He became vulnerable to suffering. His greatest suffering was certainly not in physical pain. A great many people have suffered excruciating physical pain, very much like His own. The exclusive province of Christ brings a range of feelings which, given His Divine perspective, would be deeper and more agonizing than humans would normally feel. He suffered in every respect, all that humans have ever suffered. So intense was His agony in the garden, that His perspiration was like drops of blood. This was hardly because of the prospect of physical sufferings. It was the cup that He must drink of human sorrow and sin and tragedy and heartache. But in His hour of agony, He exclaimed, “*The cup which My father hath given Me, shall I not drink it.*” He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” If you think

He does not understand the depths of your own agony, you have misunderstood Him and the meaning of His suffering together with us.

But more—we will share His glory. The extent of that glory is beyond human comprehension. But He has revealed this to our spirits. Resident within our spirits, in the very presence of Christ, is the sense of that glory. However, it does not surface in fleshly feelings and expectations. But that is why the spirit clings to the desire to have Christ within. The spirit knows what the flesh does not. And when the flesh is languishing in doubt and fear and disappointment, the spirit within somehow senses the magnitude of the glory that is at stake, and begs the flesh to hold on. To the Corinthians, Paul said, “*Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*” (I Corinthians 2:9, 10)

And Paul begs the Corinthians, on the same grounds, to hold steady. “*For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” (II Corinthians 4:17)

*But what is this glory? What does it mean to be glorified?*

Your confusion is understandable. In the English language, the word has been used to describe everything from hamburgers to hairstyles to deity. Even in modern worship services it is often thrown about

with euphoric abandon. In a church service it may be anything from letting off steam to joining the chorus.

The Greek word in the New Testament is usually  $\delta\omicron\chi\alpha$  (*doxa*), which translates the Hebrew word  $\text{כבוד}$  (*kabod*). The basic meaning of *kabod* is “heavy.” From that, came the idea of substance. Gold became the symbol of glory, in part, because of its weight. Jewelry that is made of pure gold is heavier than its simulated substitutes. In that respect, the glory of God is His substance. There is a certain sense in which matter is almost illusory. It is actually made up of energy. God is the only true substance of the universe. The Greek word *doxa* adds to the concept of substance, the facet of appearance. God is what He seems to be. And reflected in the grandeur of the universe and the intricacy of His creatures, the substance of God has its brilliance as well as its “weight.” What we generally perceive glory to be is fulfilled in its application to God. Our application of the term to substandard elements in society, is almost universally recognized as human

trivia and not really taken that seriously, except as we apply it to God. It is really the difference between the French *fantastique* and *magnifique*. One never applies the term *magnifique* to human excellence, but only to deity. Human excellence is described in the term *fantastique*. We have no such distinction in English and so we content ourselves with the use of “glory” as the common expression.

*So what is meant by our glorification?*

What is meant is that we, bearing the seed of God within us and being, thus, partakers of His Divine nature, will one day “shuffle off the mortal coil,” and enter into an eternity with God. We will be characterized only by the attributes of His nature, which we have come to possess by dint of our infusion with the Holy Spirit. Whatever the meaning of the earthly chaos and our participation in it, we will one day be rid of its putrefaction, and bask for eternity in the glory of His presence.

# Romans 8:18-25

## TRANSLATION

*For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is about to be revealed in us. For the eager anticipation of the creature awaits, expectantly, the revelation of the children of God. For the creature was made subject to deceptive illusion, not willingly, but on account of the One Who subjected them on the basis of expectation, because the creature also, itself, shall be liberated from the bondage of corruption unto the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that all the creation groans together and travails together until the present time; and not only so, but also we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also ourselves groan within ourselves, awaiting expectantly our adoption, that is the redemption of our body. For we have been saved in the context of expectation; but expectation which is seen is not expectation, for what one sees, why does one expect it? But if we expect what we do not see, then do we wait for it, expectantly, through endurance.*

## COMMENTARY

### **The Earthly Ordeal and the Heavenly Glory**

The greatest hurdle to confidence in the grace and mercy of God, is the tragic saga of human suffering. How can we justify God in the face of the “faith-shattering” catastrophes on the earth? There is a discipline, or subject area, of theology called “Theodicy”—“The justifying of God.” At the outset, it seems an audacious or brazen thing for human beings to think that they have the right to stand in judgment of God and make a pronouncement as to whether or not He is just. If we assume that we have the right to make such a pronouncement, we are, *de facto*, assuming a position above Him. In truth, any effort, however obsequious or humble, must fail from the start

because of the limits of the human mind, either to understand the Divine meaning of justice or to fathom the actions and purposes of God.

At certain levels, it seems fairly simple to grant that there is an ultimate purpose quite beyond our human comprehension. But then we encounter things that are so shattering to the human senses as to leave the mind in a pit of darkness. The classic example of this was the holocaust of World War II. There is no word in the English language to describe the horrors of Auschwitz. No system of a human “theodicy” can touch it. At a certain point, the mind simply shuts off and has no

capacity to grasp the dimensions of its savagery.

There are some theologians who feel that it is a “cop out” not to wrestle with the mental challenge. But this puts an unwarranted confidence in the ability of the finite mind to handle infinite truth. With all the theological systems that have been devised to deal with the matter, one is left in the end, with nothing more than human words. If the sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory, we are certainly limited at the level of the imagining of such glory. To balance out the glory against such things as the holocaust, requires a perspective of glory that is obviously inadequate. So the age-old problem of evil is still with us. To share God’s glory for eternity—to be all that God intended us to be forever—should be adequate to offset the pain, but when one is in the midst of misery, words are only words. But possessing the energy of Christ within, the spirit is satisfied though the mind may not be, and provides the inner strength to hold on to Christ in the face of contrary evidence.

There are two things that provide the fabric of our assurance in the midst of the world of evil. First, that the grace of God is sufficient to hold us steadfast in the midst of the suffering; and second, that one day evil will vanish from the earth and the “evil one” shall be no more. One day the glory of God will be revealed to us, but it is not manifest to us now. Thus, the pursuit of the knowledge of God’s glory can only end in frustration. According to Jesus, *it is not for us to know the times or seasons of His return*, so it is not for us to know the extent of His glory. Paul tells the Corinthians that *“Now we see through the glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then we shall know as we are known.”* Thus, the effort to know everything, now, is futile.

Nor is it a matter of human trust—“things have a way of working out.” It is, rather, a process in the spirit, superseding the mind and providing the energy of Divine faith, which can only be sensed in the spirit. The uncertainty and doubt that often accompany times of great distress is viewed, unfortunately, as a lack of faith or spirituality—and, therefore, a source of guilt feelings. It will help a lot to remember that these feelings of uncertainty and doubt are very natural in the face of the problems, and have nothing to do with the inner strength that comes from the energy of Divine faith.

### **The eager anticipation of the creature awaits expectantly, the revelation of the children of God...**

The Greek word αποκαραδοκια (*apokaradokia*) describes the head thrust forward, intently looking for. And so the word απεκδεχεται (*apekdechetai*), which means “awaiting expectantly.” Thus, we have a certain intensity that seems to prevail in the whole realm of God’s creation. The spirit longs for its ultimate glorification, as the heart longs for home. It may not seem obvious in our fleshly minds—Paul must urge the Colossians to “*seek those things which are above*”—but it is there, nevertheless, deeper than our thoughts. Isaiah speaks of the intensely suffering Savior, in chapter 53. Suffering beyond all human comprehension, it is said of Him, “*He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.*” In like manner, when our earthly odyssey has ended and we “know as we are known,” we too shall be satisfied.

### **For the creature was made subject to deceptive illusion, not willingly...**

Apparently, from the context, Paul is talking about the entire creation, and not just human beings. Paul seems to imply that there is some instinct within the forms of nature that ties all living things

to its bare roots, and brings about an urge to be free of the restraints that have constricted them since the “Fall.” Thorns, for example, were obviously a product of the “Fall,” and it is possible that the shrub has some inner stirring (though not intelligent) to be free of the thorns. Similarly, rapacious beasts might have some undifferentiated stirring within them, not to have such poor social habits. It is certainly a mystery, but somehow, according to Paul’s words here, there is a spirit of anticipation in all of nature, to return to tamer roots. This, of course, comports with Isaiah’s statement about the “lion lying down with the lamb.” It is, of course, true that one day that is exactly what will happen. All of nature will return to the benevolent purpose which God intended for it.

**Waiting for the adoption, that is the redemption of our bodies...** The final stroke in our redemption is the recovery of our bodies.

*But if our bodies have been so corrupt and putrid as you have suggested, why then would God want to recover them?*

Because He intends to restore them to their original glory.

*But how can He do that with bodies that have been completely burned up or decayed?*

He can do it because each individual cell in the human body has a complete pattern for all the other cells. If there is one cell left, there is enough to reconstruct the original form. Perhaps you have heard of the RNA chain of molecules that have to do with genetics. It is based on the DNA chain. The RNA chain is formed from the pattern which has been established by the male and female chromosomes, which come

together and make up every trait in the individual that is the product of the chromosomes and genes of the parents. Every cell in the body has an RNA chain of molecules from which, in the creative power of God, can be a replication, exactly, of the original person. This, of course, will be minus the flaws that are the result of the “Fall.”

*But why do we have to wait for adoption and redemption? I thought we were already adopted when we were born again.*

We have, of course, been adopted and redeemed as far as our spirits are concerned, but this has to do with the body. We are not going to spend eternity floating about in the stratosphere like so many specters. Jesus indicated the nature of our resurrected body when He ate with the disciples. (Although we may not have blood as a body fluid since it is a corruptible element.) Jesus said to the disciples—“*A spirit has not flesh and bone as you see Me have.*” He did not say flesh and blood. But this is speculative, in a way. And John says, in his first epistle—“*We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” Apparently, we will be able to “feast” in heaven.

*But doesn't it also say that we will live in mansions?*

In John 14, Jesus is recorded as saying, “*In my Father’s house are many mansions.*” This has given rise to a lot of misleading statements about our residences in heaven. The word translated “mansion” merely means “dwelling place.” The King James translation employs the English word, which referred more broadly to residences. In fact, the residence of the pastor was called a “manse” (far from our

concept of mansion). John 14 develops the idea of the “mutual abode.” Jesus says that He will dwell in us and, we in Him. Just exactly what form our heavenly residences will take, is not at all clear. Whatever it is, it will certainly accommodate a new kind of existence which is not confined to time and space. In fact, by the time we have come to our ultimate glory, we will probably not be that much concerned with palatial residences. It is interesting, however, that despite the spiritual nature of our existence, Jesus does make a point of the fact of eating. Just how that fits, I’m not quite sure.

**We are saved in the context of expectation...** The Greek word *ελπις* (*elpis*), is better translated by “expectation” than by “hope.” Generally speaking, the word “hope” implies a large amount of uncertainty. Out of all the implications of hope, only one suggests certainty—in the appearance of deliverance. The wagon train is surrounded; they are out of ammunition; and suddenly they hear the bugle of the U.S. Cavalry—there is hope. That definition of hope does express some certainty. However, when we use such phrases as “the hope of salvation,” it could be interpreted as uncertain. Thus, the better word is “expectation” or “expectancy.” This word actually could be substituted wherever the word “hope” is employed.

**In the context of expectancy.** The translation—“by expectation”—is grammatically possible, but rather misleading. “In the context of” is equally correct and makes better sense. An aura of expectancy certainly does accompany our salvation. Whatever doubt or uncertainty may from time to time overwhelm us, there is always that sense deep within the spirit that we are in the

care of Christ. In fact, Paul says to the Romans that our afflictions ultimately yield approval and approval, expectation. Moreover, the expectation which works within us, ministers to us in such a way that we will not be without strength before God. (See Romans 5 commentary.)

Expectation makes the difference between the bearable and the unbearable. One of the most distressing aspects of affliction is its duration. Our sojourn on the earth is often accompanied by much trouble. In fact, for some, life on the earth can be tragic and catastrophic. One thing that makes it bearable is the realization that, ultimately, it will all be over and we will enter into our eternal glory. Paul says to the Corinthians, “*Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*” (II Corinthians 4:17)

**We wait with endurance...** The common translation “patience,” implies an emotional reaction. Believers are often troubled with impatience. They feel defeated because they have not met their afflictions “victoriously.” The Greek word, often translated by “patience,” is *υπομενω* (*hupomeno*), which means “to remain under the load.” In the testing of structural materials, it is not only a matter of how much the structure will bear, but for how long. And that’s what it means to remain under the load. The indication that you are enduring your affliction acceptably is not that you feel good about it, but that you stick with Christ—that you want Him in your life. The idea from some quarters, that one must also feel exuberant or victorious about their afflictions, only adds the burden of guilt to the already burdened life. How you feel is secondary to remaining steadfast, and remaining

steadfast is indicated by the continued desire to stay with Christ.

# Romans 8:26-28

## TRANSLATION

*Likewise also, the Spirit shares with us in our weaknesses; for we do not know what we should pray for even as we ought, but the Spirit Himself meets God on our behalf with unvoiced sighs. But He Who searches the heart, knows what is the mind-set of the Spirit, because He meets God on behalf of the saints. And we know that to those who love God all things work together unto good, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Irrevocable Touch of God

It is most important to realize that, when God touches us with His energy, a transformation takes place. It is not like joining a club, where we agree to keep the rules. It is not like entering a partnership, where we agree to cooperate. It is a metamorphosis in which our human spirit becomes a partaker of the Divine nature. It is not a matter of being members in good standing until we break the rules. Our spirits have become part and parcel of God. We are not gods, *per se*, but only partakers of His nature, according to II Peter 1:3-4. As Paul has been saying all along, this does not mean that our flesh does not fail repeatedly, in the process of life on the earth. It means that the core and essence of our lives is now spirit—spirit-essence, which partakes of the nature of God—and one day will be rid of this mortal cage which is the basis of our failures.

Repeatedly in his epistle, Paul points out the impossibility of the human nature to satisfy the requirement of God. It is well to continually remind ourselves that our

adoption is not merely a legal matter. We have been imbued with the Spirit of God by reason of a new birth, and thus, our tie to Him is not merely legal or religious, but the imparting of a new nature based upon a re-evaluation of the meaning of life. We have new attitudes towards God and others and ourselves; and on the basis of these changes do often alter our lifestyles. But the change of attitude does not, of itself, guarantee a change of behavioral patterns. The work of the Holy Spirit is indicated by the fact that we want to make changes. If things matter to us, it is because of the Spirit of Christ within us.

**So also, the Spirit shares with us in our weaknesses...** The English translation—“help”—is inadequate. The Greek word *συναντιλαμβανεται* (*sunantilambanetai*), is a much richer and more complex word. The basic verb form is *λαμβάνω* (*lambano*), and means “to take.” To that verb is attached a prefix—anti—which means “in place of.” But there is another prefix attached—sun—



which means “together with.” It is not really translatable directly into English. However, it suggests that the Holy Spirit takes up our burden, in our stead, but together with us. It is like the child who carries a load with the father, but takes a small corner of it, while the father bears the main load. The Holy Spirit shares our burdens with us and carries the heavy end, but gives us the sense that we are participating with Him.

There is a continuous process within us of communication between God and the Holy Spirit. We are not always aware of it, but it is there, nevertheless. It is this energy flow between God and His Spirit that sustains us moment by moment in our sojourn upon the earth.

**We know not what we should pray for...** Who ever really knows how to pray—what to ask for? This is where human trust falters. How do we really know what God wants to do? Those who are convinced that they really know what God wants are presumptuous. Who can read the mind of God? The prophet says, “*Who knoweth the mind of the Spirit?*” So prayer is not really redirecting God’s thinking or actions, but being conformed by His Spirit, to do what He wants. So prayer becomes a process of interaction with God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is not a question of telling God what He must do, but coming to grips with what He feels we must do.

There is a continual communion that exists between God and the Holy Spirit, within our spirits. It is perhaps akin to the alter of incense in the tabernacle, or the continual burnt offering.

**With unvoiced sighs...** The Greek word στεναγμος (*stenagmos*), is used of gentle zephyrs. It is like our breath. Since our spirit possesses the Spirit of Christ, it is

almost as if praying is for the believer something akin to breathing. Tennyson caught the spirit of this so graphically in his famous lines:

“Speak to Him then for He  
heareth,  
And Spirit with spirit doth meet.  
Closer is He than breathing;  
Nearer than hands or feet.”

Prayer is certainly not a matter of calling up to God in Heaven or calling Him down from Heaven. Some people seem to think there is a direct ratio between noise and Divine attention. (I sometimes imagine Jesus standing in the midst of some prayer meetings with His fingers in His ears.) I don’t know where people think Christ is. To the Romans, Paul says, “*Who shall ascend into heaven? That is, to bring Christ down. Or who shall descend into the abyss? That is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say?—The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.*” (Romans 10:6-8) So Christ is but a breath away. He responds to our sighs and our tears; to our thoughts and fears; He knows what we have need of even, before we ask Him.

*Then why pray?*

It is certainly not to inform God of what He already knows, or to convince Him of changing what He already plans. Prayer is not a matter of bringing our “shopping list” to God. As the text says, we do not know what to ask for. How do we know what God thinks is best for us? As the Holy Spirit initiates prayer in us, we direct it to God. Thus prayer is something of a cyclical process. It is initiated by the Holy Spirit, and returned to God by the same Spirit. We simply participate in the process and are, thus, brought into harmony with what God wants.

*Then is every prayer we offer automatically what we are supposed to pray for?*

It is really not so much what we pray for, but that we pray. We make our human utterances, which may or may not be all that valid in themselves, but the Holy Spirit extracts from our utterances that which is valid. The fact that we care to pray is the key. If the Spirit were not in us, we would not care to pray.

*Then is everyone who prays directed by the Spirit of God?*

By no means. Prayer has a wide variety of meanings. It is a common religious exercise, germane to every religion in one way or another. Only the prayers that are directed to the true God can be said to be initiated by His Holy Spirit.

*But how do we know who is praying to the true God and who isn't?*

We don't. Even among those who call themselves Christians. Only God knows those who are truly His. It is not for us to judge who is praying appropriately and who isn't.

*Then how do we know we are praying appropriately?*

You know because you want to pray to the true God, as revealed to you in the scriptures. You are not directing your prayers to the pantheon of gods; or some pagan deity; or a universal "divine principal." The Spirit of Christ within you reaches out to the true God; and the fact that we reach out to Him is the guarantee of His presence within us. Jesus said, "No man comes to me except the Father Who sent Me draw him." (John 6:44) So prayer is simply a matter of being in the flow of the Spirit of God, and participating with

Him in His purposes for our lives. As you go forth in the morning, pray that the Lord will see to it that you have the fulfillment of His purpose for you in that day, and that you have the grace to handle what takes place. Pray for the people whom the Lord has laid on your heart, and commit them to His care. If you have special needs, speak to Him about them and ask Him to do what He wishes, and to bring you into harmony with His desires.

*But can we always be sure that we are praying the way He wants us to?*

No, you can't be sure of anything except that you are His and He is hearing you. He simply takes your prayers and translates them into His purposes. He listens to your heart and not your head.

Prayer is certainly not "getting things from God." How would you feel as a parent if you overheard your children asking one another, "What have you gotten from mom and dad today?" Or even worse, "What have mom and dad done for you today?" The point is obvious. We must simply realize that we are in the flow of God. We are in constant communion with Him and we share with Him, our lives.

*If the Holy Spirit knows the "mind-set" of the human spirit, why does He have to search it?*

**He that searches the heart knows what is the mind-set of the spirit...**

Actually, it is more of a probe to disclose to the human spirit what is there, rather than an investigation to find out for Himself. It is akin to David's cry, in Psalm 139—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts." The first verse of the Psalm says, "Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and

*mine uprising and understandest my thoughts afar off.”*

*So if the Spirit already knows David’s heart, why then does He ask for the search in the last verse?*

He is asking for a disclosure to himself, and an appeal to be led aright. In the early part of chapter 8, Paul talks about the “mind-set” of those who have the Spirit in them. He uses the same word here and says that the Holy Spirit knows the “mind-set” of the human spirit and probes the heart, not to determine for Himself what is there, but rather to disclose to us what is there.

**He meets God on behalf of the saints...** The word “intercession” has become something of a catchword in Christendom that is used rather carelessly. To intercede really means to be something of a “go-between.” The word can be more graphically translated by “meet.” The Holy Spirit meets God on our behalf. He is the continual go-between for us, with God.

Prayer has a much broader meaning than merely asking God for things, and thanking Him when He gives them. Some people go so far as to keep a diary, listing things they asked for and when they receive them. This kind of an approach suggests that the essence of prayer is getting and receiving. It also suggests that there can be a direct connection between a given request and a given response. The truth of the matter, is that we do not always know what God is doing with our lives. God’s response to us is very complex. Sometimes we know when requests are granted and sometimes we don’t. Sometimes God’s response involves different facets that are not directly connected with a given request. It is better to understand prayer as a process

involving many different kinds of response and expressions, but chiefly a matter of bringing our thoughts and purposes into harmony with God’s.

**To those who love God...** This phrase has caused much confusion and distress among the believers. But it is easily resolved with an understanding of the word “love.” Most people assume that the word love involves some kind of emotional response. In this respect, it would certainly be difficult to determine just how much we do love God. But the Greek word here is *agape*, and involves caring or concern or respect. Where affection is involved, another word is used—*phile*. Do you care about God? If you didn’t, you wouldn’t be reading this commentary. Our love or caring for God is a product of the Holy Spirit within us, and has little to do with our fleshly emotions.

*But don’t we or shouldn’t we feel things for God?*

There is, of course, nothing wrong with feeling things for God. But we must understand that human feelings are very unreliable and vacillating. The truth, is that we care about God, even when our emotions are uncertain. And, of course, it would be quite impossible for us to measure the quantity or quality of our feelings. Since *agape* love is a product of the Holy Spirit, it is always constant, no matter what the expressions of the flesh might be. Many times human beings do not like what God is doing, simply because they don’t understand it. It is, of course, like children who do not understand their parents. The human feelings of Christians for God, may not be any more reliable than the feelings of children for parents. But the love of Christ in our spirits goes quite beyond our fleshly emotions. So at the outset, we must establish the point that all who

have Christ within them do love God in, the sense of verse 28.

**To those who are the called ones according to His purpose...** Once again, we have a problem with the phrase—“called ones.” Many leaders in the church, like the Pharisees of old, are all too quick to levy guilt. Perhaps it is because they need the leverage to accomplish their programs. The questioning usually runs something like this—“Are you really living according to God’s purpose for your life? Are you in the center of His will? Are you doing all you should for the church?” Of course, very few would be able or willing to answer “yes” to these questions. And therefore, very few would feel that they fit the conditions of Romans 8:28. And thus, they think they cannot expect God to work things out for good in their lives. This is a tragic misunderstanding of the word “called.” If you care about Christ you are a member of His body, since apart from the Holy Spirit you would not care about Christ. If you care about Christ, you are part of His church—the *ekklesia*—“the called out ones”—and you fit the category of Romans 8:28.

**According to His purpose...** Once again, we have a problem. It is assumed by many that if we are not doing exactly what God wants us to do, we cannot expect Him to work things out in our lives. The questions usually go something like this: “Are you doing exactly what God wants you to do?” “Are you fulfilling His purpose in your life?” “Are you in the center of His will?” Most people would not be able to answer these questions with

absolute certainty. Who really knows absolutely what God wants? We may have some reasonable assurance, but how does a human ever really know? But that whole issue is not what is intended here. We are dealing here, with the general purposes of God for His people. And this is something which only the Spirit of God can evolve in our lives. Hebrews 13:20, 21 clearly teaches that it is God who works out His purposes in us, and not we who determine what that purpose should be. *“The God of peace...make you perfect [restore you] to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.”* If you care about Christ, you can assume that you have His Spirit within you. If you have His Spirit within you, you can assume that He is working out in you, that which is “well pleasing in His sight.” If He is working out that which is well pleasing in His sight, you can be sure that you fit the category of Romans 8:28. You are one of the “called ones,” according to His purpose.

**He works all things together for good...** The Greek word *συνεργεω* (*sunergeo*) is the basis of our English word “synergism,” which is an integrally interacting process. The word here means more than simply cooperation or collective action. There is an intrinsic relationship involved. In other words, the forces that affect our lives are used by God to bring about within us, a living process of growth. All of that which comes from a world which has been tainted with evil is filtered by His Spirit to affect us for good, rather than evil.

# Romans 8:29-30

## TRANSLATION

*Whom He foreknew, He also preappointed to be conformed to the image of His Son, to the end that He may be the first begotten among many brethren. And whom He foreordained, these also He called; and whom He called, these also He justified; and whom He justified, these also He glorified.*

## COMMENTARY

### **The Permanence of God's Purposes for His People**

There have been many centuries of controversy over this most profound subject. In part, the controversy has been due to human definitions and designations. In part, it has been due to the inability of the human mind to grasp completely what God has in His mind. If the church would accept the limitations of human thought, and assume that we are all ultimately after the same end—to understand what God wants—we might be able to live in harmony together in spite of our differences of theological opinion. The idea that one group of Christians is more spiritual than another or more knowledgeable than another, is pretty narrow thinking.

So why do we differ? We differ because we are human. Over many decades of ministry I have known people on both sides of these controversies who are equally sincere; equally open to Christ; equally knowledgeable. But the truth is, we see things from different perspectives. Those that are bold and *blasé* about their relationship to Christ, may need something of the humbling warning. Those who are shy and timid and anxious,

need a stronger assurance as to their security in Christ. In fact, the multitude of different gatherings of believers may have something to do with the same thing. People's needs are different. What satisfies one type of personality in terms of worship and application of truth, may not satisfy the needs of another group of people. The truth of God is certain and changeless; the application of that truth may vary with the situation.

The controversy we are discussing here, of course is the sovereignty of God versus the free will of man. To what degree are we humans really free to choose, and to what degree does God exercise sovereignty over His world? It is unlikely that humans will ever fully understand this. They haven't for 2,000 years; it is unlikely that they will now. There is a very fine line between what God can choose to allow in the way of human decisions. There can be no freedom of will, of course, where His ultimate purposes may be frustrated. The question is what are the purposes that are so fixed? That is something we will never really be able to determine. The answer lies somewhere

between His design for His world, and the freedom of humans to choose their own personal destiny. Jesus said to the disciples, *“Whosoever will, let him come unto me.”* He also said, *“If any man will to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.”* This, and a number of other scriptures indicate that human beings do have in some respect, a freedom to choose, otherwise there would be no point in the various injunctions in scripture that motivate people to make the right choices.

On the other hand, there are many texts that indicate that God does what He will in the affairs of men, and none can stay His hand. On the personal level, Paul spoke of having been called from his mother’s womb. And to Jeremiah the prophet, who complained of his inadequacy, God said, *“I knew you when you were in your mother’s womb.”* (Jeremiah 1:5) So apparently there were some whom God had anointed before they were born. Jacob, of course, is a classic case in point of God’s election by sovereign decree. And Paul makes a point of the fact that he had done neither good nor bad. We may have to simply hold the two ideas in our minds as equally valid and await the resolution of the problem until we finally “know as we are known.” The eastern philosophers seem more open to this than the western thinkers. To the western philosopher, everything needs to be tied in a neat package. Imagine a triangle with two legs that are far apart, which may not be joined together until infinity. So, on the one hand, we assume that God is infinite and omnipotent. On the other hand we assume that He has given to His creatures enough free will that, they are not simply puppets or marionettes. We may just have to be content to leave it that way until we have come to our glorified state. When it comes to the understanding of God, it is quite respectable to say, “I don’t know.”

**Whom He foreknew...** This is a very interesting word, especially when seen in the light of God’s attitude toward Jacob. In Romans 9, God is quoted as having said, *“Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated.”* In a brief statement here, since we will be dealing more extensively with it in chapter 9, the essence of the declaration is not a matter of the emotions, but of the will. Basically, He was saying that He had accepted Jacob and rejected Esau, in terms of a future covenant relationship with His people. He was only rejecting Esau in an administrative sense. Esau certainly would not have been excluded from relating to God in a personal way. Similarly, Jacob was accepted by God, for the purpose of establishing the nation of Israel. It was a love of acceptance and caring. In Chapter 11, Paul will say, *“God has not cast off His people whom He foreknew.”* Thus, the connection between foreknowing and foreloving. The word “knowing,” in Hebrew is **יָדָע** (*yada*), which is sometimes used in a far more personal way than mental cognition. Thus, in Genesis 4:1, it says that Adam *“knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore Cain.”* The word is used in that intimate sense rather often in the Old Testament. This suggests that there was a personal side to the use of the word “to know.”

Thus, when Paul speaks of “foreknowing,” He is suggesting that God had established, even before the world began, a purpose to create a family of human beings who would be related to Him in a very personal way. In Ephesians 1:5, Paul speaks of this relationship in terms of adoption, and indicates that such a relationship had been planned before the foundation of the world.

**He also preappointed to be conformed to the image of His Son...**

Here is the word that has been the crux of controversy for centuries. The theologians have used the word “predestination,” and it has become one of the catchwords of Christian doctrine that has been used widely and carelessly, but which few people really understand. The Greek word is προορίζω (*prooridzo*), which means “to decide or determine beforehand.” It does not have the irrevocable force of the theological usage of “predestination.” In Ephesians 1:5, Paul says, “*Having preappointed us unto adoption through Jesus Christ, unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.*” That is to say, He had predetermined that those who would be His people under the new covenant, would be in a relationship of adoption. He is not saying that each individual is chosen beforehand either to be adopted or not.

**To be conformed unto the image of His Son...** Having determined before the foundation of the world that He would establish a family, whose relationship to Him would be a personal one and a legal one, He further indicates that this family would be in the likeness of His Son. John makes a very clear statement of this in his first epistle—“*It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” (1 John 3:3) Not only is our relationship a personal one; and not only a legal one; but also a genetic one. We have taken on the spiritual nature of Christ, inasmuch as we have been born again by His Spirit. So this is not an injunction by Paul that we ought to be like Christ, but a statement of fact that we are like Christ in our spiritual nature.

**Whom He preappointed, them He also called...** As we suggested earlier, all who are saved are also “called according to His

purpose.” That, of course, is the meaning of *ekklesia*. This whole passage is not referring to very special or very “spiritual” people, who are given a very special place. All who are believers have entered into a relationship to God, which was predetermined before the foundation of the world. They have been called according to God’s purpose, and they have been imbued with the very nature of Christ.

**Whom He called, them He also justified...** Those who are adopted and called are, *de facto*, justified. This has been Paul’s message throughout the Epistle to the Romans. And thus, those whom He is describing here, are those whom He has been discussing in the previous chapters.

**And whom He justified, them He also glorified...** According to this entire passage, one’s glorification is as certain as one’s justification. One’s justification is as certain as one’s calling. One’s calling is as certain as God’s commitment to establish a family; adopt them; and imbue them with the Spirit and nature of Christ. This entire process was established in the reaches of eternity past when the purposes of God evolved into a determination to bring into being a host of humans who would be very like Himself, and to Whom He could relate on a personal basis for the ages of eternity. Moreover, He decreed that “*Whosoever would call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” (Acts 2:21) And thus, “to call upon the name of the Lord,” is to enter a process which ultimately will result in one’s glorification. To ask if one’s behavior can reverse that process, is to beg the question. One calls on the Lord because one’s behavior cannot merit salvation.

## Romans 8:31-39

### TRANSLATION

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up on behalf of us all, how shall He not, with Him, also give us freely all things? Who shall bring charges against God's elect? It is God Who justifies. Who is He that condemns us? It is Christ Who died, indeed, rather has been raised, Who also is at the right hand of God, and Who meets God on our behalf. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ—affliction or pressures or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written:*

*For thy sake we are killed all the day, we  
are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

*But in all these things we are more than conquerors through the One Who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things standing now, nor things about to be, nor power, 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.*

### COMMENTARY

#### **Partakers of the Nature of God and of His Destiny Forever**

We have not merely joined a club of the religious elite. We have become children of God through adoption, and we have become partakers of His nature by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. We have a new nature—God's nature. We are no longer "flesh-beings"; we are "spirit-beings." We cannot be severed on the basis of a legal adoption; we are part and parcel of God. As the child by natural birth can never be denied His genetic

heritage, so those who have been made part of God by rebirth can never be denied their integral connection with God. We can be disciplined and instructed, but never denied our new nature—never recalled, as spirit beings.

The alienation that some people feel and talk about, is never really from God's point of view. It is strictly a human feeling, as when one is disobedient to



parents, one feels alienated from them. There is a popular, but quite appropriate, saying—"If you feel alienated from God, guess who moved?" It is not at all of the nature of God to abandon His children when they are in trouble. Do you think Christ is so fickle that He will back away from you when you need Him most? The misdeeds of God's family reflect human weakness, and not revolt against God. The proof of the unbroken connection is that we do not want an unbroken connection. The phrase "out of fellowship" is of human origin, and belongs in the pit whence it came. Because of it, many Christians plagued with human weakness, have failed to get the help they need from Christ, Who alone can help them, because they assume that they were cut off from Him and not worthy of His help. It is the old Pharisaical assumption that membership in the family of God is based on performance, and not upon the creative act of the Holy Spirit.

**If God is for us, who is against us?** In a certain sense, we really have no enemies, because in the eternal purposes of God the enemies are already vanquished. As prisoners of time and space, our enemies are only illusions. In the famous story of "Ben Hur" by Lew Wallace, Ben Hur is the protagonist and Massala is the antagonist—the enemy. Massala, as a Roman official, has wreaked total desolation on the house of Hur. Ultimately, Ben Hur meets him in a chariot race. In the course of the race, Massala falls from his chariot and is caught under the horse's hooves. So emaciated is the lower portion of his body, that much must be amputated. Ben Hur goes to see him in the infirmary, and Massala greets him with the line, "Behold your enemy." Ben Hur counters by saying, "I see no enemy." In other words, so devastated has Massala become, that he

is no longer an enemy. So devastated has Satan become, in the eternal purposes of God, that he really is no longer an enemy. We only perceive him to be an enemy in our time/space capsule. However ferocious may be his appearance, he is ultimately chained to the abyss.

**How shall He not, with Him, also give us freely of all things...** The Greek word for "give" is *χαριζομαι* (*charidzomai*). It does not mean simply to make a gift, but to give in great abundance. It is like a river of Divine benevolence. As children of God, all that is in the universe is ours. Someday its import will be understood by us. As Paul said earlier, "*The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.*" When we are balancing out the evils of the world against the rationale of God's creation, remember this: So great is the glory that, whatever the cost, it will be perceived by us as worth it. *Charidzomai* really implies a flow of Divine benevolence—a river of God's love. We are not dealing here with a reluctant acceptance of fallen humanity, by a patient and tolerant Deity. We are talking about an all-emcompassing flow of God's love and grace toward those who are the victims of this wretched world.

**Who shall bring charges against God's elect?** It is God Who made us; it is God Who presided over our devastation; it is God Who alone can evaluate and expiate the human condition. But humans are so quick to judge and so slow to understand all the implications. Jesus was moved to say, "*Judge not that ye be not judged.*" And Paul says, "*Judge not one another...I judge not myself.*" We are as likely to be biased in our judgment of ourselves as we are in our judgment of others—and, of course, as ignorant of the true facts.

Not only did Christ die for us, but also sees to our daily well-being by meeting God for us, through the intercession of the Holy Spirit Who is dwelling within us.

**What shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Once again, in consideration of the human flesh, it is not to say that these things would not cause us to feel separated. How often the question—why? How often the resentment that Christ has allowed these factors in our life? How devastated we feel in the wretchedness of our pressures and persecutions and perils, but none of these do separate us. They may seem to separate us, and our attitudes may seem totally unworthy, and we are sometimes ashamed of our behavior; but none of these things do, in fact separate us. God does not turn His back on us like some petulant overlord, even in our human resentment. His love is never diminished. *“He loved us with an everlasting love.”* It may not seem that He loves us when He allows circumstances to overwhelm us. But He is not like the indulgent earthly father, who is more concerned with the surface feelings and benevolence than with the ultimate implications of life. How often parents indulge their children with earthly sentimentality and contribute, rather, to their own destruction.

**We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter...** In Satan’s world, God’s children will never find true comfort. They are in a hostile environment. They are like a human who is underwater without equipment God provides the apparatus that helps us to survive in this hostile world. Without it, we would perish. And without the constant vigilance of Christ, Satan would surely destroy all of the people of God, if he

could. Don’t look for benevolence from Satan’s people. To whatever degree he can, Satan will try to keep God’s people from prospering in his [Satan’s] world. And so, we depend upon Christ to preserve us. And preserve us He does. However, the preservation of our spirits may entail some stress in the flesh. Jesus said, *“If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also.”* If we are Christ’s, we must bear with Him the cross of crucifixion. This world is hostile to us. Only Christ can cause His people to survive.

**For I am persuaded that neither death nor life...nor any other creation...** This is our Father’s world. He has made it all. He will not let anything in this world adversely affect His people. *“He makes the wrath of man to praise Him.”* In God’s eternal province, nothing can affect His ultimate purposes for us. Satan constantly frightens us with illusions and threats and the roaring of the lion, but that is all that Satan can do—intimidate us with illusions. None of it is real. Every adversity that comes to us is an effort of Satan to discourage, dishearten, deter, and overwhelm us. Our job is merely to “stand fast.” We don’t have to fight the devil, or move ahead in spite of him, or defeat him—only “stand fast.” We humans have no power against Satan. Only God can defeat him. Therefore, all the religious activities and exercises and fervency can never defeat Satan, Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—believe it. Satan will not be defeated by our shouts of victory and determinations and vows and promises and perseverance. He will only be defeated by the power of Christ. So when he comes around—turn him over to Christ.

# Romans 9:1-9

## TRANSLATION

*I speak the truth in Christ—I do not lie—my inner consciousness witnessing together with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great stress and ceaseless pain in my heart. For I could wish myself put away from Christ for the sake of my brethren—my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites; whose is the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the worship elements, and the promises, whose are the fathers and of whom is Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all things—God blessed forever, Amen.*

*And it is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all who are out of Israel [Jacob] are Israel; neither that they who are the seed of Abraham are all children but, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” That is, not the children of the flesh are these children of God, but the children of promise are reckoned for a seed. For this is the word of promise, “According to the appointed time [the time of conception], I shall come, and there shall be to Sarah a son.*

## COMMENTARY

### **The Mystery of Divine Election**

Paul is suffering deeply for his people. It is not an act or a moment of unbridled emotion. It is a ceaseless and unassuaged sorrow concerning the plight of his kinsmen. He makes some very bold statements later on in this section of the epistle relative to the universal recovery of Israel, and yet there are elements here which cause him great distress. It might be assumed that if he knew with certainty that there would in time be a complete recovery, he might not be so deeply concerned. But there are obviously some serious problems along the way. Very soon, he will express one of the greatest enigmas which the followers of

Christ have faced for many centuries—if God hardens the heart and blinds the eyes, as is plainly stated regarding Israel, how can God find fault with those who are the progeny of the perpetrators of this apostasy, and therefore innocent victims? This question was, in fact, put to Paul, and his response is confessedly and strangely unenlightening, if not brittle and unsympathetic. “Who can argue with God?” We will have to examine this a bit later, and cannot ignore it.

But first, we must set the stage. Chapters 9 to 11 in Romans, deal primarily with Israel. This must be understood at each

point in the exegesis of the section. If we pick verses at random and apply them universally, we run the risk of pulling them out of context.

Unfortunately, this is a common practice and brings about great confusion in the body of believers.

*But isn't all of the Bible for all of us?*

Yes and no. There is a certain sense in which all of it is instructive to us as we use analogies and symbols and types. For example, all of the instructions regarding Jewish worship are instructive to us symbolically, as types of Christ. On the other hand, we do not make direct application as far as our own practices are concerned. Similarly, the warnings and promises to Israel and the prophets, are instructive in terms of God's general attitudes and purposes in the world are concerned, but cannot always be directly applied. For example, in II Chronicles 7:14, there is a promise to Israel about her ultimate recovery. *"If My people which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."* But any attempts to apply this promise to modern-day revival hopes in America are misguided, since we cannot be identified as "the people of God called by His name." Furthermore, while we may have much to be forgiven for in our history, the special promise of "healing the land," was only given to Israel.

While there may be many statements in Romans 9 to 11, which could be beneficial to everyone, the first step in unravelling the enigma, is the recognition that this passage is primarily regarding Israel.

If we apply this principle to the whole

passage, we have a broad scenario of God's people afflicted with universal blindness and hardness of heart, so that they cannot come to the truth on a national level. (It is obvious that a remnant will be able, nevertheless, to turn to Christ.) This condition will exist "until the fullness of the Gentiles come in." Ultimately, the blindness and hardness will be removed and Israel will turn to God as a nation. These facts are fairly clear and fairly well accepted. The thorny questions have to do with the culpability of the victims of this judgment; the duration of time; and the extent of the recovery. Perhaps the most difficult of the questions is the one Paul himself raises—How can God blame anyone for His own decree?

We will proceed to examine the text in detail, and then in the end, draw our conclusions.

**My inner consciousness bearing witness in the Holy Spirit...** The Greek word here—συνειδησις (*suneidesis*)—refers to a coming together of knowledge so as to form a concept. The young people have an expression—"Getting one's head together"—which is not bad. In psychology, we call it "integration"—the mind interpreting the data of a sensory experience. For Paul, this feeling about his people, Israel, came as a result of a stirring of the Holy Spirit within him. It was not merely a human feeling of sympathy for an oppressed people.

**I could wish myself put away from Christ...** Shades of Moses! While Moses was on the mount, getting from God the most basic charter of the nation of Israel, the people were down on the plains engaging in a most wretched form of idolatry. So happy had been the Egyptians at losing the "pesky" Hebrews (*Habiru*), that they wanted to expedite

their going by giving them a large amount of jewels and other treasures. These the people took and melted down, and made from them the infamous “golden calf.” When Moses came down from the mount and saw it, he dashed the precious stone tablets on the ground in violent outrage. He returned to the mount in great despair. God said to him in effect, “Forget these people; they are hopelessly rebellious. Come with me and I will make you a new nation.” Moses responded, in effect, “No way. If you don’t bring these people along, I’m not going. And if you don’t forgive them, blot me also out of your book.” In effect, Paul is saying the same thing.

**I could wish myself put away from Christ on behalf of my brethren...** He is really not saying here that if it would help to save them, he would agree to be put away from Christ. He is saying the same thing as Moses said, *“If You are going to cast off Your people, then let me be cast off with them.”* Paul reminds God that from His own hand, His people have received adoption, and glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the worship and the promises. Even Christ has come to them as their progeny in a human process. How can God cast them out? This whole scenario of Paul’s intercession for the people gives us a major clue to the ultimate meaning of chapters 9 to 11. There is a rather strong attitude among many Christians today, that in one stroke God totally obliterated His relationship to Israel; and Himself turned instead, to bestow all of His benevolence upon the Gentiles. Paul points out here, that given the whole range of God’s election and love and gifts to Israel, He would not cast them off forever. And that, too, is one of the clues as to the impact of this section of Romans.

**It is not such a thing that the word of**

**God has fallen down...** Here again, Paul stresses the fact that if Israel is utterly abandoned, it would be in many respects, a reflection on the reliability of the promises of God. The truth of the matter is, that the name Israel is not directly applied to all who have some genetic connection to Jacob. Of course the name Israel was the one given to Jacob after God had entered into a special covenant relationship with him. Thus, the children of Israel are really the children of Jacob.

**Neither is it true that because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children...** The promise to Abraham was that his seed would be as the stars of the heavens and the sands of the seashore—numberless. On the other hand, Paul makes it clear that not everyone who is of Abraham’s seed, is a child of Abraham. The point is made that “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Ishmael, who was a child of Hagar and of Abraham’s seed, was therefore, regarded not as a child of Abraham, but merely one coming from his loins. This has been the essence of the age-long conflict between the Arabs and the Jews. The Arabs, of course, are descendants of Ishmael, the son of Hagar. They claim the land of Palestine as their proper birthright. But God declared plainly that only the progeny of Isaac, who was the son of promise, would be the rightful heirs. It is quite likely that Abraham’s involvement with Hagar, not really unacceptable by the standards of the day, was not, nevertheless, in the will of God. He had obviously become impatient, as had Sarah, who urged him to take Hagar. Interestingly enough, in Hebrews 11 it is said that Sarah bore a child by faith, being persuaded of the promise of God. The fact is that she became quite impatient and even had laughed at the original promise. This gives us an insight into faith that

indicates that faith is a matter of the Spirit, energized by God, and is not dependent upon human, fleshly attitudes or actions. According to Hebrews 11, the child came by faith; but it was God's faith at work in Sarah, and not her own human feelings of trust or confidence.

It is further important to understand that the promise of God to Abraham, included not only his own progeny, but also a much wider involvement in "all the nations of the earth." Actually, the word for nations is *Goyim*, and is the term applied to the Gentiles.

And so we must conclude that the promises made to Israel have not, in any way, been rescinded. In the first place, the term Israel is applied in a much broader sense than those who are strictly the seed of Isaac. But in another sense,

not all of those who are of the seed of Abraham are children of promise. All this excludes the descendants of Ishmael (the Arabs) as the children of promise, and includes the Gentiles who become believers, as heirs together with the descendants of Isaac, of the promises made to Abraham when he first arrived in Palestine. Thus, the Gentiles are heirs of Abraham; but not the Ishmaelites. That would not, of course, exclude individual descendants of Ishmael from becoming members of God's family. Nothing that is said in Romans 9, really excludes anyone on a personal basis from identifying with God. It is all administrative in application. The Ishmaelites are not included in the prophecy that all Israel shall be saved; and yet many descendants of Ishmael have become part of God's family.

# Romans 9:10-18

## TRANSLATION

*And not only so, but also Rebecca having conceived of one, Isaac, our father; for [Jacob and Esau] not yet having been born nor having practiced good or evil, in order that the purpose of God may stand according to election, not of works, but of the One Who calls, it was said to [Rebecca] that, “The greater shall serve the lesser,” even as it has been written—*

*“Jacob have I loved,  
Esau have I hated [rejected].”*

*What then shall we say? There is not unrighteousness with God, is there? God forbid [let it not be so]! For to Moses He said—“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; I will show favor to whom I will show favor.”*

*Therefore then, it is not the one who wills nor the one who runs, but God Who shows mercy. For the Scriptures said to Pharaoh, “For unto this end I have raised you up so that I may show forth in you My power and so that I may declare My name in all of the land. Therefore then, He shows mercy to whom He will, and whom He will, He hardens.”*

## COMMENTARY

### **Jacob and Esau—Endless Enigma**

So now we have the classic story of Jacob and Esau. If it is an age-old saga, it is also an age-old enigma. It troubles us to this day, especially in America where we are obsessed with the idea of fairness (although not too consistent in our personal practice of it), nor does Paul really satisfy us much in his discussion of the problem. His infuriating tendency is always to leave matters to Divine

wisdom. We do not let God off so easy (or so easily). We westerners have a difficult time admitting that there is anything that might be beyond our capacity to understand. The Oriental mystic is more philosophical about it all, being able to hold two seeming opposites at the same time. But let us examine the story of Jacob and Esau and see what may be in it of clues to God's purposes.

Isaac was, of course, the son of promise. Despite Abraham's impatience and errancy, God finally fulfilled His promise and brought Isaac into being and into the process of redemption. His wife, Rebecca, was chosen under Divine direction. To Isaac and Rebecca were born a set of twins. He was to be the father of the one who would be the father of the nation of Israel. The selection of parents must be precise; the genes predetermined. The purpose of God would stand purely on the basis of election and not on any human merit. There is no question but that the progenitors of God's family had to be preestablished by God. Nothing could be left to chance. It must be absolutely understood here, that we are dealing with a special administrative function and not establishing general principles. To presume from this historical event that all persons on earth are predetermined to salvation or damnation is a *non sequitur* of the most serious inconsistency. That is to say, that it does not follow that because God functioned thus in the establishing of the race, He so functions in the process of redemption. God would fashion His people along carefully prescribed lines. It was necessary that the genes of the progenitor would be in keeping with His purpose. It was fundamentally a physical matter and not a spiritual one. Redemption is a process of the spirit and not the flesh.

In the same respect, God made an administrative decree relative to the position of each, in the economy of the Divine redemption. We must always distinguish between that which is of an administrative nature, and that which is a matter of personal salvation. Chapters 9 through 11 of Romans, have to do with God's Divine purposes relative to the nation of Israel. They are not to be

applied to the issues of personal salvation. This is the point at which we find a significant solution to the problem of the potter and the clay. Who indeed can reply against God in terms of what He does with His world and His universe?

Though Esau was technically the firstborn. Jacob ultimately evolved as the chosen of God to be the father of His family. A choice was made prior to any kind of personal conduct that would have given one the advantage over the other. If anything, Jacob was really the least likely to be the chosen one of God. There was in him a certain deceptive spirit, which God had to deal with later.

The most celebrated episode that reflects this contrary spirit is one in which he conspired with his mother, Rebecca, to deceive Isaac who, would have given his irrevocable blessing to Esau, all things being equal. It is interesting to note at the first, that Rebecca was, as a matter of fact, herself a specially chosen vessel. It is one of those inscrutable realities, not uncommon in the Bible, that those who had been chosen of God for very special purposes are nonetheless typically flawed human beings. The list is endless. Rebecca joins it. So anxious was she to see to it that Jacob (perhaps her favored son) would receive the blessing from Isaac that she was willing to engage in an act of unvarnished dishonesty. In fact, this mother draws her own son into it with her. The story is detailed in Genesis 25 and 27. Isaac fell for the trick and gave to Jacob the blessing, which he could not rescind. It is certainly true that God would have provided this birthright for Jacob in some other way. It is not likely that God would use dishonesty to accomplish His purpose. Jacob fled from his outraged brother and began a series of episodes that reflected some of the weaknesses of his nature. Nevertheless,



in the midst of Jacob's earthly and questionable sojourn. God still accomplished through him, His basic purpose of establishing a nation. Who knows why God operates in this way. But it is certainly a reality in the scripture that its chief characters are not whitewashed. This is one of the things that substantiates the veracity of the scripture—we are not dealing with myths and legends.

**Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated [rejected]...** This brings us to the central point of the story of Jacob and Esau. In an administrative decree, Jacob was elected to be the father of the nation of Israel. The precise reason for that election completely escapes us, nor is it profitable to speculate. The words "love" and "hate" are not, in any sense, an emotional interaction. It would be better to say "accepted" and "rejected." The Hebrew scholars who translated the text into Greek, in a volume known as the Septuagint, used the Greek word *agape* for love, which was the same word used by Jesus when He suggested that we love our enemies. As we have said many times, the word simply means consideration as a human being. The word "hate" is the same word Jesus used when He said that one must "hate" one's parents and follow Him. It is obvious that Jesus was not contradicting His injunction to love even one's enemies. He is rather, saying that, if it comes down to it, one must be willing to leave or set aside one's parents in order to follow Him. As we have continually stated, this election of Jacob over Esau was strictly an administrative act, and had as much to do with genetic factors as with spiritual factors. It is certainly not likely that God would have rejected any effort on the part of Esau, for example, to come to Him on a personal basis.

**There is not injustice with God is there? God forbid!** Paul anticipated that such a statement would surely bring questions—if God's dealings with Jacob and Esau were purely on the basis of election, and not connected with the merit or virtue of either, would not God be shown to be unjust? The answer is a resounding—"No indeed!" The phrase *μη γενοιτο* (*me genoito*), would be literally translated, "Let it not be so." However, the phrase really appeals to God to verify the prohibition. Hence, the translation—"God forbid!" It is somewhat akin to our English expression—"As God is my witness." Paul assures us that God is not unjust. But can he really demonstrate the truth of that statement? Seen through human eyes, it would seem to be a gross injustice. Then Paul appeals to the episode of God's giving of the Law the second time. Moses had gone back up to the mount to plead the case of his brethren before God, and vowed that unless God Himself would go with him and his people, he would not go. In this dramatic scene, God reveals Himself to Moses in a most unusual way, and bids him make two more tables of stone. God descends once more in a cloud, and this time gives the Law to Moses again, in a context of mercy. The Jews had demonstrated their human propensity toward rebellion, and God brings forth the Law in a context of forgiveness and grace. Thus, the Law is shown to be, not a graceless code of regulations, but a gracious expression of the will of God toward His people. As Jesus would say over a thousand years later—"The essence of the Law is love." God gave the Law in His love for mankind, and not in oppression and bondage. This is evident in the episode of the revealing of God, to Moses, and the second giving of the Law. "And the Lord passed by before Him, and proclaimed, 'the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in

*goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...*” (Exodus 34:6, 7)

*But how can we regard the Law as a gift of grace?*

In the same way that you could regard the gift of a manual for the operating of your automobile, as a gift of grace. The dealer is not obligated by Law to give you such a manual. But it certainly is an important, as well as generous, gesture on his part. The analogy is weak, of course, as all human analogies are, but it makes a point that, in one sense of the word, the Law is a vital communication from God to reveal to us His will for the world in general and His creatures in particular.

**I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and grace upon whom I will have grace...** The words for mercy and grace are almost synonymous. They are an example of a Hebrew poetic device called “parallelism.” An idea is presented and then emphasized by repeating it in a slightly different way. In the original quotation in the Old Testament, the words *racham* and *chanan* are used. Technically, *racham* has more of a feeling of compassion, and *chanan* is a benevolent attitude of God toward His

creatures, and an expression of that attitude in the process of redemption. It all adds up to the idea that God does communicate with His creatures and has provided for them a way of restoration. The conclusion that Paul draws from this is that the benevolence of God toward His creatures has nothing to do with human effort or willpower. And, lest anyone should misinterpret the impact of the statement, He gives an unmistakable example in the case of the Pharaoh (probably Seti I), who released the children of Israel.

**For this cause have I raised you, up that I may show forth My power in you and declare My name in all the land...** So Paul, seeking to emphasize the point he is making, selects an episode which throws us into deeper trouble. There is no mistaking the stark reality of the illustration, especially in the statement that follows—“*Therefore then, He shows mercy to whom He will, and whom He will, He hardens.*” It is evident that Paul has made no effort whatsoever to modify the concept or justify God. What this, in itself, should indicate to us, is that where the purposes of God are concerned, we humans may find it necessary to leave it to God to defend Himself. But more in the next section.

## Romans 9:19-26

### TRANSLATION

*“You will say to me then, why does He yet blame us? For who has resisted His will?” Oh man, who indeed are you to challenge God? The thing formed shall not say to the thing that formed it, shall it, “Why have you made me thus?” Or does not the potter have power over the clay to make one vessel unto honor and one vessel unto dishonor? But what if God, willing to show His wrath and to make known His power, bore with, in much longsuffering, the vessels of wrath prepared unto destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand unto glory? To us whom also He called, not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles, as also He said, in Hosea—*

*“I will call those who are not My people, My people;  
and those who were not beloved, beloved;  
And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them,  
“You are not my people,”  
There shall they be called the children of the living God.”*

### COMMENTARY

#### **Vessels of Honor and Vessels of Dishonor**

Paul anticipates the question arising out of his former statements—“What is God doing?” Why does He blame us? Who has resisted His will? “If God has preordained everything, how can He charge us with responsibility?” Paul himself anticipates the questions and asks them, even though he obviously does not have a good answer. This is the mark of a good teacher. He is not reluctant to raise the obvious questions even though he may not know how he is going to answer them. But they have to be asked. He cannot play ostrich. Nor is he afraid to say he doesn’t know.

Where God is concerned, we must never be afraid to plead human inadequacy. For any human to assume he knows all about God is not only the height of arrogance, but also trivializes God.

**Why does He yet blame us?** This may be the most crucial question a human being can ask. If God is so unhappy with His creation, why did He make it in the first place? We didn’t ask Him to make it and we didn’t ask to come here. The question is a reasonable one. Who can really challenge the right of the created to

say, “Why did you make this place?” Why didn’t you leave us alone?

### **Who are you that challenges God?**

The answer really seems an impertinent one and not too helpful. The answer is almost in the vein of a vulgarism, “Shut up and do what you’re told.” But is it not really a natural question? On the surface, Paul’s response seems to be the very thing that infuriates children in regard to their parents. What the children really hear is—“You are of no consequence; your opinion doesn’t count.” What the parents really mean to say is that children are not always able to understand the situation. And so it is with God. We are not able to comprehend all that He is doing in the world. We do not usually like that kind of answer now as adults, any more than we did as children, but it is essentially so.

It must be understood that the seed of God is planted in a tiny pod, if you will. How can it be that humans who really represent no more than a tiny cell in the midst of the vastness of the universe, can ever really feel big enough to talk to God? It seems really absurd, if you realize the microscopic nature of the individual as compared to the universe of God. The answer lies in the Spirit. The seed of God is planted in the tiny “seed-pod” of the human. Like the mustard seed of Jesus’ parable, this minute particle becomes a great tree. The tree is really the tree of the spirit. According to David, in Psalm 1, we are “trees by the river course.” We are “God-trees”—not because we are godly or pious, but because we are made in the image of, and partake of the nature of, God. Expanding far beyond the confines of the infinitesimal human frame, the spirit does participate with and interact with the God of the universe. Our spirits, touched by the Holy Spirit, are part and parcel of God. As well might we ask how can Jesus participate with God. The

answer is obvious—possessing the Spirit of God, His earthly shell was no deterrent. But are we not in the world, “as Christ was in the world?” The earthly shell is but a temporary vehicle. It is soon to be cast off, and constitutes no hindrance to our interaction with God.

The vessels God fashions for the executing of His purpose in the world, have little to do with the realities of the Spirit of God in the universe. That Pharaoh was a human vessel, whose actions revealed the power of God, is an act of the potter and His handy work. It is not a statement relative to the ultimate meaning of the Holy Spirit. To infer from this concept that God has predisposed every spirit entity to be saved or lost, is a gross misapplication. To deduce that God would send spirits into the world to wind up ultimately in hell, would be a most heinous charge against God. It must be observed that what God is in the Spirit realm is quite different than what He does in the flesh realm. We must understand the difference between His administrative acts, and His actions with reference to individuals. The bottom line in the New Testament is—“*Whosoever will, let him come unto Me.*” If that is a rhetorical question only, circumvented by a predisposition, it would be a gross deception.

Pharaoh was an earthly vessel prepared for an earthly purpose. What the ultimate end would be of Pharaoh’s spirit, is known only to God. Why God would require such a vessel to be prepared is known also only to Him. To charge Him with playing games with the souls of men would be, on the other hand, an outrageous condemnation of God by His creatures, who do not have the capacity to make such a charge.

**I will call those who are not My**

**people, My people...** The “people of God” were those whom God had developed through the line of Jacob (or Israel) as His specially elected agents in the world. They were raised up by Him, not by any merit of their own, but by the process of Divine election. They were very proud of this heritage and designation, but they did not esteem it highly enough to guard against the loss of it. In a gross despising of it, they turned to the idols of the pagan world, among whom they had sojourned in the land of Palestine, and became outcasts from God.

Around them lived a number of people who were called the Gentiles (the *Goyim*). Everyone who was not of Israel was regarded as one of the *Goyim*. In like manner, the Greeks regarded everyone who did not speak the Greek language as Barbarians. The name itself suggests their attitude toward their speech—a guttural use of symbols (bar, bar, bar). The Israelites did not regard the *Goyim* as being savable. Hence, when the revelation of the Holy Spirit came through Paul and the apostles, the Jews had to be convinced that the Gentiles were capable of receiving it.

The prophet Hosea, a contemporary of

Isaiah (c. 750 B.C.), predicted that ultimately the Gentiles would also be brought into the grace of God and receive His salvation. They too, would become His people. Jesus said, “*Other sheep have I also, which are not of this fold. Them also, must I bring with Me that there may be one fold and one shepherd.*”

The obvious implications of passages which refer to the complete restoration of Israel, is that one day a large number of Gentiles will also share with Israel the glory of God. This is especially notable in Psalm 68. Even the Egyptians and the Ethiopians will come up to Jerusalem to worship in the new kingdom which God will establish on earth—“*A kingdom wherein dwelleth righteousness.*”

All the things which God has devised and all the vessels which He has created, will one day eventuate in the accomplishment of His purposes for His creation, both in heaven and on earth. To assume that God will ultimately wind up with a very small handful of faithful followers, is a total trivializing of His power and a misunderstanding of His glory.

# Romans 9:27-33

## TRANSLATION

*Isaiah cried on behalf of Israel—“If the number of the children of Israel should be as the sand of the sea, that which is left shall be saved; for a consummated and speedy work shall the Lord do upon the earth.” And even as Isaiah said beforehand,*

*“Except the Lord Sabaoth that left for us a seed,  
we had become as Sodom.  
And we would have been like Gomorrah.”*

*What then will we say? That the Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, received righteousness; and Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, did not attain unto the law. Why? Because it was not by faith, but as by works. They stumbled over the stone of stumbling, just as it is written.*

*“Behold I am placing in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense;  
and he who believes on it [Him] will not be without strength.”*

## COMMENTARY

### **God’s Ultimate Intention—Salvation, *En Masse***

Step by step and point by point, Paul has been building a case—God is in charge. It matters not what philosophical *badinage*—prattle—may be indulged in by the childish human fantasies. The Creator of the universe is the ultimate Controller of it. The world is but a “cosmic sandbox;” the players but children living, in a microcosm. They kick down each other’s sand castles and throw sand in each other’s faces. They scream at each other and fight and cry, but in the end, they are all prisoners of the sand pile; and their marvelous works as shifting as

the sands. Even the earthly expression of the church is but an “ecclesiastical nursery school.” Paul says we are all children, and the divisions in the church but natural fleshly weakness. So what is God up to? What is He going to do with the sandbox? And more importantly, what is He going to do with the children of the nursery schools? He’s going to save them.

*Save them all? You mean everybody in the world is going to be saved?*

Well, that's not quite true, either. There are people who don't want to be saved. That is, there are people who don't want anyone telling them what to do—even God. And there are those who are so bent on avarice and despotism that they have no place for God. Many of these despots in the world have been literal agents of Satan. The angel who was sent to deliver a message to Daniel, said that he had been hindered by the "prince of Persia." In context it is obvious that he was, himself, an agent of Satan. And so also many described in the prophets, as for example the King of Tyre. His description in Ezekiel 28 is so beyond the normal human characterizations, that he is obviously at least a type of Satan, if not the very personification of him. Obviously, they will go, as Jesus said, to the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

*So then who is going to be saved?*

I don't know. But Paul says that if those who are left on the earth be as the sands of the sea, they're going to be saved.

**If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand in the sea, the rest shall be saved...** The word *υπολειμμα* (*hupoleimma*) is often translated by "remnant." But that obscures the true meaning behind the cover of a "catch word"—"remnant." Thus the text appears to say that there will be a remnant out of that number that will be saved. But that is not what the text says. It says that the rest will be saved even if their number is as the sands of the sea.

*But isn't He talking about the children of Israel?*

Yes, that is certainly true here, but a few verses later He draws the Gentiles into it—"The Gentiles who did not pursue

*righteousness, obtained righteousness, even through righteousness which is by faith."*

*Well then, are you saying that all the Gentiles will be saved?*

Certainly not. But they will not be kept out of the kingdom because they were simply not born under the umbrella of Israel. The bottom line is that anyone who wants to be saved will be saved, even if the number should be as the sands of the sea. And that is in keeping with the power and greatness of God. It is also in keeping with a purpose that is glorious enough to offset the agonies of this wretched world.

**A complete and speedy end will I make upon the earth...** This is a very startling statement. How can Paul say speedy when it has been thousands of years? In the light of eternity, what is a thousand years? Peter says that a thousand years is but a day, in the sight of God. Actually, the earth is but a moment in time and space. In that moment, God has created and recovered a race of human beings, very like Himself, with whom He will spend eternity; and this is not going to be some "super-pious" little group sitting off in their cliques, reveling in their own perfections. Whoever makes up the earthly group, the implication is that they will be as the "sands of the sea" or, in another figure, the "stars of the heavens." If, as some believe, those who will be saved are a very small little group, one cannot avoid the implication that Satan, in effect, wins. Moreover, are all of the catastrophes and cataclysms and heartaches and sorrows of the earth worth it, if there's only going to be a very small number saved?

*But what about the statement in Acts—"There is none other name under heaven*

*given among men whereby we must be saved?"*

Well, of course, that does not really limit anything. Basically, the text is saying that whoever is saved in the world, will be saved only because of the atonement of Christ. It is never made clear in the Bible just exactly what the minimal requirements are, in terms of knowing Christ at a particular level. But whatever God's scope of grace may be, it is only possible because of the sacrifice of Christ. Remember, though, that I am not what is known as a "universalist"—that is, one who believes that everyone in the world will be saved. I have no idea what God's ultimate intention is in this regard. One thing I can safely say—The number of those who are saved will be "as the sands of the sea" and the "stars of the heavens."

**Except the Lord Sabaoth had left us a seed...** *Sabaoth* is a Hebrew word which means "hosts"—something of a limitless number. The seed is the basis of future propagation. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were totally annihilated. There was no seed left to evolve again a corrupt nation. It is very likely that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were actually a progeny of Satan. Perhaps that is why God called for the absolute annihilation of some groups. We get a hint of this in Genesis 6 where it says that the "sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they went in unto them." In other words, there was a mix of angelic beings with earth beings. It is quite likely that these beings, who have never really been properly identified, were from Satan. Angelic beings are not always from God. Satan has his angels as well. Of course, the word "angel" really means "messenger." To say that someone is an "angel" is not necessarily complimentary. But Israel was not in any way so annihilated, in

spite of their gross idolatry and apostasy. In spite of many efforts in the past to stamp out Israel, there still remains today the substantial base for a recovered people.

**The Gentiles who were not pursuing righteousness...** So now we bring the Gentiles into the orbit. The plain teaching of the scripture is that the Gentiles do come in for their part in the restoration. In fact, in Psalm 68, David foresees the leaders of Egypt and Ethiopia, and other Gentile sectors, coming up to worship at Jerusalem. Up to the time of Pentecost, many devout Jews believed that the Gentile world was not savable. It was only as the Holy Spirit ministered through Peter that it became obvious to the leaders of the church that the Gentiles, also, were granted salvation.

But in this passage, we have a strong statement by Paul confirming his message of salvation by the grace and gift of God, rather than by the keeping of the Law. The Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, were given a gift of righteousness by God. On the other hand, the Jews, who were the avid pursuers of righteousness through the Law, did not attain unto that righteousness. The Gentiles, on the other hand, not pursuing righteousness, were touched by the Spirit of God to obtain the righteousness of Christ through His indwelling presence, and experienced the righteousness which is by faith. The Jews put their weight on their ability to live up to the Law. They never did. The Gentiles did not even make a pretense of keeping the Law, and God gave to them the gift of faith, within their spirits. To this day, large groups of believers have their "formulae" for salvation—lists of steps to take and actions to perform and a will to believe; putting the fundamental base of salvation



on the capacity of the human to achieve it by willpower and performance.

**Israel, pursuing the Law of righteousness, did not attain unto the Law...** Israel was seeking the righteousness which is of the Law. They did not attain it. Paul asks, “why?” And he answers it—*“Because they sought it, not by faith but by works.”* “They sought it by human effort. They were not seeking to please God. They were seeking to show their own strength.

*But why would anyone really care about righteousness, apart from God?*

The answer is human pride. That is what motivates the dare-devils—the speedsters, the mountaineers, the aerialists. It gives one a chance to test one’s mettle.

*But what is wrong with that?*

Well nothing, really, when it is recognized as human achievement. But in religion, it can be merely self-righteousness. The Jews were the religious “dare-devils.” Their efforts did not draw them closer to God but farther away from Him in the search for human excellence. Paul said that in this respect, Christ became a stumbling block to them.

**Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone...** Isaiah had promised a Messiah Who would be “a precious cornerstone.” (Isaiah 28:16) But in another place (Isaiah 8:14), he said that this cornerstone would also be a stone of stumbling. The precious cornerstone became a stone of stumbling because it interfered with their own religious self-effort. To admit defeat and call on the Messiah was, to them, a humiliation.

When Jesus came, the Pharisees said to Him, in effect, “If you are truly a Messiah, deliver us from Rome but leave our religion alone. We are doing all right.” It is well to note here, that the Messiah they will finally accept will be a false Messiah. He will promise to resolve their national problems, but he will turn on them and seek to destroy them.

When Jesus came, He tried to show them in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, that they really needed help. They were only keeping the Law outwardly, but were decaying inwardly. He told them that they should admit they were sick and needed a physician. He offered Himself as that physician. To the Pharisees this was blasphemy; and for that they crucified Him. Thus, the precious cornerstone became the stone of stumbling.

**He that believeth on Me shall not be without strength...** The Greek word used here is often translated “ashamed.” Thus, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” Actually the word has nothing to do with embarrassment. It is the word for strength, with a negative particle in front of it—*αισχησῶ (aischuno)*. It means to be without strength. Properly translated, the verse says, *“I am not without strength in the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.”* (Romans 1:17) Here, there is also added a preposition—*kata*—which intensifies it—“I am completely strong” or “utterly able.” *“He that believeth on Me shall be utterly able.”* This had, of course, been the message of Jesus as it was with Paul. If they would admit their inability to keep the Law and turn to Christ, He would heal them, and give them the strength to trust in God.

The same message is relevant for the world today. The common message of the church today includes a number of steps that humans must first take before the

Lord will hear them. This misses the point as surely as the Pharisees missed it. What saves the church is the grace of Christ, which sees the heart of the supplicant and chalks up the inadequate human efforts to misunderstanding. There was no such escape for the Jews, because Christ had not as yet come. However, it is obvious that, had they

come in faith and humility, as did large numbers of the prophets and the people of God, they would surely have found grace in the eyes of God. The problem for the believer today, who has come with his baggage called human works, is not that he is not saved, but that he labors under a needless burden.

# Romans 10:1-4

## TRANSLATION

*Brethren, the good pleasure of my heart and my petition to God on behalf of them [Israel], is concerning their salvation. For I bear witness to them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to full knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness which is of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they are not submissive to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the consummation of the Law unto righteousness, to all who believe.*

## COMMENTARY

### No Righteousness Apart From Christ

Whatever the zeal of Israel; whatever the sincerity; whatever the assiduous effort to obtain righteousness in the Law; the rejection of Christ as the Messiah is a fatal blunder. As Peter tells his people. *“There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12) Apart from Christ, the righteousness which the Jews sought to establish, was mere paltry personal piety. It had nothing to do with the level of purity which God required of the people of earth. Only Christ possessed such purity; only Christ could fulfill God’s purpose for His creatures on the earth. only Christ could become an adequate sacrifice.

### The good pleasure of my heart...

*εὐδοκία (eudokia)* is a word of purpose, and not of emotion. Literally, it means “good thoughts.” The word “desire” implies something uncertain—“I wish it would happen.” In a certain sense, Paul is saying that the good news regarding Israel is that they are ultimately going to be recovered.

*Then why would he have sorrow for them if he knew they were going to be delivered?*

He had sorrow because he watched their suffering, even though it was suffering that they had brought upon themselves. It is like the parent who suffers over a child’s injuries, even though the injuries were brought about by some disobedience. In chapter 9, Paul says, *“I have continual sorrow in my heart.”* In chapter 10, he says, *“The good thoughts I have in my heart are that they are going to be delivered.”*

**And my petition...** Not only did Paul sorrow for his people, even though he knew there was a certainty to God’s purposes, but He also prayed to that end. Why? If he was confident that God was going to do it, why did He have to pray for it? The answer lies in an understanding of prayer that lifts it far beyond the crass simplicities of “getting things from God.” God is certainly not some “celestial shopkeeper,” filling orders on demand. Nor does He go through some

“computerized process” of plan-changing at the multiplicity of earthly whims. Rather, our prayers are more of a participation in the process of life as God directs it. It is rather, a matter of seeing that we fit into His purposes, than that He juggles His to ours. Thus, Paul had the great privilege of carrying the burden of Israel as a gift from God. According to Paul’s words to the Philippians, suffering is a gracious gift (*charisma*) from God in the effecting of His own purposes for us. This is in keeping with Paul’s words to the Romans, “*We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit joins together with us in our weaknesses with unuttered sighs.*” (8:26)

There is a constant interaction between our spirits and the Spirit of God, initiating within us the prayers that He wants us to pray. Thus, the outcome is of less significance than the process of prayer itself, where we join with God in the fulfillment of His ultimate intentions. The proof that our prayers are effective is not that we have persuaded Him to alter things, but rather, that we have clung to Him in the midst of it all.

*But what if we are distressed or anxious, or even unhappy with God?*

Remember our discussion of this point in chapter five. Our human emotions do not affect the work of God. For example the Greek word usually translated “patience,” really means “to endure.” You endure by staying with Christ in spite of it all. Patience is a human emotion that does not necessarily accompany that endurance. In time, one may learn to be more confident in what God is doing and come to greater peace about life. But remember that peace in the spirit is a constant reality that we possess with the Spirit of Christ. Peace in the spirit means that, in spite of everything, we are still at

peace with God as to the salvation of our souls.

So Paul’s petition to God, relative to Israel, had nothing to do with getting God to alter His plans for Israel, but rather, with participating with Him in the great process of His eternal redemption. It is important to understand that, when you have a burden to pray for someone, it is a great gift from God. It means that He has asked you to share with Him in the process of that person’s life. God will accomplish His purpose with Israel apart from Paul, but He put it on Paul’s heart to share with Him in the redemption of His people.

**Concerning salvation...** Not as in some translations—“That they might be saved.” Here we have a preposition of reference—*eis*—“concerning.” There are a number of passages in the scripture relative to Israel, where the translation has conveyed uncertainty rather than certainty. It is perhaps more of a theological interpretation than a philological requirement. For example, in Psalm 68:1, the common translation is, “*Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered.*” But the use of the imperfect tense in Hebrew is more properly translated—“*God shall arise, His enemies shall be scattered.*” And the rest of the Psalm fully supports this kind of certainty; so that in the end you have God ascending to His holy hill of Zion, and all the surrounding nations, including Egypt, coming to Jerusalem to worship Him.

**They have a zeal for God...** The word for zeal—*ζηλος* (*zelos*)—is from *ζεω* (*zeo*) which means to “boil,” and has to do with the human emotion of ardor, or fervency. Paul was a first-hand witness of this ardor because it had moved him to attack the followers of Jesus, Whom he considered to be an imposter and a

blasphemer against God. The leaders of the Pharisees, who would later attack Paul, were not simply zealous for God but were actually agents of Satan, who were jealous of Jesus, Who was delivering the people from their tyrannical and treacherous power. But not all of the Pharisees had this attitude. Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, was sincere in his concern and responded readily to Jesus' teaching. Paul was not so open, but when confronted with the hard facts of reality, saw the error of his ways.

**But not according to full knowledge...** The word, "knowledge"—*γνῶσις* (*gnosis*)—is intensified with a prepositional prefix. Under centuries of misguided leadership the Jews had sought to establish their own kind of righteousness. But it was a human, fleshly thing, based upon a motivation of self-glorification. There are many cultic groups today that live in a world of self-sacrifice and self-denial, and yet have no true touch with the Spirit of God. They are akin to the psychological phenomenon of "masochism," which is an obsession with self-inflicted pain and punishment. Many Christians today are victims of this phenomenon in a mild sort of way, in the acceptance of the guilt and penalties laid upon them by religious leaders. In more traumatic ways, cultic groups such as the "flagellantes" of the Philippines literally beat themselves to death in the seeking of absolution from their sins.

So it is not a mystery that large numbers of people in the world go about seeking a fleshly kind of righteousness that is based upon self-denial. As is often the case, it may have nothing to do with true devotion to God. Paul sees this as a purely fleshly thing, based upon ignorance of the true righteousness of God, to which they were not submissive.

**For the consummation of the Law is Christ...** God had made known to His people the extent of His own standard of righteousness. This was expressed, of course, in the Law of Moses. At the same time, He knew from the beginning that the nature of His creatures was such that they would never be able to fulfill that Law. Their sins had separated them from God with a crippled nature that could never bridge the chasm. The whole purpose of the Law was to make them aware of their crippled nature, and cause them to seek the healing of it. Wherever the prophets and the early leaders of the people saw this inadequacy, they were extended mercy by God. Thus Isaiah... who cried out "*I am a man of unclean lips and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*" (6:5) And David, when finally confronted with his evil, threw himself on the mercy of God, "*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*" (Psalm 51:2) David gained an insight into the issue, which brought to him not only personal forgiveness, but a message of human transgression and Divine mercy; which carried over clear through the New Testament.

And this is what redemption is all about, forever. It is not in the steps and formulae and commitments of human efforts to gain a response from God. It is rather, in the confession of one's inability to do this. In the religious formulae of salvation there is always this taint—"You must do this and this and this, first." The truth of the matter is, that we cannot do this and this and this. We can only cry for help. God responds not to vows and promises, but to a simple call for the physician. "*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*"

So the answer to the human condition is simply the acceptance of the

righteousness of Christ. No power on earth can restore fallen creatures—only the power of God, and He does it freely and instantly.

The moment of desire is the moment of

acceptance; for if the Spirit of God were not inviting us, there would be no desire.

Some have called this “cheap grace.” But we humans cannot afford cheap grace—it must be free.

# Romans 10:5-13

## TRANSLATION

*For Moses writes concerning the righteousness which is of the Law, that the person who has done them shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaks thus, "Say not in your heart, who shall ascend into heaven?" That is, to bring Christ down; or, "Who shall descend into the abyss?" That is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say?*

*"The word is near you,  
in your mouth and in your heart."*

*That is, the word of faith which we are preaching. That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes concerning righteousness, and with the mouth, one confesses concerning salvation. For the scripture says, "No one who believes on Him shall be without strength." For there is no difference between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord of all is rich unto all who call upon Him. For "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

## COMMENTARY

### Salvation Through Christ Brings Him Into Our Spirits

The Law established a relationship between God and His people, but in many respects, the chasm remained. Our interaction with God in the New Testament era is through the Spirit of Christ, Who dwells within us. The connection with God in the Old Testament, was through prophets and priests and judges. They communicated with the people the will and purpose of God. The priests offered the sacrifices that satisfied the righteous requirement of God. It was something of a caretaker

relationship, with God functioning more as Governor than Father. There was a certain kind of Fatherhood, but it consisted more of providing for the welfare of His people. They received His guidance and blessing; His provision and protection, but did not enjoy the same kind of personal relationship which we have today through the presence of His Holy Spirit. Paul sums up the nature of righteousness which was tied to the provisions of the Law, by quoting the Old Testament passage—"The person who

*does them shall live by them.*” (Leviticus 18:5) This means of course that the very life of the children of Israel was dependent upon keeping the Law. Long lists of ordinances were presented and judgment pronounced on all who violated them.

It is interesting to note that when Moses had finished giving the commandments to the children of Israel, they answered him together—“*All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.*” (Exodus 19:8) Their intentions were good, but lacking the presence of the Holy Spirit within, they were not able to satisfy the righteous requirement of God. Of course, God knew this from the beginning. Therefore He provided an elaborate system of sacrifices that would cover their human weakness. The grace of God consisted in providing a cover for their sins. The word which is translated everywhere, by “atonement,” is actually the Hebrew word **כַּפַּר** (*kaphar*), which means “to cover.” The blood sacrifice was intended to continually remind the Lord’s people that their sins called for the judgment of death, but God accepted a substitute in the form of an animal. The grace and forgiveness of God was freely given to all who sought it.

The necessity of a blood sacrifice was never rescinded. But Christ came to be the one sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Our participation in the blood sacrifice of Christ is the continual recognition that it is through Him that we have our covering. It is not necessary to remember His death in a literal observance of the sacrifice (as some do in the observance of the Mass), but merely to remember that, whenever we come to Christ for prayer or worship, it is possible only because of His sacrifice. On the other hand, Christ did entreat His disciples to remember His death in the less elaborate observance of a simple Communion (or Lord’s Supper).

The assumption that the elements of the Communion become the literal body and blood of Christ, is not substantiated by scripture, and gives rise to many problems. On the other hand, it may not be unacceptable to God, given the fact that we humans, like children, do many things that reflect our fleshly natures and our lack of the grasp of the full implications of the spirit realm. In other words, if we could receive it, the whole issue of worship, so literally observed in the Old Testament, is now resident within us and is fulfilled by Christ, Who is the fulfillment of all the types of the Old Testament observances. He is the Temple and the Sacrifice; the Priest and the Mercy Seat. Thus, the recognition of the sacrifice of Christ is a continual thing within us, as Christ is continually within us. It needs not earthly symbols and observances. But that is a level of understanding that often eludes the childish and fleshly minds of the Lord’s people on earth. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “*The kingdom of God is within you.*” His Spirit within us becomes part and parcel of our very being; and therefore, the essence of all of our worship.

To the woman of Samaria, who raised the question of where to worship, Jesus said that it was neither here nor there, but in the Spirit. “*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 4:20-24) In effect, He was saying that the fleshly side of worship—the religious exercises—were no longer the vital issue, since the coming of the Holy Spirit to establish the temple within us. The Old Testament forms of worship were, thus, a temporary substitute and, as Hebrews 10 says, “A



*shadow of things to come, but not the very image of those things.*” And thus, of course, the righteousness which we possess is not a human fleshly kind of righteousness, based upon the observance of the ordinances of the Law, but a Divine righteousness—the righteousness of Christ within us.

**Who shall ascend into heaven? Who shall descend into the abyss?** Again, we are dealing with the flesh versus the spirit. We do not have to call the Lord down out of heaven, as some earthly worshippers are prone to do. Nor do we see Him in a “séance”—to call to Him in the realm of the dead. His Spirit is within us forever (if we want Him to be). We are partakers of the very nature of God. Our spirits are part of His Spirit. In this respect, our whole life is a prayer. And our prayers are not shopping trips to the “celestial shopkeeper.” They are a matter of participating with God in the process of our lives. The Spirit within us initiates the prayers and we join with Him. Even asking for things that may appear to be fleshly or earthly and self-oriented in nature, are but childish expressions of an inner communion with God. Whether or not God responds to them in the way we would like Him to, is secondary. Like good parents, who want their children to be free to come to them, so God receives us in the spirit of communion which we express by our prayers.

**In your heart...and in your mouth...**

These are the instruments of human response. Christ is not afar off, but in us. We have but to receive God’s gift of faith in our hearts and ask Him with our mouth. This has nothing to do with public confessions or pronouncements. How often the parent has said to the child—“You have a mouth, ask for it.” One doesn’t merely think God—one asks Him to come in. To make public confession a

condition of salvation, as some do, is to destroy the beauty and the simplicity. The preposition, *eis*, is not strong, and really means “with reference to,” more than “for the purpose of.” If public pronouncements are a condition of salvation, the extrovert has the edge, and the focus is on the flesh instead of the spirit.

Furthermore, the real evidence of the presence of the Spirit of Christ within us, is the desire to have Him within us. Without the Spirit of Christ we would have no such desire. Many a child of God has whispered His name in private and found an instant response—not in external religious demonstrations, but in the quiet consciousness that one wants Him there and is inclined now to talk to Him. In over 40 years of ministry, the author has observed that people with such a simple experience of salvation, have remained just as true to Christ and just as committed as those I who have claimed great religious experiences. Sometimes well-meaning, but overzealous promoters of the gospel have robbed believers of their peace by insisting that there has to be some special experience or some basic change, to turn a quiet person into a “marketeting personality.” The evidence of salvation is always the desire to have Christ within. The private acknowledgement of this desire, to Christ, is as much a confession as some public declaration.

**No one who believes on Him, shall be without strength...**

The Greek word *κατασχυνω* (*kataischuno*), is often mistranslated by “ashamed.” The word is made up of three elements. The basic form, *ισχυνω* (*ischuno*), means “to be strong.” To this is added a negative particle—a—which is like our own particle—*un*. To this, is added a third element—*kala*—which adds to the

intensity. The word then means “to be utterly without strength.” Now in this context, Paul says that the believers shall not be in this condition. Paraphrased, he is saying, “No believer shall be in any way without strength.” The force of expression, in context, is that no one who identifies with Christ, however weak as a human being, shall be without the enablement to be saved.

**Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord, will be saved...** Paul declares plainly that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, as far as

salvation is concerned. The God of the Jews is also the God of the Gentiles. The prophet Joel, whom Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost, declared boldly in that prophetic passage (Joel 2:32), that any Jew who would call upon the name of the Lord, would be saved. Now Paul offers this same invitation to the Gentiles. Thus, anyone in all the world who wants to be saved, can be. And this salvation comes out of the reservoir of God’s limitless grace. His salvation is not dispensed reluctantly. He is “rich” unto all that call upon Him.

# Romans 10:14-21

## TRANSLATION

*How then, shall they call upon Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe Him Whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without preaching? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? Even as it is written, “How timely are the feet of those who give the proclamation of good things.” But they have not all heard the proclamation. For Isaiah says, “Lord who has believed our report?” Therefore then, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I say, it is not that they have not heard, is it? Indeed,*

*“Their sound has gone out unto all the land,  
and their words unto the extremities of the world.”*

*But I say, it is not that Israel did not know, is it? Moses first said,*

*“I will provoke you to jealousy with those who are not a people, and  
I will provoke you to indignation with a senseless people.”*

*And Isaiah spoke with boldness and said,*

*“I was found by those who did not seek Me,  
I became manifest to those who did not inquire after Me.”*

*But to Israel He said,*

*“All the day I have stretched out My hands to a people disobedient  
and contrary.”*

## COMMENTARY

### The Condition of God’s People—Disobedient and Contrary

The attitude of God toward His creation is open and conciliatory. They are His progeny; He created the world and peopled it with beings very like Himself. So what is the problem? Why does the world languish in evil and catastrophe? Whence comes the spirit of rebellion? What broke the line of communication? And how can we say that God is conciliatory?

From the very beginning God had offered a means of recovery—of reconciliation. The issue in the original scenario of disobedience, was not so much, recrimination but recognition. That is, it was important that Adam and Eve, representing the race in symbol, should recognize their disobedience. The text in Genesis 2:25, says that Adam and Eve, “*Were naked and were not ashamed.*” But what does that mean? Is that not, in the absence of any other humans in that place, rather unimportant? Quite possibly it reflects a state of innocence, since conscience, *per se*, had not as yet evolved. The innocence, of course, was what got Eve into trouble in the first place. Satan is described as “crafty”—עָרִים (*arum*); a word very similar to the word describing the nakedness of Adam and Eve. Whatever the word means, there was something in common between Eve and the serpent. Obviously, the serpent had enough in common with Eve that she could talk with him. Today serpents strike fear in the heart of most people. Eve was obviously not afraid. And whatever the status of the serpent at the time of that conversation, it was altered enough to render it a common symbol of evil (with apologies to the herpetologists). This was, of course, the result of God’s judgment, in recognition of the fact that the serpent had really been the contributing cause of the deception and disobedience.

In addition to His judgments upon the serpent, God made certain judgments upon Adam and Eve; including exiling them from the Garden. However, He made cloaks for them of the skins of animals; indicating the strong possibility that there was some symbolism of sacrifice involved. Later on, Abel would be commended for offering a blood sacrifice versus the sacrifice of Cain, which was the fruit of the field. Obviously, Abel had learned this requirement from his parents. Cain must have heard the same instruction, but chose to ignore it and brought ultimate judgment upon himself.

The point in all of this is that the tragedy of the Garden did not close off communication between God and His creatures. He has been, in fact, in continuous communication with them from the beginning. He has never been out of touch with them. This brings up a question we discussed before in the previous chapter. How is it that tiny specks upon the earth could ever presume to be in conversation with the great Eternal Spirit—the Author of all the universe? The answer lies in the work of the Holy Spirit. The seed of the Spirit, implanted in our human spirits, transcends these earthly cocoons and meets the Spirit of God. In Romans 8, Paul says that the spirit “*meets God on our behalf.*” The English word “intercedes” tends to obscure the dynamics of the situation. It is not as one calling out to God from the human spirit—it is one actually interacting with God in the Spirit realm. That is why we minute specks on the surface of the earth feel quite comfortable with the idea of interacting with God, the Eternal Spirit.

*So what does this have to do with our text in Romans 10?*

It has everything to do with it. It is about

communication. It is about God's continual effort to communicate with His people, and their stubborn resistance to His efforts. Paul has just said that whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. But, as usual, anticipating the argument, he says in effect, "You will ask how they can believe if they haven't heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will one preach without being sent?" He answers the question—"God has spoken, but you have not listened. No matter how hard God tried, you always resisted Him. In the end, He had to turn away from you with the woeful cry—*All the day I have stretched out My hands to a people unbelieving and contrary.*" So goes the argument. We will examine the words in greater detail.

**How shall they believe Him Whom they have not heard?** Thus begins the argument. How can they call upon one whom they have never heard of? And how can they hear unless someone would be sent to them? Paul responds with a searing rebuke, *"Have they not, indeed, heard?"*

**How timely are the feet of those who give the proclamation of good things...** This is a quotation from Isaiah 52. The Greek word often translated "beautiful" is *ωραιοι (hōraioi)*, which will be recognized instantly as the basis of our own word "hour" (a similar word in all romance languages), and has more to do with the beauty of "timeliness." It is akin to the beauty one might find in the marching band keeping perfect step in all of its maneuvers.

Thus Paul cites a dramatic example from Isaiah, of God's constant consciousness of the needs of His people to hear from Him. Israel had been under the oppression of their enemies—the Egyptians and the

Assyrians—long enough. God had heard their cries of misery and listened to the blasphemies of their enemies, and now He is going to make His name known. *"Therefore My people shall know My name: Therefore they shall know in that day, that I am He that does speak: Behold, it is I."* And then He gives the declaration that is quoted here in Romans. *"How beautiful [timely] from the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that sayeth unto Zion, Thy God reigneth"* Remember that Paul is referring to the Jews throughout this chapter. They are the ones in the Old Testament to whom this statement was directed. This verse has nothing to do with modern-day evangelism (it comes from the mountains and not the streets). It is God Himself Who is addressing His people, as well as the enemies. To apply it to humans certainly beggars the impact of this proclamation of victory from God. These three chapters are all addressed to the Jews. If we do not keep that in mind, we bring confusion and misapplications.

The use of the plural (those) rather than the singular, as in Isaiah, probably indicates that Paul is including, not only God's word, but the prophets who were responsible for giving it.

**Who give the proclamation of good things...** This phrase is often translated by "preach the gospel." The Greek word *ευαγγελίζω (euangelidzo)* means much more. The word "gospel" has come into considerable question. It has been used in so many ways and for so many trivial things that have nothing to do with Christianity; (or it has been used of so many carnival-type promotions of Christianity), that it has had a negative effect on the impact of the word. Sometimes in language, words that we

have cherished do get lost to us in the maze of misuse. But in this case, the Greek original is so much richer. The Greek word has to do with victory proclamations and not just good news. Aeschylus used the word in a narrative about the Trojan War. Troy or Ilium, where the battle was fought, was on the north coast of Asia Minor, The palace of Agamemnon was in the Greek Peloponnesus, 500 miles away. It had been arranged that if victory should come, fires would be lit on the chain of mountains that extended to Greece, thus signaling the victory. In the narrative of Aeschylus, a watchman is stationed at all times on the roof of the palace to await such a signal. He is said to be waiting for the “victory proclamation. *“May the fire with its victory proclamation [εὐαγγελιον] flash through the gloom (Aes, Bk II. 21).* This word is the one usually translated by “gospel” or “good news.” Both of these words are inadequate for the dynamic meaning. The word “gospel” is, of course, easier to use, but one must bear in mind that the announcement by God of His Salvation requires a much stronger word.

**But they have not all harkened to the proclamation...** Now Paul bites in, “*Yes, they have heard, but they have not obeyed...*” And he quotes Isaiah to back up his statement, “*Lord, who has believed our report?*” (Isaiah 53:1) He then broadens the base of his charge by including a sweeping statement of David, which applies to the entire world. “*Their sound has gone out to all the earth and their utterance unto the bounds of its habitations.*” (Psalm 19:4) David is referring here, of course, to the

communication of God through nature.

To those who will listen for it, all of nature sings the praises of its Creator, from the stars in the heavens to the most minute creature upon the earth.

So God’s people are without excuse. God had communicated openly and freely. His people had closed their ears and willfully turned away from Him.

**I was found by those who did not seek Me...** When Israel turned away from God, He turned away from them. The nations surrounding Israel—the Gentiles—had no interest in Israel’s God. They had a multitude of gods and had no need of another. In spite of that fact, God made Himself known to the Gentiles in such dynamic ways as to bring about a very large response. The present period of time is part of the phenomenon known as “the times of the Gentiles.” Extending far beyond the Middle East, which would be generally known as “The Land,” the entire world has been invited to join the family of God. It really began on the day of Pentecost, when the presence of Christ descended upon the earth in the form of the Holy Spirit. Henceforth, the word of God has travelled from continent to continent and from pole to pole. When this era has ended, according to the prophets and to Paul in this section of Romans, there will be a great ingathering and recovery of the Lord’s people. A new heart will be given them, replacing the stony stubbornness, and they will turn again, *en masse*, to the God of their fathers.

# Romans 11:1-10

## TRANSLATION

*I say then, God has not cast off His people has He? God forbid! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast off His people, whom He foreknew. Or you knew, did you not, what the scripture says in the matter of Elijah, how he complained to God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left and they seek my life.” But what did the Divine declaration say to him? “I have preserved for Myself 7,000 people, who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So also then, at the present time a remnant according to the election of grace has existed. But if it is by grace, it is no longer of works, since grace would no longer be grace. What then? The one who sought—Israel—this one did not attain, but the elect attained; and the rest were hardened, even as it is written,*

*“God gave to them a spirit of stupor,  
eyes not able to see  
and ears not able to hear,  
until this day.”*

*And David said,*

*“Let their table be for a snare and for a trap  
and for stumbling and for a recompense to them,  
that their eyes become darkened that they may not  
see and their backs bent over continually.”*

## COMMENTARY

### **The Remnant—Election By Grace**

God has not cast off His people. That is the fundamental issue of Romans 9 through 11. There were many nations

that emerged in the course of history, had their moment of glory; and vanished in oblivion—some of them by Divine decree

at the hand of Israel. Evidently, God saw no redeeming factor to their existence. Nor was it merely uselessness or social vacuity. Some of these nations had quite obviously been veritable spawns of Satan himself. Their continued existence on the earth was an inexorable expression of Satanic evil. King David's wars were, fundamentally, types or symbols of the war against Satan. They were not wars of attrition—wars for territorial or political advantage—they were rather, fought against the enemies around Israel, who posed a continual threat to the people of God. The history of civilization is littered with the relics of once—mighty nations, who have come and gone on the sands of time with scarcely a footprint. One of the great evidences (they are not proofs, *per se*) is the survival of the nation of Israel, as predicted in the Bible. This tiny nation—scarcely a spot on the globe—has survived for over 3,000 years, often without territorial roots, and in spite of the efforts of Satan through his “henchmen,” to wipe them off the face of the earth. Centuries of straying and intermarriage and terrible persecution have not prevailed to put them, ever, out of a prominent notice by the world. In fact, so prominent has been their identity that they have been continually accused of everything from economic recessions to conspiracies for world domination. Many organizations throughout history have risen up to counter Jewish movements, such as “Zionism,” which have been perceived to be sinister threats to the Gentile world. No, God has not cast off His people, nor will He ever. *“For Thou hast confirmed to Thyself Thy people Israel, to be a people unto Thee forever: And Thou Lord art become their God.”* (2 Samuel 7:24)

God's promises to Israel seem to extend far beyond the possibilities of fulfillment in the foreseeable time frame. To

Abraham, He promised, *“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore.”* (Genesis 22:17) Furthermore, there is a strong indication in connection with the prophecies concerning Israel, that there will be something of a kingdom on earth reigned over by the people of God—perhaps a restoration of God's original intentions for Eden. It is quite probable that the whole earth was something of an Eden, prior to the “Fall”. As the distortions of nature had been universal, so the original creation, so glorious in many of its aspects, will be universally restored to its pristine glory.

In Revelation 21, John sees a new heaven and a new earth, and also a new Jerusalem *“descending out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”* He also heard a great voice from the throne saying, *“Behold the dwelling of God is with men, and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them and be their God.”* (Revelation 21:1-3) Peter also saw such a new heaven and a new earth *“wherein dwelleth righteousness.”* (2 Peter 3:13)

Apparently, though not certainly, there will coexist both a heavenly dwelling place for the church, the bride of Christ, and an earthly kingdom reigned over by Israel; with Jerusalem, which has come down out of heaven, as something of a universal capital. The descriptions of the new Jerusalem are singularly of a material rather than spiritual, nature. Heaven, on the other hand, is a place where we will cast off the space-time limitations, and dwell with God at a different level. In John 14, where the English translations used the word “mansion,” the Greek text merely says “dwelling places.” The word “mansion” is



in keeping with the old English usage, which referred to a simple dwelling rather than a palatial home. The pastor's house was often called "the manse." It is not really clear in the scripture despite the common descriptions (Disneyland in the clouds), exactly what our living conditions are going to be.

A number of scriptures (Isaiah 35 and Matthew 24, for example). indicate that there will be a great ingathering of Israel in a miraculous way, far beyond the migrations that have taken place since the establishing of the nation. The indication is that God is going to sort out Jew and Gentile, and bring back to the land those "whom He knows to be His." ("I know My sheep"). There is much about the future of Israel that is not clear. But one thing is certain, God has not cast off His people.

**Whom He did foreknow...** And what does that mean? Did God merely respond to Israel on the basis of His omniscience? We have a clue in the statement—"*Jacob have I loved.*" In the Old Testament Hebrew, the word "to know" יָדָע (*yada*) was frequently used for love between a man and a woman, as when "Adam knew his wife Eve." Of course, in the Semitic languages, there are a great many usages of a different word, with different nuances. Thus, in the matter of Jacob, God knew him in the sense of love or election. The contrast with Esau was that he had accepted one and rejected the other. It is thus obvious, that before the birth of Jacob—indeed, before the foundation of the world, God had formed a bond with the spirit of Jacob, who would one day appear in the course of history, as did Jesus (though not with His Deity), to be the founding father of a nation that would bear his name.

These are great mysteries beyond our

human minds to fully grasp. There are yet many questions; however, it seems certain that God's plans for His creation were fashioned in the ages of eternity past. Whatever happens in the executing of these plans, we can be assured that He will be just and fair. "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" Although, it must be understood that human standards of fairness and justice are limited by human inadequacies. We may sometimes think that we humans would be fairer than God, but that is because our perspective is finite and earthly.

**Do you not know what the scripture said in the matter of Elijah?** So who was Elijah, and what does he have to do with all of this? We pick up the story of Elijah, in I Kings 17. He appears on the scene suddenly, without any historical background. Except that he was from the plains of Gilead, east of the Jordan River. His name means "*Yahweh is my God.*" We meet him when he strides boldly into the presence of Ahab, the king of Israel, and announces to him that there is going to be a drought and a famine in the land. This alone, in those days, could have gotten him executed for bearing evil tidings to the king. He further offends the King by declaring that it is God before Whom he stands, and not the king. He could have been slain on the spot, but he escapes and flees, on God's orders, to Zarephath in Sidon at the far north of Israel. God wanted to preserve him for another very important assignment.

When the days of famine were coming to an end, God called on Elijah again and sent him, once more, to the presence of Ahab. It was risky, of course, but God had His own plans for him. Elijah challenged Ahab to a contest between the priests of Baal (the favorite god of Jezebel, the queen) and the God of Israel. There were 450 priests of Baal and one lone prophet

of God, Elijah. They would go to Mt. Carmel. Altars would be built, and bullocks laid out on them, but no fire. The stakes were that whichever God sent fire to consume the offering would be the true God. The frenzied efforts of the priests of Baal brought no fire, but a single prayer of Elijah brought an intense fire that even consumed the altar of stone. Elijah had the priests summarily executed. This brought down on him the fury of Jezebel, who sought his life. He escaped from her, but the feeble response of the children of Israel to the spectacular event caused him great discouragement. This is the point at which Paul picks up the story.

In effect, Elijah said to God, "You might as well kill me, because I'm the only one left in all of Israel that is loyal to you." God's response was—"You are wrong Elijah. I have 7,000 who have not bowed to kneel to Baal." Obviously, Paul recounts this story to indicate that, throughout the history of Israel, God has always had His faithful remnant. The nation, thus, has never died out. The people of God have never been eliminated, and according to the prophecies and promises of scripture, never will be.

In a way, so common among genuine prophets, Elijah thought himself a failure. It may be the whisperings of Satan, who is the "accuser of the brethren," who seeks in every way possible to bring down the servants of God. It may be that God allows this in order to keep His servants humble. But His true attitude toward Elijah is seen in two remarkable incidents after his work was done. The first one came at the end of his life, the famous "chariot of fire" appeared and he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. The second came when He appeared with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, long after his passing from the earth.

Elijah never saw himself as one of the great prophets. After all, he did seem to spend most of his time hiding from the infamous Jezebel. During this time he was able to perform a few miracles—important to the individuals, but not significant on a large scale (as were the miracles of Moses). However, in God's eyes, a single event may have farreaching implications. Elijah is a great example of Paul's teaching to the Corinthians—God uses the weak to overcome the mighty. When Elijah was in a state of discouragement, God told him to go to Mount Horeb where He would reveal Himself to him. While he was there, a violent wind tore up the rocks, but God was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but God was not in the fire. After these came a "still small voice"—the true voice of God through which He comforted Elijah.

And we hear the words of Zechariah thundering across the cosmic ages—"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," sayeth the Lord. In the eyes of the world, Israel has always been a "flickering light"—sometimes standing up against the mighty nations around her and sometimes all but extinguished. In the end, she will be God's ultimate triumph—in an everlasting kingdom, "wherein dwelleth righteousness."

**At the present time a remnant according to the election of grace...**

The grace is unconditional. Paul is careful to define what he means by grace in a contrast with works (the keeping of the Law). What Israel had failed to achieve by her own efforts, God had provided to a remnant, through the exercise of His own power, in an expression of free grace. This was, of course, the forerunner of the universal application to Jew and Gentile

alike, of the free grace of God based upon the sacrifice of Christ.

**And the rest were hardened...** These are chilling words. Nor are they easily explained in terms of human understanding. What was the basis of this hardening? What, on the other hand, was the basis of grace? Before we presume to indict God, elevating ourselves above Him, let us realize that God's grace has been freely dispensed through all the world to Jew and Gentile,

in large numbers. And let us assume that He knows what He is doing far better than we. We humans have a habit of fighting for rights and fairness for others on our own personal standards, and often fail to exhibit the same rights and fairness that we are expecting from God.

Whatever it was that brought such severe judgment upon the people whom He loved, rest assured that His Divine purposes were valid to Himself, if inscrutable to us.