

# WRITINGS OF ALLEN ROSS

by Allen Ross

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*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Allen Ross, compiled for study and devotional reading.*

28 Chapters

## Table of Contents

1. 00.00. Ross, Allen - Library
2. 01.00. Sound Doctrine, A Biblical Study of the Doctrines in the Nicene Creed
3. 01.01. God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth
4. 01.02. Son of God, Begotten, Not Made
5. 01.04. And Was Made Man
6. 01.05. Death, Burial & Resurrection of Jesus Messiah
7. 01.06. The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah
8. 01.07. The Ascension of the Lord
9. 02.00. Studies in the Book of Malachi
10. 02.01. God's Faithful Covenant Love
11. 02.02. Worship That God Rejects
12. 02.03. Faithful Teaching of God's Word
13. 02.04. Profaning The Marriage Covenant
14. 02.05. God's Justice and Faithfulness
15. 02.06. Preparing for The Day of The Lord
16. 03.00. The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans
17. 03.01. Introduction to the Book of Romans
18. 03.02. The Revelation of Righteousness
19. 03.03. Condemnation, or, the Universal Need of Righteousness
20. 03.04. Justification
21. 03.05. Exultation
22. 03.06. The New Freedom in Life
23. 03.07. The New Power in Life
24. 03.08. Vindication or God's Righteousness in His Relationship with Israel
25. 03.09. The Consolation of Israel's Rejection
26. 03.10. Application in the Assembly
27. 03.11. Application in the Society
28. 03.12. Application to Doubtful Things

## **00.00. Ross, Allen - Library**

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Ross, Allen - Library  
Ross, Allen - Sound Doctrine - A Biblical Study of the Doctrines in the Nicene Creed  
Ross, Allen - Studies in the Book of Malachi  
Ross, Allen - The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans

## 01.00. Sound Doctrine, A Biblical Study of the Doctrines in the Nicene Creed

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### Sound Doctrine

A Biblical Study of the Doctrines in the Nicene Creed by Allen Ross, Ph.D.

01 God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth 02 Son of God, Begotten, Not Made 03 Son of God, Creator, Redeemer, Light of Life 04 And Was Made Man 05 The Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah 06 The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah 07 The Ascension of the Lord

This study of biblical doctrines is the second part of a project designed for training Christians to be able to minister in their churches and communities. The project is called "The Exodus Project" because it is based on the teaching of the Bible first found in Exodus 19:1-25 and then restated in 1 Peter 2:1-25 that the redeemed of the LORD are to be a kingdom of priests. Accordingly, Deuteronomy 33:10 teaches that the ministry of the priests included:

Teaching the Word of God, Making intercessory prayer ("burn incense"), and Enabling people to find access to God through the sacrifice.

Part One, which will be posted on this web site in the spring, is a series of lessons designed to help people be able to teach the Bible. It will include the full introduction to this project and how it can be used in the churches.

Part Three, which will appear later in the spring, will focus on intercessory prayer and the related spiritual services that derive from it.

Part Two, presented here, is a survey of biblical doctrine. Israel's priests were to make the sacrifices so that others could find access to the living God. This required that they understand what the sacrifices were all about, and how everything worked in God's program to bring people into communion with Himself. In other words, those entrusted with this service had to know God, understand His attributes and works, be able to explain forgiveness and salvation, instruct others in the rituals of the congregation, and be able to articulate the covenant promises and the hope of glory. Being a worship leader, then, goes way beyond singing a song in front of the congregation--it requires that people be articulate in the doctrines of the faith. Sadly, what is missing in the church today is the articulate Christian, the one who knows the faith and can explain it clearly. And, even more sadly, that quality is disappearing in the clergy as well.

It is, of course, impossible to study all the doctrines included in the Bible, or even a creed like the Nicene Creed in a short period of time. Each doctrine deserves the full attention of a separate course of studies; in that way the doctrine could be fully defined and all the supporting evidence from Scripture and the subsequent writings on the doctrine could be taken into account. Nevertheless, in a survey such as this we will be able to gain a full picture of the beliefs of the historic Christian faith in one sweep. The survey should then inspire individual Christians to read further on the doctrines, or on a particular doctrine. The doctrines of the church have come under

attack again in this generation. Whereas in the past they have simply been denied, now they are being reinterpreted to mean something very different. This survey is not designed to be a defense of the faith, for that would have to include all the false teachings that have arisen over the centuries. But in surveying the historic faith one will be better equipped to discern these subtle challenges that if embraced will change the church completely.

There are a number of ways that this material could be surveyed. I have chosen to focus more on certain passages of the Bible that are basic texts for the doctrines. After the first part on the meaning of faith, each section will give a brief statement of the doctrine and its meaning, and then use a Bible study to elucidate it. In other words, this will be a series of Bible studies on doctrinal themes. But the point of each section will be that the believer who is going to function as a part of this kingdom of priests--which should be every believer--should understand the doctrine involved. In passing we shall consider what the Nicene Creed left out, or why it said things the way that it did. This will lead to additional studies in other creeds for those who are interested.

Introduction: "I Believe"

**Early Creeds** The word "creed" comes from the Latin verb *credo*, the first word of the creed, which is translated into English as "I believe." Essentially, then, a creed is a collection of doctrines or beliefs that a religious order or denomination holds as distinctive.

**Israelite Creedal Expressions** From the very beginning the redeemed of the LORD found it necessary and helpful to clarify their beliefs in the world. After all, when Abraham made sacrifices in the land of Canaan, they would have appeared very much like the sacrifices of the Canaanites, or Babylonians, or other religious groups. So he had to make sure every one knew which God he was worshiping. So in Genesis 12:1-9, we have the report of the beginning of his creedal worship. He made an altar to Yahweh. The first duty was to name the God being worshiped. And then the text says that "he proclaimed the name of Yahweh" at the altar. He publicly declared the nature, the person and the works of this God Yahweh. The clue to what he said is found in Exodus 34:1-35 where the exact same expression is used of Yahweh's activity of proclaiming his name to Moses--a long list of attributes. This list became part of the ritual faith of Israel because it is repeated so frequently in the Bible. As time went on the worshipers would add to the name and to the attributes great works that God had done, such as "Creator of heaven and earth," or "the one who delivered me from all my enemies." The nation of Israel was then instructed by the LORD at various times concerning their use of statements of belief to be used in conjunction with worship. Deuteronomy 26:1-19 is perhaps the clearest example of this; in this chapter the Israelites were told what to say when they offered the first fruits to the LORD. Their words expressed their own personal faith and their part in the heritage of the faith.

Many other creedal statements were used at the Temple over the centuries, but perhaps the most important was the famous "Shema" ("Hear") of Deuteronomy 6:6. It says, "Hear, O Israel. Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone." There are other possible translations, but this one captures the idea well. It was a statement of faith in the sovereignty of Yahweh--He alone is the true and living God. The rest of the passage reports how important such a statement of faith was to the people. In time expressions from the Law and the Prophets were used in the worship services of the Temple and later the Synagogue. Later prayer books recorded the most frequently used of these. But in the biblical period, the Book of Psalms provided most of the creedal statements and benedictions

because it was the prayer book of the Temple.

### Early Christian Creedal Statements

More importantly for our study is a brief survey of fragments of creeds and confessions of faith found in the New Testament, suggesting that the early Christians found it necessary to summarize their distinctive beliefs. The basic pattern of these early statements is concerned with two things: (1) the naming of Jesus, who lived and died and rose again in history, and (2) the ascription of a title or titles to him, marking his divinity. Here are some of the fragments that the early church used:

“Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mark 8:29; Mark 14:61; Mark 15:2) “Jesus is the Son of God” (John 1:34; 1 John 4:15; Acts 9:20; Hebrews 4:14) “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 10:9; Php 2:11)

These confessions in time were enlarged to include the resurrection, as well as the divine nature of Jesus, the Christ, who was with the Father in the beginning and became the mediator between God and people. The most extensive one is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, the summary of the Gospel, the essence of the Christian faith:

“That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred brethren at one time ... then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles” etc.

Other condensed versions of creeds may be found in Romans 1:3-5 a, Romans 8:34, and 1 Timothy 3:16. In fact, some of the creeds were preserved in the early hymns of the Church, such as in John 1:1-18, Colossians 1:15-20, and Php 2:6-11. 1 Timothy 3:16 will serve as a good example:

“And by a common confession, great is the mystery of godliness;

God was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit,

was seen of angels, proclaimed in the world, taken up to glory.”

These confessions of faith by the early Church served several purposes: (1) they became the center of the teaching of the Church, the essential doctrine; (2) they formed the basis of the Gospel, the proclamation to be made to the world; (3) they provided new converts with the proper things to say at the time of baptism; and (4) they provided worshipers with a nucleus of expressions for their liturgy. But the important point that comes out of a study of the Old and New Testament about creeds is that they were formed out of necessity. The new community of worshipers of Christ found it necessary to formulate what they believed in common when they were confronted by old religions, false teachings, and established heresies. The early Church was confronted and attacked on every point, but held onto the belief in the person and work of Jesus the Christ by these fixed formulas. The Nicene Creed The creed that is used in services with holy communion today is the Nicene Creed. There are many creeds that could be studied to gain a survey of Christian doctrine, but this one is both fairly complete and still concise. The creed was composed at a Church council at Nicaea in 325 A.D. Nicaea was located just south of

Constantinople (today, Istanbul), and a little inland, in what today is Turkey.

It is helpful to understand why this council ever came about in order to appreciate the doctrines it includes. At the risk of oversimplifying it, we can say that a man named Arius, an elder under the Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, began teaching that Jesus was a being who had been created by God before time and then was himself the agent of creation. His teaching made Jesus less than God, and more than man, somewhere between the two, but fully neither. This, in sum, came to be known as Arianism. The teaching spread throughout the world quickly, sparking a lot of controversy. And so the emperor Constantine called a council of some 300 bishops to assemble in Nicaea and settle the matter. This council was significant in that it was the beginning of the functioning of the catholic (=universal) Church. It had never been so visible as an organized entity before. The bishops were considered to be the Church, and since there was a worldwide gathering of the bishops, this represented the assembled Church. At the council the creed of Arius was promptly and soundly rejected. Bishop Eusebius offered a creed that he had been using, but it was too general--the Arians were willing to adopt it. Then Athanasius, a deacon from Alexandria and a champion of the orthodox view, presented his creed which stressed the oneness of Christ with the Father. The new creed was adopted, and a condemnation was made on anyone not accepting it (now the Church was using power that formerly they had seen in the Roman government used against them). Constantine himself chaired the meeting, interrupting whenever he wished, and directing the choices. But it is probable that he knew very little doctrine, and certainly did not conform very well. Later in his life he seems to have come more to understand and accept the truth. *The Nature Of Belief And Beliefs The Church as a Believing Community*

It is the central teaching of the Bible that the Church is a community of believers, individuals who have come to faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul asserts, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8; Ephesians 2:9). This is clearly based on the teaching of Jesus, who in the night explained to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is simply not possible to please God without faith. And this principle of faith has been at the heart of the ancient Israelite community as well, so that by the time the early Church began to formulate the doctrines they could see the unity and the continuity of the faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The cardinal passage in the Old Testament is Genesis 15:6 (I say "cardinal" because Paul quotes it twice to establish justification by faith). Genesis 15:1-21 says, "Now he [Abram] believed in Yahweh, and He [Yahweh] reckoned it to him for righteousness." The Hebrew word "believed" is related to our familiar Hebrew word, "Amen." The verb means "to be reliable, dependable, firm." In the verbal conjugation that means "believe," the basic idea is to consider something dependable and therefore count on it, or, act on it. When Abram believed in Yahweh's word, he left Ur of the Chaldees to become a great nation in the land of Canaan. If he had never left, he would not have been counted a believer, no matter how much he considered to be true in the call from God. And this is the point Hebrews 11:1-40 makes of all the greats of the faith: by faith they did what they did. Or, as James puts it, their faith was evidenced by their works. The principle of faith should not be hard for us to grasp, for almost everything we do requires some faith. When we get up in the morning, we turn of the light switch, believing that it will work. We turn on the water, believing that water will come out of the lines. We start our cars, believing that by the

switch of the key it will all work. Our faith in these things is based on two things: the reliability of the things we trust, and our experience that has proven them reliable over and over again. If, however, we have a car that is ready for the junk heap, our faith in it will not be very high. If it has failed us time and time again, we will not have much confidence when we turn the key. The same principle works with people. If you are looking for a person to repair something in the house, you have to hire someone that you trust. If that person says that he has never actually done this kind of work, but has always been fascinated by it, your confidence will drop dramatically. Now in the realm of religion we see the principle of faith is similar, just on a higher level, for the stakes are higher. Our faith will only be as strong as the object of our faith; and we will only feel confident if we have proven him again and again.

Abram believed in Yahweh, and Yahweh credited him with righteousness. That Abram was credited with righteousness for his faith shows that his faith was saving faith. It was a faith that responded to the revelation of the word of God in obedience. And throughout the Bible true faith is similarly described as obedience to divine revelation.

### Belief as Commitment to the Truth

Now, we must understand what we mean by the word believe. There is a major difference between the way we use the word “believe” in general discussions and the way we use it in theological discussions (where “trust” might serve us better). If I accept the trustworthiness of the biblical and historical accounts, I might say that I believe that Jesus lived, taught, and did many wonderful things. But this takes no commitment on my part, and so is not what the Church means by faith that is credited with righteousness. Knowledge may compel the assent of the intellect, but it does not compel the act of the will to trust. So when I say “I believe” when saying the creed, that is not meant to say, “I have sufficient data to support these ideas as valid and viable philosophical tenets.” No, it says much more; it says that these are the truths from God that I have believed in, that I have committed my life to, that I have made the center of my life and the basis of my hope.

We have to think a little more about this kind of faith so we are clear. We cannot dissociate knowledge from faith, for we gave to know the word of God and the claims of Christ found in that revelation in order to believe. We do not scorn knowledge, for that would make faith a subjective experience without solid content; the Church is built on the truth of divine revelation (the word of God), reason (the use of the intellect in studying and knowing the truth), and tradition (the ideas and writings of the greats of the faith who have gone before). But when we use the words “I believe,” we are using the language of faith and not certainty (in the sense of verifiable data). We can have assurance and certainty based on the reliability of the word of God, the witness of the Holy Spirit, the shared experience of the Church in its pilgrim journey, and on supporting evidence and experience. But we do not have the certainty of seeing fully--that will come in the presence of God in glory. The Content Of Belief The Reformers had to deal with this question of faith because it was such a critical issue in their day. Justification is indeed by faith and not by works--but what does that faith involve, what does it include? They went to great lengths to show that saving faith including the clear understanding of the doctrines to be believed, the assent to the truthfulness of those doctrines, and then the commitment to them. Thus, saving faith was not a general belief, a hoping against hope; and it was not merely the assent to the truthfulness of the things being taught, for even the fallen angels and Satan believe this way, and tremble (James 2:19). Saving

faith is present when the message has been properly apprehended, assented to, and appropriated as the basis of one's relationship with God. Saving faith then is characterized by a life that is committed to living out the truth of the faith. So what is the content of the faith? Well, that will be the focus of the survey of these meditations on the creed, for the doctrines that the creed contains express the essence of the Christian faith. This kind of creed is the full explanation of the Christian Gospel. Scripture itself says that we must believe the Gospel to find eternal salvation; and the description of the Gospel is that Christ died according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures. But the key in this statement is "according to the Scriptures." It is not sufficient to believe that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. We have to believe these facts as explained by Scripture. This will require us to determine who Christ is (why did his death redeem), how he is related to the Father and the Spirit, what kind of death it was, why the death was necessary (sin), why he was buried, what the resurrection revealed, as well as what all this does for us when we accept it by faith. In other words, the simple Gospel formula assumes a good number of biblical doctrines--and these were included in the creed because the Gospel cannot be properly understood without them. But knowing only the creed is inadequate. The creed is meant to be a summation of what Scripture says on the various doctrines. To summary revelation we use a creed; to understand the creed we have to know revelation, the word of God. So in this series of studies we will not simply define doctrines, but we shall look at various key passages that give us a full picture of what these brief expressions say. But we will have to be brief, for there is so much available. We could, after all, use up all our time, and more, on just one of these expressions in the creed. The plan, however, will be to define the doctrine briefly and then look at a passage that with teaches it or clarifies what it means.

## 01.01. God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth

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1. God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth The Doctrine Of God The Nicene Creed begins:

“I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.”

It was natural for the creed to begin with the doctrine of God the Father, for the creed is trinitarian in its arrangement and content--Father, then Son, and then Holy Ghost. And although there are only a few brief ideas stated here about God the Father, those ideas cover a wide range of theological ideas. It is simply impossible for us to do justice to them all in one short meditation on the doctrine; but at least we can affirm the major points. The rest of this series of studies will keep coming back to the nature of God the Father in relation to all the other doctrines. The Trinity The first point that we must make about the creed in general is that it affirms the biblical teaching that there is only one God. The mystery of the trinity is that this one God exists in three persons (not three people, or three separate Gods). There is a unity to the Godhead, one essence, but three persons. And this makes the study of the doctrine of God the Father a little complicated, because all three persons of the Godhead are actively involved in every work of God. We normally say that the Father decrees the work, the Son carries it out, and the Spirit enables the work to be done--whether it is creation, salvation, judgment, or any other of the works of God. Moreover, when we survey the attributes of God, all the attributes likewise apply to all three persons of the Godhead. Therefore, faith, prayer, praise, and all other forms of worship and service must include the entire Godhead. The Bible is filled with this revelation about the triune God. True, in the Old Testament it is only hinted at, but nonetheless, when the full revelation of the New Testament is brought to the discussion, it is easy to see that the foundation of the trinitarian faith was laid down from the beginning. The creed of Deuteronomy 6:4 may be interpreted with this fact in mind: “Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one”; or, “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.” The Scripture affirms through the teachings of the prophets and the apostles that there is one God; and yet the Scripture reveals that God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Knowing this we are more keen to note how in the Old Testament there are intimations of the tri-unity of the Godhead (see Isaiah 6:8; Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 48:15; Isaiah 48:16; Proverbs 30:1-4; Malachi 3:1-5, et al). Moreover, as we shall see later in the doctrine of Christ, Jesus claimed that he and the Father were one and the same (John 10:30) and that he was the I Am of the Old Testament (John 8:58). We cannot fully understand the trinity, not with our finite minds, but we must believe it if we accept the revelation of the Bible for the faith. And we cannot separate the three persons of the Godhead as if they were in some way independent beings. There is one God; but this one God revealed in the Bible is very different than the one God Islam and Judaism profess. This one God is fully revealed in the Son by the Spirit. The Attributes of God

Most theological studies will begin with a list of the attributes or perfections of God, and this is a helpful way to organize the vast amount of material. After all, the whole Bible would have to be taken into consideration if there was not a way to synthesize the material. And after all, this is

about the best we can do--describe a little of what God is like based on his revelation in his words and works. One of the more helpful works on this would be A. Pink's, *The Attributes of God*; but J. Packer's *Knowing God* is very helpful as well. The attributes or descriptions are divided into two categories: the non-communicated attributes and the communicated ones. In other words, there are attributes that belong to God that he did not share with humans through creation, and there are those he did. We conclude from the Bible that God is sovereign over all things, eternal and infinite, all powerful, all knowing, and present everywhere at once. Only God is like this. But when we try to understand and explain what these mean, we run into limitations. If we say God is infinite--what does that mean? We can only say God is not finite, not limited by time, space, or any other limitation. But that does not get us a full understanding. Or, we can say God is all powerful, that all the power in the universe, in any universe, belongs to him. Trying to imagine or understand that is very difficult. We can look at the acts of God revealed in Scripture and begin to appreciate it. But we are like Moses on Mount Sinai, seeing only the fringe of the hem of the garment as he passes by.

We have an easier time with the communicable attributes, for these we possess in a measure. Some of these are love, mercy, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, compassion and the like. We know though that we have only a finite amount of compassion, or love, compared to the amount that exists with God. So as we study the Bible we can see these key words used and described as they relate to the God who is the sovereign over all things. The Revelation of the Father The creed begins its description of this one God with the designation of the first person of the Godhead as the "Father." The metaphorical language of "father" is the designation God has chosen for revelation, whether we like it or not. But we must be clear about this: it is a figure of speech; it does not mean that God is a male or a man, or that men are more important to God than women; nor does it mean that there was procreation in the Godhead that produced the Son. The term "Father" for God is a powerful description, lofty and elegant. It should not be trivialized to mean "daddy," no matter how popular that idea may be. The title "Father" was used in other countries of the ancient Near East as well to describe the high God of the pantheon, the sovereign. In Canaan, for example, the lesser gods of the heavenly court are called the "sons of God." In the Old Testament, since there is but one God, the "sons of God" are the angels (see Job 1:1-22; Job 2:1-13). And in contrast to the Canaanite myths, there is no physical intercourse with God. The gods of the pagans were far too human, base and low. The one true and living God creates by decree, not by copulation. So in the Bible we have this description of God as "Father," some in the Old Testament, and more in the New Testament. But what is the expression designed to communicate about God? The first meaning of the expression "Father" is creator. When we call God Father, we are saying that he is the sovereign creator of all things. He produces everything, but he also provides for it, and he protects it. Creation, provision, providence. All these ideas are there with the image of "Father." No other description could capture them all at once. And since God creates and sustains everything by his decree, he is truly "Almighty." We shall return to this in a moment. The second meaning of the expression "Father" has to do with Covenant. When we call God our Father, it means that we enjoy a covenant relationship with him. In the world of the Bible "father-son" language is the language of covenant. You might read in a genealogy that a city is the son of an ancestor. It means there was some kind of treaty there. In Israel, king Ahaz was known as the son of Pul (=Tiglathpileser, the king of Assyria); it means he was a political dependent, a vassal. And so in the covenant with Israel God calls the people his son. He warned Pharaoh to let

his son go or he would kill Pharaoh's son (Exodus 4:23). And in the covenant that God made with David (2 Samuel 7:14), the king would be the son and God would be the father in the new relationship. This, when a king came to the throne he would declare his right to rule with the words from the covenant found in Psalms 2:7, "The LORD said to me, You are my son; today I have begotten you." This was fine until Isaiah turned the language on its head and predicted that the Davidic king would be known as the "father of eternity"--the one who produces and provides for everything in eternity (Isaiah 9:6). Of course, that would be fulfilled by Christ who declared that he and the father were one and the same. But it was the resurrection from the dead that authenticated that claim and declared that Jesus was the Son of God (Romans 1:4). In the New Covenant that Jesus inaugurated we who have put our faith in Christ Jesus, the son of God, have the right to be called the sons or children of God, and the privilege to call God "our Father," especially in our prayers. God is not only our sovereign creator, but our redeemer as well, bringing us into covenant with him. To call God Father in our New Covenant praying is to seek the sanctity of his name and the fulfillment of his sovereign will on earth as in heaven, as well as to seek the daily provisions from the Lord of the covenant. And third, when we call God Father we are also attesting that God is a person, one who we can know and have fellowship with, because the language is that of human relationship and community. This is no impersonal God, no abstract force in the universe. God is personal, and the description indicates that the relationship he has with his people is intimate and relational. This is because the language first applies to the relationship within the Godhead: as the Father God decrees the sovereign will and oversees its outworking; as the Son God carries out the will of the Father; and as the Spirit God empowers the work to be done. The Son submits to do the will of the Father, but they are equally God. We shall return to this in the doctrine of Christ.

Creator The creed focuses on the doctrine of creation at the beginning, and rightly so. If the biblical teaching on creation is removed or watered down, the faith will not be the same. The doctrine clearly reveals that God is the sovereign over all his creation; remove the doctrine and he is not sovereign, we are not accountable to him, and in fact, there is no basis for ethics and morality. The Bible teaches that God is the primary cause of all things. Out of his will, and by his decree, he brought everything into existence. One may quibble over the means used in all the points, but the fundamental point, the non-negotiable teaching of the Bible is that he is the Maker of everything. And he did this by decree, by his powerful word (Genesis 1:1-31; Psalms 33:1-22; Isaiah 44:1-28; Isaiah 45:1-25; John 1:1-51; Romans 1:1-32; Colossians 1:1-29). There is no room for natural development apart from God's superintendence in the Christian view of origins. At the risk of simplifying this too much, several observations are in order:

- 1) The Bible affirms that God existed before anything else; and that He is the creator of everything that exists.
- 2) The Bible affirms that God created everything that exists by decree; he called everything into existence. This does not say anything about intermediate means; it does say that God is the source of everything.
- 3) The Bible affirms that God created everything after its kind (Genesis 1:1-31). This rules out the idea that from one form evolved all the species. So regardless of the debates of the age of the earth, fossils, natural selection or beneficial mutations, there are some straightforward declarations

in the Bible that clearly teach that God is the creator of everything, and that as a result he is the one who has control over the world he created. He is called “Almighty” because he must be almighty to do the things that he has done, notably create and sustain everything! All power belongs to him; he is the sovereign Lord of the universe he has made. (Perhaps this is the real issue! Perhaps people would accept the biblical doctrine of creation more readily if it did not mean that he is the almighty God who will hold them accountable for what they do.) But a god who cannot create, is not a sovereign god; it is a god who does not have to be listened to. However, to acknowledge God as the creator is to accept him as the sovereign Lord, all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever present everywhere. And to accept him as the almighty God is to accept that he is the sovereign Creator. A Biblical Exposition

There are many passages in the Bible that capture the revelation of this sovereign creator God very well, but a couple of Psalms do it in a very practical way. The first is Psalms 33:1-22, a psalm of praise to God. The psalm has the standard parts of the descriptive praise psalm: the call to praise (Psalms 33:1-3), the cause for the praise (Psalms 33:4-19), and the conclusion (Psalms 33:20-22). In the cause or reason for the praise, we have a carefully planned structure: Psalms 33:4-5 form the summary statement. Psalms 33:4 a says God’s word is right and true, and that will be developed in Psalms 33:6-9; Psalms 33:4 b says God’s works are dependable, and that will be developed in Psalms 33:10-12; Psalms 33:5 a says God is righteous, and that is explained in Psalms 33:13-15; and Psalms 33:5 b speaks of God’s faithful loyal love, and that is elaborated on in Psalms 33:16-19.

1. His word is true. In Psalms 33:6-9 the psalmist describes how God created everything by his powerful word. He simply spoke, and everything came into existence. Borrowing from Genesis 1:3, he actually says, “he spoke, and it was.” This is the simplest expression of a profound truth. God has such power and such authority that he simply had to give the command and everything came into existence into conformity to his will. Some will say, this is poetry and not to be taken seriously. That is just silly, for the poetry simply reiterates in hymnic form the great teachings of the Bible. The desired result of this teaching, the psalmist says, should be adoration, fear, and praise.

2. His works are dependable. The works described here are the works of a true sovereign heavenly God. He nullifies all the counsels of the nations, but his plans and his will stand firm. Any plan that any nation or people have that does not harmonize with the will or plan of God will ultimately come to frustration. He rules over history, over nations, over the will of man. This too is powerful. We do not understand the choices he makes, the reasons for the way he rules; but the Bible teaches he is sovereign, and he knows what he is doing. Daniel simply praised God for his rule over history (Daniel 2:1-49).

3. He loves righteousness. Now, in Psalms 33:13-15, the psalmist focuses on how God looks into the hearts of all humans to see if there is righteousness. He must be omniscient and omnipresent and all-wise to do this. But he examines and evaluates the human heart. How can he do this? He made the human heart--if he created all things, then he certainly knows what is going on in what he made. The examination is a form of judgment, for the knowledge of God is both penetrating and evaluative.

4. He extends his loyal love to his people. In the fourth part, Psalms 33:16-19, the psalmist deals with a practical issue--warfare. He affirms that a king cannot win a battle by military armaments

alone, whether horses or today's arsenal of weapons. His strength alone cannot save him. Victory comes only if the sovereign God allows it to come. Jesus told Pilate that he, Pilate, would have no power at all unless it was given to him from above. This is the faith; this is the sovereignty of God. The truth is that God extends his faithful covenant love to his people, to deliver them from death (yes, they may die, but the covenant promises demand a future life) and from all danger. The eyes of the Lord are on those who hope in him. Believers in the sovereign love of God know that the world is not out of control, that God has his eye on them, and that nothing will happen to them outside the Lord's plan.

Another psalm that brings the doctrine of God to the practical level is Psalms 139:1-24. It can be divided into four stanzas of 6 verses each. In the first stanza David reflects on the truth of the knowledge of God--that God knows everything about us. It is as if God has gone on a search of our lives--he knows us. He knows every move we make, and he knows the reasons for those moves before we even do them (Psalms 139:2). In fact, this knowledge of God is penetrating, because he discerns our daily activities, always evaluating them (Psalms 139:4). Specifically, this may be illustrated by our speech: before we can get the word out, God knows it entirely (Psalms 139:4). David's initial reaction to this is that he is uncomfortable with it--it is surpassing, beyond his control. He feels hemmed in all around, not free (Psalms 139:5-6). And this is the natural reaction at first to the sovereignty of God. One wonders in what sense he or she may be free, if God is God. The first impulse is to escape from that penetrating knowledge--there must be some place where our wills are sovereign, we think, where we are from his sovereign knowledge. So the second stanza, Psalms 139:7-13, raises that issue: where can we go? The theme of this stanza is the omnipresence of God--God is everywhere, and therefore there is no place to which we might flee to get away from his penetrating knowledge. But when David begins to think of some of the places he might go--the dark deep in the sea, sheol, all places of grave danger, then he begins to see God's knowledge and God's presence are real comforts--even there God leads him and takes his hand. Nothing can separate him from the powerful presence of God, not darkness, not bruising, not distance or time. He is there. And he knows all about us. The third stanza of the psalm explains why this is possible, in terms that Psalms 33:1-22 briefly mentioned. He made us (Psalms 33:13-18). God formed both our bodies and our spirits in the womb. Of course David knows that natural reproduction was the means--but it was God who was behind it all. He supervised the details of the birth and the life that would follow while we were yet in the womb. God lovingly prepared for our lives on this earth, making us with the characteristics we have to suit his divine purpose for each one of us. And all the events of our lives were written in his book, meaning, planned out for us (divine omniscience does not need to keep a day book) before there was even one of them. Now David is filled with adoration and praise--here is a God who lovingly planned his life and prepared him for it. So the conclusion of the psalm is the practical application in his experience. He is surrounded by enemies who hate God and his will. But David takes comfort in the fact that God will protect him, because he is loyal to God, totally rejecting them and their evil ways. But he wants God to continue to examine him to make sure there is no evil way in him. He wants to be loyal to God, so that God's everlasting plan will work out completely in his life. In these psalms we have a grand picture of the sovereign God who is the creator of all things, who is sovereign over all things, who knows all things, who is present with all things, who evaluates everyone, and who protects his own by his love and righteousness. Rather than try to explain how this works with our wills, or try to escape from this penetrating presence, all we can do as believers

is put our trust in him and his word and seek to do his will, knowing that he is the one true and living God, our Maker and our Father in heaven who loved us and brought us into fellowship with himself through the Son and the Spirit.

## 01.02. Son of God, Begotten, Not Made

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2. The Son of God, Begotten, Not Made The Doctrine Of The Son The most important question that anyone has to answer is, “Who is Jesus Christ?” Or, as he put it himself, “Who do you say the Son of Man is?” How you answer that question determines your faith, and your fate.

Almost everyone believes that Jesus lived, that he was a teacher, a famous prophet, even a miracle worker, although they may not accept everything the Bible says about him. Islam believes he was a good prophet, that he died and went to heaven, and that he will come again (as a prophet of Islam); but it does not believe that he is God and that his death was salvific. And liberal teachers in the churches today might claim something similar, that he was a good man, a great teacher, a wonderful example, but not God in the flesh. But the Bible and thereafter the traditions of the church claim much more for him. So in this section of the study we want to examine the doctrine of the Son of God, or, the second person of the trinity, called in his earthly ministry Jesus the Christ, or the Son of Man, or the Son of God. The early church struggled with the issue until they finally formulated the creed and condemned Arianism. At the heart of the Nicene Creed are these words:

“And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ... .” In other words, although Jesus was a fully human person, he also was and is fully God. When we speak of the deity of Christ, we cannot water it down to mean that he was supernatural, or a divine being, or most God-like. He was and is God; but he was manifest in the flesh. This is why he alone is able to redeem us. This is why he is to receive our worship and our obedience.

Those who have rejected this teaching in part or in full often claim that the doctrine was formulated after the fact by the early church, and that it was never there in the Bible. But this is simply not so. The teaching is anticipated in elementary form in the Old Testament, imbedded in the Gospels, and fully explicated by the apostles. When we read the great prophecies of Isaiah about the Messiah, we catch a glimpse of what that greatness would be: he would have such an amazing birth (Isaiah 7:14) that he would be known as Immanuel, “God with us.” And by his nature and through his works he would be known as the “Mighty God” and the “Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). This one alone would bring everlasting peace and righteousness to the earth, for he would come into the world for that purpose. Isaiah is very precise: the child would be born, but the Son would be given. It would take the incarnation (the subject of a later section in this series) before people could fully comprehend what that meant. A careful reading of other passages will also show that the prophecies identify the Messiah with or as the LORD. Isaiah 48:15; Isaiah 16:1-14 identifies him as the LORD, the one who is sent into the world by the Spirit. By itself this passage could be given different interpretations; but as part of the collection of Messianic passages it underscores the theme that the Messiah is not merely a mortal. Malachi 3:1-5 describes the Messiah as the messenger of the covenant who will come to his temple (the house of the LORD),

but clarifies that it is Yahweh, the speaker, who will draw near. Proverbs 30:4 equates the Son with God the creator. These, but a few, give us a hint that this one who will be the Messiah will be much more than just a great human. And the New Testament fully explicates these prophecies as fulfilled in the person of Jesus. There was a birth in Bethlehem, for Messiah was to be born of the family of Judah. He would be known as Jesus. But the Son of God did not begin at Bethlehem. John 1:1-51 claims that he was the eternal Word, God himself, who created everything that exists, and that in time he became flesh and dwelt among us. Php 2:6 makes it clear that he is God, and that he set aside the use of some of his attributes to take on the form of the human, and die for the sins of the world. Titus 2:13 equates Jesus with God. Romans 9:6 describes him as God, who is blessed forever. And Revelation 5:13; Revelation 14:1-20 portray Christ as deity. These are but a few of the New Testament passages that one would consider first in dealing with the topic. But the creed had to focus on some of the language the Bible uses for Christ, and some of that language has confused people from time to time. How could the Son be said to be begotten if he is eternally God? To study this more closely I have chosen to use a Pauline passage, Romans 1:1-7, which shows that Jesus is the son of David and the Son of God, and that he has authority over us by virtue of his deity. While we will be studying this passage we will consider other related passages as well, and have several more sections on the doctrine of Christ.

#### Biblical Exposition Of Romans 1:1-7

There are many passages in the Bible that we could use for the basis of this study, but this simple introduction to the Book of Romans states clearly what the message of the New Testament is all about--it is about the person and work of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

#### Jesus Christ is Authoritative (Romans 1:1-2)

Romans 1:1-2 are simply a salutation or greeting from the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. But the fact that there is a church at all and that it is devoted to the worship and service of Jesus, indicates the deity and the authority of this one person. Accordingly, in the simple salutation we see some references to the doctrine of Christ that is the foundation and focus of the church.

Believers are His Servants This is the practical starting point for all who worship Jesus as Lord and Savior--they are his servants. Paul's expression, "a bond-servant of Jesus Christ," is the equivalent of the Old Testament's "servant of the LORD [Yahweh]," because to Paul they are one and the same person. This is the highest title that any human could have: Moses, David, Paul--they are all the servants of the LORD. The word for LORD in the Old Testament is the revealed name Yahweh, explained by God to Moses as "I AM." The explanation "I am" is the Hebrew word 'ehyeh (pronounced eh-yeh); the name Yahweh is actually the third person form of the verb and would translate "He is." Worshipers declare, "He is!" But God explains that it means "I am."

Paul is simply identifying Jesus as this Yahweh of the Old Testament, which is why he calls himself his servant. The term "servant" also needs some clarification. Unlike today, a servant in those days would actually be owned by the master. He, his family, his possessions, all belonged to the master. Likewise, anyone who is the servant of the LORD, or as Paul puts it, a bond slave of Jesus Christ, no longer is his or her own; they have been bought with a price, the blood of Jesus, and are now under his absolute authority. If Jesus were just a good man, a great teacher, no such

authority would be expected. But because he is God the Son, we owe him our lives. This is why in the book Paul will say that if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is LORD (=Yahweh) and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, we shall be saved” (Romans 10:9).

### Believers are Called by the LORD

Paul was called to be an apostle; others are called for different works in his kingdom. But the word “called” indicates that this life-long task was not of his (or our) choosing, but God’s. Jesus called all the disciples from their jobs, and they dropped everything and followed him. That is authority. Paul’s calling was dramatic: on the road to Damascus God dramatically changed his whole life. To be called of God means that we have a new purpose in life, a new mission, a new reason for living. And that new life and mission is to worship and serve Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul was therefore separated to the Gospel. He was dedicated by God’s calling to take the good news to other lands. People do not choose ministries and avenues of service; God chooses people and equips them for the task before them. The Gospel, or good news, that Paul was to declare was promised beforehand in the Old Testament. Once Paul came to faith in Jesus the Messiah, then all the Old Testament made complete sense to him (and he had studied it all his life). Paul’s formulation of the Gospel, that Christ Jesus died according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures, was clearly drawn from the Old Testament and explained fully in the person of Jesus, the Messiah. So both Paul’s calling and his message came from God. Thus it is with all believers. The Authority of Jesus is Based on His Deity (Romans 1:3-4) The subject matter of Romans is stated in the words “concerning His Son.” That is what Paul is writing about. He will here say two things about the Son: he was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and he was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection. The Son of David

Jesus was born into this world as a Davidic king, in line to the throne of David, king of Judah. This is what people usually focus on at the season of Christmas--the birth to Mary in a stable, in Bethlehem, in the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David. It is familiar material for even the most irregular Church-goer. But the text says that he was the son of David “in the sphere of” the flesh. There was a birth, to be sure, but that was not the whole story; it was only the story of his physical nature. People do not usually say someone was born into a family “in the sphere of the flesh” unless there was another sphere to consider as well. The physical birth did not mark the beginning of the Son of God, only the beginning of his physical life on earth. He entered the race through the line of David so that he would become the promised Davidic king and restore the dominion that was lost because of sin. The Son of God

Jesus was “declared to be” or perhaps “appointed to be” the “Son of God” by the resurrection from the dead. This was not in the sphere of the flesh, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. What this means is that the resurrection from the dead demonstrated that Jesus was not just another physical descendant of David--he was the divine Son of God who had authority over death and the grave.

(Note how the doctrines are so intricately connected. It is no surprise that unbelievers try to nibble at the issue from the related themes, the resurrection, the virgin birth, the miracles, for if those are taken away, the person of the Son of God is changed).

Hebrews 1:1-14 explains how this appointment developed in the exaltation of Jesus (resurrection and ascension = exaltation; we shall study these in later sections). The writer draws upon Psalms 2:1-12 and Daniel 7:9-14 to show that Jesus is the heir to the throne of David and that he would come from heaven to claim his throne. The Bible says that the heir would become the king and have the title of Son of God when he ascended the throne (2 Samuel 7:14). So every Davidic king could claim the title "Messiah" (= "anointed one") or "Son of God" (= heir to the kingdom of God) because of these promises. No doubt that was uppermost in Peter's mind when he first declared his faith that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God. But Hebrews takes this all to another level because Jesus was not a normal son of David. Jesus was not crowned as a king on earth, but he died and rose again and ascended to heaven where God declared him to be the Son who "this day" (=exaltation) was begotten (from the dead; Revelation 1:5). So his exaltation inaugurated his kingship; but he awaits the second coming to put all things under his authority. This resurrection declared for all time that Jesus was not merely a mortal in the line of David with a claim to a special title; it declared that he was by nature the Son of God. But what exactly does "Son of God" mean? We know it cannot be literal, for that would mean that the "Father" procreated him by a woman or a goddess (as the pagan religions, which had such human activities among the gods). These ideas are foreign to the true faith of the Bible. There is no heavenly consort; God has no wife; there is no goddess. And Arianism, which claimed that Jesus was the first of God's creation, cannot be right either, for it denies too much Scripture. To understand what is meant here we have to consider several lines of Revelation 1:1-20. The "Father-Son" Language. At least 100 times in the Gospels Jesus called God His Father. Is this just a general reverence to the spark of divinity in all people (for they too can refer to God as Father), or does it actually mean He was procreated in some way, or does it have a totally different meaning?

We have to link this terminology with the claims of Jesus Himself, namely, that He was sent to earth by the Father (John 14:24; John 5:26). Or the claims of those he taught, namely that he is the eternal God who created everything (John 1:1-51). And then there is also the hostile witness of his enemies: they sought to kill him because he made himself equal with God (John 5:17). From a human point of view, that is why he died: the charge was blasphemy. Or, study the parable of the vineyard: the owner sent his son to the vineyard, and they killed him (Matthew 21:33-46). Why? Because he was the son. In other words, there would have been no cross without Jesus' claim to be equal with God the Father and heir of all things. And everyone, believer and unbeliever alike, acknowledges that Jesus was crucified. So the point of Jesus' use of the "Father-Son" language was meant to teach that he was equal to the Father in nature but subordinated to the Father for the mission.

2. The "Only Begotten Son" Language. The second piece of evidence we must examine is the expression "only-begotten." It is the Greek word "monogeneis." This is not simply "begotten," for that expression can be applied to all believers, those who have been begotten or born again by the Spirit. This is a unique expression for a unique person, the only-begotten Son of God. The expression appears in John 1:14; John 4:18; John 3:16; John 3:18. It would literally mean the "only generated one." This is the key expression for the doctrine of "the eternal generation of the Son," meaning, he always was the only begotten Son. The expression does not refer to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, because he is the Son from eternity past.

Perhaps the language can be better understood if contrasted with synonyms. Take the verbs “make,” “create,” and “beget.” The verb “make” is general; one can make dinner, clothes, a house, or any other product. The “create” can have the same objects, but usually elevates the act to an art: one creates a masterpiece, or a work of art, or a symphony. While these creations bear the imprint of the creator, they do not share his nature. But “beget” is different. You can only beget a child that has the same nature as you have--a son or a daughter. There is nothing else you can beget (unless you were speaking very figuratively). Your son or your daughter will inherit his or her nature from you--genes, personality--all of it. You can use “make” or “create” for producing a child; but when you use “beget” it only means you produce a child that has your nature.

Now follow this carefully. If Jesus is said to be the begotten Son of God (using the figure from human language to make the point), then Jesus has the same nature as the Father. If Jesus has the same nature as God the Father, then Jesus is divine and eternal as well. If he is eternally God, then there was never a time he was literally begotten--which is why we know the language is figurative to describe his nature, and not his beginning. To call Jesus “the only begotten Son” means that he is fully divine and eternal. He is God the Son. This is why the creed says that Jesus was “begotten, not made.” Why? Because he is of one substance with the Father.

One more point. The word “begotten” has “only” (mono-) prefixed to it. There is only one. This means that Jesus has a unique relationship with the Father--they two along with the Holy Spirit make up the Godhead. You and I, if we are believers, have been born into the family of God--we are said to be begotten of God. But we are not “only-begotten.” That refers to Jesus’ divine nature. We were adopted by grace and given the divine nature by the Spirit so that we may be called the children of God. But Jesus--he is very God of very God. He is the only-begotten Son of God (that is the part of the creed that reads “of very God”), which means that he is God (that is the part that reads “very God”).

3. The “I Am” Language. The third line of evidence concerns the Lord Jesus Christ’s use of “I am.” Although there are times when “I am” in Jesus’ words mean simply “It is I,” or “I am here,” there are a number of occasions where it clearly means that he was identifying himself as the “I Am” of the Bible. In the Old Testament the great “I am” revelation has numerous predications that make amazing claims: I am with you always, I am your healer, I am your rock, I am the first and the last, I am Yahweh and there is no other,” etc. And so too do we find Jesus’ revelation of himself making similar claims: I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the resurrection and the life; I am the good shepherd; I am the door; I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, etc.” But there are certain passages that stick out because of their claims of “I am” without predicates. In John 8:58 the Pharisees were disputing over the identity of Jesus, and Jesus said that Abraham rejoiced to see his day (perhaps a vision of the sacrificial death of Jesus). They challenged this statement because Jesus was not yet +fifty years old. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I Am.” And they wanted to kill him for blasphemy. In that very same chapter, John 8:24 and John 8:28, Jesus said, “unless you believe that I am ... .” Now, if you compare Isaiah 43:10; Isaiah 43:11, you will see that same thing being said by God in the Old Testament. Clearly, Jesus was equating himself with Yahweh, the I Am of the Old Testament. These and other passages show that Jesus was identifying himself with God. Finally, in John 10:30 Jesus declared “I and the Father are one.”

All these claims and works of Jesus would have fallen flat after his death if he had not risen from the grave. But he did rise from the grave, and ascended into heaven, and will come again to judge the world. That resurrection declared that he was indeed the Son of God, not in a general sense, but in his nature equal with the Father. He is the one who came into the world as Immanuel, God with us, and not merely one born in time. The Authority of Christ Calls for Devotion (Romans 1:5-7)

What is the effect of this on all who believe in Jesus? There are three listed here: (1) We receive grace and peace through Jesus Christ; (2) we receive a commission to serve him in this life; and (3) we must be set apart to him, sanctified, for he is our Lord and our God.

If Jesus is not the divine, eternal Son of God, of one substance with the Father, then all Christian worship of him is idolatrous. But if he is the true and living Lord, then all worship must be in Christ Jesus, for no one comes to the Father except by the Son.

### 3. The Son of God, Creator, Redeemer, Light of Life

Introduction The human dilemma cannot be solved by human efforts; for when we observe the world around us, or the world at any point in history, we find disaster. In the place of grace we find indifference, animosity, and even cruelty; and in the place of truth we find deception and confusion. The Bible describes the spiritual condition of the unbelievers in the world as dead in trespasses and sins, and walking in darkness, that is, ignorant of the truth and living in sin and despair. Darkness in the Bible signifies life in sin away from God; and death is its punishment. If the world is spiritually dead and enveloped in spiritual darkness, it cannot possibly find spiritual life and light -- apart from a work of sovereign grace. And so the good news of the gospel is that God entered the human race, breathed life into believing human beings by his Spirit, and transferred them into his marvelous light. Thus, they are alive in him, walking in the light, and looking for the glorious appearance of the one who is the light and the life. The Nicene Creed focuses on the nature of the Son in this great incarnation by affirming that he is

“God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven ... .” In the first chapter of John’s Gospel we have these truths clearly stated. There are four parts of the teaching developed here: the nature of the Word, the witness of the Word, the regeneration by the Word, and the revelation from the Word.

I. The Nature of the Word (John 1:1-5) A. He is the eternal, divine Word. The first five verses of the chapter describe our Lord Jesus Christ as the source of life and light -- the very antithesis of the spiritual condition of the world.

What strikes you first is the fact that he is called the “Word.” It is the Greek term *logos*. What is clear from this is that “Word” describes Jesus as the one who completely reveals the Father (see 5:18). He is the full expression of the Godhead, the Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, indicating he is the complete revelation). He is the first word of creation, and the last word of Revelation. But there is more, much more, here, and we shall only begin to uncover it. Throughout the Old Testament God was described frequently in human terms (we call those expressions anthropomorphisms, from the Greek words for “man” and “form,” meaning God is described in human terms). The writers described God as if he had hands and feet, or ears and eyes; he was said to laugh, ridicule, turn his back, come down for a closer look, and all kinds of all

too human descriptions. They were figures of speech to communicate what God is like on our terms so that we could understand. These were the words used to describe God. But in the fullness of the time God sent his Son into the world to reveal God fully, and all those “words” became literally and historically true: God did come down to earth, and as Jesus he did have ears and eyes and hands and feet--he lived out the revelation of God and so is called the “incarnate Word,” the revelation of God in human flesh. In this he not only fulfilled Scripture but became the culmination of all revelation (Hebrews 1:1; Hebrews 1:2).

John offers three descriptions of the Word. First, he was in the beginning. Actually, the article “the” is not present in the text; it simply has “in beginning.” So before anything else, before the creation in Genesis even, the Son of God was there. He is beyond time; he is eternal. Second, John says he was with God. The idea of “with” is that the Son had a close and intimate existence with God the Father. Before time began the Father and Son were together as one, a relationship that is unparalleled in existence. And third, John says he was God. This does not mean that the Son was a divine creature, a heavenly creature, a lesser god (among many), a former creation who became a deity--no, it simply declares that he was God, equal with the Father and the Spirit. So the passage opens by declaring that Jesus Christ is both divine and eternal.

B. He is the sovereign creator.

If John 1:1-2 describe the nature of the Word, John 1:3 describes his power. He created everything that exists. This idea is taught in Psalms 33:6-9, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2. So the Word reveals the Father, but the initial revelation of the Father is the creation, for the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalms 19:1-14).

We have seen that God the Father is the creator; now we learn that was all done by the Son. We cannot sort out all the distinctions here, but in general it should be noted that every work of God involves the entire Godhead, for while there are three persons in the Godhead there is one God. For every work, the Father decrees it, the Son does it, and the Spirit enables it to be done. So the Bible will mention at different times the work of God in different terms. The Son, in this place, is declared to be the active agent of creation. Nothing exists that was not made by him. But it came from the Father’s decree; and it was accomplished through the Spirit’s hovering over the deep and preparing for creation (Genesis 1:2).

Now, as you read Genesis 1:1-31 carefully you will notice that the predominant theme is that the means of creation was the spoken word of God. “And God said” occurs ten times (which the teachers of Israel observed paralleled the ten commandments for humans). As God commanded nature and all forms of life, the different parts of creation came into existence or took form. John is telling us that the living Word, Jesus Christ, spoke the creative word in Genesis. In fact, there is also a subtle word play in Genesis that brings out this connection: in Hebrew “let there be” (yehi) is the shortened spelling of the verb “to be” which in the longer spelling is the holy name “Yahweh,” which the LORD interpreted to Moses to mean “I AM.” So John indicates that the Word of God created everything; and in Genesis the I AM was the One who said “Let there be,” and “there was.”

C. He is the life and the light.

Now John turns to Jesus’ mission. One of the major themes in the book is that Jesus is the life: “I am the way, the truth, and the life”; “I came that they might have life”; “I am the resurrection and

the life" (see, for example, John 5:26; John 6:57; John 10:10; John 14:6). Not only did the Son of God create life, he holds it together by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:2), and he is able to give it again if we should die (John 11:1-57). He is life, in the fullest sense of the term. There is no life without him. This life, Jesus Christ, is the light of all humankind. Recall that the light was the first thing created in Genesis--"Let there be light." Its purpose was to dispel the darkness that covered the earth. And so light became a symbol of God, his nature, his reign over the earth. Those who remained in darkness, meaning sin, oppression, war, and gloom, Isaiah predicted, would see a great light (Isaiah 9:2) in the region of Galilee of the nations. Jesus came preaching in Galilee, announcing, "I am the light of the world." Light represents life and understanding, or the truth. He came to reveal the Father, and by so doing guide people in the way of righteousness. But even though the Word is life and light, that light, that truth, was not "apprehended" by people who are in darkness. The term conveys to us that those who are in sin and unbelief neither understand nor receive the truth, They cannot, for light and darkness are mutually exclusive. Darkness cannot apprehend the light, meaning, sinners cannot receive Jesus and remain in sin. Light invades and destroys darkness; when Jesus enters a life, that life is transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. But darkness itself cannot apprehend the truth. T. S. Eliot in "Ash Wednesday" writes:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent  
If the unheard, unspoken  
Word is unspoken, unheard;  
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,  
The Word without a word, the Word within  
The world and for the world;  
And the light shone in darkness and  
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word.  
O my people, what have I done to thee.  
Where shall the word be found, where will the word  
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence  
Not on the sea or on the islands, not  
On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,  
For those who walk in darkness  
Both in the day time and in the night time  
The right time and the right place are not here  
No place of grace for those who avoid the face

No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and

deny the voice. So the Word is the light that shines in darkness; but the darkness does not apprehend it--not without the grace of God.

II. The Witness to the Word (John 1:6-8) The discussion now turns to the witness of John the Baptist. John 1:6 introduces him: "There was a man sent from God." Even the witness to the light was sent from God, so thorough was the preparation for the revelation of the incarnation.

Then, in John 1:7-8 he describes his mission: he came as a witness (the word is martyr) to the light. The witness points to Christ, and Christ reveals the Father. So how do people get to God? --through Jesus Christ. And where do they find Jesus Christ? --witnesses point to him. The darkness, that is, the unbelieving world, needs someone to guide them to the light. Today, all Christians are to be witnesses. But as the prophets would say, woe to the witnesses who do not point people to the light.

John the Baptist, John 1:8 clarifies, was not the light. This is repeated in John 1:19-33 where he himself disclaimed, saying, "I am not the Messiah." What was he then? A voice. He was a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare a way for the Lord, as the prophets had foretold (Isaiah 40:1-31). All too often today many witnesses blur the distinction, and make themselves lights to be followed, make themselves the center of their ministry or their church. Witnesses, whether ministers or not, have to say clearly, "I am not the light!" "I am a witness to the light." I am a voice. "He is the one you should follow."

III. The Regeneration by the Word (John 1:9-13) A. The true light illumines everyone (John 1:9).

John was not the light. There was a true light coming into the world, and that was Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. When the text says that the true light illumines everyone, it does not mean that everyone will be converted and enter heaven's kingdom. That is clear from the Bible as a whole, and from Jesus' preaching as well ("repent, or you shall perish"). What is meant here is clarified by the work that the Holy Spirit does today, continuing what Jesus began (according to Acts): he convicts the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit works in the earth with this ministry so that everyone receives some degree of light, some knowledge and some conviction; how they respond to the light they receive will determine whether or not God sends them more light (see the story of Cornelius in Acts). Well, this is what Jesus did when he walked on earth--he revealed the will of the Father and called people to repentance--and it is what he continues to do today through the Holy Spirit.

B. The world knew him not (John 1:10-11). The sad report of John 1:10 is that the world did not know him (compare Isaiah 1:3). When Jesus came into the world, that world was so blinded by sin that it did not recognize who he truly was. It still does not, even though most people know something about Jesus.

John is using the word "world" in a couple of ways. First, it is a place: Jesus came into the world, a place that was made by him. Second, it refers to the present evil system and members of Satan's domain--"the world (people) knew him not." John 1:11 makes the point again; and John 12:37 explains that they simply did not believe in him, so they could never truly know him.

C. Those who receive him are regenerated (John 1:1-13).

Those who respond to the light by faith, that is, those who believe in Jesus Christ, are given the authority to become the children of God. This is a different word than that which is used to describe God's own Son. We enter the family of God by faith in Jesus; and when we do God imparts to us light and life, that is, spiritual understanding and eternal life. If we try to gain all the understanding before entering the kingdom by faith, we will never enter. We have to respond to the amount of light given to us with faith before we receive more.

John explains that becoming a child of God is not a natural process (John 1:13). This is a spiritual birth (read John 3:1-36 about Nicodemus). It is not a physical birth ("not of blood"), nor is it even by human decision ("not of the will of the flesh"), nor of a father ("not of the will of man"). It is a spiritual birth, a new birth, what the Bible calls regeneration. And while many professing Christians prefer not to talk about being "born again" or about the "new birth," (as if it was some strange expression from the fundamentalist circles) Jesus did, and he said that was the only way anyone was ever going to get into heaven.

Regeneration is the divinely mysterious act by which the Word enters the human spirit, raises that person from spiritual death (alienation from God) and spiritual darkness (ignorance of God), and gives that person spiritual life (union with God forever) and spiritual understanding (illumination by the Spirit through the written word). It is a work of God; but from our perspective it happens when we by faith accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. There is no salvation, no eternal life, no acceptance with God, without this spiritual transformation.

Regeneration is not a process throughout life: there is a point in our life when we pass from death to life, from darkness to light, from being separated from God to being accepted by God. It will take the rest of our lives to work it out in every area of our lives, and to learn more and more, but regeneration itself refers to when we are born into the family of God--it is our salvation.

IV. The Revelation from the Word (John 1:14-18) A. The Word became flesh (John 1:14 a). So the first part of his coming into the world was to bring light to all. The second part of the mission of Jesus was to reveal the Father; and this is done simultaneously with illumination and regeneration in many cases. But in general it happened at the incarnation.

Here, then, is the basic passage for the doctrine of incarnation (carn, "flesh," into flesh). The text says that the Word took to himself flesh and "tabernacled" among us--pitched his tent. The background, of course, is the Israelite experience in the wilderness with their tabernacle or tent of meeting. Once Israel put up the tent, the glory of the LORD entered it and dwelt among them, concealed from their view by the tenting. That brilliant, luminous cloud that had represented God's presence through the wilderness now was dwelling in the holy of holies. John is saying that the flesh of Jesus is like that tent, both enabling the glorious Lord to dwell among his people and concealing his glory from their view. Jesus, then, is the same LORD of glory in the Old Testament who dwelt among people; but now that dwelling is more fully expressed in the incarnation.

B. The glory was revealed (John 1:14 b).

John says that they saw his glory. I think that in the fullest sense this is referring to the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-27) where John and the two other disciples saw the glory transform the appearance of Jesus (see also Revelation 1:1-20). But it also means that they witnessed the unique splendor of the life and work of Jesus in their midst. They saw the miracles, heard the

teachings, witnessed the death, and celebrated the resurrection appearances. The glory they saw was the glory of the only begotten of the Father, and the resurrection declared that once and for all. The glory that John describes was “full of grace and truth.” We see so little grace or truth today--it is a struggle to maintain either, or both. Some folks you meet may be very gracious, but at the cost of the truth; others may hold fast to the truth, but exhibit not an ounce of grace or compassion. Jesus not only had a perfect balance of grace and truth, but a full measure of each. He was unique in this, but then he is unique--he is the living Word, the glorious God who provides life and light to us. And the only way the human dilemma could ever be resolved was for God himself to come into this world and tabernacle among people for the expressed purpose of bringing life and light to the world.

C. The eternal word brought grace and truth to us (John 1:15-18).

John prefaces his remarks to remind us that Jesus is the pre-existing Word. He was younger than John the Baptist, but preceded him as well. In the proper time God brought grace and truth to mankind in the person of his Son, Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of glory. Apart from the ministry of the Son of God in this world, there is no salvation, no hope, no light or life. But because Jesus is the Lord of glory, he has redeemed us, and we worship him.

## 01.04. And Was Made Man

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4. And Was Made Man The Doctrine Of The Incarnation The doctrine of the incarnation is central to the Christian faith because it is central to the eternal plan of God. Without this doctrine, Jesus is just another human being; without this doctrine there is no salvation for us in him; and without this doctrine it is wrong for people to worship him. Today, many people, including theologians and church leaders unfortunately, would be just as happy to say that Jesus was just a prophet, or a great teacher, as Islam and Judaism would allow; but the Bible says more than that, much more--and not simply in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament prophecies about the person and work of the Messiah.

It is a fundamental teaching of the historic Christian faith that God came into this world in mortal flesh to redeem us. The word "incarnation" means "in flesh." And John declares this truth very early: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:1; John 14:1-31). This is how the prophecy of Isaiah about "Immanuel," God with us," came about (Isaiah 7:14). Paul writes, "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law" (Galatians 4:4). There was a birth in Bethlehem, but that birth was anything but natural. It was the birth of Jesus, a Jewish man from Galilee; but it was in that birth that God the Son entered the human race. The one born to the virgin Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit; he would be fully human, but he would also be divine--this is his twofold nature. Thus, Isaiah was very precise as it turns out when he wrote that a child would be born, but a Son would be given (Isaiah 9:6).

About a thousand years ago Anselm expounded on this doctrine in his classic work, *Why God Became Man* (*Cur Deus Homo*). He eloquently discussed what the Bible clearly teaches about the person of Jesus Christ. It was God's plan for the human race to triumph over sin, death, and the grave; but there was no human qualified or able to do this, for all are sinful and need salvation themselves. And so God himself would have to enter the human race, become one with his creation, in order to bring about the victory. He would be fully human, living out every aspect of mortality through to the suffering of a horrible death; but he would also remain divine, fully able to conquer sin, the temptor, death and the grave--and fully qualified to do it because he alone was free from sin. The entire process of the incarnation is a mystery to us, as are most of God's works (once we acknowledge God exists, however, then anything is possible with him, whether we understand it or not). Anselm observed that God had formed a man (Adam) without a father and a mother; and that he had formed a woman (Eve) without a father or a mother nor by natural reproduction through a mother, but from as man; and so he could form Jesus, without the natural reproduction of parents, but using a woman. And by entering the human race this way, the Son had to lay aside the use of some of his divine attributes for a while (this is the doctrine of the kenosis, which we will consider below). The angel announced to Mary and Joseph that the holy child who would be born of Mary would be conceived by the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:26-38). The child would not have a human father to pass on his nature; and neither would

the child draw his human nature from the mother who would give birth to him. This was a special creation by the Holy Spirit so that the child Jesus would not be born with a sin nature. The doctrine of the virgin birth is necessary because as God in the flesh Jesus had to be sinless in order to save those who were sinners. The Church of Rome argues that Jesus did draw his nature from Mary, and so it has taught that Mary also had to be sinless (the doctrine of the immaculate conception). But the Scripture nowhere teaches that Mary was sinless in order to give birth to the Savior. That issue aside, we must focus on the clear teaching of the Bible that Jesus was born of a virgin through the work of the Holy Spirit so that he was fully human and fully divine and completely sinless.

It is very important that Christians be clear on this teaching. Jesus Christ was not just another man--although he certainly was a man. He was not just another prophet--although he certainly was a prophet. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. When God the Son entered into the human race, his creation, he did so to redeem it. When he arose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he was returning to his eternal home in glory. But something had changed through the incarnation, forever! There is now a "God-man" in heaven preparing for our arrival. Because Jesus is there as a glorified man as well as the glorious eternal divine Son, the way is open for all of us humans to enter in and share his glorious estate.

If Jesus is not God (note I am saying "God," not "a god" or "a divine person" or "a supernatural person"), then it is wrong for us to worship him. That would be idolatry. But we do worship him because he is God. When he was here on earth he revealed by his words and his mighty works that he was indeed God with us. And his enemies certainly understood this, for they put him to death under the charge of blasphemy (if he had never claimed to be God they would not have had a case against him). And then his resurrection from the dead proved him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:1-7).

Today there are a lot of theologians and ministers who argue that the deity of Jesus was a later idea made up by the early Christians to compete with the Roman idea of a divine emperor. They contend that primitive Christianity did not have the doctrine, but the early church needed a God to compete with Rome and with Judaism, and so they developed the ideas about Jesus. But the facts of the life and especially the death and resurrection of Jesus make it clear that this was no later idea inserted into the creeds of the faith or the Bible itself--the whole Gospel account is a single theme--how the divine Son of God came into the world to redeem us. And besides, the early Christians were already worshiping him as God. Moreover, the doctrine of the incarnation was why the Christian faith had been such a stumbling block to so many people in the first century--and continues to be so today. But Paul holds firm to the essentials of the faith:

"The mystery of godliness is great: he appeared in the flesh,

was vindicated by the Spirit,

was seen by angels,

was preached on in the world,

was taken up into glory" (1 Timothy 2:16). And the apostle John in the beginning of the Book of Revelation sees a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, and hears him declare, "I am the first

and the last, the living one. I was dead; but I am alive for ever more. And I hold the keys of death and hades” (Revelation 1:17-18). This is the language that was used in the prophets, especially Isaiah, for the true LORD God. Jesus is that LORD God. But he declares there that he came into the world and died, but is now alive for ever more. That is the description of the incarnation; that is the Son of God having come down and being made man, but now in glory again.

We must also note that the doctrine of the incarnation is bound up with the doctrine of the trinity, or more precisely, the tri-unity of the Godhead. And this is the greater mystery of the faith. The Nicene Creed is arranged according to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but it does not attempt to articulate the meaning. God is one essence, but exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (not three people, but three persons of one essence). All three persons are at once and fully God. All persons of the Godhead are fully active in any and every work of God--the Father decrees, the Son fulfills, and the Spirit empowers. But the Son is also fully human now, because divinity and humanity were joined in him. The two natures of Jesus are designated the hypostatic union by theologians; but this is not something we can fully understand as humans. To speak of the incarnation, then, is to speak of the nature of Jesus Christ the Son of God as human as well as divine. But to speak of the incarnation also opens the discussion to God's plan of redemption for a race that is hopelessly lost in sin. A Biblical Exposition Of Php 2:1-11 In Php 2:1-30 we have the doctrinal record of what the incarnation meant to our Lord. But Paul does not discuss the doctrine for the sake of doctrine alone--his chapter is concerned with how Christians serve one another, in humility, as our Lord came to serve us and to redeem us. And this is the way it should be--all doctrine is meant to inform us of the faith and to direct us in our Christlike devotion and service.

Paul first makes it clear that the greatest cause of sin is pride, and the greatest Christian virtue is humility. Through pride Satan sinned and plunged himself and a third of the angels with him into darkness. Through pride Adam and Eve sinned and plunged the human race and its world into sin. Human pride has always been at the root of sins, the cause of dissension, disagreement and wars, and the reason for the lack of understanding, forgiveness and service. Because of pride the human race was lost and cannot save itself--ever. But through an act of humility, the greatest act of humility, God redeemed us and restored us as his new creation. Thereupon, to be a Christian is to be like Christ, even though there are some aspects of that we resist. And so Paul, in teaching the church about humility, tells it to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, who left his glory and became a human in order to redeem us and to form us into one body. Without a Christ-like humility, we will not maintain any semblance of the body that Christ established.

I. Humility is the means of achieving unity (Php 2:1-4).

Philippians is best known by students of the Bible as the source of the doctrine of the kenosis (the word is derived from the verb in the passage that says that Jesus “emptied” himself and became a human). Theologians spend their time trying to determine exactly what that meant (and well they should try to determine this); but all too often folks miss the point that Paul is trying to get across, the point that he illustrates with the doctrine of the kenosis, namely, an appeal for unity based on a Christ-like humility.

A. The appeal is based on four Christian virtues (Php 2:1).

Four conditional clauses are in Php 2:1 (Paul is not raising doubts about these, but assumes they exist when he says “if there be . . .”). First is exhortation in Christ. The word “exhortation” means counsel, rebuke, comfort (the same basic word for the Comforter, the Holy Spirit as paraclete). Paul is saying that if we received the work of the Spirit that exhorts us--which we did--then unity should follow.

Second, Paul says “if there be any consolation of love” (that is, love that encourages). Since we share in God’s love, that love should unite us. No one earned a share of God’s love, so there is no room for pride.

Third is the fellowship of the Spirit. If the same Spirit indwells us then there ought to be fellowship among us.

Fourth is compassion. This word refers to that feeling of tender compassion that a mother has for the child, brother for brother, or the like relationship. If there is any such compassion, there will be unity. The point of Php 2:1 is that we do have all these things in Christ because we are the recipients of grace. And if we have these, they will inevitably lead to unity. As we had to humble ourselves to receive the grace of God, we must humble ourselves to achieve spiritual unity.

B. The appeal is for Christian unity (Php 2:2-4). The appeal is recorded in Php 2:20; it has four parts to it that correspond to the four virtues of Php 2:1. Paul first appeals for us to be of the same mind. This is not a unity of the flesh (as Php 2:5 will clarify). This corresponds to the first clause of Php 2:1, or being in Christ--if we are all in Christ, then we should all be of one mind. The other ideas are still a part of this grand theme of unity. The second idea is to have the same love (this corresponds to “if there is consolation of love”); the third is to be of one accord (literally of one spirit), and the fourth is to be of one purpose (the one purpose should correspond to the tender mercies and compassions in Christ).

Then, in Php 2:3-4 Paul explains how to achieve this unity. On the negative side, he says that we should do nothing for selfish ambition (this is difficult for our “me” generation). If we do something only to serve ourselves, then it is of the flesh--and Jesus would say we have had all the reward we shall get. But selfish ambition will also destroy unity. On the positive side Paul says that we are to count each other better than ourselves. As we look around us, do we think that we are better than all of these people? (Do not confuse talents here with qualities--obviously some people are better at certain things than others--but this is asking the question of value to God). Do we think that we are more valuable to God than others around us? That is pride; it will destroy unity and harmony. Pride fixes its eyes on the flaws and imperfections of others and overlooks the same in oneself. Humility says that we are recipients of grace, and God resists the proud. Humility is self-abasing and generous; pride is self-centered and arrogant.

II. The humility of our Lord is our pattern (Php 2:5-11).

Now Paul brings in the incarnation. He does not leave us with all these instructions; he provides us with a pattern, a model for Godly humility--Jesus Christ the Lord. The passage is rather detailed, and would take some time to study (there are books written on these verses). But two predominant points emerge.

A. Humility is characterized by self-sacrificing love (Php 2:5-8).

“Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus.” We say, “I have a mind to do such or so.” So here Paul uses that kind of language to tell us that our attitude and our purpose in life should be the same as Christ’s. Even though he was of the same essence as God, he did not think that being equal with God was something to grasp or cling to, but he emptied himself. The construction of Php 2:6-7 is a little complicated, but two key verbs clarify it. The first verb is “he emptied himself” (the Greek verb is *kenoo* [pronounced ken-AH-oh]). To understand this verb we have to look at the two clauses that come before it. The first clause is “existing in the form of God.” The word “form” here refers to the inner essence. Jesus was and is of the same essence as the Father--he is divine. The second clause is “he did not consider being equal with God something to cling to.” When Jesus “emptied himself” he relinquished his rights, or the free use of his divine rights--he set aside his self-willed use of the attributes of deity. He did not cease being deity; but he surrendered his right to manifest his power and his glory for the purpose of the incarnation. We have to be careful when we explain how he emptied himself. He was, and always is, divine. But he set aside the use of some of his attributes for the purpose of his earthly ministry. Not so with human pride. Pride clings to its rights, to its power, and is unwilling to give them up. If someone achieved such power as Jesus had, pride would probably flaunt it rather than surrender it to the service of others.

Paul then explains what it meant for Jesus to empty himself in this way: “taking the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of man.” Note the contrast: he was the “form” of God (inner essence), and now would be the form of a servant; he was equal with God, but now he would have the “likeness” of a man (and the word here refers to the outer form). He was similar to a human, especially in outer form, but he was not exactly human--he did not share the human essence, which is sinful. How did this come about? When he emptied himself for the incarnation? The second key word in the section is “he humbled himself” (Php 2:8). This picks up where the last clause left off: being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself. It was one thing to leave glory and take the form of a human--that is emptying. But it is another thing altogether to suffer and die on the cross--that is humbling. Humbling is submissive obedience at great personal cost. In Christ we find the greatest act of obedience, and the most humbling act. Rather than fighting off death and resisting it, he willingly submitted to it, so that others might be saved. Here is the greatest heroic act the world has ever seen.

#### B. Humility is reward by exaltation (Php 2:9-11).

Having shown the great humility of our LORD in the service of the divine will, Paul now describes the reward for it. God exalts the humble--and God the Father exalted Christ above everything else. Note the structure of the passage: “God exalted him” is antithetically parallel to “he humbled himself.” And the statement “God gave him a name” is in contrast to “he emptied himself.” So two verbs here reverse the two verbs given earlier. That name will ultimately bring all creation to its knees before the Lord Jesus Christ, to acknowledge his deity. The beginning of this exaltation is recorded in Hebrews 1:1-14 (and we shall look at that at a later point in the creed). The lesson of the passage is clear enough: unity in the church comes when the recipients of grace pattern their lives after Christ and respond to one another with the humility of a servant. The doctrine in the passage explains in greater detail what it meant for the Son of God to enter into this world as a human and to die for us. When we simply say “and became man” in the creed, we need to think what that must have meant for the eternal LORD God, the Son, our Savior. But because he became man, we have been redeemed, and he shall be highly exalted. We shall focus more on

this in the next lesson on the creed.

## 01.05. Death, Burial & Resurrection of Jesus Messiah

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5. The Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah The Gospel The “Gospel” is a term that is used for a number of things in Christianity; it means “good news” essentially. The word is used for one or more of the four books of the Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are the four “gospels.” But the word is also used very precisely for the central doctrines of the Christian faith concerning Jesus, namely his death, burial and resurrection.

Paul clearly states that the Gospel that he preached is that Jesus died according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures. Paul says:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he as raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Paul then goes on to declare that Jesus made many appearances that proved that he did rise from the dead. And so the creed says: and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures. The point is that the Christian Gospel is not simply the facts of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, but those facts understood in accordance with what the Scriptures say. In other words, the death of Jesus has to be understood in accordance with what Scripture teaches about it--who this Jesus was who died, why his death was so important, what kind of death it was, and what it accomplished. Likewise, the burial and the resurrection have to be understood in the way that Scripture teaches--what exactly it teaches about his resurrection, why it was important, what it proved, and how it relates to his exaltation to glory. This would mean that we must first be clear on who Jesus is. If he is not God manifest in the flesh, if he is not the divine Son of God, then his death would be at best a martyrdom, a great act of love and devotion--but it would not have saved anyone, it would not have made atonement. This would also mean that we would have to be clear on why he suffered and died. Scripture teaches that it was for our sins that he died (he did not deserve to die), the just for the unjust. His death was a vicarious substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world. And Scripture also teaches that his death was an atonement. In other words, it was not just a physical death. For the divine Son to die was the equivalent of the human race suffering the second death, eternal separation from God. Christ, the eternal one, was separated from the Father spiritually on our behalf when he died on the cross. This would also mean that there was a complete death, and so he was buried. He did not swoon, or faint, or go into a coma to be revived. He died, and was buried. It was a real death. And if it was a real death, this would also mean that it was a real resurrection, one who was dead actually coming back to life. The resurrection proved that his death was an atoning sacrifice, that it accomplished what it was accomplish, and that it authenticated all of Christ’s claims.

It would take much longer to explain all the details about the Gospel that are contained in the Scripture. This is the task of the churches in their teaching and preaching ministry in the word of God. And we have our entire lifetime to focus on these truths and discover all that God has done for us. But perhaps it would be most helpful in this brief survey to look at the cardinal Old Testament prophecy about the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah, Isaiah 52:15, Isaiah 53:1-12. The song is written in the past tense, as if it had already happened; but that is normal for the prophets who saw the visions and described what they had seen (called "seers"). We know from the contents of this song that its ultimate meaning is in Jesus the Messiah, for Jesus claimed to be the servant who came into the world to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), and the apostles knew that this song was a vivid picture of the suffering of the Lord Jesus on the cross and so quoted from it in their epistles (see 1 Peter 2:21-25). A Biblical Exposition

Isaiah 52:15, Isaiah 53:1-12 is the fourth of the so-called Servant Songs in the book, and the most powerful of them all. The prophet Isaiah does not always identify the servant in the oracles; at times it seems it could be referring to the righteous remnant in Israel, at times to the prophet, at times to other servants that God might use. But in this passage, a song about the suffering servant, the meaning clearly breaks free from any Old Testament application and finds fulfillment in the Messiah, the Christ--Jesus. Much of the song talks about how the innocent suffer for the sins of others, but when it comes to speaking about the LORD placing the sins of others on this one's back so that he could justify them, the passage can have no other fulfillment but in the saving death of Jesus, the Christ. < | > And so this song is about the ideal suffering servant, the one whose suffering goes beyond anything that mere mortals could accomplish in their suffering.

Down through history the sufferer has been the astonishment and stumblingblock of humanity. Ancient barbarians simply removed them from society. More civilized people have dealt more kindly; but sufferers still pose a problem for philosophers and medical doctors, and a test for the faith of religious people. People have a hard time seeing any profit in suffering; rather, it is considered a tragedy, an inconvenience that hinders progress, a fate to be avoided. But for the Christian the point of suffering should be clearer. In summary, we may say that the Scriptures teach that it is the will of God that believers suffer--not all the time, not all the same, and some very little. That is not to say that God enjoys it, or that people should seek it. But the Bible says that it is inevitable. Jesus said that if the world hated him, it would hate us as well. Paul said all who live Godly lives in this world will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:1-17), and that it was given to us to believe and to suffer (Php 1:29). And Peter explains that Christ's death, revealed so fully in Isaiah, is both our justification and our sample to follow so that we might know how to suffer (1 Peter 2:19-23). Moreover, our Lord himself learned obedience through the things that he suffered (Hebrews 5:8)--and if that is true of the sinless Son of God, how much more is it true of us? All of these teachings simply say that suffering is inevitable in this life, especially if we seek to live a righteous life of spiritual service. The sample for us to follow in our suffering--if it comes--is the suffering of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is displayed graphically in the prophecy of Isaiah, written centuries before the actual death of Jesus. Isaiah displays the ideal sufferer, but never names him. That identification had to await the fulness of time, when Jesus claimed, and the disciples could see, that Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah's oracles. The song is divided into five sections or stanzas of three verses each. The first line of each stanza gives a summary of that section. And, the entire first stanza is a summary or an overview of all that the song will say.

## I. "My Servant Shall Prosper"

The suffering leads to glory (Isaiah 52:13-15).

A. My servant shall be exalted (Isaiah 52:13). The grand theme of the entire song is summed up in the first three verses: the servant who endured such suffering will eventually be exalted on high to the amazement of all the world. He will be highly exalted--and the means of this exaltation is that he will "deal wisely" or "wisely prosper." The verb describes prudent and practical wisdom that finds success doing the will of God. He will live wisely before God and therefore prosper. Jeremiah 23:5 associates this verb with Messiah's receiving the kingdom.

Since the song will describe his death, the exaltation here assumes a resurrection. This passage does not explain that precisely, but other passages do. There could be no exaltation of one who stayed dead.

B. The exaltation will contrast with the humiliation (Isaiah 52:14-15). The theme of the humiliation is now developed: earlier, many were aghast or astonished at him because his form was so marred (literally ruined, spoiled). His appearance was so changed by affliction that kings were astonished that such a one should be exalted over them (Isaiah 52:15). He will startle <l > these kings, for they will see what they never thought could have happened. The point to be made here is that the suffering servant will ultimately prosper with God because he dealt wisely--he did the will of God. He has insight, and so his suffering is practical. He endures the suffering because he knows it is leading somewhere--to glory. Pain in God's service will lead to glory (2 Corinthians 4:1-18); and the pain in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus will lead to the greatest glory, his glory for ever, for he will reign as king of kings and Lord of Lords--to the amazement of all.

## II. "Who has believed?"

The suffering is offensive (Isaiah 53:1-3).

A. The report meets with disbelief (Isaiah 53:1).

If we may paraphrase this verse, we would say, "No one ever imagined this!" For ages, the prophet predicts, people would not believe the word that such a suffering servant could be at the heart of God's redemptive plan and would eventually be exalted on high. Isaiah uses a series of questions to make this point: the penitent would reflect on this, and eventually realize it--who would have imagined?

B. The suffering is observed (Isaiah 53:2-3). The response to his sufferings is so true to life: they are at first thought to make him insignificant, and then they are considered to be offensive. First, he was considered insignificant. Who would have thought that a carpenter's son from Nazareth would figure in the eternal plan of God this way? He was just a tender plant out of parched ground, nothing great and glorious. Certainly not kingly. He did not appeal to them in any kingly way so that they might rally to him. But then the more they observed them his sufferings became offensive: he was despised (Isaiah 53:3). His life was filled with grief and sorrows, so that people turned away their faces. In short, they did not "esteem" him--they did not think much of him, especially in this condition, so they wrote him off, as it were.

These words point out a habit we all share, the habit of letting the sight of suffering blind us to the meaning. We don't like to look on anyone who is suffering or even disabled. We forget that such conditions have a purpose and a future and a God. We make snap judgments about sufferers and their value to life in general or to God. The point is that suffering is a part of God's plan to remind us of the human predicament we share, to bring us out of ourselves in sympathy and patience, and to eventually fit us for glory. It was certainly so in the case of Christ, more so than imagineable.

### III. "Surely our griefs"

The suffering is vicarious (Isaiah 53:4-6).

A. The servant's suffering is punishment (Isaiah 53:4). The earliest and most common moral judgment that people make about pain is that which is implied in its name--it is penal. People think that those who suffer do so because God is angry with them and punishing them. That is exactly what Job's three friends argued relentlessly. Here, the people say in the words of the Isaiah the prophet, 'we saw the suffering servant and thought that God was striking him severely. But now they knew they were partially wrong. The hand of God was indeed against the sufferer, but the sin was not his, but theirs. It was penal--but he did not deserve it.

B. The punishment of the servant was vicarious and redemptive (Isaiah 53:5-6). As we read Isaiah 53:5-6, we must note the contrast between the "he" expressions and the "our" expressions. In the first set we see that he endured the suffering, we had the sins that deserved the suffering, and so his sufferings were vicarious--for others. The second set shows that the sufferings were also redemptive: "our peace" and "we are healed." The pain was the consequence of our sin; and the peace that is ours was the consequence of his suffering. Thus, the suffering was not only vicarious, but now redemptive. This truth is confessed by Israel in Isaiah 53:6. The verse begins and ends with the word "all." So the substitutionary suffering of this servant touches all who have sinned; it benefits all who acknowledge his suffering with these correct words: "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." In every family, in every nation, innocent people often suffer for the guilty. So vicarious suffering is not unique to the Messiah. It is part of human life. Vicarious suffering is not a curse; it is part of the service we have to God and to mankind. People like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah went into the captivity with the sinners and the idolaters--they did not deserve to go. But they were able to use it as an opportunity to proclaim God's word. Even on a lesser note we know that parents who suffer for their children when they are sick or in need understand the impulse of vicarious suffering. People in a country suffer because of the mistakes of leaders or previous generations. We may suffer because we deserve it; but we may also suffer because of others, or out of love for others in service to other people. That is noble and magnificent: greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:1-27). But it is limited--it cannot save another person. So then, as great as vicarious suffering can be, it is not redemptive when we do it. What is pictured here is that the suffering of our Lord Jesus also removed sin. When Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he became the sin-bearer for us. No other suffering could have done this. It took the suffering of God incarnate, the holy one who knew no sin, to remove the sins.

### IV. "Oppressed he humbled himself"

The suffering was accepted (Isaiah 53:7-9).

A. The suffering servant was silent (Isaiah 53:7).

What is remarkable is that this suffering servant accepted his affliction in silence. This is almost unheard of. In the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Psalms, the sufferers either confess their sins that brought on the sufferings, or cry out that they are suffering and do not deserve it. They either confess or complain. But not the Messiah: he did not confess sin, for he had none; and he did not even cry out in complaint, for his death was vicarious. How could he remain silent? He knew the truth; he dealt wisely. If anything will enable a person to accept suffering silently it is this--the knowledge that the suffering is a service to God and will help others who are suffering.

B. The suffering servant was innocent (Isaiah 53:4). The prophet affirms that this sufferer has done no wrong; there was no guile in him. Yet he was taken to judgment by tyrannical powers. It was a judicial murder. And when they considered that he was lawfully put to death, they gave him a convict's grave. On this note the stanza ends: he was an innocent man, the only innocent man ever to walk on earth; but he silently submitted to oppression, an oppression that brought him a criminal's death. From all outward appearances an innocent man's life ended fruitlessly. But nothing could be further from the truth.

V. "It pleased the LORD"

The suffering was efficacious (Isaiah 53:10-12).

It appeared to many that the death of this servant was an awful tragedy. Surely here passed into oblivion the fairest life that ever lived. People might see it and say that God forsakes his own--even in his own sufferings that thought crossed the Messiah's mind. But Isaiah will now declare that the suffering was efficacious--it accomplished God's will.

A. The suffering was God's will (Isaiah 53:10).

"It pleased the LORD to bruise him." This does not mean that God really enjoyed it! It means that God willed it, and that is satisfied God's will. This is the one truth that can render any pain tolerable--God willed it. So, anyone that God calls to suffer for him must make it his or her purpose to please God with it. Therein is success with God.

B. The suffering was our justification (Isaiah 53:10-11). This suffering was powerful to effect its intended results (i.e., it was efficacious)--it justified sinners. God made his innocent sufferer a guilt offering (Leviticus 5:1-19) for many, so that by the knowledge of him people might be justified. Those who know him, those who come to personal faith in him and acknowledge their sin and his salvation, are justified. Paul explains that the Father made the Son to be sin for us, that we might become righteous in his sight (2 Corinthians 5:1-21). We, the guilty sinners, have been declared righteous because of his vicarious sufferings. By the way, the word "many" used throughout this passage is the word that Jesus used in the upper room to apply Isaiah 53:1-12 to his death: "This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

C. The suffering will lead to the servant's exaltation (Isaiah 53:10-12). With this note the passage comes full circle. Isaiah says that because he bore the sins of many, that is, because he made

“intercession” for sinners in his self-sacrificing love, God appointed him to honor and glory. The rest of the Bible explains that his exaltation involves his resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven, and his coming in glory. We shall return to this when we focus on the belief in the resurrection.

Using military figures, Isaiah says that he will divide the spoil, that is, celebrate victory. But there is a hint here to of his coming to conquer evil (see Psalms 110:1-7). So in his suffering the servant was closest to his glory; he may have been despised and rejected by people, but he was pleasing to God, and that assured his exaltation in glory.

### Conclusion

Isaiah, then, presents a picture of the ideal sufferer. He does not identify him, but his language parallels so many other prophecies about the coming Messiah that we know it had a future fulfillment in his mind. And then when the Son of God came into the world and fulfilled this passage to the letter (so far), we know that it was a prophecy of Jesus the Messiah. By his suffering we have peace with God; by them we have been justified because our sins have been paid for. Or, to put it another way, apart from his vicarious sufferings there is no remission of sins for sinners, no hope of justification with God. That is why the Church worships and serves Jesus Christ the savior. Worthy is the Lamb! But there is a practical side to this passage too apart from its great prophetic message. We who believe in Christ are called to follow him, and that usually involves suffering in one way or another. When Peter quoted this chapter in his epistle, he explained that it also left us a sample of how we should suffer. If God calls us to suffer in some way for him, then we need to understand that it is service to God, it is part of the pilgrimage to glory, and that we must use it to glorify him and help others. Knowing that it is part of the will of God and will lead to greater glory, we will be better able to endure it and use it properly.

## 01.06. The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah

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6. The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah The Doctrine In the last study we focused on how the Hebrew Scriptures prophesied the death and the exaltation of the Messiah. Isaiah's oracle focused mostly on the suffering servant Messiah, but did not specifically teach the doctrine of the bodily resurrection, not as Psalms 16:1-11 and Daniel 12:1-13 so clearly describe such. But for Isaiah to speak of the exaltation of the Messiah after a suffering and death certainly assumes some kind of restoration to life, and that restoration is clearly explained in many other passages of the Bible. The Gospel narratives record the resurrection appearances of Jesus after his death and burial; and the apostles taught very plainly this truth of the Christ-event: that Jesus who suffered and died for our sins actually rose from the dead, physically and not just spiritually, and appeared to the disciples and to larger groups of people in his resurrected body. That body was similar, but different. And the resurrection itself authenticated everything that Jesus had claimed about himself, and about his death, namely, that he was the Son of God who came into the world to die and also to conquer sin, death, and the grave, and bring immortality and eternal life to all who believe in him.

It should come as no surprise that this doctrine has been attacked more than most in the Christian faith--just the idea that Jesus came back from the dead is a stumbling block to many. Modern theologians have tried to argue that the early Church simply made up the doctrine to give people hope and comfort, and then made it the foundation of their living faith. Others suggest that Jesus may not have been dead, but in a coma, and the cold tomb may have revived him. But the Scripture makes it clear, that he was actually dead, and buried (under guard), and that he rose from the dead; and the apostles rightly based the Christian faith on his death and resurrection. Without the resurrection, Jesus died a martyr, a good man, a sample to his followers, but not as a Savior, and not as the incarnate God. With the resurrection we have the guarantee that his death was more than this, and that we will be saved, resurrected, and exalted to glory with him. Only Jesus could say, "I was dead, and am alive for ever more; and I have the keys of death and Hades" (Revelation 1:1-20). In the resurrected Christ, then, we have the answer to all of the problems and difficulties that this life can afford--Christ has overcome them, because death has lost its sting. Therefore, we worship and serve him, the risen Savior and divine Lord. The Pauline Teaching

Perhaps the clearest presentation of the doctrine of the resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 where Paul defends and explains it to the church at Corinth. There were those teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead. But Paul begins the chapter by reminding them of the Gospel, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Elsewhere Paul had preached strongly from the Old Testament (Psalms 16:1-11) that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead (see Acts 13:13-48; Acts 23:1-11). He then proceeded to remind them of all the appearances that Jesus made to people after his resurrection, so that there were abundant witnesses to the fact. The Lord also appeared to him, Paul, as well (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Paul's grand theme is announced in 1 Corinthians 15:20 : "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

First, this statement is the answer to the issues raised in 1 Corinthians 15:6-19 --that is why it begins with "but." Paul had gone down the list to state what the case might be if there were no resurrection of the dead--those who had died were gone forever, Christ would still be dead, their preaching would be useless, people would still be in their sins and without hope, and they who proclaimed it would be false witnesses. This is what it would mean if Christ did not rise from the dead. But Paul declares, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead." He was seen by scores of witnesses; it was a proven fact. And now the declaration of 1 Corinthians 15:20 affirms that those who died in the faith are not lost forever, Christ is alive forever, the preaching of the Gospel was true and life-giving, and that believers were indeed forgiven for their sins and had the assurance of eternal life.

Second, Paul says that the resurrection of Christ is a first fruit. He is here alluding to the Israelite festival of giving the first fruit of the harvest to the LORD (Leviticus 23:9-14). When the spring crops began to grow, the devout Israelite would watch the fields for the first shoots of wheat. They would be given to the LORD as a token thank offering, and viewed by the worshiper as a pledge that a great harvest of wheat was to follow--this was the first. Paul clearly is using the agricultural festival as an illustration of the resurrection, for he talks about planting the body in the ground when it dies, and in season a glorious new body rises from the ground; Jesus was the first to rise, and his resurrection is the harbinger that a whole harvest of people being raised will follow in God's plan. But for Paul this is more than an illustration, it is a divinely foretold illustration, what we call a "type." Biblical typology is a form of prophecy; it uses people, places and things as divinely intended revelations of the greater truths to come, the fulfillments. But one does not know the item is a type until the fulfillment comes; then looking back, we can see what God had in mind all along (manna, the sacrifices, the tabernacle, etc). Paul already knew that the Passover was a type of Christ's death, for he declared "Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Then, in Leviticus 23:11, after the instructions about Passover, the text says the first fruit is to be presented (waved) before the LORD on the morning after the Sabbath after the Passover (1 Corinthians 15:4-8)--that is Sunday morning. The Church rightly saw the first fruit being fulfilled in Christ's resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week, the morning after the Saturday after the Passover. And if it is the first--then there is a great harvest to follow, at the end of the age (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Third, Paul says that he is the first fruit of those who sleep. This is a figure for death--falling asleep. It is the way believers refer to death as a temporary aspect of their journey to God. Jesus himself used the expression to describe the death of Lazarus (John 11:1-57), and when his disciples did not get the point, he explained that Lazarus was dead. In Acts 7:54-60 Stephen was put to death at the hands of an angry mob. But the chapter ends calmly by saying "he fell asleep." His death was cruel and violent, but it was a falling asleep in the Lord because the Lord has conquered death. The verb "to sleep" in Greek is *koimao* (pronounced *koi-mah-o*); in the language a word can be changed with certain suffixes, and there is a suffix that is used that makes a noun of place; it is the suffix *-terion*. The word *koimeterion* is a "sleeping place"; we use it for our word "cemetery." Those who believe in Jesus do not fear death, for it is a falling asleep in Jesus until the resurrection morning when he appears and the dead in Christ rise and with all who remain alive

are transferred into the glorious estate of his presence. The Comfort Of The Resurrection

Luke 24:1-53 records one of the post-resurrection appearances of our Lord to two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It is Sunday afternoon, the very day that Jesus rose from the dead. The account is wonderful because it clearly teaches that the resurrection of Jesus enables us to see past all discouragement and disillusionment that this life can present. (There is a full sermon on Luke 24:1-53 in the archives of this web site). The two disciples going home represent for us the embodiment of disillusionment and near depression that all the discouragements in this life can cause. They were soon to learn that the inspiration of the risen Christ restores the proper perspective on the circumstances of life. The first scene (Luke 24:13-24) sets the stage--disillusionment brings spiritual depression. The two were walking along pondering the events of the crucifixion, and Jesus came along side them asking them what was wrong. They were taken back that he would not know. But their report to him reveals that they had almost given up. "We had hoped" that he was the Messiah, but he is dead. "Some women" told us this fantastic story that he was alive; some of the men checked it out, " but him they did not find." They were now without hope; it was time to go home. The second scene of the story records Jesus rebuke (Luke 24:25-27)--the word of God will correct their thinking. Jesus rebuked them for being slow to believe in "all" the prophets had said about the Christ. "Was it not necessary" for the Christ to die before entering his glory? Of course it was. Then he proceeded to open the Scriptures to them and teach them "all" that was written about this truth. Their problem, which was not theirs alone but ours too, was that they read the word selectively--about kings and victory and salvation and driving out the enemies. Not about suffering for sins and death. In the process of his teaching several clear truths came out: (1) the Messiah had to suffer and die first to pay for sins, and then could enter his glory; (2) the Messiah stands sovereignly apart from time and space, not limited to this world, or the grave, or our time; if he existed before Bethlehem and came into this world from the Father, he can easily exist after the grave and return to the Father; (3) the Messiah is the sovereign Lord who controls life and death--no one rushed Jesus to the cross as they had thought; it was the fulfillment of the eternal plan of God. No wonder they later said, "Did not our hearts burn within us . . . while he opened to us the Scriptures?" The third scene (Luke 24:28-32) records the dramatic revelation of the risen Christ to the men in the breaking of the bread--faith in the word brings knowledge of the Word. In their home Jesus took the bread and broke it and blessed it. Then the text says "and they knew him." And then he was gone. Jesus chose that moment, that familiar act, to open their eyes so that they could see it was he. This suggests that there was some difference in his appearance; but it also is clear that he had withheld their vision of him til this moment. They instantly recognized in the act of breaking the bread the symbolism of the vicarious suffering of the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world--this is how Jesus had instituted the New Covenant in the Upper Room. The men now knew why he died, and they knew that he conquered death, because he was alive--he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. The fourth scene (Luke 24:33-35) is the report of their rushing back to Jerusalem to tell others--knowledge of the resurrected Christ brings zeal. All was well now, all was different now, for he was alive. The resurrection was the answer to their discouragement and depression, to all of life's sorrows. He had overcome the greatest enemy, death. The Holy Spirit carries on the ministry of Jesus to us today. Through the clear exposition of the Word of God, the Spirit illumines our hearts as to the plan of God, and especially as to its victorious outcome in spite of the sorrows and sadness of life. And then, having had a clear teaching on his word, when we come to the Lord's

table for communion, the reality of his presence is solidified in the spiritual experience of the breaking of the bread. This act of Jesus became the symbol for the Church down through history of the meaning and purpose of his death, a meaning and purpose that the resurrection affirmed and confirmed. Nothing in this life can separate us from the love of God we have in Christ; because he lives, we shall live also, even though we may die here on earth. But we must keep the proper balance in our spiritual lives--unless we hear from God through his word, clearly, faithfully, the pressures of life will control our hearts and minds, and the holy communion will become an empty ritual to be got through. But if our hearts are open, and the exposition of the word is clear so that the "burning heart" is the frequent experience of being in the word, then all the spiritual aspects of the faith and the worship will remind us powerfully that he is alive, and that our faith alone offers true hope to a world that has no hope and no expectation other than conflict, suffering and death. Christians need to be in a church where the word of God is clearly and faithfully expounded (and not in shallow little talks), where the Holy Spirit is actively at work in changing peoples lives (and not just spectacular experiences), and where the worship focuses powerfully on the risen Christ (and not just some ritual acts done routinely). All of this together will build up the faith and confidence of the believer to live for Christ in this world. Then they can proclaim, "He is alive," "Was not our heart burning within us when he opened the Scriptures to us," and "He was known to us in the breaking of the bread."

## 01.07. The Ascension of the Lord

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### 7. The Ascension of the Lord The Doctrine

Few things in life are more exhilarating and fulfilling than the crowning celebration of some great achievement. What makes it so, of course, is the struggle to get there; without the agony and the pain the triumph would not be as sweet. And while these moments seem to be the culmination, they are in reality transitions, for they open the way to new beginnings. With the celebration of victory comes the commencement of a new role to play--if the success is to have any lasting value.

Think of the great crowning moments down through history. I have just read about Charlemagne. After years of struggle he established his empire. Through war, legislature, education, and various other dealings, he was able to rescue the world from barbarism, violence and ignorance, and to begin to develop the dream of civilization. But on Christmas Day, 800, he was crowned supreme ruler over what is known as the Holy Roman Empire. He was able to give his empire the prestige, sanctity, and stability of Imperial and papal Rome. An incredible coronation! An amazing recognition! What a moment that must have been! It was a coronation that would have results for the next thousand years. But then, that is the point. With this coronation he began a new phase of his life-- extending, and sustaining the empire. But as great as that may have been, it does not begin to compare with the greatest crowning triumph of all--the Ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father in Heaven. When we consider the doctrine of the Ascension, we must not only think of it as the culmination of his earthly ministry, the crowning victory, but we must also think of it as the beginning of a new phase of his ministry. The doctrine is not covered very well in many theology books or commentaries; all too often it seems to have been tucked away as an afterthought. Of course, if some theologians deny the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, they are not likely going to do very much with the ascension. But even those who believe in the resurrection give little more than a nod to the Ascension and what it means. When I was studying in Cambridge in England it was an Ascension Day service that made an impression on me, perhaps because it was, well, unexpected. My professor cancelled classes for the services; and the services culminated in the choirs of St Johns College ascending to the roof top of the chapel tower to sing anthems to the exalted Christ that echoed across the skies over the city. But when I returned to the States and tried to attend an Ascension Day service in our church, I was surprised to learn that the church had completely forgotten about it. (And this was a liturgical church that was to observe these things.) They had to scurry about to put something together--for the five or six of us there. The Ascension cannot be forgotten. It must not be ignored. For without the Ascension, the death and resurrection of Jesus would carry far less value, if any, in the plan of redemption. It is this glorious Ascension that is the culmination of the atoning work of Christ, the guarantee of his promises, the proof of his claims, and the beginning of his dominion. The Nicene Creed affirms that Christ Jesus "ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and he shall come again with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end." In other words, the Creed affirms what the Bible clearly teaches, that after the resurrection of

Jesus from the dead, after he appeared to various people and groups, he departed from his disciples from the top of the Mount of Olives. That is, he simply ascended from the earth in the clouds and entered into the heavenly court to be exalted. The ascension teaches that there is in heaven today a “God-man,” Jesus, who is fully human and fully divine. And because he ascended into heaven, those who are alive at his second coming will be caught up to be with the Lord in the air, along with those raised from the dead. And that coming of the Lord will be in the same manner as his departure, for he will descend in the clouds with saints and angels, to judge the world. The doctrine teaches that neither time nor space interferes with our Lord’s movements; he was able to travel between earth and heaven (whether a distance or a dimension we cannot say) by his own power. The biblical teaching on the ascension, found in several passages in the New Testament (some of which draw upon the Old Testament prophecies), presents not only the fact of the exaltation, but the several purposes for it. These must be considered in any study of the doctrine; and this survey will look at several passages, beginning with Ephesians 1:1-23. At the risk of oversimplifying a profound doctrine, I have tried to make my points on the meaning of the Ascension as clear and easy to understand as possible. They are:

- I. The Son of God went home.
- II. The Son of God presented His work to His Father.
- III. The Son of God sat down.
- IV. The Son of God sent the Spirit to continue His work.
- V. The Son of God will come back.

I have deliberately tried to make these point sound very human, very anthropomorphic, because of the amazing point of the Ascension--Jesus, as resurrected and glorified human, is in heaven. If in the incarnation deity entered into the human race, in the ascension humanity (joined with deity in one person) entered into the realm of God. The implications of this for you and me are staggering. The Implications Of The Doctrine I. At his ascension Jesus returned home to glory to continue to prepare a place for us.

A. The Meaning This is the basic meaning of the Ascension--he returned to heaven, to the angels, to the glory he had before the foundation of the world (John 17:1-26). He ascended up into heaven, in his resurrected bodily form. He went from the human place on earth to the Father’s place in heaven. It was not a journey into outer space; rather, he ascended and was removed from space and time into the immediate sphere of God’s holy presence.

He had descended into time and space when he came into the world to save sinners. What a condescension the incarnation was. This world, with all its sin and corruption, was not and is not suitable for the Son of God. But he chose to enter for our redemption. He made it abundantly clear that he was from above, whereas we are from below. His rightful place was in glory! And so he prayed that his Father would glorify him with the glory that he had before the foundation of the world. And so when his earthly task was done that prayer was answered when he returned to his heavenly home. Imagine how the angels welcomed him! But Jesus also knew that this world was not the place for us either. Jesus taught that in his Father’s house were many “rooms”, and that he was going to prepare a place for us, that where he was, there we might be also (John 14:1-31).

What a marvel that is. I think the statement refers more to spiritual preparation for us than simply constructing places: it refers to all that Christ did in completing the process of our atonement so that we could be there. Thus, the main point is that he actually wants us there with him in his heavenly home. His mission here was not merely to rescue us from judgment; it was to bring us home with him, so that we might be with him evermore. How amazing is the love of our Lord! So Jesus completed his mission to redeem his fallen creation by bringing glorified humanity into heaven at his ascension--in his own person. This is but the foretaste of things to come, for we will follow him there. In fact Ephesians says that we are already seated in the heavenlies, because we are in him. Our future is certain. All creation is his; but his new creation is precious to him. He will not relinquish it.

B. The Significance The significance of this aspect of the Ascension as explained by Scripture is that heaven is our home and not this world. The entire ministry of our Lord has been and continues to be to fit us for glory. So the lesson should be clear: We must live above the world and not like the world (world meaning the present world system that has no place for the Lord). The Scripture again and again tells us not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world, for it is passing away; we are not to lay up treasures here on earth where there is corruption, but in heaven; and we are not to be conformed to this world. I think these warnings go beyond material things to attitudes. We get so caught up in worldly living--the petty competitions, the little power plays, the desire for worldly fame, and the sometimes dishonest and selfish ways of gaining such. But the Word of God reminds us that our faith in Christ is the means of victory over the world. So we must not get so attached to this world, or this world's way of thinking, that we become worldly.

Rather, we must measure everything by heavenly standards, by spiritual, eternal things (2 Corinthians 4:1-18). We do not belong here. Our rightful place is with Jesus in glory. The more that we grow spiritually, the more that we become like Jesus Christ, the more we will realize that we do not belong here, and that our stay here is an earthly ministry in our eternal life. This proper perspective will influence all our choices. So Jesus would have us realize that we are to ascend with him over the present evil world. And when we say in a worship service, "Lift up your hearts," we mean that for that little moment we transport ourselves in the spirit on the Lord's day into the heavenlies--and that is a picture of when we in fact will be lifted out of this world and into his presence. We do this by faith now; but someday in the future we shall go to our heavenly home.

Thus Paul, in writing to the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:23), lists as one very practical issue from his Ascension our INHERITANCE. How foolish to clamor for what is temporal and temporary, when we have an inheritance in heaven.

II. In his ascension Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary to complete his atoning work.

A. The Meaning The second significant truth about the Ascension concerns Christ's atoning work, so clearly expounded in the Book of Hebrews. There are two aspects of this. First, Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice. Using the imagery of the earthly temple, that shadow of the heavenly sanctuary, the very presence of God the Father, the writer explains how Jesus our high priest took the sacrifice--himself--into the presence of God, thus completing the transaction. So in heaven now, as we may perceive it, ever before the gaze of the heavenly Father is that sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world.

Moreover, in the imagery of Leviticus, Jesus presented himself as a wave offering before the Father, the firstfruit of the dead, guaranteeing that a great harvest of resurrected saints would follow--he was the first (Leviticus 23:1-44 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-58). So Jesus opened heaven's gate, and entered as our eternal high priest, having made once and for all complete atonement in his blood. It is done. And so in Christ we have access into the presence of God.

Second, Jesus is also our living high priest who ever lives to intercede for us. Jesus interceded for us with his blood, and now continues to intercede for us as our advocate. In his incarnation he revealed the Father to us, so that we might see God in Christ; but in his ascension he reveals us to the Father, and God sees Christ in our place, so to speak (all we can do is try to describe a heavenly reality and divine omniscience in the limitations of earthly language). As perfected, glorified human nature, and as the incarnate Son of God, Jesus has become the perfect mediator, the perfect high priest, the substitute for humans in the heavenly courts. As our high priest, Jesus presents our work, our prayers, our worship in an acceptable way to the Father. All that we do down here passes through our mediator to the Father and is thereby perfected. Without the presence of Christ in heaven, and the indwelling Spirit on earth, the worship and prayer and praise of the Church would be utterly inadequate. The high priest as our representative takes into the presence of God all that we do and offers it there for us. And God is satisfied. And when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One, who can declare that our sins have been paid for, once and for all.

B. The Significance This point speaks of the heart of the faith we have through Christ Jesus. Because of the finished work of Christ as our sacrifice, and because of the continual ministry of our Lord as high priest, we have CONFIDENCE. Our consciences have been cleansed from dead works, our sins have been placed on the scapegoat, we have been justified by his blood, and we are righteous before God. Therefore we may come boldly before the throne of grace. So Paul makes it clear that if we believe in Jesus we are "in him." We have died to sin in his death, and we have been raised to a new life in his resurrection. If we are in Christ, we must not let sin reign in our mortal bodies, but must live to righteousness. But if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ. Thus we have a high priest who is our mediator; and the glorious news is that there is abundant forgiveness for sins.

III. In his ascension Jesus sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High

A. The Meaning The Book of Hebrews (Hebrews 1:1-14) says that when Jesus made purification for sins he sat down. To be seated at the right hand of God the Father was the place of honor, power, and authority. In other words, the ascension meant Christ's coronation; and his second coming will mean the beginning of his reign in actual fact. Paul in Ephesians 1:1-23 says that his exaltation was above all power and dominion and every title that can be given in this life and the life to come. Indeed, at his ascension Jesus declared, "All power is given unto me." By this exaltation Jesus shares the universal rule of the cosmos with the Father. He especially directs all the affairs of his advancing Kingdom. But beyond that, he guides the events on earth according to his purposes. Hebrews 1:1-14 says that the whole world is being borne along by his powerful command, his spoken word. But this is not yet the fullness of his authority. We do not yet see all things under subjection. Psalms 110:1-7 says, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'." Jesus now awaits the fullness of the Kingdom; but soon

the Father will say, "Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance" (Psalms 2:1-12). Then, Hebrews 1:1-14 says, when he (the Father) again brings his firstborn into the world, then his (the Son's) exaltation will be seen by all, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is LORD (Php 2:1-30). Then the exaltation will be complete; then will be delivered unto him, as Daniel foretells, kingdom, power, glory, and dominion, for he alone is worthy (Daniel 7:1-28).

## B. The Significance

Because the Lord Jesus Christ has been seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, he has the authority and the power and the dominion of heaven, and he has given to his people AUTHORITY to advance his kingdom. At his ascension Jesus gave his commission: We are his witnesses to the ends of the earth, both by what we say and what we do. We who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior have been given the authority to extend his kingdom throughout the world. We are ambassadors of the King. In Ephesians Paul affirms that in Christ we have already been seated in the Heavens. It is as if the judgment is past and the transition completed--we are already there (this is a positional truth). And this is the guarantee that we shall reign with Christ. But in our earthly service we know that our position is safe; our victory secured. And we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we may go forth with confidence and boldness, proclaiming the Good News.

IV. At His ascension Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the world.

## A. The Meaning

Jesus said, if I do not go away, the Comforter cannot come. And when he left, he told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit was sent to give them power. So the point here is ENABLEMENT. The Holy Spirit was sent into the world to continue the work of Jesus; this was an integral part of the promises of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:1-40 Ezekiel 36:1-38). The Spirit came bearing the name and the characteristics of Jesus to the disciples, to guide and lead them into the mind and way of Christ, so that they might do the will of God in the way that Jesus did. Therefore, the Spirit convicts of sin, regenerates, sanctifies, illumines, and empowers. In short, the Holy Spirit applies the work of Jesus to people (see John 16:1-33). In continuing the work of Jesus the Holy Spirit employs people to carry out the various ministries. Thus, critical to the Spirit's work is the bestowal of gifts upon His loyal subjects. Psalms 68:1-35 tells how the LORD ascended Mt. Zion to his resting place. "You have ascended on high, you have received gifts." Paul, in Ephesians 4:1-32, interprets this passage to say that Christ, the conquering king, has ascended on High, leading a host of captives--death, sin, evil, the grave. But as a magnanimous victor he divides the booty among his followers--he gave gifts to us. To some he gave this authority; to others that place of power; to others different responsibilities. Other treasures to different people. To each person different gifts and responsibilities, so that each can help him expand and govern his kingdom. The spiritual gifts are a direct result of the Ascension, because the ascension resulted in the sending of the Spirit. The Church must have these gifts to do the work of Christ; and it must have all of them, the routine as well as the spectacular. In the body, not every part can be an eye; there must be the leg, and the foot, and the ear. But all one body. So to in the Church, the mystical "body" of Christ. Christ's program cannot thrive without the power of the Spirit enabling the people of God to participate in his kingdom, all of the members using their gifts in the process.

B. The Significance The lesson here is simple: We must live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Just before Jesus ascended to heaven he announced that his followers would receive power, so that they might be his witnesses (Acts 1:1-26). The ENABLEMENT comes from the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit. Paul in Ephesians says that that power is like his own mighty strength. It is so important to emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit today--but in line with the purpose of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is not power for power's sake. The focus must go beyond the Spirit to the exalted Christ. He must have the pre-eminence (Colossians 1:18). And the work of the Spirit is often not seen, but gradually changing lives and bringing them into conformity with the living Christ. To live by the power of the Holy Spirit we must be rightly related to the Spirit. That is what it means to be "spiritual." To do this we must yield ourselves to him (make that total commitment), be obedient to his Word (make every effort to live by the Word), and be controlled by the Spirit (make spiritual perception the means by which we live out our lives). And the promise is that God's Spirit will bear fruit in our lives--the fruit of the Spirit. Then he will use us mightily in our Lord's kingdom, in whatever capacity he has given to us.

V. By his ascension Jesus demonstrated how he will come again

A. The Meaning

Acts 1:11 records the words of the angels that this same Jesus whom they saw go up into heaven will so come in like manner as they have seen him go up (Zechariah 14:1-21). It will be an actual return of Christ into space and time; but, of course, it will be more glorious. He will come in the clouds of glory; and we who remain will ascend, along with those who are raised from the dead, all changed, to be with the Lord.

Why is He coming back? Scripture offers several reasons: (1) He will raise the dead, some to honor, and some to dishonor. Just as his resurrection was part of his ascension, so shall be that of the dead in Christ. He will not abandon their bodies to this world. The work of redemption is not complete yet. (2) He will come to receive the homage. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is the Lord God of the universe (Php 2:1-30). They shall look on him whom they have pierced (Zechariah 12:1-14). Kings will shut their mouths (Isaiah 52:1-15; Isaiah 53:1-12). (3) He will come to judge, putting down all evil and all enemies. All judgment is given over to the Son of Man (John 5:1-47). (4) He will renovate his creation, establish universal peace and righteousness, remove the curse, and fulfill all his promises (Isaiah 11:1-16). When he completes his restorative work and demonstrates what God had intended, then he will deliver the kingdom up to the Father, and he will resume his place in the triune Godhead, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:1-58). But the ascension prepares for the second coming in glory. It will be in answer to the prayers of the ages: "Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!" Or, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as in heaven." He will not abandon this world to chaos.

B. The Significance And here is our HOPE. The point here is that we must live in the expectation of his coming in glory. How differently we would live, how differently we would serve, if we lived with this hope as a daily reality. For, the apostle says, those who have this hope, purify themselves.

Conclusion So in his ascension, Jesus went home; and that is our home. He finished the redemptive work; and we have confidence in his blood. He sat down in the place of authority; and

we have been commissioned to represent him. He sent the Spirit; and we have been enabled to do his work. And he will come again; and we look in hope for that glorious time. The Ascension declares for all time that Jesus is the eternal Son of God and perfected and glorified man. The event was not an after-thought or an adjustment by God. It was part of the eternal plan of God that was established before creation. God determined to create human beings, enable them to triumph over evil, and to exalt them to glory. This is the glory of Christianity, that in Christ Jesus we have access into the heavenlies, now by faith, but in the future in reality. What a glorious faith! Because he ascended, so shall we; we shall stand in the presence of God, complete and perfect.

## 02.00. Studies in the Book of Malachi

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Studies in the Book of Malachi Study By: Allen Ross In this work 6 chapter work by Ross, he looks at the different sections of Malachi, God's Faithful Covenant Love, Worship that God rejects, faithful teaching of God's Word, profaning the Marriage Covenant, God's justice and faithfulness, preparing for the Day of the Lord.

CONTENTS 1. God's Faithful Covenant Love (Malachi 1:1-5) 2. Worship That God Rejects (Malachi 1:6-14) 3. Faithful Teaching Of God's Word (Malachi 2:1-9) 4. Profaning The Marriage Covenant (Malachi 2:10-16) 5. God's Justice and Faithfulness (Malachi 2:17; Malachi 3:1-12) 6. Preparing for The Day of The Lord (Malachi 3:13-18, Malachi 4:1-6)

## 02.01. God's Faithful Covenant Love

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### God's Faithful Covenant Love

(Malachi 1:1-5) Introduction: Author and Date (Malachi 1:1) The Book of Malachi begins with: "A burden, the Word of Yahweh to Israel by the hand of Malachi." And that is all the information we have on this prophet. Other prophetic books often tell when the prophet wrote, that is, during the reigns of certain kings. As we shall see, though, there were no kings in Israel when Malachi delivered his messages--they were a thing of the past. So how can we date this book? What are the clues that we have? To answer some of these questions we can only look at the contents of the book and make an estimation of the date of its composition. A quick read through the book will tell us that the messages are intensely practical about sacrificial worship, priestly ministry, marriage and divorce, tithing, and anticipation of the coming of Yahweh to judge the world and fulfill the promises of the golden age. We can conclude from this general survey that there was no problem with idolatry--it was a thing of the past. In fact, there is no mention of the judgment on Israel for idolatry, the Babylonian captivity. That was a thing of the past as well, long since forgotten by these folk. There is no reference to any king, only a governor. But they did have a temple and a functioning priesthood, even though it was not functioning correctly. On the basis of these observations we would date the book in the post-exilic period. The exile in Babylon ended in 536 B.C. Many of the people returned to the land under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the heir apparent to the throne if there ever was one to inherit, Joshua the High Priest, and the prophets Zechariah and Haggai. By 515 B.C. they had rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, a major triumph for the people of God, but also a disappointment for those old enough to remember Solomon's temple. As the people settled in to the land and tried to make a life for themselves, they became discouraged and disillusioned because the glorious prophecies about their re-gathering to the land seemed not to be fulfilled. And so in time their commitment to the covenant began to lag as well.

About 455 B.C. Ezra returned to the land and promptly began a revival to bring the people back to faith. The results of that spiritual work did not last very long, for in 444 B.C. Nehemiah was sent as governor and he found the same sins being committed that Ezra tried to correct. Nehemiah had to continue the reforms as well as rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was called back to the palace about 433 or 432 B.C. and remained there a few years. It seems most plausible to put the ministry of Malachi in this time of Nehemiah's absence, because the messages address the same problems that Nehemiah had been working to correct. In Nehemiah we find that many had taken alien wives (Nehemiah 13:23), and so too do we find this in Malachi (Malachi 2:11); in Nehemiah the people were withholding their tithes (Nehemiah 13:10), and so too in Malachi's time (Malachi 3:8); Nehemiah had to deal with divorce of legitimate wives (Nehemiah 13:23, Nehemiah 13:27) and so did Malachi (Malachi 2:15-16); and Nehemiah spoke of the neglect of temple service (Nehemiah 13:4-5, Nehemiah 13:11), and so did Malachi (Malachi 1:12-13). We may conclude that while Nehemiah was there his reforms took hold, but when he was recalled there was a relapse, for he returned to find things in a mess again.

Malachi stepped forward to assist in bringing about the reforms permanently. He found a spirit that would later be expressed in Pharisaism and Sadduceeism, a spirit of outward perfunctory service with no inward repentance or devotion. There was widespread skepticism and resignation. The people complained that the earlier prophetic promises had not been fulfilled, and they were impatient for God to judge their enemies, especially the Gentiles. And so Malachi had serious issues to address--but he was exactly the right man for the job.

All this would mean, then, that Malachi wrote between 430 and 420 B.C. He was the last of the prophets to write, and his writing predicted the next great prophet who was to come to prepare the way of the Lord, John the Baptist. But we must remember when we say he was a post-exilic prophet that he came on the scene a good hundred years after Zechariah and Haggai, and almost a generation after Ezra. Malachi is the last of the twelve Minor Prophets--but those twelve prophets stretch over a period of 400 years, about the time from Shakespeare to today in our literary history. When Malachi came preaching it had been some time since a prophet was heard, and the people to whom he preached reacted with antagonism and skepticism. But we still have no information about the man himself other than his name is Malachi--in Hebrew mak'aki (pronounced mal-ah-key). Some commentators even think that was an abbreviated name from Malachiah, "Messenger of Yah," or that the name might have even been a pen-name. But the prophets did not do that, as far as we know. The name most likely was as it appears, "My messenger." And the name will provide a major unifying theme of the book: the prophet is a messenger, the priests are messengers, the forerunner is a messenger, and the Messiah Himself is a messenger. The style of the Book of Malachi is clear and direct; it is the style of prophetic sermons with a few predictions included. Malachi may not have the lofty style and poetic imagination of an Isaiah, but he is nonetheless eloquent and effective. He is more a reasoner than a poet--and that is what was needed for these people. His style is simple, smooth, concise, and forceful--and at times eloquent. His description of the ideal priest in Malachi 2:5-7 is powerful as well as poetic; and his description of the coming of the Lord in Malachi 4:2-3 includes some of the most beautiful imagery found in the prophets. Because Malachi's audience was skeptical, he chose to use interrogation and reply as the way of getting through to them. In each point he knew what they were thinking and what they were about to say, and so he anticipated them with both the questions and the answers. The title of the book characterizes this prophecy as a "burden." In other words, the oracles included here will be heavy and stern, warnings and rebukes. But the messages are also consolatory: they are not "against" Israel, but "to" Israel. And there are hopeful notes of forgiveness and blessing and joy--if the people will heed the warnings.

I. The prophet declares God's special love (Malachi 1:2 a) The book opens with the declaration of the word of Yahweh: "I have loved you." This affirmation of God's choice of and affection for the nation provides a powerful beginning to the oracles, for on the one hand it will soften the tone of the messages--they will be delivered in love, but on the other hand it will underscore the nations ingratitude. Even though God has loved them, they had failed to show any appreciation for it, or any response to it. In fact even when the prophet declared this message, the response was a skeptical challenge for the prophet to convince them that God loved them.

If people are in any way open to the word of God, the constantly repeated message of God's faithful love for his people should inspire greater devotion and service. But the appeal of Malachi will be even wider than that, for the object of God's love in this passage is the whole nation, some

unbelievers and some believers. Even the unbelievers would have to acknowledge that they were part of a special people that God loved and desired to use, if they would only believe and follow His word. So Malachi begins with the most powerful motivation that he can use to appeal to the people--the love of God.

II. God's love was realized in his choice of Israel (Malachi 1:2-3 a). The people were not immediately convinced of this declaration; to them, because of their state of spiritual rebellion, it sounded good but was not convincing, not convincing because things had not worked out to their satisfaction. "How have you loved us?" they asked. And the prophet's response reminded them of their status as the chosen people of God: "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Yahweh says. "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau have I hated." To our word "love" ('ahab [ah-have]) we now add the antonym "hate" (sane' [sah-nay]). A careful word study of each of these terms will show that choice is a part of the meaning for love, and reject (or not choose) is at the heart of the word for hate. Even Jesus used the word hate with this basic meaning when he called for his disciples to hate father and mother--he called for them to choose to follow Him and that involved a radical break with families. With Jacob and Esau we know that the choice was made for Jacob even before the two boys were born, when the mother was pregnant and sought an oracle about the twins. And that oracle was not about two boys, but about two nations (Genesis 25:1-34). The loving and hating was not personal, but providential. That is why Paul refers to the same event in Romans 9:13 as a sample of divine election. God's love for Jacob was a distinguishing love; it meant that the line from Jacob, i.e., the Israelites, was chosen for a special purpose in the world--to be the channel of blessing to the nations and the source of the Messiah. The Edomites, the descendants of Esau, were not chosen. This, of course, does not mean that individual Edomites could not come to faith in the LORD; it means that the line of the Edomites was not the chosen line. The point that Malachi was making to his audience was that their existence as the people of God was the clearest evidence of the love of God on any nation. God chose the Israelites to be his kingdom of priests in the world. He gave them the Scriptures, the temple, the priests, the prophets, the covenants, and ultimately the Messiah. And His love for them was an everlasting love--even though they failed Him again and again, He still retained His covenant with them and chose to use them in a glorious way. That is--those who believed in Him and were willing to serve Him.

III. God's love was demonstrated in His care for Israel (Malachi 1:3-4). Not only did God choose Israel ("Jacob"), but He also cared for the Israelites whenever they were in trouble. The simple fact was that Israel was protected down through the ages, and the Edomites were not. Israel's expectations were being fulfilled; Edom's were not. This also should have told Malachi's audience that the love of God was genuine. The Edomites, mostly descendants of Esau but also a number of tribes that were included, lived in the region to the south and east of Israel, across the great rift of the Jordan Valley, and south of the Dead Sea. At one time it was heavily wooded and well watered. When the Israelites, their cousins, came up from Egypt, the Edomites would not let them pass through their land, but made them go all the way around into the eastern desert. But God would not let the Israelites fight them, for they were relatives. Nevertheless, down through the history the Edomites from time to time attacked the people of Israel or supported others who attacked them. When the Babylonians invaded the land and sacked Jerusalem and carried off the people, Edom was left in misery along with the many other little states. The destruction of the Edomites was a part of the prophetic message from God to the region (Obadiah 1:1-21). And even

in Babylon the people remembered the way that Edom had dealt with them (Psalms 137:7). After the exile the Jews were restored to their land, but the Edomites were never again a force in the desert. They were an easy prey for the Persians, and then the Nabateans--Arab tribes who drove them out of their land. They settled more to the south of Israel, and became known as the Idumeans. But they were subjugated by the Maccabeans, then the Macedonians, and finally the Romans. The only sore spot for Israel was that in the days of Jesus the Romans installed on the throne a client king, Herod the Great--an Idumean, a descendant of Esau. In this passage God makes it clear to the nation that the Edomites have been left to the desert jackals. This was their state after the exile was over--their lands were barren, and they were subjugated. Moreover, God said through Malachi that even if the Edomites tried to rebuild, He would destroy their work. The only conclusion that was left from these themes is that the Edomites would always be a people under the wrath of God, and they would be known as the boundary of wickedness.

Therefore, God was judging the Edomites for the treachery that they showed to Israel throughout their histories. Not only had God protected Israel from the treatment they received from Edom, He also in the end restored Israel to her land and left the mountains of Edom a wasteland. This too was a clear demonstration of God's love for his people. In a similar way the Church can look back over human history and see how the love of God has been demonstrated to them. God loved us; He chose us to be His people, to be a kingdom of priests; and He has preserved and protected us down through the ages, although so many in the world have tried to destroy the people of God one way or another. But Jesus said that He would not allow the gates of hell to prevail against His Church. And when the Church begins to doubt the love of God, they simply have to take stock of who they are and how they came to be. It was the love of God. But now, because of that love, the Lord will speak sternly to His people.

#### Conclusion

Malachi ends this little introduction with a final word from God: "You will see it with your own eyes and say, Great is Yahweh, even beyond the borders of Israel" (Malachi 1:5). The people may have thought that God had not fulfilled all His promises to them, at least not as fast as they would have liked. But God declares that they will see the greatness of God, even beyond the land. This word anticipates the themes in this book that speak of the blessings on Israel, the salvation of the Gentiles, and the coming of the Lord to destroy all the wicked. Clearly, not everyone in Malachi's day would see all of this--they would see bits of it. But true to the prophetic style, "you" refers to the people of God in general, and not just the immediate audience.

## 02.02. Worship That God Rejects

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### Worship That God Rejects

Malachi 1:6-14

#### Introduction

Worship is supposed to be a celebration of being in covenant fellowship with the living God. It is a time set aside for the members of the covenant, the believers, to demonstrate their faith with genuine praise and thanksgiving. And God arranged the worship of Israel in a way that praise and thanksgiving would be most natural for the people--he arranged it for the three great harvest festivals on the land, barley in the spring, wheat in the summer, and summer fruits in the fall. Because the harvests were a gift from God, the people were by duty bound to bring tokens of their thanksgiving to offer to God at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. And because these were harvest celebrations, they were natural times for the farmers to rejoice--the work was over for the season. Only those who grew up on a farm would know how hard the work is, and how much joy there is when the harvest was finally in. When the Israelites came up to Jerusalem to worship, they were to bring animals from their flocks, wheat and fruit from their fields, and whatever other gifts of gratitude they wanted to give to God. God did not need the food to survive (see Psalms 50:1-23); Israel was to bring the offerings to God not because he needed them, but as an expression of the Israelite's need of God. To refuse to offer the gifts to God was to say that God was not necessary to the success of the people, when in fact without him they could not survive. When the people came to worship, God did not require a great deal of them in the way of offerings--tokens, really, of their herds and their crops--a handful of grain, or an animal for the family. But what they brought had to pass two important tests, and in many cases only they and God would know if they passed them. What they brought had to be the first and the best. Nothing else mattered. It had to be the first-born animal, or the first fruit of the crops or the orchards. God gets his share first, because he is the most important. But it had to be the best--the best firstborn or first fruit offering. To bring God an inferior gift would say that one did not think much of God, for the quality of the gift indicates the value the giver places on the one receiving the gift. That is true in any human relationship, and it certainly is true in the spiritual relationship we have with the Lord. But people are always falling short of pure worship, or at least pure worship on a sustained level. And so the prophets came on the scene in Israel to rebuke, reprove, correct, and exhort the people. In the earlier periods the prophets had to deal with idolatry and pagan corruptions in Israel's worship. After the exile that was no longer a major problem. But instead, worship was being corrupted by the indifference and selfishness of people. And so Malachi had to address a whole different set of problems in the nation. His first sermon, directed at the priests but certainly speaking to the worship of the people, deals with their making a mockery out of worship by bringing inferior offerings. God was not pleased with that kind of worship.

I. Those who offer God worthless gifts despise the name of the Lord (Malachi 1:6-8) A. The Charge of Despising the Name

Malachi begins his message with a couple of affirmations that the people would probably agree with wholeheartedly, but that he would use to lead into his rebuke. He declares, "A son honors a father, and a servant his master." They would respond, "Yes, this is what the Law said, and this is how things ought to be." The word "honors" indicates that the son would give his father, and the servant his master, the proper weight of authority (the verb is from *kabed*, to be heavy"). But Malachi follows this with two rhetorical questions from God: "If I am a father, where is my honor; if I am Lord, where is my fear?" says Yahweh of armies to you, O priests, who despise my name." This would have overwhelmed the people; they thought the message was going to be on the human relationships he introduced, but he turned it to their spiritual relationship with God. The accusation is clear: they were not honoring nor fearing the Lord, and so they did not really consider him their father or their master. He still has not stated what the problem is, but whatever it is it can be summarized that they do not honor the Lord and they do not fear him--and yet they are priests and worshipers! It is possible to be in attendance in a worship service, go through all the ritual and sing all the hymns, and yet despise the Lord. This is the point the prophet makes by saying that they despise his name. The message is addressed to the priests directly, but as we shall see, because of their failures, the nation was also guilty of not honoring and fearing the Lord. They are also the ones "who despise my name." The word "despise" means to look down on something as if it is worthless, to despise or treat with contempt. The Lord says the priests are "despisers of my name," the participle form emphasizing the nature of the word as their nature. And the "name" in the Old Testament refers to the Lord himself, his person and his works. The priests thought they were doing everything right, saying the prayers and the blessings, and making all the right sacrifices; so they responded (at least Malachi knows how they would respond), "Wherein have we despised your name?" Even if they made a mistake here or there in the service, it did not mean that they despised the name of the Lord, did it?--so they would reason. But Malachi said the Lord said otherwise. This is a very serious charge even as it stands; the seriousness is signaled by the title of God, "Yahweh of armies" [hosts], a judgment title meaning that God has all the heavenly and earthly armies at his disposal to judge the people. And so now that Malachi had their attention, he could explain what was happening.

B. The Charge Explained The Lord said through the prophet that they were offering on the high altar defiled food. The altar was the place of sacrifice, of course; and the charge was that what they were offering to God did not measure up to the standards. The "food" that they brought was defiled or polluted. That the sacrifices were called food was both symbolic and practical, symbolic because when they were burned on the altar it was as if God "consumed" them, and practical because some of the sacrifices were to be eaten by the priests and the people as communal meals. This was a serious charge because of the requirements in the Law. They were supposed to bring sacrifices that were perfect--healthy animals, without any blemish at all. There were two very important reasons for this. First, the sacrifice was a gift that was to be offered to God. As noted above, the kind of gift that someone gives indicates what they think of the person they are giving it to. For example, if a husband gave his wife a gift for Valentines Day, say a new mop, the gift would certainly not be well-received because it would not be special and because it would speak volumes of what he thought of her. Or if someone gave another person a gift that was old, used, worn out, and of no use any more, it would be an insult. They would just be pawning off some junk on the person. So to bring a gift to God that was defiled was a real insult--no matter how much the priests protested the charge.

Second, theologically the animal sacrifice was for atonement, signifying that the perfect animal would be offered in place of the sinner. Since the animal represented God's provision for the sins of the worshiper, it had to be without blemish itself. This principle came to fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross: he was the sinless Lamb of God who gave his life for the sins of the world. If Christ had been defiled, a sinner, his death would have been no better than our own deaths. The only one who could redeem us from sin was the only one who was sinless. So to bring defiled offerings was serious. And they knew it. But they challenged this as well: "Wherein have we defiled you?" Note, in anticipating what their response is, Malachi changes the object--they were not just bringing defiled offerings, they were defiling God." If the sanctuary were holy, if the altar was holy, if the sacrifices were to be holy, then to bring in defiled gifts would be to defile everything about worship. How so? Because, as Malachi answers this charge, he says that in effect they are saying that the table of the Lord is contemptible! Here is the word "despise" again--not only do they despise the name of the Lord, they think the table, that is the altar, is worthless. Because the people brought defiled gifts they did not think the altar and the ritual was worthwhile.

How exactly did they despise the altar and offer defiled things? Here then are the specifics. In Malachi 1:8 the prophet says, "When you offer the blind for a sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer the lame, and the sick, is that not evil?" He is talking about animals. The people knew they had to bring animal sacrifices to the sanctuary for their worship--an animal for a sin offering, another animal for the burnt offering, a third animal for the peace offering--three animals for the family group every time they came to the sanctuary! That could get expensive, of course. And so they brought the animals that were diseased, crippled, blind, and worthless, animals they could not sell or use, but they could offer them to God. After all, God was only going to burn them up anyway. So this was a very practical thing to do--so they thought--fulfill the ritual, and get rid of the crummy livestock at the same time. But Malachi challenges them: "Offer them to your governor; see if he will be pleased with you, or respect you"--says the Lord of armies. Try paying your taxes to the government by giving it worthless things. No, the government gets its hand into the paycheck first and takes its share right off the top. Always. But God is more important than the government; so why do people think they can get away with giving him inferior gifts? And the people in Malachi's day are not the only ones guilty of this. When I was growing up people used to collect things for missionaries or disaster relief, and they often found that people had given junk, things that they could not use any more. What happened to sacrificial giving? This was cleaning out the attic. And, when people give to the Lord in worship, it is often what is left over after they plan everything else that they want to do with their money. The standard in worship from the beginning is that God gets the first and the best. The first-born animal, the first fruit from the trees and the field, go to God; and whatever is given to God has to be perfect, it has to be the best. This is true of physical gifts as well as spiritual service. Our money, our time, our service--God's people must give the best they have to him; and in all things he must have the pre-eminence (Colossians 1:18).

II. Those who are guilty of worthless worship must seek God's favor to continue to be his people (Malachi 1:9-11) A. The Instruction to Find Favor In the next section the prophet instructs the people what they should do. They have a choice. If they feel that they have violated the holy things, then all they can do, and do quickly, is pray to the Lord for forgiveness (Malachi 1:9). "Now, entreat the face of God that he may be gracious to us." The expression is bold, but simple--they

have to pray for divine favor (the face of God usually represents his favor). The motivation is that God may be gracious. The word “gracious” implies that they do not deserve God’s favor, but rather his judgment, for “grace” is undeserved favor. The reason for the urgent prayer is that the people are guilty: “this is from your hands” is an idiom in the book that means, “this is what you have produced.” Will God be pleased or will he respect those who do this? The implied answer to the rhetorical question is that God has no pleasure in or respect for the worshiper who offers to God something that is ruined or worthless.

B. The Need to Prevent Vain Worship But on the other hand, if they are going to keep worshiping like this, the prophet declares, “O that someone would shut the doors so that you might not kindle fire on my altar gratuitously.” Malachi thinks it is better to lock the doors of the temple and keep the people out. If they continue to worship this way, then the fire they light on the altar will be worthless. In stating this the prophet uses the word “gratuitously, without a cause”; it forms a word play on their seeking God’s grace, for it is from the same root (khanan). “Grace” is undeserved merit; “gratuitous” is for no reason, without a cause. In this passage, the latter meaning applies, for their worship would be worthless, pointless, for no reason, a waste of time. God takes no pleasure in worthless worship; in fact, he rejects it! If people do not do it with love and devotion, but only out of compulsion to follow a ritual, their gift will be worthless, and they will be rejected.

### C. The Prophecy of Gentile Worship

What would be the outcome of shutting down the temple and keeping false worship out? Turning to the Gentiles. In verse 11 we have one of the early predictions of Gentile faith: if the Israelites reject the Lord, the nations will not. So, from the rising of the sun to its setting, the Gentiles will worship him. This is a figure of speech called merism, two opposites are stated for the meaning of the totality. Rising of the sun is in the morning, setting is in the evening-all day; the rising is in the east, the setting in the west-everywhere. All day long and everywhere the nations will worship and magnify the Lord. Moreover, they will burn incense and offer pure sacrifices to the Lord. The burning of incense goes with offering prayers, and offering pure sacrifices goes with the obedience of faith, for to do that they would have to prepare for the worship. In time this is what happened, God turned to the Gentiles. And when the Gospel went to all nations, people celebrated the pure offering, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Righteous.

III. Those who would worship the Lord must change their attitude or they may be cursed (Malachi 1:12-14).

### A. The Danger of Letting Worship be a Drudgery

Malachi, in contrast to the prospect of others worshiping correctly, turns back to his audience to reiterate their sin and explain it further. “But you are profaning it.” The word “profane” in Hebrew means to treat or make as common (English “profane” means outside the temple), ordinary; the word is the antonym of “holy.” Their holy meal in the sanctuary was not holy; it was a profane or common meal because they brought ordinary animals. They said, or thought, that the table was defiled, and its food contemptible. Of course, they would not say this--they were priests, after all, and they had to say the right things in the services; but in the way that they worshiped they were saying this. And even worse, Malachi says they are not even trying to hide their true feelings. In Malachi 1:13 he adds, “And you say, ‘What a drudgery!’ and you snort at it, says the Lord of

armies.” The snorting must be some kind of gesture or expression of disgust; to them it was a drudgery to do it, a pain in the neck. There was no joy in worship, no delight in serving God. This attitude prevails today in so many circles of worship where the ritual has become a routine, then a drudgery. People go through the service, but it is something to endure. And sometimes ministers, for one reason or another, might become bored, or indifferent, perhaps burned out. They need to turn the service over to someone else until they can get their spiritual perspective restored. Genuine praise and thanksgiving will go a long way to bringing life back into the service; but a large part of the problem is going to be concerned with how the Word of God is used--and that will be Malachi’s next sermon.

B. The Warning of Deceiving the Lord The Lord asks through the prophet, “When you bring injured, crippled and diseased animals to offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?” What an insult! The message concludes with a curse: “Cursed is the deceiver who has in his flock an acceptable male [sacrifice], and offers to God a blemished thing”--literally, a ruined or corrupt thing (the word is used for things like spoiled milk). The Hebrew word “curse” basically means removed from blessing, or loss of the blessing. This will be the way the next sermon of Malachi begins--how God curses their blessing because they do not obey Scripture. But if people keep the best for themselves, and offer God the junk, God may take away even the best they have (see Deuteronomy 8:1-20), or even their lives, as he did in Acts 5:1-42 when Ananias and Sapphira lied to God about what they were giving. So God will not long tolerate false worship; he will get rid of it, or as John warns in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, he will remove the candlestick” And then, if this curse lands, if the deceivers are removed from the place of blessing, the Lord’s name will be revered among the Gentiles. Even among the Gentiles it was known what the Lord could do, and so they feared him.

Conclusion The Lord Jesus Christ told the woman at the well that the Father was seeking worshipers who would worship in spirit and truth. Worship must be honest and spiritual; the worshipers must put their heart into it and offer to God the best that they have, and the best that they can do. To get to this point they have to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord so that they will appreciate more who he is and what he has done. The greater the knowledge of the object of worship, the greater the worship. But if people do not venture there in their faith, but live selfish and self-indulgence lives, then the worship will be a drudgery and their gifts perfunctory and worthless.

## 02.03. Faithful Teaching of God's Word

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### Faithful Teaching Of God's Word

Malachi 2:1-9

#### Introduction

Malachi had to deal with a variety of sins among the clergy and the people. In the last section he had to deal with their “cheap” worship and contempt for the ritual; and in the next section he will address the problem of divorce and marriage to pagans. Whenever there are such violations out of control in the people--people who claim to be followers of the LORD--it is almost always due to bad teaching. Somehow the people had the idea that these things were not sins, or that they could do them and get away with them. And so Malachi turns in this passage to address the priests, these ministers who were failing to do what they were supposed to do. Blaming the priests for the problems in no way let the guilty off the hook; they were responsible for their sin even if they were unaware of what Scripture said about it. But the guilt was greater for those who by their false teaching condoned sin in the congregation. The short message breaks down into three parts: the condemnation (Malachi 2:1-4), the covenant standard (Malachi 2:5-7) and the charge (Malachi 2:8-9). It is constructed for the greatest rhetorical effect: he first condemns them for their failure in ministry--this would have grabbed their attention, but also sparked their interest to see what he was so upset about; then he lays out the standard for their spiritual service so they would know what they have failed to do, and finally he states explicitly what they have done wrong in the light of that standard. The passage focused on the priests themselves, but also spoke to the guilty members of the congregation to remind them that no matter what the priests said in their teaching, they were to obey Scripture. Jesus in his day had to remind the people that when the Pharisees sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:1-39) they had to listen to them--because there the Pharisees read and explained the text. But then Jesus also said to beware of their false teachings, their leaven, and be careful not to do what they do. So the laity must be discerning, they must know the Word of God well enough to discern when the teacher or preacher gets it wrong. And all these applications remain today, even though Malachi preached about 2400 years ago. Those who minister, that is, those who teach the Bible, whether pastors, teachers, missionaries, or any others, must be very careful how they interpret and apply Scripture. And those who hear the Scripture taught must study it to know if the message or lesson was true or not. Today we are falling down on both counts. Who today is to teach the Bible? Well, Hebrews 5:1-14 makes it very clear that all believers are to teach God's word. The writer tells those early Hebrew Christians that they had been in the faith long enough that they ought to have been teachers by then, but instead they still needed someone to teach them the basics, they still were drinking milk and not eating the solid food of biblical doctrine. Some Christians will be called by God to pastor or to teach, and they will give their full time to this ministry; but every Christian must be able to teach something, to someone. If they cannot, then all that can be said is that they have not grown spiritually.

I. God will remove his blessing from those who refuse to give glory to his name (Malachi 2:1-4).

A. God warns people of his judgment (Malachi 2:1-2). The sermon begins with the bold, direct confrontation: "The instruction is for you, O priests." One can only envision the temple filled with priests, Levites, and the people, and all of a sudden the prophet stands up to speak and speaks directly and bluntly to the spiritual leaders. They might have anticipated that he would be critical of them, but they were not sure how critical. This would be major. The announcement is that God would send a curse on them if they did not give glory to his name. This would be a curse on their blessings, something that God said he had already begun to do. These two words are important throughout the Bible. The word "blessing" (and the verb "to bless," *barak*) means "enrichment"--physically, spiritually, materially. A blessing is a gift from God, but it is a gift that comes with some empowerment or enablement. What blessings had God given the priests? Well, in addition to the normal blessings for the people of God, the rain, the crops, the families, the homes, peace in their time, their health, and all that, there were the blessings of the priesthood. As priests they were empowered to lead worship, teach the Word of God, announce God's forgiveness of sin and full atonement, eat from the offerings, dwell in the sanctuaries or the priestly cities, and have the respect of the congregation. It was a wonderful life because God had given them so much. The opposite of the word "bless" is the word "curse"; it essentially means to ban someone, that is, to remove the person from the place of blessing, or remove the blessing. For example, when God cursed the ground in the beginning, we are told that it would no longer yield its strength in the harvest. And then when Cain was cursed, he had to flee from the fertile soil (the 'adamah) to be a ceaseless wanderer in the world (the 'erets, like the outback). Removal of a blessing is therefore a curse; the ultimate curse will be that some people will be removed from eternal blessings because of their unbelief. In Malachi 2:1-17 if God cursed the blessings of the priest, it meant that he was rendering them unfit for ministry; if he removed the blessings of priesthood from them, they would have no effective ministry even though they might remain in office. But as this section ends, God would make them contemptible and base in the opinion of the people (Malachi 2:9). And this is so true of the household of faith in all ages--because of sin the blessing of God is removed, even though the organization may continue to grind on. Jesus' warning to the seven churches of Revelation was that he would remove their candlestick, i.e., he would remove their effectiveness as his witnesses in the world--they would cease to be a light to God. In other words, the churches would be dead, and considered worthless and irrelevant by people.

What did Malachi's priests do to warrant this warning? They did not give glory to God's name. Malachi presents this idea in the form of a conditional clause: "If you will not obey, if you will not take it to heart to give glory to my name." The verb "to hear" (*shama'*) has the meaning of respond to, or obey. The priests heard the Word of God read, but they were not hearing it. Jesus had to tell people that if they had ears to hear, they should listen. This is the expected faith-response. And if they will not listen, they will not make a decision ("take it to heart"). He is talking about the faith commitment to do God's will. And in this case, that is "to give glory to my name." The "name" of Yahweh, of course, means his nature, his person and his works, his character, who he is. How does one give glory to a name that is already glorious. Well, the word "glory" (*kabod*) comes from the basic word "to be heavy"--what is heavy is important. To honor someone, say a father or a mother as the commandment says, means to give them their proper importance, their proper weight of authority. But how does this work with God, who has it all? The only way we can glorify the LORD is by extending the knowledge of him in the world, we add to his reputation by what we

say (praise) and what we do (righteousness). To glorify God in everything we do means that we cause God to be seen in everything we do. If we sin, or fail to do what he wants us to do in worship and service, we do not glorify his name, but give people the wrong impression about God. And this is what the priests were doing.

Another example may be helpful. In Numbers 20:1-29 when the people murmured against God because there was no water, God told Moses to speak to the rock in the presence of the people so that water would come out for them. But Moses lost his temper; he said, "Listen you rebels, must we bring you water from this rock?" And he struck the rock twice and water came out. But because of that, God told Moses that he would not bring the Israelites into the promised land--that blessing would not be his, but another's. What did Moses do wrong? He was angry and impatient, he took credit for the mission ("we"), and he disobeyed the Word of God. This was not the picture of God that he was to convey; and so God made sure he was sanctified in the eyes of the people by punishing Moses. As God said when the sons of the priests offered strange fire on the altar (Leviticus 10:1-20), "I must be sanctified in them that draw near to me [=priests], and before all the people I must be glorified." Those who represent God, represent God. That is an awesome task. But if by their words or their works they bring down God's reputation or character, they fail to glorify his name. And God will not let anyone destroy his name.

Malachi has not yet stated what the priests were doing wrong; but whatever it is that they were doing was ruining the picture that people had of God.

B. God explains what his judgment will be (Malachi 2:3-4).

Now the Word of the LORD tells what this curse on the priests will be. The first statement is "I will rebuke your seed." This is not very clear. For God to rebuke something means to change it, stop it, replace it (recall Jesus' rebuking the winds and the waves). But the word "seed" is difficult. It could mean the literal "seed" in the fields, that is, the crops. The Book of Haggai actually discusses how God punished the nation a little earlier by bringing a blight on their crops. So that is a possibility here if the priests and the people do not obey. But since this is addressed primarily to priests, "your seed" would refer to their descendants, that is, that because of their sins their line would be stopped from being priests. This happened in the beginning of Samuel when God removed Eli and his corrupt sons from the priesthood and chose another line. This interpretation would either mean that the seed of the priests was already as bad as their fathers, or that such a curse on the father would be severely felt if he knew that by his actions he put his descendants out of ministry. Either one is possible. But this seems to be the best explanation.

Some of the ancient versions read the word as a different word here. The Hebrew word "seed" is almost the same as the word for "arm," just a vowel or two change in the same letters. They thought that the arm of the priests was rebuked. This would mean he could not offer sacrifices on the altar, he could not lift his arm to give the priestly blessing, or he was physically incapacitated in some way that he was no longer qualified to be the priest (priests, according to Leviticus 21:1-24; Leviticus 22:1-33, had to be healthy and whole--no broken bones, no hunchback, no physical defects at all, because they were conveying to the people the ideal). So Malachi 2:3 a is one of those lines in the Bible that we know what it means basically--their ministry is being judged--but we do not know the precise idea in the expression that the prophet intended. And, it is not impossible that he had here a deliberate ambiguity (as the prophets often did), meaning he had a couple of

things in mind and this phrase covered them.

However that line is interpreted, it leads into the rest of the verse, which is very clear--graphically clear. God said to the priests, "I will smear offal on your faces, even the offal of your feasts, and you shall be carted away with it." Zechariah used the same kind of language to describe the sins of the priests that contributed to judgment on the nation; in Malachi 3:1-18 he portrayed the high priest as being clothed with filthy (=excrement be-spattered) garments. These post-exilic prophets did not mince words. Now then, in the ritual the priests would have to sacrifice animals, cut out the internal unclean parts, carry them outside the camp and burn them, wash, change their clothes, and come back in. That was the normal ritual to get rid of the unclean things. But God said he would smear it across their faces--making them as unclean as the unclean parts, and so they would be carried out to the rubbish heap. Obviously this is figurative language, for God did not do this literally. But what he meant was that he was declaring them unclean, and as a result they were not allowed in the sanctuary. Their ministry was over! This would have absolutely overwhelmed Malachi's audience. He is saying they were unclean, disqualified, not welcome in the holy place, cursed by God. They thought they were doing fine. But Malachi says when God removes them from his service, then they will know that it was the LORD who did this--not just the raving of some prophet. It is a serious matter to attempt to speak for God, or minister in his name.

What was the purpose of the LORD's judging these corrupt priests? Malachi 2:4 says he will do this so that his covenant would remain with Levi. There is no specific covenant laid out in the Bible with Levi--Levi was the son of Jacob and not a priest--and there was no covenant laid out with the tribe of Levi, the Levites. But because the LORD chose the tribe of Levi to be the priestly tribe, that choice was considered a covenant. A covenant essentially includes the LORD's calling of people, his promised blessings to them, and their obligations to the agreement; it is then sealed with a sacrifice. God called the tribe of Levi to service, gave them the wonderful blessings of ministry, but laid out their obligations in this arrangement, and then sealed it with the ordination sacrifice in Leviticus 8:1-36. That is what is meant by the covenant of Levi--it is the ministry of the priests.

II. God reminds his messengers that they must teach and live the truth (Malachi 2:5-7).

A. The essence of the covenant: It is a ministry of life and peace (Malachi 2:5).

Now the prophet reminds the priests of the calling that they received--what their ministry was supposed to be. This will make his charge against them all the more glaring by contrast. First he sets for the nature of the covenant with Levi, the nature of the ministry: it is a covenant of life and peace. The words "life and peace" in some way explain the nature of this covenant; in all probability, they state what the covenant, what the ministry, should produce. If the priests were faithfully serving in the sanctuary, speaking the truth, offering the sacrifices for atonement, praying for the people, then the worshipers would find life and peace through them. If they believed and obeyed the word, they would live; if they confessed and brought sacrifices, they would have peace with God. This is what any form of ministry is about--people need the life and the peace that God gives through the forgiveness of sin and the guidance of his Word. But God reminds these priests that the earlier priests not only accepted the ministry and were ordained in it, they understood what an awesome task that was. God said that he gave life and peace to the early priests who were going to minister them, and he did this that they might fear God--reverential fear that leads to adoration, obedience, and worship. If any people receive such a position as priest, minister,

pastor, spiritual director, and teacher without it striking the fear of the LORD in them, then they have missed the fundamental principle of the service of the LORD. It is service because he is the LORD God. That he would choose us is amazing; that he would entrust his word to us is frightening. But if the calling is received with faith and understanding, it will make us into more devout worshipers. That is what happened with the early priests--they feared the LORD and stood in awe of his name. That kind of reverential fear in the leaders will prompt devotion and dedication in the people.

B. The means of the covenant: It is a ministry of the Word (Malachi 2:6-7). The LORD continues to describe the ministry of the priesthood as he intended it to be. First he speaks of them as teachers. "The law of truth" could be interpreted either as "true instruction" (for "Law," torah, means "instruction," and "truth" can mean the content of the instruction was true, i.e., biblical), or "faithful instruction" (because "truth" is related to the basic idea of reliable, dependable). Probably the first is intended, given the context of this message; but that would also include the second, because if people teach the truth, then they are faithful to their calling.

Besides, the contrasting clause clarifies this: "unrighteousness was not found in his lips"--the early priests did not say things that were wrong, that did not conform to the standard of the Torah.<sup>1</sup> They taught the truth--and that was their primary task (see Deuteronomy 33:10). But second, they did not just teach the truth, they lived it. They walked with God in peace and uprightness. "To walk" is a metaphor for the activities of life, conduct. To walk "with God" means to live one's life in accordance with the will of God. That would be characterized by "peace" and "uprightness." To walk with God one has to be at peace with God; and to be at peace with God one has to be upright. So the prophet is affirming that God gave the covenant to the Levites, and they were faithful in teaching the truth and living it out before the people. And third, to no surprise, the faithful teaching and the obedient life caused many people to turn away from iniquity. The ministry had results--people changed to follow the LORD. They put away their iniquity and followed after righteousness. And this is still the pattern of effective spiritual leadership: teach the Word and live the life. People will hear God's Word, but they will see that it makes a difference in life, and many will respond. And so the prophet declares the central principle that should govern the priests' service of the LORD: "The lips of the priest must keep knowledge, and people must be able to seek that Law at his mouth." Why? Because he is the messenger of the LORD (the word "messenger," Hebrew mal'ak, is the key theme of the book--Malachi, "my messenger"). The point is based on the blessing of Levi in Deuteronomy 33:10. There were three duties the priests were to perform: teach the Law of God, burn incense (i.e., make intercessory prayer), make sacrifices (i.e., be able to help people get to God through the provision of the atonement). But first and foremost, they were teachers. And whatever else might be said about teaching, the teacher must have knowledge, here the knowledge of God's Word. There is no place in ministry for ignorant ministers, for ministers who have not and will not study, for ministers who do not use the Word of God much in their messages. The people must feel confidence that their minister knows what God said and what it means, and that they could go with their questions and the minister could answer from Scripture. This is central to ministry, to the faith itself. If there is no solid teaching, worship become a meaningless ritual (chapter 1), and the standards of righteousness irrelevant or unknown. Whoever speaks for God must remember that he or she is God's messenger; the message is not theirs, no matter how clever they might be--it is God's message.

III. God treats with contempt those who do not comply with the standard of spiritual service (Malachi 2:8-9) A. Many have corrupted the covenant (Malachi 2:8).

Malachi 2:8 starts with "But," a sharp contrast to the standard in Malachi 2:7. That is an ominous way to begin when the ideal has just been set forth. "But you have turned aside out of the way." They had deliberately changed the course of their service--they did not study, they did not tell people the truth, they did not live out the faith before the people. The ministry did not change--they turned away. They probably thought that they were simply making practical innovations for their age, but they were corrupting the plan of God. And by their teaching they caused many to stumble. This no doubt refers to things like the first chapter where the priests were allowing corrupt gifts to be brought, and to the next oracle which is concerned with divorce and marrying pagans. The last line of this sermon gives us an idea of how this worked: they were showing respect of persons over the teaching of the Law. They applied the Law differently to different people, perhaps more leniently with the rich and powerful, the same kind of favoritism that James decried in his epistle. It is evil to use the Word of God this way, to cause people to sin through the teaching, or to show favoritism through it. The other prophets spoke of the false teachers who called evil good and good evil. And we are seeing a rise in this kind of application of Scripture today. Jesus said it would have been better for that one not to have been born than to cause a little one to stumble.

B. God makes them base and low in public opinion (Malachi 2:9).

They dishonored God in their ministry; God will now dishonor them. He will leave them alone, let them continue for a while, but now that they have been exposed, everyone will know that they are base and low. How horrible to try to be a priest in the sanctuary and know that everyone knows you are a reprobate and condemned by God. That person would rather disappear into the countryside. How horrible to try to be a minister without God's presence or power.

Conclusion This was a sermon addressed to the priests, but the topic concerned the knowledge and use of Scripture in ministry. The principles set forth here certainly apply directly to people who are fully active in ministry today--pastors, teachers, counselors, and the like. How they handle the Word is critical; they dare not make mistakes. James said that it was a dangerous thing to teach. Perhaps we rush into it too eagerly, not realizing how serious a matter it is to speak for God. But as with Israel, so in the church, all believers are a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:1-25). What the priests were to the people, the people were supposed to be to the world. Teachers of God's Word. The Great Commission made this clear: Go into all the world ... and make disciples. Disciples are learners; we are the teachers. Christians, especially if they have been Christians for some time, must know the Word of God and be able to teach it and live it so that they may influence people toward righteousness. It is a wonderful, but solemn obligation.

## 02.04. Profaning The Marriage Covenant

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### Profaning The Marriage Covenant

Malachi 2:10-16

#### Introduction

Marriage is an institution of God. It accords with the dictates of nature and the laws of divine inspiration. It was an integral ingredient in the happiness of Eden, and so is an integral part of society. It heightened, it perfected, the pure, fresh, and serene joys of that Garden, the scene of every beauty and the temple of God; and so it has been perpetuated to this present hour as a social blessing to soothe and sustain us amidst the depressing and difficult circumstances of our fallen condition.

Jesus threw a distinct holiness and grandeur around this particular relationship of a man and a woman. To him it was a blessed estate, and so he clothed it with honor and sublimity. He ratified its contract; he guarded its obligations; he expounded its laws; and he graced its celebration with his presence. In fact, the first sign that his hands performed was at a bridal festival where he turned the water into wine for the joyous celebrations to continue. The apostles caught the idea of their master, and invested it with mystic solemnity by presenting it as a type of the substantial, invisible and everlasting union existing between Christ and his bride, the church. Accordingly, it involves the most tender, close, and lasting ties that can unite human beings together in this life. It combines the earthly interest, fortunes, and happiness of two people, a man and a woman, and it influences the destiny of many others. The interests of the couple united, the triumph of truth in their union, and the upward progress of humanity in their arena are all dependent on the preservation of God's institution of marriage.

Unfortunately, things have not turned out very well. If we are to look to the institution of marriage for progress in truth, stability, and progress in society, then we will be disappointed. From the very beginning of Genesis people have attempted to change God's institution of marriage to suit their desires. That plan was simple and clear: one man and one woman becoming one flesh throughout their earthly lives, to produce a godly seed. But the human race embraced every form of profane and vile activity; and within the marriage relationship the laws of God were broken at every turn. Formally or informally, marriages were dissolved, because all these sins in one way or another affected the family. And when the family serenity and unity is destroyed, the spiritual life and worship falls as well. In the modern world the dissolution of a marriage is rarely considered a sin; rather, it is an option that may be taken to avoid difficulties or tensions. Oh, it is regarded as a tragedy, certainly a stressful experience, and a failure on some level. But a sin, or even an embarrassment? Only in the strictest of religious settings. To God, however, divorce is a sin, no matter what the causes or circumstances, or who is the guilty party or who is the innocent party. A divorce, according to his word, is the breaking of a covenant, a falling short of the standard of God, and a serious and painful complication of life that seems never to go away. And we find no better

description of this violation and its pain than in the Bible than in Malachi 2:1-17. No passage in the Bible deals with all the details of marriage and divorce. Rather, each passage comes from a particular set of circumstances or a particular question. Malachi was dealing with a situation where a good number of men got rid of their Hebrew wives and married pagan women. The prophet gave no details, only a description of this as a treachery--to God and the covenant as well as to the wives. Modern counselors would look into what went wrong with their original marriages, or what in their personality needed to be addressed, which is certainly helpful. But the prophets wanted everyone to realize that the failure was a sin, and that to go ahead in life with God they first had to acknowledge that, or as we say, own it, at least own their part in something that fell short of the will of God. If reconciliation was possible, it was to be pursued; if not, then the people had to accept responsibility for their acts, find forgiveness and healing from God, and get on with their lives--like any other person forgiven and restored.

Malachi delivered his burden to the people of Israel well after the time of the return and revivals of Ezra and Nehemiah, somewhere between 440 and 400 B.C. What we have in the book is a number of his messages; we have them because they are part of the divine revelation of God and timeless in their relevance. But what this prophet faced was an antagonistic audience, much like today in these matters. In the earlier days when people heard the Word of the LORD they trembled and listened; but in Malachi's day when they heard the Word they challenged it. This should not surprise us. For people to sin, say, for them to get rid of their spouses in order to marry pagans, biblical Law would have to be challenged, qualified, or set aside in some way. It cannot be ignored, because it stands there as a witness. And in the days of the prophets, a Malachi was there to declare the standard. After the captivity many folks got carried away with their freedom. When they divorced and married women who worshiped false gods, Malachi presented their actions as a defilement of the holiness of the LORD. Malachi's message was similar to that of Ezra and Nehemiah; but he alone focused on the pain all this caused and on the fact that God hates it. His message follows two major sins, first the divorces, and then the marriages to foreign women.

I. Those who wilfully violate the covenant of marriage face the punishment of God (Malachi 2:10-12).

A. Divorce is the sin of treachery (Malachi 2:10).

Malachi begins by laying down a principle: although Israel was created by one Father, they were guilty of treachery against the covenant. The first verse affirms the principle by rhetorical question that they had one father who created them; and the second half expresses the prophet's amazement over their violation of the covenant. The prophet at this starting point speaks in general terms to get the people's attention; when he has it, he narrows the focus to the actual sins involved. As we shall see in these first three verses Malachi was actually condemning intermarriage with pagans; and these intermarriages gave the occasion for the divorces. And since the message begins with the affirmation of the sovereignty of God, then the message is that unfaithfulness to the marriage in this way is disloyalty to God. But the principle as it will be related to marriage is well summarized by Hengstenberg: The one who annulled the distinction between an Israelite and a heathen woman proved by this very action that he had already annihilated the distinction between the God of Israel and the idols of the heathen, that he no longer had the theocratic consciousness of God (Christologie, III:381).

Malachi's reference to their creator as "father" recalls the language of Malachi 1:6, "Is not God our father?" And the use of "father" recalls the covenant relationship that God established in Egypt and confirmed by covenant at Sinai ("let my son go"; see Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 32:18; Isaiah 1:2; and Jeremiah 3:9). Spiritual unity should have existed because they had a close relationship with God and with one another by means of the covenant. But more to the point, because loyalty to the covenant was paramount, the Law strictly prohibited intermarriage with the pagans (see Exodus 34:11 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Such marriages would destroy worship and undermine the entire covenant. To do this, then, was to dishonor God and act faithlessly against fellow members of the covenant. It was all unfaithfulness to God, for sin against another person was sin against God. And it still is. The sin is introduced as a "treachery" before the sin is defined. "A treachery had been committed"--that would get the attention of the audience. The word for "treachery" here means a willful betrayal of confidence, trust or truth. One who is treacherous is a traitor, unreliable and disloyal; and a traitor is dangerous. The term is bagad (bah-gad), related to beged ("garment"). In the Jewish writings the verb came to mean "act violently, faithlessly, and rebel." So the people had been unfaithful to God, traitors to the covenant. This was very harsh language; the sin must have had greater implications than, say, a couple not getting along and divorcing.

#### B. Marrying idol worshipers profanes God's holiness (Malachi 2:11).

Moving from the general description, the prophet now identified the exact problem. Malachi's style is first to give the theological principle (against which there was no argument), then the general rebuke (over which people would be concerned), and then the actual sin (which would hit home). Even here it is not until the second half of the verse that it is clear what he is talking about. The first thing we note is the identity of the guilty. He mentioned Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem in order. These are figures of speech (metonymies of subject, meaning the people in these areas). Israel was mentioned because it was the name of the covenant people; Judah and Jerusalem emphasized the center of the theocratic kingdom, the religious center of the nation. These heightened the boldness of the sin--it was no marginal problem of people who had no biblical training; it was in the very center of the political and religious community. The force of the verse lies in the idea of the treachery, which was paralleled with the word "abomination." This makes it something that God loathes, something that is repugnant to God, and therefore tabu. It is clear that the intermarriage of Israelites with pagans was repugnant to God; and it should have then been a matter of reverential dread to the people as well. We are talking about bringing idolatry into the family of Israel! Did they not learn from their history and their exile? The reason that God loathed it was that it "defiled the holiness" of God that he loves. The words "defile, profane" and "holiness" are cleverly put together--they are antonyms. "Holiness" means "distinct, set apart, separate" to God. "Defile" means "common, profane, separated from the sanctuary" or from God. These people made common that which was to be distinct.

What did Malachi mean by "the holiness" of the Lord? It could refer to the temple. The idea would be that some Israelites were bringing pagan idolaters into the Lord's house and therefore profaning it. Support for this view comes from the fact that the Lord loves Zion (Psalms 78:68; Psalms 87:2) and prohibits idolatry from the sanctuary. But the word "holiness" may refer to the nation itself. The support for this view is a little more convincing. First, Israel is called a holy nation (Deuteronomy 7:6) and his sanctuary (Psalms 114:2). Second, the immediate context is based on the fact that God made them one nation. Third, Malachi begins his book on the fact that God loves

Israel. And fourth, intermarriage with pagans profaned the holy seed (Ezra 9:2; Jeremiah 2:3; Deuteronomy 14:2). God established the marriage laws (Leviticus 21:14-15 and Nehemiah 13:29) for the people he loved (=chose) in order that they might be distinct to him. Now, however, Israel had profaned that holiness and made themselves common. The last clause explains how they did this: "by marrying the daughter (worshiper) of a foreign god." This expression, we know from Jeremiah 2:27, refers to a worshiper of a strange or foreign deity. It would destroy Israelite worship, and therefore the covenant. The text uses the singular "daughter," but it means the practice was typical of a widespread sin in the land.

C. Introducing idolatry into the family of God warrants the threat of a curse from God (Malachi 2:12). The message brought a clear rebuke from the prophet because a violation of the covenant has been committed. Malachi says, "May the LORD cut off ... ." This is not an announcement of doom; it is an imprecation of the prophet as if to say the people deserve this judgment. But a curse from the prophet was warning enough that if such sin was persisted in it would bring the penalty. The idea of being "cut off" needs some explanation. In its uses for divine punishment, the verb "cut off" can be used for the death penalty at the hands of the people, for premature death at the hand of God, or excommunication from the religious community. One of the latter two is probably in the mind of the prophet--God would deal with this matter if the righteous in the land did not. Who stood to be so "cut off" by God? The answer, through some poetic expressions, indicates that none are excluded. The general statement is given first: "the man who does this." Then the specifics: "him that wakes and him that answers." There are many suggested interpretations for this difficult phrase. One thing is clear, the two different ideas in it are opposites, and so the expression forms a figure of speech (a merism)--everyone from the waker to the answerer. One very possible interpretation would be to say the waker and answerer refer to watchmen in the city. Perhaps with the reference to the "tents" we can get the idea of watchmen at either end of the camp, one calling out and the other answering. Thus, it would mean everyone, from one end of the settlement to the other. Judgment for this kind of sin applied to everyone, rich or poor, leader or follower. No one would be exempt. The last expression is set off by itself in the poetry: "him that offers a offering (a gift, *minkhah*) to Yahweh of armies." The point is that judgment would fall on such covenant violators, even if they appeared to be faithful and generous worshipers of God (albeit hypocritically). This kind of gift was not usually a blood sacrifice, but a gift of foods and produce. To give this gift along with the blood sacrifice would be the way to indicate gratitude for God's provision and dedication of life to his service. Here is real treachery. The outward sign of dedication to the LORD was betrayed by the treachery of uniting with paganism in marriage. Such dedication is a delusion. It is an attempt to gloss over the sin, to salve the conscience, and to appear faithful to the community.

II. The LORD rejects worshipful acts from those who violate the covenant and bring pain to their spouses (Malachi 2:13-14).

A. The pain caused by sin overshadows any attempts to worship (Malachi 2:13).

Now a second thing that they did is mentioned by the prophet. This second sin grew out of the first, for in finding and marrying pagan women they put away their primary wives by divorce. The two sins here are inseparably bound together, but the prophet turns his attention now to the treachery on the personal level. Marrying an idolatrous woman was one thing; but dumping a legitimate wife

for her is another. Both violate the covenant and bring pain to God, but the latter causes great pain to the women who were put away. The picture is painted dramatically. The wives who had been put away were in great mourning and anguish. The women came to the altar to pray, but their tears intermingled with their prayers. Their woe rose to God with such intensity that God no longer could regard (give attention to) the offerings brought by the men. So, in effect the men covered the altar with tears and sighing--not their tears, for they were cavalier about it all and thought God was pleased with their gifts, but with their wives' tears, because by causing the pain the men were actually presenting their wives' grief to God and not a sacrifice. That is what their hand produced, as Malachi put it. And all such hypocritical worship was completely rejected by God.

Here were men, calloused and less than loyal to the historic faith, coming to the sanctuary with their impressive gifts of dedication and thanksgiving. But over here were their unfortunate wives, now abandoned, praying and crying to God for help. Their tears were what God saw, not the offerings of their husbands. There is scarcely a thought more solemn and searching than the thought that few, if any, of our prayers go up to God unqualified and unchecked. We pray for something, but our sins cry out for something else, and the prayer is hindered. After all, Peter reminded all Christian men to treat their wives with respect as joint heirs of the covenant "so that nothing will hinder [their] prayers" (1 Peter 3:7).

B. Self-righteous protesting of God's word will not work for God witnessed the marriage and the treachery (Malachi 2:14). The response of the men was again to challenge the word of the prophet: "Wherein have we dealt treacherously?" There is a cold defiance in the words of the people, a defiance that comes from a rationalized sin. They had been told by the prophet that God was rejecting their worship; but their response was not fear and repentance. It was a proud challenge to "his view." They thought that if they did the worship routine well enough and gave to the sanctuary, they would be highly favored in the courts of heaven. Well God not only did not need their gifts--he did not want them. But this is what we are seeing today, people entering all kinds of religious service with new marriages, never having admitted, let alone confessed, that there has been sin. The answer to the peoples' question was a stinging answer from the prophet. He takes them back to the marriage of their youth, a marriage covenant that God himself witnessed, and so one signed and sealed in heaven. Here is the rebuke of a prophet most forceful and precise; here is pastoral counseling at its best. The fact that God was witness tells us that marriage is a covenant, whether there was a ceremony or not. To agree to live together as man and wife is a covenant, and God is the witness. To dissolve the marriage is to break the covenant, to break an oath. Several passages use covenant language for marriage: Proverbs 2:17; Ezekiel 16:7 (applying it to God and the nation); Ruth 4:11 (witnessed by the community) and Genesis 24:60 (based on love and faithfulness). The covenant agreement of a marriage is to be based on loyal love, characterized by the protection and care of the partners, and dedicated to producing righteous, believing children that God may provide. The expression "wife of your youth" should be understood as "youthful wife," the wife the man married when he was young and full of love and devotion and ambition and plans. Pastoral counseling tries to get the parties of a marriage to go back and recall what they had and what they wanted together. She was the wife of his youth, the one who had his first affections when they were the strongest, the one who probably gave him children, the one who had lived through it all with him. Now she had become the scorn and loathing of his later years.

Malachi also says that the wife is “your companion.” This adds to the treachery. The word comes from a verb “to unite,” or in our language we would say things like “tie the knot” or “be united” in marriage. She was not only the wife of his youth, but his comrade, his partner. She was not a servant or a slave; she was a partner. They were bound together as one in the eyes of God. They shared everything together, grief and joys, successes and failures, hard times and good times. But now, these women were being cast aside as an old garment for something new and fresh and exciting, but thoroughly pagan. Whatever was there that fit the description of “holy matrimony” had now become nothing more than a “common coupling” or “profane fornication.”

All of these qualifications of marriage were piled up by the prophet to enforce how treacherous this all was. The word “treachery” now appears for the third time in the oracle--it was against women like this that the treachery was committed. The word has a use in Job that illustrates the meaning. Job’s friends are described as treacherous as a brook. The brook provided water, as the text explains, so that people became dependent on it. But when Job went to his friends for help, the brook had dried up--when that happens with literal brooks, caravans in the desert die. One cannot depend on a traitor, and that is the case of a treacherous husband--or wife as the case might be. The main idea of the passage is clear: God planned that a man and a woman would become one, be partners, share everything, build a life together, and please God. Their personal blessing depended on preserving this covenant; and the well-being of the nation depended on the marriages doing what they were supposed to do.

III. Believers must be on guard against treachery in marriage because that thwarts God’s plans for a godly seed (Malachi 2:15-16).

A. Because God desires a godly seed, people must take heed in their marriages (Malachi 2:15).

Malachi was not yet through. The final section is clearly set off as a warning for those who are in a marriage. They must understand its purpose if they are going to preserve it.

Malachi 2:15 is the most difficult verse in the book. The two thoughts center on the meaning of “one” and the “residue of the Spirit”: “Did he not make one, even though he had the residue of the spirit? What then is the one? Producing a godly seed.” One view takes the “one” back to the creation of Eve with Adam. It would be normal to think of Genesis 2:1-25 because Adam and Eve were to be “one flesh.” God could have done it differently--he had the residue of the Spirit, that is, he had all the resources and options available. But he chose one wife for one man. The difficulty of this view is that monogamy does not guarantee godly children would be produced. The two would have to be committed to the faith and to the training of children in it.

Perhaps a better view is that the “one” refers to the nation of Israel, the covenant people. This view has the support of the book that presents the nation as the creation of God. Why did he choose one nation, Israel? --to produce a godly seed in the earth. Pagan intermarriage and the dissolution of good marriages would ruin the chance to do this. God wanted a nation; he could have chosen and formed others, or more. But by focusing on one as the means of bringing blessing to the world, he would form a righteous people on earth.

Therefore Malachi warned them to take heed not to deal treacherously, against the wife and therefore against the covenant plan of God. The verb “take heed” means “to watch carefully.” It calls for constant vigilance and concern, like a night watchman watching the city. The husband

must be careful and alert to protect the marriage covenant from any treachery, by himself or from outside.

B. Because God hates divorce, people must take heed in their marriages (Malachi 2:16). The line is powerful: "I hate putting away." Some of the ancient versions actually misinterpreted the line to say, "if a man hates his wife he should put her away." But the context is against divorce, and an exception as wide as this would not fit. What Malachi is doing is offering the quintessential reason for trying to keep a marriage together come what may--God hates divorce.

What does it mean when it says God hates it? When "hate" is used in contrast to "love" in passages, as it is in Malachi 1:1-14, it has the sense of "reject" and love would have the sense of "choose." But when the word is used separately, as it is in this particular passage, it adds the idea of "to detest, abhor" to the rejection. We can see from this that God is emotionally involved in the lives of his people. He hates it when they destroy their marriages, because he knows the pain that will cause, and the effect that will have on the faith for the future. But God adds something else as the object of his hatred--when people cover their garments with violence. This word for violence is a word for social injustice. Their replacing the garment of marriage, their vows of love and devotion to their wives, with acts of social abuse and emotional and even physical violence, God hated as well. The final step in this violence against their wives is putting them away, divorcing them. It creates havoc with the society, violates the family, and spoils the covenant God loves.

Conclusion The prophet closes with the same warning: Take heed. Be on your guard against such treachery. To do this involves two very important considerations: knowing and agreeing with the plan of the covenant God has made for the people of God, and knowing and agreeing with what God has planned for the marriage. To fulfill the first one must be committed to worshiping and serving God in holiness and righteousness. To fulfill the second one must know that the marriage is a covenant confirmed by God and the wife is a lifelong partner. To motivate diligence and care for the marriage, Malachi has included three warnings: 1) divorce and remarriage (especially to a pagan) destroys worship; 2) divorce and remarriage (especially to a pagan) hinders producing godly children; and 3) God hates divorce. So the message to the household of faith is clear: if you truly see how the marriage covenant fits the covenant God has made with his people, then you will marry within the faith and you will give all diligence to preserve that marriage come what may. No marriage is perfect. In marriages there will be fallings from the ideal for sure; the marriage may be strained and thinned by friction, or marred and spoiled by a gross contempt for its moral meaning; but the failures and abuse do not destroy or degrade the ideal. We are always called back to the ideal, to the standard of God. For marriage to be "holy" matrimony, it must be pleasing to God; and to develop this there must be a real giving of soul to soul in the Lord, so that the husband and wife truly belong to one another, and truly see their marriage as service to God. Malachi says to take heed that this is preserved--do everything in your power to do it. And it will take such diligence because the way of the world is so different.

Some may find that it is too late, because they have lived through a failed marriage and there is no going back. For them, the message of God's Word is clear: they must be sure their lives are now right with God, and that means acknowledging their share in the dissolution of a covenant and resolving to serve God now with all devotion and obedience, and that certainly means that in any new relationship they might have they will see to it that it counts for God.

## 02.05. God's Justice and Faithfulness

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### God's Justice and Faithfulness

Malachi 2:17; Malachi 3:1-12

Introduction The prophet Malachi had to deal with a different kind of situation now, people who were wondering why God was not doing something to correct the sins and the corruption in the land. The only answer that they could come up with was that God was not just, that he was unwilling to judge sin. The prophet came down hard on this kind of shallow thinking; he made it very clear that if they really wanted the justice of God to be meted out, no one could stand! The individual who understands doctrine will always desire divine grace over divine justice. And we who live in the New Testament age understand this very well: what the justice of God demanded for our sins, the grace of God provided in the death of Christ on our behalf. And now that we are in Christ by faith, there is no condemnation for us. In this next prophetic message the promise of coming justice, or judgment, is tied to the coming of the Messiah. And so here we get into Malachi's "eschatology" (the word means the study of last things). In preparation for that we need to think about a couple of things, just to make sure we understand how the prophets wrote. Most informed Christians know that the word "Messiah" (Hebrew *mashiakh*, pronounced mah-SHE-ack) means "anointed one," i.e., the anointed king who is to come, Immanuel. The word was translated into Greek with *Christos*. Every king who came to the throne of David was "anointed" and so a messiah; but as time passed the prophets began to write of the great coming king, THE Messiah. And his kingdom, or the age that he would usher in, is called the Messianic Age. This Messianic hope was the desire of the nation, as Malachi 3:1 says.

Israel's prophets looked forward to that golden age when the Messiah would come and judge the wicked and reward the righteous by setting up his universal reign of righteousness and peace. They knew the facts about the Messiah, but they did not have the time sequence of the events of the Messiah. In fact, they did not know that there was going to be a second coming of the Messiah--it appeared that there would be only one. And yet, when they spoke of the coming of Messiah, it seemed confusing--he would suffer and die, but reign gloriously. Peter says that they could not put this together. But with the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of his return, the Old Testament passages began to make very good sense. However, the teacher of the Bible has to explain this occasionally, especially in a passage like ours where it moves from first to second coming with no indication. Bible teachers at times illustrate it with mountain ranges: one can stand and look at a mountain peak, and yet there may be another peak directly behind it with a great valley in between them, but he cannot see the second peak as distinct from the first. This was the view of the prophets--it looked like one coming, but when that coming occurred, one could see a huge valley lying before the second peak. In the prophecy we have before us the prophet will also employ his prophetic name. That name, "Malachi" (Hebrew *mal'aki*, pronounced mal-ah-KEY), means "my messenger." The prophet was the LORD's messenger. And we have seen that the priests were the LORD's messengers. Now we will see the word used twice, once for John the

Baptist and once for Jesus.

I. God will come to judge with righteousness (Malachi 2:17, Malachi 3:1-5).

A. Impatience for God's Justice is presumptuous (Malachi 2:17). The passage opens with a short exchange between the people and the prophet, something that had occurred frequently enough in life for Malachi to make it a sample of the weakness of their faith. There were those who came to the conclusion that people who did wickedly were good in the eyes of the LORD, that he was pleased with them. They must have concluded since God is a righteous God he should have done something to judge the sinners, but since he did not he must have been approving what they were doing. Or, they could word it another way, "Where is the God of justice?" Why was God not doing anything about the sin in the land?

Malachi told his people immediately that their challenges and questions wearied God. This figure of speech is "anthropomorphism," i.e., using human language that we understand to explain God's reaction to their endless challenges. As a human would get tired of endless argument and challenge, God was tired, fed up as it were, with these people. They did not think they had wearied God, but they had.

There are a number of reasons why God would delay judgment, apart from the fact that he is slow to anger. God often postponed judgments to give people a better chance to put their houses in order, meaning, to repent and prepare spiritually. We also read in the Bible that our Lord has other sheep to bring from other sheep folds, and he must bring them. Thus, judgment is delayed. But also, in the divine plan of redemption, the Messiah had to come and pay for the sins of the world so that judgment would be poured out on him on behalf of people. Thus, he would not come to judge in the days of Malachi, but in his own time. But the prophet told his audience that their request was presumptuous--if they really wanted the justice of God then they too would be in trouble. No one could stand under divine justice. But the Judge would come some day.

B. The One for whom they long will suddenly come (Malachi 3:1). The entire section through the judgment of Malachi 3:5 could be made two separate points; but it seems better to make verse 1 a separate point of the coming, and then the next sections what it means.

Malachi 3:1 has two figures, two people in mind. The first figure will prove to be John the Baptist and the second the Messiah. The LORD announces, "Behold, I am about to send my messenger who will prepare the way before me." The grammatical formula "Behold" plus the participle--almost "here I am sending"--is a way to express the imminent future. It is what God is about to do--even though 400 years off. In Matthew 11:1-30 Jesus made it clear that this was a prophecy of John the Baptist. As the messenger of the LORD, John was to prepare the way before the coming of the LORD. That was to involve a spiritual preparation. Isaiah 40:1-31 also prophesies that John will be a voice in the desert preparing the way of the LORD--every valley shall be filled, and the crooked places made straight, so that the LORD may have direct access. The imagery of building a super highway refers to spiritual preparation--the crooked places in the heart had to be straight, and the things missing had to be supplied, so that people would receive the Messiah. John came preaching repentance to prepare people for the Messiah, the Lamb of God.

Jesus does something very significant in his use of Malachi. He changes the pronouns from "my face" to "your face." In Malachi the LORD was speaking, saying "I ( the LORD) am sending my

messenger before my ( the LORD's) face." Since Jesus was now in mortal flesh, he wanted to make clear that if John who introduced him and preached repentance was this forerunner in Malachi, then he, Jesus, was the LORD. It was a clear claim of deity. The second figure in this prophecy is also a messenger, but he is called the messenger of the covenant, that is, the one who was going to bring in the covenant. This would refer to the New Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:1-40, Ezekiel 36:1-38, and Isaiah 54:1-17. Two things are said about this messenger. First, he is the one that they all strongly desired--he is the Messiah, the king, that people had been longing for. Second, he would come to his temple. Now in the Old Testament the temple is called "the house of the LORD (Yahweh)"; it is God's house. But here this messenger will come to "his temple." He is the LORD, meaning, Yahweh of the Old Testament, God in the flesh. And so the second messenger is Jesus himself, the Messiah of Israel.

"Suddenly" he will come. This does not mean quickly, but surprisingly. And yet, the prophecy of Daniel 9:1-27 helped the diligent students of the Bible to determine pretty much the time of the appearance of Messiah on earth. And even then his appearance took people by surprise. But when he entered into the temple and cleansed it, then this part of this prophecy found its full meaning.

Note, then, that we have God the sender, and God, the one being sent. We can read this from the New Testament and note the hint of the trinity, as in other Old Testament passages. But in the Old Testament times it would have been somewhat confusing; they would not have thought of Messiah as divine, but certainly pre-existent (according to Daniel 7:14 ff.), for he was in heaven and given the kingdom before he appeared on earth. And even though he was born in Bethlehem, his goings were from everlasting (Micah 5:2). The people could not think that he was God, and so concluded he was the first creation of God and would come to earth in some way. But with the full revelation of the New Testament we know that Jesus is indeed God, the second person of the trinity, and we can now understand so many Old Testament passages that spoke of this, but needed confirmation by further revelation. In Christ we have that full revelation--God the Father sent God the Son into the world, and he, God the Son, came to his temple.

C. No one could stand in the day of judgment (Malachi 3:2-5). This section starts with the rhetorical question, "Who can endure the day of his coming?" The meaning is that no one could survive divine judgment. The reason is that his coming will be like a laundryman's soap and a refiner's fire. This did not happen when Jesus was here on earth. His first coming was to establish who he is and to pay for the sins of the world and gain victory over the grave; his second coming will be with fire, judgment, and will bring to fulfillment all things. John the Baptist already made this clear in Matthew 3:1-17, the baptism of Jesus. He announced that Jesus would baptize with the Spirit and with fire. In the context "fire" is mentioned twice, in the sense of judgment--it is an unquenchable fire that will burn up the chaff. The baptism (identification with) the Spirit was established in the first coming; but the second coming will be with judgment by fire. When Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue in Luke 4:1-44, he read the prophecy about his ministry, but he stopped half way through the passage and said that what he had read was fulfilled in their presence. But the next line, which he did not read, announced the time of God's wrath. That would be fulfilled in the second coming. The first focus of the judgment will be on purifying the Levites so that he will have righteous servants to lead the worship. It is a common theme in biblical prophecy that the LORD will cleanse Israel from its sin so that those still alive after the wrath on earth will

come to faith in the Messiah and will once again be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. This is the major theme in the Book of Zechariah, especially in chapter 3, which tells how the LORD will clean up the priesthood by the sacrifice of the Messiah (using the images of the Branch and the Stone). The divine judgments at the end of the age, many of which are detailed in the Book of Revelation, will be designed to bring Israel to its knees and to its Messiah. The reference in Malachi is not to any time that the LORD purifies his people--it is the coming day of judgment.

Then, in Malachi 3:5, we see that the coming judgment will be swift against the great sins of the people. God will be the witness and the judge that these crimes have been committed: sorcery, adultery, perjury, defrauding workers, oppressing the widows and the orphans, and depriving foreigners of justice. The judgment is not simply for these sins, but for people who did not fear the LORD. The expression "fear me" means to worship and obey the LORD. The judgment will fall on unbelievers, people who have no reverential fear of the LORD, no matter who they are; and that judgment will be for their sins. The sins that the prophet listed here covered a wide array of crimes, from the gross violations of the moral code to the breakdown of social justice. Not caring for the poor and needy and the foreigner were serious matters in Israel; James reminds us that this is at the heart of pure religion. And so Malachi's messages continue to convict the so-called good people of his day, the people who thought God should come and judge the world, uncovering their failure to do works of righteousness.

II. God will show himself faithful to the faithful (Malachi 3:6-12).

A. God does not change (Malachi 3:6-7). This section of the message on the faithfulness of God begins with a firm doctrinal statement: God does not change. The statement forms a transition from the last section where people thought that God was no longer judging sin, to this section, which shows that he does. But the people of God should find this statement so comforting, because in spite of their failures God does not change--if he did, they would be consumed on the spot. The point is that God is faithful to the covenants that he makes. Those who belong to him will not be judged; even if they prove to be unfaithful, he remains faithful because he cannot deny himself--as the apostle says.

God then reminds the people that they have failed time and time again, ever since the time of their forefathers. But he has always been there to call them to repentance so that they could enjoy the blessings of God. Here again he calls for them to return, so that he might return to them. The verb "return" in Hebrew is often a call for repentance, to turn back from sins. Then God will turn back from the course of action that he has begun--punishment for their sins.

B. God punishes ingratitude (Malachi 3:8-12).

Once again Malachi's audience was indignant: "How are we to return?" They did not see that they had any need to repent. What should they turn from? And so Malachi pulls out another indictment against them, robbing God. Their ingratitude showed their unfaithfulness to God at the very foundation of the faith--stewardship--they owed their lives to God. The people had not been paying their tithes, and so the whole land was under a curse, an actual dry spell where nothing was growing. First, we need to consider what their tithing was all about. Many people today claim to be tithers, and by that they mean they give 10% to the Lord. I suppose churches would be delighted to get at least that. But in the Old Testament the system of tithes and offerings was far more

complex. The Israelite under the Law had to bring first the priest's due (either 2% or 10%). Then he brought the basic tithe, 10%. But he was also required to pay a second tithe (another 10%) that was to go to Jerusalem and its needs--it could be spent in Jerusalem on the three annual pilgrimages, somewhat of a pilgrimage budget. If they could not go to the holy city, they had to send the money. And then, every other year there was a third tithe, which went to the poor. So the basic tithing was probably over 22% any given year, possibly 27%.

Now this did not count the offerings, the animals that were to be brought to the three festivals. It did not include the extra money to be paid for sin and trespass offerings, which could be high, based on the sin. The tithing system also called for the people to have a Sabbath year, one seventh of their income over a seven year period would be given up, as well as a forty-ninth of it over a forty-nine year period if they kept the Jubilee. Then they were to leave the corners of their fields for the poor to glean; they were to give to charity; and they were to take care of the widow, orphan, poor and the stranger. On top of all that, they could at any time offer a free will thank offering--more animals and gifts. So then, if someone today wants to live under the Law of Israel in this respect, the amount would exceed 40% a year. In the New Testament the outlook is totally different. Everything belongs to God, and we give proportionately as a token of our acknowledgment of this truth as the Lord prospers. It is not how much we should give, but how much we should keep and what we should do with it. Our time, our possessions, our abilities--all part of the stewardship--are gifts from God. We live in the light of the spirit of the Law, not the letter. And yet we still try to get by with the simple interpretation of a tithe, something that was not even allowed in Israel. But the principle found in this passage applies today. If we refuse to show our loyalty and faithfulness to God in even such a simple thing as giving a token of our time, talents, and treasures in gratitude to him, then he may very well hinder his greatest blessings from being given to us.

## Conclusion

Malachi calls for the people to test God's faithfulness. Give, and see how God will take care of you. This is not like the modern prosperity preachers in television, who treat giving like a sure thing on the stock market; the blessing of God may not mean that you will get back your money with a tidy increase. People were to give by faith out of gratitude, not as a way of manipulating God to give it back with interest. But the law of Israel promised blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience (see Leviticus 26:1-46). If they were disobedient, God would withhold the rain--and that is what has happened here. They were to pray for rain, but they were to be faithful as well, if they wanted God to provide for their livelihood in the land. It was no simple cash investment; it was a call for obedient, faithful living--tithing was but one evidence of their commitment to the LORD. If they persisted in disobedience (all the kinds he has addressed), there could even be pests in the land. But God would keep that away if they lived obediently. It would not matter if they gave money, thinking God would give them an increase; if they were divorcing their spouses, marrying pagans, not teaching the word right, ruining worship, or treating poor people with contempt, then tithing would not bring a blessing. The modern orientation is selfish and self-centered, to get money back. But the biblical picture is sacrificial giving, helping people in need, and trusting that God will take care of your needs. This is giving by faith. And if people who claim to be believers are not doing what verse 5 said, helping people in need, championing justice for the oppressed and the stranger, then they had better think twice about calling for the God of justice to step in.

Malachi calls people to order their lives aright in view of the coming of the LORD--which for him was the first coming, but or us it is now the second.

## 02.06. Preparing for The Day of The Lord

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### Preparing for The Day of The Lord

Malachi 3:13-18, Malachi 4:1-6

Introduction In the preceding message the prophet challenged the people to be faithful to the LORD in their personal stewardship and obedience. This included far more than bringing a simple tithe--it included the total commitment of the people to serve the LORD with all they had. The prophet held out the promise of God to them that their land would flourish if they were faithful, that all the nations would call them blessed, for the land would be a delightful land. But the people Malachi addressed still had an attitude; they still thought God was not administering things correctly. And so the prophet warned them about this, and reminded them that the day of divine vengeance was coming.

#### I. Second Guessing:

People with selfish expectations will be frustrated with God (Malachi 3:13-15).

A. They say insolent things (Malachi 3:13). The prophet immediately addressed the problem of those people who criticized the faith (and therefore the LORD) because it was not what they expected or thought it should be. The LORD says through Malachi, "Your words have been insolent against me." The people that the prophet addressed here were skeptics; they had their doubts about the validity of the faith. But then they were not committed to the LORD; they had false and selfish expectations. They were expecting an immediate payoff, rewards or benefits for becoming part of the congregation and living under the Law. They thought that God owed them something for their presence. They probably were not true believers; but if they were believers, their whole approach to the worship and service of the LORD was mercenary--they wanted to know what was in it for them. The great saints of the ages who endured all kinds of suffering and deprivation never said such impudent things. But these people revealed extensive impiety in their words, their attitudes, and their method of spreading their discontent ("they said" indicates they were saying this to each other, complaining among themselves).

B. They say it is vain to serve the LORD (Malachi 3:14-15).

These "make-believers" had done what the LORD said to do in a way--test him and see if he was faithful--but they concluded that he was not. Their insolent words formulated three claims. The first is the dramatic statement that it is vain to serve the LORD. The word "vain" means "emptiness, vanity" or "to a false purpose" (found in the ten commandments); their statement claims that all service of the LORD is without value or worth on any level. This is followed up with the claim that there is no profit in keeping God's Law. There was no reward or benefit in it for them, no pay, no return on their investment. They are like some moderns who give to the LORD only because they expect to get double or triple their money back, a special reward. They expected their "cut" in much the same way as a gangster would want his share. In fact, they were truly surprised that

there was no pay off since they had even gone about mourning. They apparently went through the motions of appearing to have grief and sorrow for the sin of their nation. But it was false; they did it expecting some reward from God, as if they were professional mourners. But God always inspects the hearts of the mourners, or worshipers, to see if they are genuine--and if they are doing it for a reward or recognition it is not. But the most impudent statements they made concerns the justice of God. They claimed that the reality was just the opposite of what was said in verse 10--they claimed that it was the arrogant who were "blessed" by God, that the wicked prospered, and that even those who put God to the test escaped. In other words, God was either too weak to stop them, or was not interested in clamping down on the wicked or in making a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, or good and evil. God had promised to bless those who obeyed, but now he was blessing those who were wicked--so they said. These are amazingly sharp words against God; they show a severely unspiritual attitude, probably that of unbelievers (since the rest of the book seems to assume they are the wicked).

## II. Second Coming:

The LORD promises victory for his people when he comes to judge the wicked (Malachi 3:16-18, Malachi 4:1-6).

A. The LORD remembers his own, who fear him, and will spare them and enable them to return (Malachi 3:16-18).

He remembers those who fear him (Malachi 3:16). At the same time ("then") there were the righteous believers who spoke to one another, but their conversation was very different. They are known as people who "fear" the LORD. This word in the Bible is a word that describes faithful worshipers. It includes both the idea of being drawn near to something amazing or overwhelming in adoration and wonder, and also that of shrinking back in a healthy respect or fear. This may be illustrated by anything that fills people with wonder and fear. Here the object is the LORD. The devout love and adore the LORD because of power and his glory--but they treat him with reverential fear that leads to obedience. After all, he is still the sovereign judge of the whole world (it is a good study to see in the Bible what results whenever the fear of the LORD is mentioned). The LORD heard what these folks were saying, heard their words of faith and reverence, in contrast to what the insolent people were saying. And so the text says that God recorded this on a "scroll of remembrance." This is a highly figurative description, an implied comparison, for divine omniscience does not need to keep written records (any more than God needs to keep our tears in his bottle [Psalms 56:8]). God does not forget his own. But the ideas of God remembering and not forgetting are very human descriptions (anthropomorphisms) and need explanation. He knows everything instantly--he never forgets anything. But the point of the Hebrew word "remembrance" goes beyond simple recall to mean "act on the basis of what one remembers." If God remembers us it means he will do something on the basis of the covenant he has with us--he will act on what he "remembers." In this passage God will not only secure the believers as his own people but also spare them from the judgment. The next line repeats that these people are those who fear the LORD, and who think on his name. The "name" of the LORD refers to his nature, his character--the attributes of God (power, glory, wisdom, love, mercy, righteousness, goodness, eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, infinity and so on). And the verb "think" is an active word (in the Bible it can mean "reckon, think, plan, devise"); here it would have the connotation of

regarding or meditating on the nature of the LORD. This was what built their pious devotion to the LORD. It is like taking inventory on what God is like, or reckoning how those attributes work out in real life. The implication is that true believers value God as their prized possession.

He will spare his possession (Malachi 3:17). God announces that these people shall be his, his own possession (see Exodus 19:5), and this will be important in the day that God will do all these things. Accordingly, when the Day of Judgment comes, God will remember (= save) his own people, that is, spare them from the judgment. The security of the believers is based on this: that they belong to God.

He will enable them to discern (Malachi 3:18). When he does judge, then everyone will see the real difference between the righteous and the wicked. The skeptics claimed that there was no difference--because they had false expectations of a simple pay off. But in the eternal plan the benefit of faith is much greater than a few rewards now.

Everyone will discern between the one who is saved and the one who is not; and they will realize the importance of fearing and serving the LORD.

B. The LORD will deliver the believers in judgment (Malachi 4:1-3). The wicked will be burnt up (Malachi 4:1). The announcement picks up the theme of the day of the LORD, a theme that prophets in each of the last few centuries of the monarchy stressed. The day of the LORD can refer to any divine intervention to judge and to bless; but the great day of the LORD refers to the second coming (as the study of the minor prophets and the New Testament fulfillment will show) when the Lord Jesus will come to judge the world and establish a universal reign of righteousness. All prophetic oracles about the day find their fulfillment in the coming of Christ; and any immediate and partial fulfillments over the ages merely foreshadow the great coming redemption. The motif of burning is used by Malachi, and later used by John the Baptist when he declared that the wicked would be burned with unquenchable chaff (as the Lord's baptism by fire would signify). Those judged are the proud and the wicked. The word "proud" must not be trivialized, as in taking pride in one's work. It refers to people who think they do not need God, who live independently of God and any faith. But their good works, whatever good works they have, will not be good enough to enable them to escape the judgment fire. The prophets sometime linked this judgment of fire (what John calls the baptism of fire) with the final great war that will be raging at the time the Lord descends to the Mount of Olives (see Zechariah 14:1-21). The furnace may in fact be a description of some kind of nuclear holocaust that will bring human history to a close, and be the means of removing the wicked from the earth. After all, it will be as in the days of Noah, when the righteous survive the judgment and are left (the wicked are taken away), and begin a new age with the worship of the LORD.

Those who fear the LORD will have a glorious deliverance (Malachi 4:2-3). The contrast is now made with the true believers. "You who fear my name" refers to true believers who faithfully worship the LORD and seek to keep his commandments. The word "fear" is now used a third time for true believers, those with reverential fear--drawing near to the sovereign Lord with adoration and devotion, but shrinking back in a healthy fear or respect. Once again the object of this fear is the LORD's (i.e., Yahweh's) "name" (the character of God; see passages like Isaiah 9:6). Thus, to worship the "name of the LORD" is to worship the LORD in all his glory, power, and majesty, all that he is and all that he does. So these are the devout believers who are faithful to the LORD.

What do they have to look forward to? The coming of the Messiah and all the changes that will bring. To them the “sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.” This is an implied comparison: the coming Messiah is like the rising sun, whose rays, like wings, bring light and life to the world. But this “sun” is qualified with a genitive--“sun of righteousness.” This could be attributive, a righteous sun, which is certainly true of the Lord. But it is more likely that the expression was meant to say that this “sun” would produce righteousness throughout the world, as the Messianic promises of Isaiah foretold. Zecharias, the father of John the Baptist, referred to the Messiah as the “sunrise” (dayspring from on high) in his great song (Luke 1:76-79). The great release from the bondage of the world, sin and oppression will cause the righteous to celebrate enthusiastically. Another image is used, an implied comparison followed up by an explanatory simile: “you shall go forth and gambol (skip) as calves from the stall.” Calves that have been penned up closely for winter months will skip in their running when they are set free from the stalls. So the righteous when they are finally set free from all the effects of the curse will leap for joy in great celebration. But they will also trample the wicked oppressors underfoot. Isaiah 63:1-6 portrays Christ as trodding them underfoot as in a winepress of his wrath; but here the prophet sees the righteous sharing in that great victory (for it was promised that the human race would destroy the seed of the Serpent in Genesis 3:15; see Romans 16:20)--not that we will actually do anything to banish evil, but it will appear that way when we accompany Christ in his victorious conquest as youthful warriors as numerous as the dew of heaven (Psalms 110:1-7). The verse here simply says that the wicked will be ashes under the feet of the righteous. Perhaps the battle is already over, and the symbolism of treading on the ashes indicates sharing in the conquest.

C. The LORD will prepare them for that day (Malachi 4:4-6).

Instruction: Obey the Word of God (Malachi 4:4). Malachi calls on the righteous to “remember”--act on what they remember--the Law of Moses. (One may note that if the liberal critical view were correct that the Pentateuch was written and edited during the exile, this post-exilic author would not have been so dishonest as to call it the Law of Moses). The Law of Moses, given at Horeb/Sinai, was the foundation of Scripture--everything was based on that. People could not disobey the Law and claim to be faithful. We of course have much more Scripture; but Jesus said he did not come to annul or destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. So we interpret the Law through the fulfillment of Christ, and learn that the spirit of the Law is profitable for instruction in righteousness, as the apostle says. So in principle we may say that we who are looking for the second coming of Jesus the Messiah should be living soberly and obediently. The apostle says that whoever has this hope purifies himself. To live daily in the expectancy of the second, watching and waiting, means that we will be ready.

Promise: Elijah will come and unite the people in the covenant (Malachi 4:5-6). Now Malachi announces that God is sending Elijah the prophet before that great and terrible day of the LORD. At the beginning of Malachi 3:1-18 God said, “I am sending my messenger”; and now in similar words he says, “I am sending Elijah the prophet.” Malachi does not say that these two are one and the same, although if we only had this book we might say they could be the same person because of parallel constructions. We know from the New Testament that the messenger of Malachi 3:1 is John the Baptist. But is John also Elijah? In the Gospels John the Baptist came preaching repentance in the desert, preparing people for the coming of the Lord. Luke 1:17 says that he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. In the Old Testament Elijah, you may recall, never died, but

was taken up in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). But before he left he gave his mantle to Elisha, so that Elisha could have a double portion of the power of Elijah. Elijah was the first full prophet (although Abraham is called a prophet, and Samuel and David are called prophets). He stands at the head of a long list of prophets, so that all the prophets coming after him have something of the spirit and power of Elijah--but they were not Elijah the Tishbite. When John was asked who he was, he stated very clearly, "I am not Elijah" (John 1:21, John 1:23). Now in Matthew 11:13 Jesus said, "If you receive it"--this was Elijah who was to come. There is a contingency here. John may have come in the spirit and power of Elijah--but he was not Elijah, and he did not do what Malachi 4:1-6 said, turn the people right just before the great and terrible day of judgment. "If you receive it" may very well refer to receiving the message of the kingdom, that is, receiving Christ. But we know that Jesus came to his own, but his own received him not, but to as many as received him he gave the authority to be the sons of God (John 1:11-12). Jesus may have meant that had the people received the Messiah, John would have fit the requirements. But of course they did not, and the Scripture was clear that they would not; but Jesus' offer of himself to his people was still a legitimate offer, even if he knew they would reject him.

Then at the Transfiguration (see Mark 9:2; Matthew 17:11), Jesus announced that Elijah does come, and restores all things. But then he added that Elijah already came. So here we have another example of the already--not yet theme of prophecy. John came in the spirit of Elijah, and people killed him. But Elijah must yet come.

Most commentators identify one of the two witnesses in Revelation 12:1-17 as Elijah--either the real Elijah (otherwise, why did he not die?) or one like John who came in the spirit of Elijah. That chapter goes on to say that these witnesses have the power to shut up heaven so it will not rain--exactly what Elijah did at the beginning of his ministry. But when this "Elijah" comes at the end of the age, he will bring about true repentance and change in the nation so that they will be ready for the coming of the Lord. The imagery of turning the hearts of fathers and children to each other is a spiritual change, the hearts referring to their wills; as they turn their hearts, it will be in obedience to the Law, and so they will be in fact turning their hearts to the Lord.

People everywhere must turn their hearts to the Lord, or when he comes he will smite them with the curse (kherem). This word for "curse" literally mean "banned, devoted"--it is off limits. In holy war, things would be put under this "ban"; that meant they belonged to the Lord, to be used by him or to be destroyed, but no human could have them (see the sin of Achan in Joshua, and the sin of Saul in 1 Samuel--they preserved banned things that should have been destroyed). So Malachi is thinking in terms of holy war, that when the Lord comes he will utterly destroy the world and its inhabitants, but will spare his people.

## Conclusion

If people do not think God is ruling in fairness today, and they choose to rebel against him for that reason, they will have a sad future awakening. When the LORD comes, he will separate the righteous from the wicked, and it will be such a dramatic moment as the world and all in it are . But before he comes he will send guides to bring about harmony and righteousness in the families, the key to the nation. The Word of God is full of instructions to watch and pray for his appearance. And the New Testament continues the theme. The faithful must work to bring people to repentance and to a proper spiritual level. And God is preparing his messenger. Many will come in the spirit and

power of Elijah over the ages; but after they are long gone, and just at the eve of the coming, an Elijah will appear and draw people back together, and back to God.

Those living in the hope of the second coming will have to be prepared for it, but they will also be doing the work of the prophets, warning people that of the evil devastation to follow.

## 03.00. The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans

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The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans Study By: Allen Ross 1. Introduction to the Book of Romans 2. The Revelation of Righteousness 3. Condemnation, or, the Universal Need of Righteousness (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-20) 4. Justification (Romans 3:21-31, Romans 4:1-25) 5. Exultation (Romans 5:1-21, Romans 6:1-23) 6. The New Freedom in Life (Romans 7:1-25) 7. The New Power in Life (Romans 8:1-39) 8. Vindication or God's Righteousness in His Relationship with Israel (Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21) 9. The Consolation of Israel's Rejection (Romans 11:1-36) 10. Application in the Assembly (Romans 12:1-21) 11. Application in the Society (Romans 13:1-14) 12. Application to Doubtful Things (Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13)

## 03.01. Introduction to the Book of Romans

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### Introduction to the Book of Romans

“This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”<sup>1</sup>

“It is the most remarkable production of the most remarkable man. It is his heart. It contains his theology, theoretical and practical, for which he lived and died. It gives the clearest and fullest exposition of the doctrines of sin and grace and the best possible solution of the universal dominion of sin and death in the universal redemption by the second Adam.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the Book of Romans is one of the most profound books in existence; it is certainly one of the most valued parts of the Holy Scriptures. It has been appropriately termed the Cathedral of the Christian faith. Its profound theology and impressive style were reason enough for it to be assigned the first place among the Pauline epistles. When Paul wrote this epistle to the church in Rome, that congregation must have already been in existence for a number of years, for Paul writes that he had desired to visit them “these many years” (Romans 15:23). To him this church was strong enough to help him carry out further missionary activities. They are not called recent converts; they are not treated as having been improperly instructed, but seem to have been an organized and well-grounded congregation (Romans 15:14, “filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another”). The epistle deals with no major error in the church; nor does it have to deal with organizational principles. It was a church that was universally famous (Romans 1:8), and not merely because it was in Rome. The Roman church was a group that had a large Jewish element, but was also filled with Gentile converts from paganism, both free as well as slaves. How the church in Rome was started is unclear. The Roman Catholic view is that Peter founded it; another view is that Roman Christians from Pentecost in Jerusalem made their way there. But it may simply be that several Christian families or groups from Pauline churches in the East settled in Rome and grew together. According to the end of the book, there were several congregations meeting in the city. At the outbreak of Neronian persecutions, Tacitus says that the Christians in Rome were “an immense multitude.” The Place and Date of Romans

Based on the material from Acts and the Corinthian epistles, the Book of Romans clearly indicates that it was written from Corinth on Paul’s third missionary journey. Paul had never visited Rome; but after fulfilling his mission of mercy to Jerusalem, he hoped to go to Rome en route to Spain (Romans 15:23-25). At any rate, the date of the book is probably 60 A.D. The chronological order of the Pauline epistles is about as follows: First and Second Thessalonians, Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, First Timothy, Titus, and Second Timothy. Romans is placed first among Paul’s letters in the New Testament not only because it is his longest work, but because it also furnishes a massive and basic theological frame-work for the whole collection of the apostle’s writings. The Theme of the Book of Romans

The theme of the book centers on the Gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16-17). Paul is deeply concerned that his readers understand how a sinner may be received as righteous by a righteous God; and how a justified sinner should live daily to the glory of God.

Most commentators have said that Romans 1:16-17 are a concise summary of the content of the epistle. But C. K. Barrett goes a step further to say that it is not wrong to see in them a summary of Paul's theology as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we can be very precise here. Perhaps in the text of Habakkuk 2:4 as it is used in Romans (and elsewhere), we have a pithy expression of the essence of the doctrine of the Word of God—"the just shall live by faith." We will have to explain what all this means shortly.

The Structure of the Book of Romans

The book falls neatly into an introduction (Romans 1:1-17), a doctrinal section on justification (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-11), a doctrinal section on sanctification (Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39), a parenthetical section on Israel (Romans 9:1-33, Romans 10:1-21, Romans 11:1-36), a practical application section (Romans 12:1-21, Romans 13:1-14, Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13); and then a conclusion (Romans 15:14-33, Romans 16:1-27). A simple outline of this structure looks like this:

I. Introduction: The Revelation of Righteousness (Romans 1:1-17) A. The Salutation (Romans 1:1-7) B. Personal Items (Romans 1:8-13) C. The Theme (Romans 1:14-17)

II. Justification, or the Imputation of Righteousness (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-11) A. Condemnation, or the Universal Need of Righteousness (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-20) B. Manifestation, or the Universal Provision of Righteousness (Romans 3:21-26) C. Harmonization, or Justification and the Purpose of the Law (Romans 3:27-31) D. Illustration, or Justification and the Old Testament (Romans 4:1-25) E. Exultation, or the Certainty of Salvation (Romans 5:1-11)

III. Life in Christ, or Union With and Ultimate Conformation to the Righteous One (Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39) A. The Reign of Sin and the Reign of Grace (Romans 5:12-21) B. The New Relationship in Life (Romans 6:1-14) C. The New Principle in Life (Romans 6:15-23) D. The New Freedom in Life (Romans 7:1-25) E. The New Power in Life (Romans 8:1-17) F. The New Hope in Life (Romans 8:18-39)

IV. Vindication, or God's Righteousness in His Relationship with Israel (Romans 9:1-33, Romans 10:1-21, Romans 11:1-36) A. The Consideration of Israel's Rejection (Romans 9:1-29) B. The Explanation of Israel's Rejection (Romans 9:30-33, Romans 10:1-21) C. The Consolation of Israel's Rejection (Romans 11:1-36) V. Application, or God's Righteousness at Work (Romans 12:1-21, Romans 13:1-14, Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13) A. Application in the Assembly (Romans 12:1-21) B. Application in the State (Romans 13:1-14) C. Application in Doubtful Things (Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13)

VI. Conclusion, or Purpose, Plans, and Praise in Connection with the Dissemination of Righteousness (Romans 15:14-33, Romans 16:1-27) The Book of Romans and Old Testament Theology

Romans has often been described as an exposition of the Old Testament in view of the Gospel of Christ; this is certainly an accurate description in view of the pattern that emerges. The Gospel of Christ tells how sinful people can find access into the heavenlies through sacrificial atonement. It is

clear that this also was the focus of Israel's sacrificial system. It is little wonder that the book draws upon the pattern of those ancient sacrifices.

There were three main types or groups of sacrifices in ancient Israel's worship: those that made Expiation or atonement (Sin Offering [Leviticus 4:1-35], Trespass Offering [Leviticus 5:1-19], and Whole Burnt Offering [Leviticus 1:1-17] as well as the great Day of Atonement [Leviticus 16:1-34]), those that were for Celebration (Peace Offering [Leviticus 3:1-17] as well as other variations, such as Passover [Exodus 12:1-51]), and those that were for Dedication (Meal Offering [Leviticus 2:1-16] as well offering the first fruit, first born, paying vows, and making other types of dedicatory ritual). But essentially there was the forgiveness and acceptance by God through atoning sacrifices, the celebration of being at peace with God in the fellowship or peace offering, and the dedication to worship and serve God through the dedication or meal offering. The Book of Romans employs this basic theological pattern of Atonement by God, Peace with God, and Dedication to God, as it weaves a theological argument from the beginning of God's work until the end. The following overview will show how the argument of the book unfolds:

1. In Romans 1:1-32 after giving the introduction and purpose of the book, Paul surveys natural revelation via creation, noting that the creation rejected the Creator for the satisfaction of baser instincts. This section is an exposition on the early part of Genesis.
2. In Romans 2:1-29 Paul announces the judgment of God according to truth, explaining that the judgment is by law and that circumcision alone avails nothing. This section is a theological explanation of the law code.
3. The point is that all have sinned—there is none righteous (Romans 3:1-31). No one is justified by works. But instead, the righteousness of God comes through CHRIST'S ATONING SACRIFICE, the propitiation in His blood. Here then is the fulfillment of the expiatory sacrifices.
4. But the sacrifice by itself was a ritual; there had to be faith operating or it was of no value. So righteousness was reckoned for faith (Romans 3:28-31, Romans 4:1-25).
5. Once there is justification by faith in the atoning blood, there then follows the celebration of being at peace with God in a new life (Romans 5:1-21). This chapter picks up on the idea of Israel's PEACE OFFERING, announcing that because the atonement has been made, we have peace with God.
6. We are so identified by faith with the sacrifice that we are actually dead in Him—as with Israel's ritual, the sacrifice that is slain is a substitute for the sinner. And so we are actually dead to sin (Romans 6:1-23). Just as a believing Israelite knew that blood of the animal should have been his or her blood that was spilt, that body on the ground his or her dead body, we also reckon the same, that because Christ is our substitute he died in our place. Since we actually died in Christ, we now live in him, and become servants of righteousness.
7. But we are still sinful human creatures; we struggle constantly with sin (Romans 7:1-25). Israel repeated her sacrifices, but we do not. Instead, we find emancipation from the law through God's provision, a provision which is better than repeating the sacrifice again and again.
8. That better provision made for us is the glorious Holy Spirit who leads us into righteousness and bears witness that we are the children of God (Romans 8:1-39). If we are in Christ, we are dead to

sin; but in the spiritual realities of life it is the Spirit who is alive, delivering us from sin and bondage, through suffering to glory.

Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21 and Romans 11:1-36. If all this fulfillment in Christ is so much better than the old covenant, what then do we make of the old covenant? In Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21 and Romans 11:1-36 Paul stops to recall the privileges Israel enjoyed, but how through disobedience she missed the fulfillment of the promises and the Lord turned to the Gentiles for the present time. But Paul affirms that there is a glorious future for the covenant promises.

Romans 12:1-21. Now, in view of the fact that we have been grafted into the program, and have peace with God through faith in the atoning blood of Christ, we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. This brings forward Israel's DEDICATION OFFERING (see also Leviticus 2:1-16, Psalms 40:1-17, and Deuteronomy 26:1-19). The rest of the book (Romans 12:1-21; Romans 13:1-14; Romans 14:1-23; Romans 15:1-33; Romans 16:1-27) lays out the application of our new covenant relationship through Christ—it is the law of love. Romans 12:1-21 discusses the application in the assembly through the spiritual gifts offered in love; Romans 13:1-27 broadens the application to submission in love; Romans 14:1-23 applies the law of love in doubtful things, focusing on having the mind of Christ. So the argument of the book builds upon the age-old revelation through the ritual of Israel that provided the sinner with access to God. But now Christ has come and he is the end<sup>4</sup> of the Law (Romans 10:4). In other words, the righteousness that the Law required and that the sacrifices pledged has now become a reality "in Christ," that is, it is available through faith in his atoning blood and worked out in life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### Bibliography for the Book of Romans

Commentaries on the English Text. There are several works that would provide helpful material for the study of the book in the English. Among these I would list: F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series; H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in the Cambridge Bible for Schools (a preacher's reference work); William R. Newell, *Romans, Verse by Verse* (for good exposition); and James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans* (a beautiful treatment of the book).

Commentaries on the Greek Text. The following are helpful tools: James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (a theological treatment); E. H. Griffith, "The Epistle to the Romans," in *The Speaker's Commentary* (a classic for tracing the argument); F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans 2:1-29* volumes (clear; traces Paul's thought; offers expository help); Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (theological study); Douglas Moo, *Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39* in the Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary Series (good for the critical problems and technical matters); John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* in *The New International Commentary Series*; and certainly John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 1947 Eerdmans reprint of the 1540 edition; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC New Series (Edinburgh, 1975, 1979); and William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh,

1902).

These works, plus many more that could have been listed, can be acquired through book stores, or, if out of print, found through the internet (such as [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com)). It would be most helpful—although certainly not necessary—to have at least one good commentary on the book, one that you can work with (i.e., if you do not know Greek you will not get everything out of a commentary based on the Greek).

Very importantly, however, Bible students should read through the Book of Romans several times in different English translations. Use a couple that you are not used to, in addition to your favorite translation. These will get you thinking when you see different wording in the text.

1 Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans” (1522), in *Works of Martin Luther* (1932), Vol. VI, p. 447.

2 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (1910), Vol. I, p. 766.

3 C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 27.

4 As we shall see, the word here (*telos*) will have more meaning than simply an “end”; it will indicate the intended end, or the goal.

## 03.02. The Revelation of Righteousness

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The Revelation of Righteousness I. The Revelation of Righteousness: The Salutation, Introduction, and Theme of Romans (Romans 1:1-17) A. The Salutation (Romans 1:1-7)

1. Paul's relationship to Jesus (Romans 1:1-2). In the first few verses of the book Paul relates himself to his master, his gift, and his work. His master. In relating himself to Jesus as his master Paul uses the expression, "a servant of Jesus Christ." This is the Hebrew Old Testament expression "servant of the LORD [Yahweh],"<sup>1</sup> the highest title that anyone could have. Paul makes a powerful statement by substituting "Jesus" for "Yahweh." This would be heresy to an unconverted Jew; but Paul has the deity and dignity of Jesus in mind. The point is that everyone who has been redeemed belongs to him; they are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to him, their LORD and Master. His gift. Paul was an apostle, or as the term "called" shows, he was an apostle by calling, or, his gift originated in divine calling.<sup>2</sup> The term "apostle" refers to his spiritual gift more than an office—he was sent on a mission to represent the risen Christ. This kind of term is not used in the New Testament for an "office" in the strict sense. Romans 1:5 shows the concept behind the gift: there was never the idea of the right to stand above or over someone else, but rather the privilege of serving. Nevertheless. The right to be called apostles in the New Testament leadership sense included seeing the risen Christ and being commissioned by him. His work. Paul was "separated unto the Gospel." On the road to Damascus God transformed him into a spiritual Pharisee. From then on he would proclaim the "good news." The term we know as "gospel" is here called "the gospel of God—the Gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures." The "gospel" is the Old Testament term for good news about the Messiah's coming, who, according to Isaiah 40:9, is both God and Messiah. This good news had now become Paul's life. The Gospel is about Jesus Christ. But while it is good news, it is not completely new news, for it was promised before (Galatians says preached before). Any such news not found rooted in the Old Testament is considered a false gospel. What is new is the complete revelation of the gospel in Jesus of Nazareth, that is, exactly how the revelation of God in the Old Testament would work out in the New. So then Paul's identification of himself is that of a servant under the authority of Christ, a messenger called to a new life work, and a devoted minister of the Gospel. Clearly, the person of Jesus Christ was to Paul an unparalleled authority.

2. The subject matter of Romans: the divine Son (Romans 1:3-4). The subject matter of the book is expressed in the words, "concerning His Son." This is what the Book of Romans is all about. The full title is given at the end of Romans 1:4 : "Jesus Christ our Lord."

Two things are now said of this "Son": He was born the seed of David according to the flesh, but through the Spirit of holiness He was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. The "Son" was born of the seed of David "in the sphere of" (a more precise translation than "according to") the flesh. The Son of God moved in the realm of the flesh, i.e., among humanity, as a physical descendant of David. There was a birth to be sure; but that birth in Bethlehem did not mark His beginning. He entered the world through the family of David that He

might be the promised Davidic King.

He was also “appointed” (a more specific translation than “declared”) to be the Son of God by the resurrection out of the dead. This was not in the sphere of the flesh, in weakness, but in power, in the realm of the spiritual, through the Spirit of holiness (or as some translate it, the Holy Spirit 3). What this means is that Jesus’ resurrection from the dead demonstrated that He was not just another physical descendant of David who passed off the scene. He is the resurrected Lord. With His exaltation in glory, Jesus for the first time possessed a glorified, resurrected body, perfectly human and fully divine. Peter in his sermon in Acts 2:1-47 announced that through the resurrection God made this Jesus both Lord and Christ. To be appointed to be the Son of God refers to his assuming (or resuming) his sovereign and divine authority. At the resurrection and exaltation Jesus is said to have been completely “begotten”—he was appointed to the position where He could carry out all that is involved with divine Sonship. The Book of Hebrews draws on the imagery of the coronation Psalms 2:1-12 to stress this point: “You are my Son, this day have I begotten You.” This image of “the Son” certainly has to do with authority, and the idea of being begotten to rule refers to his coronation; but the description of Jesus as the “Son of God” takes the language beyond Davidic coronation liturgy and speaks of a nature shared with the Father. John describes Jesus as the “only begotten Son” in the latter sense of a shared nature. So these images of “son” reveal that Jesus has the same nature as the Father who is divine—the Son of God is equally eternal and divine.<sup>4</sup> A son of David?—yes, to be sure, for the child was born of Mary. The eternal Son of God?—most certainly, because of the declaration of the resurrection. So Paul uses both descriptions of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah had this same balance correct: “Unto us a child was born, unto us a Son was given (Isaiah 9:6). The child was born, according to the flesh, in Bethlehem; but the Son was not born, but given or sent to the world. So the creed presents it simply but profoundly: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man.” In short, Jesus was very God and very Man. And now in glory there is a God-Man, Jesus Christ our Lord. The two descriptions of the Son also reveal the two stages of the Lord’s coming (in the historical process), the incarnation as the Son of David (humiliation) and the glorification as the Son of God (exaltation).

3. The effects of the authority of the Son (Romans 1:5-7). Paul has a ministry of the risen Christ (“through whom” links the section with Jesus in his risen stage); or, to put it another way, it is the ministry of the risen Christ that flows through Paul to the Romans. The Book of Romans comes from the risen Christ. The apostleship that Paul received from Jesus was to call people to the obedience of faith. I think that “faith” is appositional to “obedience here”—the obedience which is faith (see Romans 10:14-17). Those who obeyed the Gospel are those who believed. And those who believed were also called to belong to Jesus Christ—they were loved by God and called to be saints.<sup>5</sup>

Paul’s salutation to the churches is “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Christian is a recipient of grace (holy love on the move) and is at peace with God. This has all come about because the divine Son died for our sins and then rose again, showing that he has the authority to take away sins. The salutation, “Grace to you and peace” is

far more than a polite greeting or a good wish; it is drawn from the High Priestly benediction in the Old Testament. After the High Priest had been into the Holy of Holies and made atonement through the sprinkling of blood, he would come out and announce this oracle: “Yahweh bless you and keep you; Yahweh make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you; Yahweh lift up his face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).<sup>6</sup> Because Jesus Christ, our High Priest, has made atonement for us through his blood, and has entered the heavenly sanctuary to intercede for us, Paul with confidence can declare that “grace and peace” belongs to us. And so that became his salutation. So in this little introduction we have words like “servant,” “apostle,” “grace,” “obedience” “called” and “Lord,” all stressing the authority of the risen Son of God. The clear affirmation in verse 4 is that the message is about “Jesus Christ our Lord.” And verse 7 reiterates that grace and peace comes from “the Lord Jesus Christ.” It should now be clear from Paul’s introduction what it means to call Jesus “Lord.” William Barclay says it well:

“It is now plain to see what a man ought to mean when he calls Jesus ‘Lord,’ or when he speaks of the ‘Lord Jesus’ or of the ‘Lord Jesus Christ.’ When I call Jesus ‘Lord’ I ought to mean that He is the absolute and undisputed owner and possessor of my life and that He is the Master whose servant and slave I must be all life long. When I call Jesus ‘Lord’ it ought to mean that I think of Him as the Head of that great family in heaven and earth of which God is the Father and of which I through Him have become a member. When I call Jesus ‘Lord’ it ought to mean that I think of Him as the help of the helpless and the guardian of those who have no other to protect them. When I call Jesus ‘Lord’ it ought to mean that I look on Him as having absolute authority over all my life, all my thoughts, all my actions. When I call Jesus ‘Lord’ it ought to mean that He is the King and Emperor to whom I owe and give my constant homage, allegiance, and loyalty. When I call Jesus ‘Lord’ it ought to mean that for me He is the Divine One whom I must for ever worship and adore.”

7 B. Introduction: Personal Items (Romans 1:8-15)

1. Paul thanks God for them (Romans 1:8). His gratitude for them is “through Jesus Christ,” the one true Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). The thanksgiving, in typical Hebrew fashion, was offered to God, on the basis of the sacrificial Lamb of God. Paul is thankful not only that the Roman Christians have believed, but that their faith is being reported all over the world. What a marvelous reputation—in contrast to what was being reported about the Corinthian Church all over the world.

2. Paul remembers them in prayer (Romans 1:9). Paul affirms, with God as his witness, that he has been constant in praying for them. He may never have been there, and he may be across the sea in Corinth at the time, but his prayers have bound him closely to them. Thus it always is with the prayers of the saints.

3. Paul longs to visit them (Romans 1:10-13). He hopes to visit them in Rome for the mutual benefit of all. He had always planned to go there, but had always been providentially hindered from doing so. He prays now that it will be God’s will. Note: Paul always puts God’s will above his desires in prayer. The purposes of his visit would be (1) for mutual encouragement of one another’s faith, (2) that Paul might impart some spiritual gift to them, and (3) that Paul might have a harvest among them as with other Gentiles.

4. Paul regarded himself as a debtor to the Romans (Romans 1:14-15). Because he owed his salvation to the grace of Jesus Christ, Paul knew that as a privileged believer he owed it to a

needy world to tell them about His wonderful Savior. With all the ability he possessed, and at any cost or hazard, he was willing to embark for Rome to preach the Gospel—as he had to Jews and Gentiles for years.

### C. The Theme of Romans (Romans 1:16-17).

It has come as a surprise to many that the Book of Romans does not deal with many of the issues to be found in Rome. It was a city filled with social problems, but Paul does not address those issues. It was a city filled with slaves, but he does not mention that. It was a city of lust and vice, but he does not direct his comments to avoiding these sins. It appears that Paul did not consider social reform in Rome an evangelical imperative, at least not at this occasion. Rather, the gospel of the revelation of a righteousness acceptable to God and available to people graciously upon the condition of faith was Paul's primary imperative. The theme of the book is the exposition of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle does not set out the details of the Gospel here; but we may gather from his other writings that the gospel is the good news of Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and appearances together with the apostolic explanation of the doctrinal significance of these great facts (1 Corinthians 15:1-5).<sup>8</sup> The word for "gospel" or good news carried with it a note of excitement; it is the kind of message one would shout with enthusiasm.

Here we may notice the following: Paul's designation of the Gospel is "of Christ," for it centers in the person, ministry, and passion of the Savior; the description of it is the "power of God" (the intrinsic power of the whole Christ-event); the objective of it is "unto salvation" (meaning complete salvation, looking to the final tense of the doctrine of soteriology<sup>9</sup>); the universality of its presentation is unto "everyone" regardless of race or generation; the simplicity of its reception is "that believes"; and Paul's attitude toward it all is "I am not ashamed."<sup>10</sup> The central idea of the Gospel, promised in the Old Testament and now revealed fully in Jesus Christ, is "the righteousness of God." This term "righteousness" does not here indicate only the attribute of the LORD, for in this case it is said to be by faith. Here it is forensic: it is righteousness that is revealed in the Gospel, meaning, it is conferred on people; it signifies being in the right relation to God. To be justified is to be declared righteous by God, not to be made righteous by God. To possess the righteousness of God, then, is to possess a righteousness which God provides (Romans 5:17) and thus approves (cf. Romans 2:13). If the righteousness that justifies is God's, and Paul's "It is God that justifies" (Romans 8:33) forever settles the matter, then it can only be our's by imputation; it is credited to us by God. Therefore, the term "the righteousness of God" refers to an imputed righteousness.<sup>11</sup> As Johnson summarizes it, "The righteousness of God, then, is the key to salvation. They who have it know the power of God in personal salvation. They who do not have it are lost. They who have it know that they are right with God. They who do not have it are not right before Him. It is as simple as that. Principal Cunningham used to say, 'The righteousness of God is that righteousness which His righteousness requires Him to require.' According to Paul the simplest believer in Jesus Christ is clothed in this required righteousness through the justifying work of the Last Adam (cf. Romans 3:21-26)."<sup>12</sup> This righteousness is "from faith to faith." It is from faith, and it is designed for faith. Or, faith is the source of the righteousness, but it is also the goal of righteousness.<sup>13</sup> To support this point Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous shall live by faith." The words in the context of the Old Testament prophet carry a certain ambiguity (double entente). The text says that "the righteous shall live by his faithfulness," meaning a firm faith that is directed toward God.<sup>14</sup> Habakkuk was drawing upon Genesis 15:6 to show that faith is belief in

and firm reliance on the LORD. Paul, quoting from Habakkuk, leaves out the pronoun “his” to stress this kind of faith: “The righteous shall live by faith.” So Habakkuk, in affirming that faith is the key to one’s relationship with the Lord, was teaching that God’s favor is secured by trust. He was contrasting this with the proud Chaldeans who trust in themselves—the just, who trust in God, shall live. Paul’s use is analogical; in stressing the same point about faith, he is telling how one can attain right standing before God and live eternally.<sup>15</sup> The key passage is Genesis 15:6 (which he will develop later; and Habakkuk 2:4 and Romans 1:16-17 are offshoots of it. So there is some ambiguity in the line of the prophet; but Paul’s idea of “from faith to faith” stresses both points of faith as well: we have become righteous by faith, and by faith we shall live.

Thus, the main point of the argument is very clear: good works could never deliver people from judgment. Rather, it is the good news of Christ’s sacrificial work received by faith that liberates from sin, for it alone is the power of God unto salvation.

Things to Consider From this first section of the book there are many things that could be discussed for application, and several themes that could be stressed in developing lessons from the material. But the following questions come immediately to mind as a result of this study.

1. What does it mean that Jesus is Lord? Think in terms of the doctrinal implications about deity and sovereignty, but think also about the practical aspects—what difference will/should it make in my life that He is my Lord? How will it affect my worship, my prayer life, my daily activities or life style?

Related to this are a couple of subordinate questions. What does the title “Son of God” signify? If Jesus was appointed Son, how does that relate to his sovereign rulership? And, how does the resurrection do that?

2. What is the Gospel? Can you express its component parts succinctly and clearly—the facts of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, the response of faith, full salvation, and the righteousness of God? This should be clearly understood and easily explained by anyone serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 I shall continue to use the traditional representation of the holy name in these notes: in the Old Testament LORD is the way the name Yahweh was signified in the English, as opposed to Lord when the term “lord, master” was meant.

2 The Greek term “called” is an adjective built on a verbal stem. Most verbal adjectives are passives; they are timeless in force (no tense)—“called.”

3 The text says “spirit of holiness”; this is not the regular way of saying “Holy Spirit” in the New Testament, but it is a way of saying it in Hebrew. But only once does Paul use this phrase, so the variation indicates a slightly different idea—the phase of sovereign spiritual existence into which He entered with power at the resurrection.

4 A simple, surface reading of these and other verses would lead one to think the image and language of “son” refers to only one thing. But in fact there are a couple of different ways it is used. Through the Old Testament every king could be called God’s son because that is what the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:1-29 says, and the coronation Psalms 2:1-12 puts into poetry. When Psalms 2:1-12 is used of Jesus, it means he is a Davidic king, the Father’s vice-regent, as it

were. But John's "only begotten Son" is more specifically referring to the nature of Jesus. The term "beget" is more restrictive than "create" or "make." One can only beget a child with the same nature. To describe Jesus as the "Son of God" or the "only begotten Son" stresses His nature. If the Father is eternal and divine, then so is Jesus the Son. And he is unique in this—we may be "begotten by God," i.e., by grace we are given a new nature in Christ; but there is only one God-man, Jesus the Christ. When the expression "Son of God" is applied to Jesus, or when Jesus used it, it carried much more meaning than that he was another Davidic king (although the disciples at first did not realize that). Gradually, and especially as Jesus forgave sins and proclaimed his message, the Jewish leaders knew that when he claimed to be the Son of God he was making himself equal with God.

5 Those who have believed in Jesus as Lord have been sanctified, that is, set apart to Him. This is the meaning of the word "saints" in the epistles. It is perfectly legitimate to refer to believing members of the Church as "the saints."

6 The verbs may sound like wishes and greetings in English ("May the LORD bless you"), but the Hebrew forms (jussives) in this context are decrees or oracles, announcing what the blessing is on the basis of the atonement. The passage says that when the priest says this the LORD will bless them. This use of the verbal blessing is like Isaac's blessing of Jacob in the place of Esau—he could not take the words back because they were an oracle and not merely best wishes. This is very different than much modern teaching of people giving blessings to children or spouses.

7 From a sermon preached at the Round Church in Cambridge.

8 S. Lewis Johnson, "The Gospel that Paul Preached," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (1971):330.

9 The Bible uses three tenses for salvation: the past tense (we have been saved from the penalty of sin: 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Php 1:28; Ephesians 2:4, Ephesians 2:8), the present tense (we are being saved from the power of sin: Php 2:12; 2 Corinthians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 7:10), and the future tense (we will be saved from the very presence of sin: Romans 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9). The Bible can use the language of salvation or sanctification for all three stages; but the theology is very precise—if the process has begun, it will be completed. Technically, the past tense is covered by the doctrine of soteriology, the present tense by the doctrine of sanctification, and the future tense by glorification. If true believers pray for "salvation," it must be in the sense of the present tense (saved from the power of sin) or future (final glorification, the completion of the process), because saving faith in the Gospel has already placed them "in Christ" forever.

10 Unfortunately, too many Christians—leaders especially—have become somewhat embarrassed by the Gospel. To Paul there was no ministry without it or with any false or watered-down version of it; in fact, there is no salvation apart from it.

11 This phrase, "the righteousness of God," was the phrase that led Martin Luther into the light of truth that produced the Reformation. He had always hated the expression, associating it with judgment; but through his study of Psalms 15:1-5 14 he learned that the righteousness of God was related to deliverance and not condemnation. This understanding was clarified and enlarged by his study of Romans, upon which he lectured at Wittenberg from November 3, 1515 to September 7, 1516. It was during these years that he came to the realization that justification did not presuppose some inner change, but that it was done outside of man through the mediatorial work of Jesus.

The acceptance of this work by faith brought liberation, because a just God was now able to give freely to each believer the righteousness of God.

12 Johnson, p. 335.

13 James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 21,22.

14 The Septuagint adds a pronoun that serves as an objective genitive: "his faith in me."

15 Several commentators would translate the line: "the one who is righteous by faith shall live" (see Douglas Moo, *Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39*, p. 72). The quotation, according to Cranfield, functions as the heading of *Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39*, "righteous by faith" summarizing *Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25*, and "shall live" summarizing *Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39*. The latter grouping is less convincing.

### 03.03. Condemnation, or, the Universal Need of Righteousness

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Condemnation, or, the Universal Need of Righteousness (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-20)

II. Justification, or, the Imputation of Righteousness (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-11 A. Condemnation, or, the Universal Need of Righteousness (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-20) The section before us reveals the desperate plight of the human race apart from Jesus Christ. God is absolutely righteous; His righteousness is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 1:17). He is undefiled and will have no fellowship with unrighteousness. But human beings are sinners by nature and cannot rid themselves of sin, let alone earn righteousness. They will remain separated from the Almighty unless God stoops down to provide a way out. The wonderful news of the Gospel, according to Romans, is that God has provided the righteousness that people cannot achieve.

Before people can fully appreciate the gospel they must understand the depths from which sinners have been rescued. In order to glory in the cross of Christ, they must recognize how pitiful and hopeless their original condition really was. Romans 1:18, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-20 is a bleak and frightening exposure of the natural heart in need of salvation.

1. The Revelation of God's Wrath (Romans 1:18) An irrevocable law of God is that every sin ever committed merits and must receive judgment. All ungodliness and all unrighteousness may expect a visitation of wrath. Paul is about to describe unrighteousness, but he does so against the background of impending wrath.<sup>1</sup> Notice, however, that the ungodliness is not merely a violation of the truth—people by their wickedness suppress the truth. When evil dominates their lives, then there is no longer any room to consider truth. People are the product of what they contemplate; and if they suppress the truth and do not respond to it correctly, this will lead to a loss of morality.

There are several ways that the term "wrath" has been interpreted in this verse: (1) a time of judgment that lies in the future at the end of the age; (2) judgment in nature (suffering), conscience (right vs. wrong) and word (judgment at the end); but most likely (3) what is said in the rest of the chapter—God gave the human race over in a judicial way. The history of the world is judgment; perversion in faith leads to perversion in life, and such evil brings ruin, both as natural consequence and divine visitation.

2. The Gentiles' Need for Righteousness (Romans 1:19-32, Romans 2:1-16) To demonstrate the world's dilemma Paul divides humanity into two parts, Gentiles and Jews, and in each case reveals their hopeless condition apart from Christ. The record of the Gentiles' plight is a dreadful picture of raw sin. a. The Gentiles (all mankind) have the light of nature (Romans 1:19-20). Here the apostle introduces the theme of general revelation: God has made plain to them what might be known about Him. From the very beginning the invisible things (His attributes) of the Godhead—his eternal power and divine nature (a supreme Being, a common term today)—have been clearly perceived in and through creation. Mankind has had more than the dim light of nature;

they have had the bright light of all creation. In general, we can count on people having a sense of the existence of God; they don't need lengthening proofs and discussions. As a result, they are without excuse, for the glories of the creation were sufficient to make them aware that there is a sovereign Lord to whom they are accountable. b. Their moral degradation (Romans 1:21-32). The people of the earth rejected the truth, spurned the light, and turned their backs on God. This is clear from the early portions of Genesis and from secular history of the pagan world of antiquity. The results of this rebellion remain.

Romans 1:21 describes their indifference to divine revelation. There is a change of tenses here; from now on Paul looks to the past to see how the world fell away from the truth. It is the religious history of mankind in a brief sketch; it is a record of devolution. They knew God, but they failed to recognize God and to render to God glory and gratitude due His worthy name. Their foolish hearts, that is, their rebellious wills, were darkened, that is, spiritually blind to the truth.

It seems that God gives all people a certain degree of light. If they respond correctly to the light that they have, He then sends more (see how God provided Peter for Cornelius in Acts 10:1-48); but if they fail to respond to it, or choose to pervert it, they become darkened and cannot see the light. This is a judicial blindness.

Romans 1:22-25 describe their idolatry that resulted in rejection of the one true God. Even though they were cold and careless toward the Creator, they felt the need to worship something, they still believed there were spirits or gods or forces that had to be respected and even manipulated in life. Their utter folly was to exchange the glory of the invisible God for images of people and animals. They elevated images to a position of superstition and prostrated themselves before them. They grovelled before their manmade images, thinking themselves pretty wise for being able to invent religious systems; but in reality they were revealing their folly by worshiping subordinate creatures over which God had commanded them to rule and have dominion. Every false god they worshiped was inferior, because each was something that the true Lord God had created.

Romans 1:26-32 describes the immorality that came with the idolatrous beliefs—lust, incest, pride, blasphemy—the categories of vices seem endless! The great folly of false worship is that it leads to false ethics and morals. If people worship a higher being, they will elevate their ethics and morality to that level; but when the worship is base, the practice will be base. In fact, substituting anything for God alters one's ethics. A clear understanding of creation and the God of creation is the foundation of ethics and morality, as the Law makes clear; when people substituted the worship of the creatures for the Creator, a corrupt pattern of life could only follow, for human life was then allowed to run down with no remedial correctives. So this chapter paints a vivid description of the darkness of the race apart from God. Nothing but divine intervention could possibly lift the human race out of darkness and restore it to God. But not everyone is willing. The way that these changes came about is described as judicial: Paul says, "Therefore, God gave them over" to their depraved customs (Romans 1:24, Romans 1:26), and their depraved or useless minds (Romans 1:28). In the Bible the mind is more than the intellect; it is the organ of moral reasoning and the capacity for choosing or willing. People who refuse to acknowledge God have this capacity blunted by sin and blindness, so that their minds are "disqualified" from being able to understand and acknowledge the will of God.<sup>2</sup> People who have turned from God are fundamentally unable to think and decide correctly about God; they can certainly talk about God or

spiritual things, but the substance is contaminated by their lack of spiritual discernment, or their willingness to explain away divine standards so that they may live the way they want. Only the work of the Holy Spirit renewing the mind will enable people make the correct choices and live in a way pleasing to God. God gave them up so that their wickedness would take its logical course down the dead-end highway of evil to destruction.

There are several ways that this verb “gave them over” has been interpreted. (1) In the early Church Chrysostom took it in a permissive sense, that God permitted them to be given over. But that is not the force of the verb; it is far more active than that. (2) Another view is what we call the privitive sense, that is, God did not impel them to believe but withdrew His restraining hand, and by withdrawing his restraint the effect appeared that he was giving them up. Again, that idea may satisfy some by softening the meaning, but it is still not exactly what is being said. (3) The full explanation goes a little further, that is, it is judicial (which includes something of the privitive); God actively abandoned the race to judgment because it rejected the light (see Mark 4:12; Isaiah 6:1-13). Throughout Scripture we learn that in God’s dealings with people there comes a time when he must take retributive action in judgment; for Israel, for example, after centuries of their defection he hardened their hearts and blinded their spiritual perception (Isaiah 6:1-13) and declared that they were not his people and he was not their God (Hosea 1:1-11).<sup>3</sup>

Note the emphasis throughout here how they rejected the truth: Romans 1:19, “known of God”; Romans 1:21, “knew God”; Romans 1:28, “holding God in full knowledge”; and Romans 1:31, “known fully the deadly guilt of evil.” When did such divine retribution take place? Is it broadly mankind’s history, or were there events? We may say collectively it began at Babylon (Genesis 11:1-32) where the nations were scattered because of their pride and rebellion, God allowing that wars and conflicts and separate developments in paganism were less evil than collective apostasy. Having said that, however, we must also note that collectively the restoration of believers focuses on Jerusalem and God’s covenant program. These two centers are always antithetical in Scripture for what they symbolize. But individually the judicial retribution would have begun in the Garden. The language of Romans 1:23 in this passage is the language of Genesis. And, Romans 5:12 makes the direct reference to that beginning of judgment. Because Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they were expelled from the Garden to make their own way, until they realized that they needed divine recovery if they were ever to be truly like God. In what sense then are the results today? The judgment reappears or manifests itself in every generation. Humans are fallen and perverted from birth. If they are allowed to express themselves in their natural instincts, they will be perverted in every form of life and every aspect of life, never measuring up to the design of the creator for human life. For example, the sexual union between the male and the female is by nature natural affection; it is established by God as the proper use of sex. Homosexuality is an offense against God; it is not a weakness, or illness; it is a sin.<sup>4</sup> But all sin is forgiveable. Some might say that it is natural because they were born with that nature; but that is why Jesus said we have to be born again, by the Spirit. So what Paul is saying is that when you see and rebellion against God and His Word, whether a great evil, anarchy, wickedness, or alternative lifestyles out of the will of God, we are not to think that God is about to judge that society—the people are not in danger of judgment, rather, it has happened already. God has given them over to run their course to ruin, to self destruct, as long as they live in rebellion to His will. And they will self-destruct if they never respond to the light of the Gospel. This is not simply true of

one sin that gets a lot of attention today, but all sin if persisted in will bring about ruin, and there comes a point when God lets it run its course. This is why Isaiah said, “Seek the LORD while he may be found.” There may come a time when His Spirit stops working with a person, and lets that person follow the broad way that leads to destruction. None of us know when that might be, and so we continue to pray for people and call them to repentance.

c. A diatribe on the wrath of God (Romans 2:1-16). In the preceding section the apostle referred to the Gentiles in the third person (“they” and “them”). Had he meant the Roman Christians, he would have used the second person plural. Now in this section he begins using the second person, but it is not a direct address to the Church; rather the genre is a diatribe. In a diatribe the writer can get a point across by engaging in an imaginary debate with a student or opponent. He will often use posed questions and emphatic rejections. It appears that in this case Paul’s main target would be the self-righteous Jew. So Paul is now beginning to turn to the sin of the Jews. He will deal with it in three stages: first this transition part where he declares that the Jews are no better than the pagan Gentiles and will likewise receive the wrath of God, then in a parallel way he explains how the Law condemns (Romans 2:17-29), and then, third, he adds a parenthetical response to possible misconceptions of what he has said (Romans 3:1-8). Romans 3:9 explains what he has done: he has charged the Gentile with guilt; now he charges the Jew. So in the present section Paul will focus on the attitude of the Jew who would judge others as being evil, but who will not himself live up to the standard. The “therefore” at the beginning of Romans 2:1-29 is the strongest inferential particle in the New Testament. On the basis of Romans 1:32, you are inexcusable “everyone of you who ... .” The whole point of this section is that God judges according to righteousness—in truth (Romans 2:2), according to works (Romans 2:6), without partiality (Romans 2:11). Contrary to popular Jewish belief, the sins of the Jews will not be treated differently than those of the Gentiles. Simply belonging to the covenant people avails nothing because the wrath of God is revealed against sin. Rejecting the truth (Romans 2:8) is lack of faith—it is the sin of not believing! So here Paul is reasoning like James: faith without works is dead. And, as the basis of judgment, faith and works are inseparable. If God judges by works, or if he judges by their lack of faith, the decision is the same, for those who do not believe do not produce good works—they produce evil (Romans 2:9). What we see in appearances can be misleading; many who look lovely to the world have done so out of selfish motives, or, as Paul has laid down, everything that the unbeliever has done is touched by his depravity. The Bible elsewhere will affirm that without faith it is impossible to please God. In Romans 2:12-13 Paul affirms that those who sin apart from the Law will be judged apart from the Law and those who sin under the Law will be judged by the Law. In a parenthesis (Romans 2:14-15) he explains that the conscience forms a kind of law within; the conscience most of the time accuses, once in a while excuses, on the same basis that the law prescribes right and wrong.<sup>5</sup> No person living is without this warning voice within. But does this inner voice provide the Gentiles with the righteousness they need to have fellowship with God? No, they still need specific revelation that leads to faith in Jesus Christ. The point of the discussion about judgment begun in Romans 2:12 is then completed in Romans 2:16 as Paul affirms that “God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus Christ is the Judge. Paul is not saying that God will judge according to his gospel (some translations sound that way); rather, he is saying the fact that Jesus is Judge is in accordance with my gospel (he wanted the expression “through Jesus Christ” at the end for emphasis). Jesus Christ will judge Jew and Gentile alike, according to the three previous principles: truth, works, and impartiality. So these principles provide a picture of

true justice: God will judge according to reality, to truth, and cannot be deceived; God's judgments are universally proportionate to what people deserve, and no one can protest; God's judgments are completely unprejudiced, for apart from Christ's righteousness all will receive their just deserts<sup>7</sup>; and God's judgments relate to mankind's innermost motives—inner thoughts and outward actions are both clear to this Judge.

Paul is still laying the foundation in his argument that both Jew and Gentile need the righteousness of God. Neither the pagan apart from the law or the Jew under the law is righteous enough to escape God's judgment. We may recall here Psalms 130:1-8, what Luther called the most Pauline Psalm: "O Lord, if you should mark iniquity, who could stand; but with you, O Lord, there is forgiveness of sin, in order that you might be feared."

3. The Jew's Need of Righteousness (Romans 2:17-29, Romans 3:1-8). The Jews had higher moral and spiritual standards than most of the ancient world, due to their ethical monotheism with its strict laws. With the greater privileges of such specific revelation came greater responsibility as well. a. Their great privileges did not suffice (Romans 2:17-29). In Romans 2:17-24 Paul discusses the first great privilege of Israel—the Law of God. The commandments given to Moses were forever the unique and priceless possession of the chosen 8 race. They prided themselves in the Law and "rested" in it as though it was adequate to meet all their spiritual needs. But even though they had the truth revealed to them, knew it and taught it, they themselves failed to obey it, either in the letter of the law or its spirit.

Romans 2:17-20 extol the privileges that Israel had by virtue of the Scriptures; they were instructed, guides, lights, instructors, teachers. It is a marvelous list. But Romans 2:17 begins a condition (called protasis—"if"), and the apodasis ("then") is not until Romans 2:21—"you then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" In other words, if in the light of all this privilege this is the way you (Jews) live, then you are without excuse. Paul ends the section with a citation from Isaiah and Ezekiel, namely that God's name was being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of Israel. That meant that because they disobeyed and were sent into captivity, the reputation of the LORD was placed in jeopardy—their sin drew God's name down.<sup>9</sup>

Romans 2:25-29 record the discussion of the other great privilege of Israel that went awry—circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant; it was performed on the foreskin of a Hebrew baby boy when he was eight days old, to signify that the little lad was accepted into the covenant community (not that the child was sealed forever in salvation—that required personal faith). But Paul's point here puts this in perspective: it is not enough to be a Jew, circumcised as a member of the community; one must practice the Law. The Law itself had declared that true circumcision was of the heart, that is, a changed will set apart to serving God (Deuteronomy 30:6). And Jeremiah, always the prophet of reality, foresaw the punishment on national Israel, that is, on those who were only circumcised in the flesh (Romans 9:25). Circumcision without the reality of a living faith is uncircumcision; but Paul will add that uncircumcision (=Gentile people) that keeps the Law (righteous people by faith) is true circumcision (of the heart). Note Paul's points in this paragraph:

1. The rite without reality is really unrighteousness (Romans 9:25). There was only value in being a circumcised Jew if the Law was being kept (evidence of a living faith). Keeping the Law refers to the fulfillment of the condition of faith; it was the carrying out of the precepts of faith. As with any

religious ritual (today, baptism, or holy communion), circumcision meant nothing if there was not a genuine faith to live out what the ritual was designed to signify.

2. Reality without the rite is righteousness (Romans 2:26-27). Paul goes so far as to say the obedience of faith is the essence of righteousness, whether there was the rite of circumcision or not. Paul's words would have upset many of the circumcision who placed such great stress on the rite; he was affirming that it was far better to be an uncircumcised (physically, so a Gentile) believer trying to obey the Law than to be a circumcised (Jewish) unbeliever.<sup>10</sup> The life of the believer condemns those who have the Law and the rite, but who break the Law and deny the rite.

3. The reality of a living faith is praised by God, but the empty rite is praised by mankind (Romans 2:28-29). The man who is only outwardly a Jew by circumcision is not the true Jew, but the one who is a Jew in the inward man, by faith, whether he has the rite or not, is the true Jew. That is, the truly circumcised person—the believer—is one who by faith is set apart to God, circumcised in the heart to give witness to the meaning of the circumcision—set apart to God.

There is a wonderful word play here in this section. The Hebrew word for “Jew” is yehudah, literally, “may he be praised” (the verb yadah means “to praise”). So in Hebrew “praise” and “Jew” would be essentially the same. Paul is writing in Greek, of course; but when using the Greek word for “praise,” epainos, he undoubtedly knew what he was doing. His line has a double meaning: “such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God,” or “such a man’s Judaism is not from men, but from God.” The truly “spiritual” circumcision received praise from God because there was a reality of faith and not empty ritual to the claims. So the point Paul has made in this section is that in spite of the privileges that Israel had, they disobeyed God and therefore stand in need of divine righteousness just as the Gentiles do. The probable response of the Jews to this point was that Paul was wiping out any Jewish-Gentile distinctions with the Gospel. What about those special promises to the Jews? And so Paul will attempt to balance the picture with a discussion of God’s faithfulness in spite of Israel’s unbelief. b. God remains faithful and righteous (Romans 3:1-8). The section begins with the question of the value of the circumcision (an expression of sign for being a faithful Jew, faithful to the faith of Abraham). Paul’s affirming “Much in every way” lets the reader know right away that in spite of Israel’s failure (meaning the vast majority of Israelites) the covenant program was not a mistake. Paul will develop this theme more fully in Romans 9:1-33, Romans 10:1-21, Romans 11:1-36.

First, Israel was entrusted with the oracles of God. This expression refers to utterances or divine communications in written form. It often refers to specific passages in contexts, or, not the Scripture per se, but specific parts of the Scriptures. Paul probably is singling out passages that are revelations about the Messianic promises. The Messianic revelation of the covenant and the promises to the Jews will be unfolded beginning in Romans 9:1-33 to show that they have a future. God is righteous, meaning, God will be faithful to do what He has promised.

“But,” some will object, “Israel failed.” They were disobedient. Here is answered a basic error of many modern theologians—disobedience does not cancel the promises, it postpones them (or better, shows that they were not to be fulfilled at that time, that is, without us). Or, to put it another way, God’s covenant promises are sure, but individual participation in them depends on faith and obedience. Paul is saying, “Their unbelief shall not void the faithfulness of God, shall it?” No, disobedience cannot do that. The promises rest on the divine character of God. Their

disobedience only seems to affect when and how the promises are fulfilled, or who has a share in them—but not if they will be fulfilled. God has sworn to it and will not repent—the gifts and callings of God cannot be repented of. If we cannot believe that the promise to Abraham rests on God’s faithfulness and not on collective obedience of the nation, then how can we believe the promise of John 3:16, for the people of the new Covenant have been anything but faithful. No, God is faithful to keep his promises, even if we are unfaithful, for he cannot deny himself.

“Let God be true and every man a liar!” If everyone, not just some, did not believe, God’s word would still be true. This point is then backed up by a citation from David’s great confession of sin (Psalms 51:4). In that context David was throwing himself on God’s mercy, and having confessed his sin he was ready to accept whatever verdict came. If God sentenced him to death—that would be righteous; if God granted him mercy, that would harmonize with His nature. God was righteous whether David acknowledged this or not, and God could do as He pleased whether David confessed or not. But David in his confession was submitting to the will of God, and acknowledging the righteousness of God. David wanted the world to know that God was righteous; and his sin displayed it all the more. But this might suggest to some that God was unrighteous in condemning people if by their sins His righteousness is displayed. Or, they might say, “If I have the opportunity for the greater glory of God, how can I be judged a sinner?” This kind of reasoning simply shows that there is something wrong in the person’s reasoning. The greater the evil is it might indeed show the greater that His righteousness is, but the evil is still great. People were merely trying to justify their evil and escape divine wrath.

#### 4. Human depravity reaches every aspect of human life (Romans 3:19-20)

Paul’s conclusion of the matter is that all are sinners and in need of the righteousness of God. According to Romans 3:9 he is saying, “Well then, if we as Jews have such advantages due to God’s choice of us, do we then excel—no, we are still sinners.” Paul is saying, “We may excel in that there is yet a future for believing Israel, but we are all sinners.”

Paul has charged the Gentiles with guilt in Romans 1:1-32, charged the Jews with guilt in Romans 2:1-29, but now summarily proves all are guilty in Romans 3:10-18 when he quotes Scripture. What does the Bible say? Here is the real force of the argument, the indictment. This practical method of the New Testament writers is still unsurpassed; it need not be modernized. Paul was comfortable stringing together a long list of biblical texts that made the point. If people did not agree, then their argument was with God, and not with him.

Note also that in Romans 3:19 he will say this is from the Law. The passages are clearly not in the Pentateuch, but the Old Testament as a whole, here the Psalms—that is the Law of God as much as the Commandments of Moses. The citations are introduced with the standard Rabbinic formula, “As it is written,” meaning, as the Word of God the Scriptures remains forever binding. The first part of the series comes from Psalms 14:1-7 and Psalms 53:1-6 (the two psalms are almost identical). The psalm is a contrast between the fool (nabal) who says in his heart there is no God, and the Word of the LORD that declares there is none righteous, not one single person.

Romans 3:13-14 focus on their speech. The poetry of the Psalter is rich: what they say brings ruin and destruction (“their throats are open graves”). They are deceitful, destructive, and hurtful. If ever there was a question about the extent of depravity, one need only examine the things people

say. And much of it is an inherited ability.

Romans 3:15-16 list conduct as murderous and treacherous. Human beings are murderers from the beginning. “Their feet are swift to shed blood” captures the ease and the eagerness with which they design the death of other people. Because of human nature, ruin and misery characterize our lot in life.

Romans 3:17-18 look at the thoughts. Here Isaiah is cited as well as Psalms 36:1. These two ideas form a climax to the list. The way of peace—as Isaiah meant it—is foreign to human nature. It is, as Jesus explained, not as the world gives. Psalms 36:1 essentially means “there is no dread thing from God before their eyes.” In other words, God has not slapped them down or punished them yet, and so they live as the fools they are, concluding that he must approve. The listing by subject matter is a typical rabbinic method of building groups of texts. This is a clear, biblical description of human nature apart from faith in the LORD. The race is unrighteous; and left to themselves they become vile and destructive, leaving a trail of misery and ruin. Only common grace has kept them alive and in as much harmony as there has been. In his conclusion (Romans 3:19) Paul says that the Law speaks to those who are under the Law, that the whole world might be found guilty. The Jew was representative of the human race in God’s dealings with people. God tested one element of the race, the one with the most light given to them, and discovered it was sour; thus, he pronounces judgment on the whole race and no one can protest. The point is clear from Romans 3:20 : no one can be declared righteous by keeping the Law, because there is no one who can keep the Law. The race is corrupt. Here Paul seeks to destroy the Jews’ last stronghold—much as Jesus did when he challenged those who claimed to have kept all the commandments. The Law had many purposes; but salvation by keeping it was not one of them. Paul affirms that the Law pointed out sin—it showed our need. In this sense the old saying is true that the Jews’ death warrant has been written in their birth certificate. The Law was a great heritage for them; but it condemned them, and all of us as well.

Things to Consider This entire section is the most unpleasant section of the book, dealing with condemnation; but it is most necessary. If there is no sin, if the race is not lost, then what in the world is the Gospel all about? So as you think through some of the current debates, you should be able to explain these:

1. How would you define or describe total depravity? You may not particularly like the expression, but it has stood the test of time. What was meant by it? What does that say about theories like universalism?
2. How should we define sin? Perhaps you could write a composite description from the various ideas presented in this section.
3. Can anyone plead ignorance to God in the day of judgment? How would Paul answer that question?
4. What are some of the dangers of growing up in a religious community with all the Scriptures, rituals, and traditions?
5. Sometime privately think through your own “righteousness”; how does it measure up to the standard, and how would it stand under the kind of scrutiny Paul declares God’s judgment to

have? My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name; On Christ, the solid Rock I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand;

All other ground is sinking sand. His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the 'whelming flood; When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay. When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found, Clothed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne.

1 Of course believers in Christ understand that for them the wrath has already been poured out--on the Son of God who bore its weight and agony in the place of sinners. Now, "being justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Romans 5:9).

2 The expression is often used in translations "depraved mind." This terminology gives the impression that everything that such an individual thinks or imagines is only evil continually (cf. Genesis 6:1-22). And, of course, that may be true. But the term really means "useless." Likewise, when we speak of the doctrine of total depravity we do not mean that unbelievers only do evil continually; rather, the doctrine of total depravity means that absolutely nothing that an unbeliever does is meritorious before God. This is why the apostle will say that without faith people are dead in trespasses and sins.

3 This, of course, does not apply to the remnant of true believers in the land, people like Isaiah and Hosea themselves; it applies to the people who had rejected Yahweh and turned to worship Baal and other false gods. Paul will tell the Roman Church that not all Israel was Israel--they might have been born into an Israelite family, but they were not the spiritual seed of Abraham.

4 Neither can you change the plain meaning of the words to suggest that for the homosexual the natural affection is to someone of the same sex and to force heterosexual compliance would be the sin. That merely twists the meanings of the words of Scripture to justify a life-style that the Bible nowhere condones.

5 Here is another part of the moral argument for the existence of God begun in chapter 1. General revelation reveals the invisible attributes, and the human conscience can respond to what is right and wrong.

6 Or, "as my gospel declares."

7 As C. S. Lewis has expressed it, if people do not believe in Christ and submit to Him, saying "Thy will be done," then in judgment the Lord will say to them, "Thy will be done."

8 To call the Jews God's chosen people does not mean that they are any more righteous than others, or that God made special concessions for them. It means God had chosen them for a particular task, and such a choosing brought higher standards for them to follow.

9 Ezekiel records how the LORD would regather Israel, not because they deserved it, but because God's reputation as trustworthy demanded it. Likewise in the LORD's Prayer is the chief concern with seeing the name of the LORD hallowed.

10 Paul's comments on circumcision can be easily applied to other religious groups. In many churches infant baptism carries much the same significance for entrance into the covenant community as did circumcision for the Jews. People grow up not living the faith. But with a false security that they were baptized as an infant. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

## 03.04. Justification

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Justification (Romans 3:21-31, Romans 4:1-25) II. Justification (cont.) (Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-11) B.1 Manifestation, or, the Universal Provision of Righteousness (Romans 3:21-26) “There is none righteous, no, not one.”

“ But now a righteousness from God ... has been made known.”

Up to this point the message of the book has been bleak and discouraging. The whole world is by nature corrupt and degenerate. “But now” in Romans 3:21 forms a great divide, introducing something totally new. The form is the intensive form of the adverb. It can be logical (“now as the argument stands”) or temporal (“now, in the present time”). This appears to be a case of designed ambiguity in Paul. He knew of the two meanings, and probably intended both of them to work here. The glorious news is that God has intervened. In the gospel of salvation through his Son he has provided a faith-righteousness that avails in his sight. Paul adds that the Law and the Prophets attest to this provision of righteousness. The simple fact is that a righteousness is available, and this righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (Romans 3:22).

Romans 3:23-24 provide the balance: all have sinned, and all are justified freely by His grace. The verbal expression “all have sinned” can be taken in one of two ways. One is to take the form as a constative aorist, meaning “all have committed acts of sin” referring to personal sins. The other way is to take it in conjunction with Romans 5:12 referring to Adam’s sin, thinking more of the unity of the race. The former seems preferable here, in view of the consequence of the sin—“and are coming short” of the glory of God. The falling short need not be equally short for all people; that is not important. The point is that all have missed it, whether by a little or a lot—it is fatal. But they are being justified as they believe. Justification is not a process; it means that God declares to be righteous whoever believes in Christ. The act of grace by which God pardons all the believer’s sins and accepts the believer as righteous because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is credited to the believer’s account—this wonderful act is known as justification by faith. Believers do not become righteous through faith—they are declared righteous by God. The stress of “freely by his grace” cannot be overlooked. Believers are justified “without a cause” or “for no reason”—it is a gift, or as Lenski says, “pure, abounding, astounding grace.” Our justification originates in the loving heart of God. This justification is through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. The noun here means a “ransoming away” with the idea of never again coming into the same bondage. The form of the word certainly harmonizes with other teachings on the certainty of salvation.<sup>3</sup> The price that Jesus paid for redemption was his outpoured blood (see 1 Peter 1:18-19)—he paid enough for the sins of the whole world so that faith-righteousness was secured forever. The way this redemption worked, according to Romans 3:25, is that God set Jesus forth as a propitiation. The term is *hilasterion*, a word that can function as a noun or an adjective. It is used in Hebrews 9:5 for the “mercy seat,”<sup>4</sup> the covering for the ark of the covenant known as the propitiatory, or place of atonement (the place where the High Priest would sprinkle the blood on the day of atonement). There it has the article on it for stress—Jesus is the mercy seat. But the context in

Romans sufficiently expresses the means of propitiation as the point (and this is the only place Paul uses the word). So the idea in Romans focuses on the act (but one can hardly ignore its connections to Israel's mercy seat where the blood was applied). There is some debate about the meaning of the word; but it seems to include both ideas of expiation (the removal of sin) and propitiation (the averting of wrath). Although there was the wrath of God against sin, it was also God in His love who took the initiative against it. So the Greek term captures both the idea of appeasement of God's wrath, and the expiation of sin. By this death there is satisfaction of God's justice and holiness. The holiness of God is preserved by the need for propitiation; the love of God is revealed by the provision.

According to the following verses God had several reasons for setting forth Jesus to be such a propitiation. (1) God wished to make known his righteousness. In the Old Testament age, that is before Christ died, sin was not finally or ultimately punished once and for all—it was only passed over. Old Testament believers were redeemed in the same way that we are—by grace through faith, based on the blood of Christ (who was slain before the foundation of the world). What they did not know was who was eventually going to pay for these sins, because the sacrifices of animals were repeated. But they knew they were forgiven because God told them they were (Leviticus 4:10; 2 Samuel 12:13; Psalms 32:1-11; Psalms 130:1-8, et al). Yet for the payment for these sins God passed over them until they could all be nailed to the cross in the death of the Messiah, the Son of God, once and for all. In Christ the justice of God is completely satisfied. (2) God also wished to make known his justice for us at the present time. And (3) God wished to harmonize his attribute (righteous) and his action (justifying). The only way that God could remain righteous and at the same time declare sinners righteous was for God to come in the flesh and die for the sins of the whole human race. Thus, the demands have been met; the sins have been paid for; the way is open for grace to be bestowed on all who believe.

C. Harmonization, or, Justification and the Purpose of the Law (Romans 3:27-31) Where then is boasting? It is excluded, shut out. Conduct and achievements cannot procure righteousness, for people are justified without the deeds of the Law. This is a blow to human pride. Nothing that a mere mortal can do will win for him or for her the righteousness needed to cover sin. The only way of appropriating it is through faith in the shed blood of Jesus. This is not a vague hoping against hope; and it is not a superstitious compliance with ritual. It is a specific believing in the person and work of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, relating especially to his atoning work upon the cross. Faith in his blood is what counts, the blood shed for the remission of sin (see Hebrews 9:22). The believer is pronounced righteous, received as righteous "by his blood" (Romans 5:9). Does this nullify the Law? On the contrary, Paul will show that he is establishing the Law (in its right use of revealing sin). Moreover, he will show that faith upholds the Law. If the Law is properly understood, believed, and obeyed, then the appeal for faith in a sacrificial atonement for sins exposed by the Law would be seen as the heart of the Law. What is new is that the Son of God himself becomes the propitiation. Therefore, anyone who lived under the Law and had faith in the LORD would transfer that faith to Jesus and his blood.

D. Illustration, or, Justification and the Old Testament (Romans 4:1-25) In this chapter Paul looks back to the Old Testament to show that it substantiated the concept that a person could be accepted by God apart from the Law. Recall how Paul affirmed that this truth was "testified to by the Law and the Prophets" in Romans 3:21. Well, this chapter is an explanation of these. The point

will be clear that it is faith in the LORD that brings this imputed (credited) righteousness that is available. Just as Israel's sacrifices were of no benefit to participants who had no faith, so the death of Jesus will be of no benefit to an unbeliever. The theme of believing, of faith, will now be illustrated from the Old Testament.

1. Abraham's example (Romans 4:1-4) The passage begins with the conversion of Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15:6. This experience of Abraham, of course, was prior to the Law of Moses by about 600 years. "Abraham believed in Yahweh, and he reckoned it to him, namely righteousness." That is the way I would translate the Hebrew of the passage cited here by Paul. The text has the dual emphasis of faith and grace, as Paul says elsewhere, "by grace you are saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Abraham believed the LORD, and went to do what the LORD had told him to do; and for this act of faith, God credited him—gave him—righteousness.

2. David's Writings (Romans 4:6-8) The point that Paul makes is that when someone works the wages are not a gift but an obligation; but for the one who trusts in the LORD who justifies the wicked faith is credited as righteousness. But then Paul adds that David says the "same thing." David's point in the cited psalm is much in agreement, but the method of joining the Scriptural citations is a clever rabbinical hermeneutic method known as *gezerah shawah*—they find passages where a key word is used and show the relation between the passages. The term "reckoned" is used in Genesis 15:6 as well as in Psalms 32:1-2. In the first case it says that God reckoned righteousness to Abraham who believed; in the latter passage the psalm says that God does not reckon sin against the one who is forgiven. By taking two passages that use the same word, Paul can weave the full argument about justification by faith. The doctrine of justification by faith goes beyond the mere accounting the sinner to be righteous. It includes the idea of forgiveness of sin, or the non-imputation (non reckoning) of sin. Sin involves both omission and commission; therefore, justification signifies that it is as if the person never sinned, and did everything right.

Please pardon a rather simple but I think useful illustration. The Hebrew word to "reckon" has been brought over into modern Hebrew for "computer," which is no surprise given the obvious link between "reckon, account, credit" and "computer." We could say, then, that it is as if God calls up our file on the heavenly computer, deletes all the sins that were registered against us, and enters into our account "the righteousness of Christ."

3. Faith alone justifies (Romans 4:9-12) But the Jew might respond that Abraham was circumcised (Genesis 17:1-27); so do ritual acts come into the picture? Paul answers, "Genesis 15:1-21 comes before Genesis 17:1-27"—a smashing blow against ritualists. In other words, Abraham's obedience in circumcision was not the ground of his justification. The patriarch was pronounced righteous before he was circumcised—on the basis of faith. True, the genuineness of his faith was seen in the fact that he followed the call of God and left Ur and went where God directed him. His subsequent circumcision was also an outward seal upon his inward, justifying faith. Faith obeys! But it is the faith that brings justification, not the obedient acts. Outward religious forms and observances, though absolutely necessary as the evidence of saving faith, are nonetheless secondary.

Circumcision was the seal of Abraham's faith. The expression "seal of circumcision" in Romans 4:11 probably means the "seal which is circumcision." Circumcision was the sign of the covenant

God made with Abraham. A “seal” authenticates and confirms what the covenant claims; and this seal also was symbolic, representing a repudiation of the flesh as it dramatically displayed. Over the generations from Abraham, the seal of circumcision marked out the people in their covenantal relationship, identifying the descendants of Abraham (ideally) as members of a covenant community.<sup>5</sup> The aim of circumcision for Abraham’s covenant was not only to identify him as the father of all who were born into the family, but also as the spiritual father of all who believed in the LORD as he did. From that point on the descendants of Abraham were to be known as the “seed of Abraham”; but this expression came to mean three different things: (1) physical descendants, or Israelites who do trace their line back to Abraham; (2) physical descendants or Israelites who also believed in the LORD as Abraham did—so these are the true or full seed of Abraham (see Galatians 3:1-29), and (3) true believers who are not physical descendants—Gentiles—for if they believe in the LORD they share the faith of Abraham. The Abrahamic Covenant with its sign of circumcision, then, pertained to believing Jews who followed the rite because they shared the faith; it did not pertain to unbelievers who simply performed the rite. The rite (of circumcision) without faith is dead ritual; faith without the rite brings salvation, just as faith with the rite does. Abraham is the spiritual father of those who believe, Gentiles who have not circumcised, and Jews who have. But the deciding factor is faith. Jews cannot assume because they are descended from Abraham, or because they were circumcised, that that is sufficient. Neither can Gentiles who have become members of the Church and who have been baptized consider that sufficient to salvation. There must be genuine faith, or there is no salvation at all.

Today, believing Jews are part of the New Covenant, just as believing Gentiles are. And the name for the present body of believers, Jew and Gentile, is the “Church.” But the apostle still makes a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, for there is still a benefit for the Jews who are the natural and spiritual descendants of Abraham (as we shall see later in the book).

4. The promise comes by faith (Romans 4:13-25) The promises of God are contingent on faith and not dependent on obedience to the Law. Who could attain them by doing the Law? The great promise for Abraham was that he and his descendants would be “heirs of the world”—meaning all the families, the nations of the world. After all, he was the father of nations, and the one through whom blessings would come to all the families of the earth. But for this promise to be valid it must be a promise from God, by grace; it is not an earned estate. The simple contrast is between the human view of things and God’s view:

Human view (true): faith (means) + grace (basis) = sure promise  
Human view (false): works (means) + law (basis) > [wrath] ends up here unexpectedly  
Divine View: sure promise < (based on) grace (alone) + (through) faith

God made the promise to Abraham before the Law was given, the promise that there would be blessing for all the families of the earth. God desired to assure that the promise was on the basis of grace, and the only way that this could work is that the means be by faith and not works. Here is another tremendous support for the doctrine of eternal security if you think it through. The promise precedes the Law; grace precedes faith. Our security begins and ends with God, and is not based upon works.

Abraham believed in the LORD. Or, as Romans 4:18 says, “contrary to hope (in man), in hope (in God) he believed.” All that Abraham did was believe a promise from God—and we know he

believed the promise because he went to the land God told him to enter to receive it.<sup>6</sup> In the Old Testament faith was in the Word of the LORD, what God had said. But in essence the faith of Abraham is the same as the faith we have today—we just have more content. Abraham’s faith was a resurrection-type faith—he believed the promises of a God who could infuse life into a dead body, a God who calls things that are not as though they are.<sup>7</sup> The promise to Abraham of a seed like the stars of the heavens has in the New Testament been first fulfilled<sup>8</sup> in Jesus—the promised Seed, an unexpected birth, life out of death through resurrection. It is essentially the same faith. And so Paul finishes Romans 4:1-25 by noting how the words of imputed righteousness were written for us too—who like Abraham believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. This is the kind of faith that brings imputed righteousness, a faith that does not stagger over the power of God to bring life out of death, to fulfill the promises. It is a faith that believes that with God all things are possible, especially our eternal salvation, because it is based on the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, like Abraham, we may struggle at times with understanding it, living up to it, demonstrating it in a consistent life of faith—but we will follow no other way. The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ brings us salvation, not works, and not ritual like circumcision, or in our churches, baptism or the Lord’s Supper. These are not to be minimized; but they themselves do not bring salvation. The death of Christ does. And so on this point Romans 4:25 calls for a closer look. The text says, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” The preposition *dia*, translated “for” in the above translation, is open to several interpretations. (1) The first view is that it is used two ways here: he was delivered because of [retrospectively] ... and raised with a view to [prospectively]. The point in this interpretation would be that the result of his resurrection is our justification (as in the hymn, “rising he justified”). The difficulty is that one would expect the same preposition in parallel clauses to have the same meaning and not to be translated differently.

(2) And so a second view is to take them both prospectively (following Denney): he was delivered over “with a view to” making atonement for sins. This is satisfactory as far as the grammar goes, but misses the theological point that justification is an accomplished fact.

(3) The better view is to take them both retrospectively; they would normally be translated “on account of” or “because of.” The verse would then say that Jesus was delivered over to death because of our sins, and was raised because of our justification. The point then is clear: the fact of our justification made necessary the resurrection. Justification is accomplished in the death of Jesus Christ; resurrection is the necessary issue of an accomplished atonement. The resurrection is God’s receipt—it is the Father’s, “Amen,” to Jesus’, “It is finished.” It is heaven’s acceptance of the death of Christ. Without the resurrection from the dead, there is no indication that the death was atoning and justifying. But with the resurrection from the dead, everything that Christ claimed to be doing in His death—including justify sinners who believe—has been accomplished.

Things to Consider 1. How would you explain these significant terms: justification, redemption, propitiation, expiation?

2. What do you think Abraham actually believed when the text says he believed in the LORD? Describe the content of his faith. What exactly does someone today have to believe to be saved (now that we have more revelation)?

3. What is imputed righteousness?

4. What is the relationship between the reality of the covenant relationship and the sign of the covenant? How did this work out in history when people received the sign before the reality?

5. How does the Father in heaven confirm that Jesus' death was indeed efficacious—i.e., that it did redeem people from their sins?

1 Note: Section "A" was the last lesson; this is not section "B" under the main heading that began the last lesson.

2 The present is durative or iterative in force, the actions, complete in themselves, continue.

3 Some folks do not like to talk about "eternal security" because it smacks of easy believism. But the fact of Scripture is that those who truly believe in the Lord are secure eternally because of the work of Christ. Our salvation is not made secure because we are able to hold on to it, but because he is able to hold us by his grace.

4 The translation "mercy seat" goes back at least to Wycliffe. In the Old Testament it is called "a place of propitiation" and refers to the lid on the box, the ark of the covenant. The ark is described in the Old Testament as God's "footstool" (Psalms 132:1-18), so he sits enthroned above it, not on it (according to the imagery of the sanctuary).

5 The sign was, of course, for men; but in those patriarchal days such a sign for men was a sign for the whole tribe because it was at the heart of procreation.

6 Be careful with the modern rhetoric that is often added to the call for faith. Abram did not "yield himself to the LORD 100%"; he believed in the LORD. If we had to yield 100% in order to be saved, none of us would make it.

7 He and Sarah knew that her body was dead as far as having children was concerned, but he brought life out of that womb--Isaac. And Abraham knew that if he sacrificed Isaac to God (Genesis 22:1-24), God was able to fulfill the promises through Isaac anyway.

8 This means it finds its fullest meaning in the birth of the special seed. The basic meaning is that there will be innumerable descendents; but for the blessing to extend to the whole world that seed had to be significant--and Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the Son of God--he was and is most significant.

## 03.05. Exultation

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Exultation (Romans 5:1-21, Romans 6:1-23) Fourth Bible Class (Romans 5:1-21, Romans 6:1-23)  
II. Justification (cont.) (Exultation Exultation Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-11) E. Exultation, or, the Certainty of Salvation (Romans 5:1-11)

Romans 5:1-11 is often treated as a survey of the results of justification by faith. While it is certainly possible to use the material that way, one must be sure not to ignore the main point of the passage. The theme of these eleven verses is the certainty of salvation that we have in Jesus Christ our Lord.

### 1. Peace with God

Romans 5:1 begins the theme: “since we have been justified through faith we have<sup>1</sup> peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The alienation between God and mankind is gone; the natural hostility of the human heart is gone; the sin which separated us from God has been paid for by Christ. The sinner, once at enmity with God with no hope of recovery, is now united with the Father through the justifying work of the Son. To be at peace with God Almighty, in spite of our sinfulness, is one of the glories of saving faith. This is the peace that our Lord Jesus Christ promised, a peace that passes all understanding. It can only come when the sinner is changed, that is, through genuine forgiveness. “Peace” carries with it more than the idea of the absence of hostility or enmity; it encompasses the ideas of wholeness and well-being. It is what allows for Paul to describe believers as a new creation.

### 2. Access to God

Romans 5:2 tells us that because of the grace of our Lord there is now open to us a realm of privileged access. Paul says that we have gained access by faith into his grace in which “we have now taken our stand.” Here is the certainty of access due to the confidence of faith. This faith will not crumble in the face of adversity because it is strong enough to handle afflictions. In fact, Paul says tribulation will strengthen faith. Believers have learned that suffering produces perseverance, because the suffering of Jesus into which they have entered by faith guarantees security.

### 3. Confident Hope

Paul says that we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. The hope that Christians have is based on two facts: (1) God has given us the Holy Spirit, and by the Spirit he has shed abroad in our hearts the love of Christ (Romans 5:5) which engenders and radiates hope; and (2) the Christian experience proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that God, who was willing to send his beloved Son to the cross for our sins, remains faithful forever (Romans 5:2-5).

### 4. God’s Love for us in Christ

Romans 5:6-8 present the great comforting news of the Gospel, that God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Paul explains that rarely will

someone die for another, even a righteous person—but Christ died for the ungodly, for all of us. Our justification is based on the love of God through the death of Christ on our behalf, and not on any merit we might claim. And since all have sinned, as Paul so eloquently discussed, our only hope is faith in the shed blood of Christ. No good works are possible for salvation; our salvation is accomplished because Christ died for sinners. The security we have in the faith is not in ourselves, but in the love of God manifested in Christ. There will be a necessary and important place for good works—but not for the purpose of achieving salvation.

5. Justified—Saved—Reconciled The climax of this section comes in the message of Romans 5:9-11. Paul begins with a rabbinic argument (called *qal wahomer*—if this is true, how much more ...). Since we have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him. We are introduced here to the present ministry of the ascended Christ, which by the argument mentioned above is less difficult than the initial act of justifying people. Here are the implications in his argument: (1) it takes more to do something for an enemy than for a friend; since we are now friends, God will do even more for us; (2) it took more to reconcile us to himself than it does to keep us; (3) it took more for God to give his Son in death than for us to share in his life. If God can deliver us from the penalty of sin (justification, the harder work), then will he not also deliver us from the presence and the power of sin—that is, keep us safe and secure. So because we have been justified, we may have confidence that he will deliver/save us from the wrath to come. Or, he who has begun a good work in us will complete it in glory. Romans 5:10 uses another *qal wahomer* argument—if we have been reconciled through his death, “how much more” shall we be saved through his life. He now lives to complete our salvation. In fact, Paul is emphatic about the joy and confidence that we have through Christ: We shall be delivered from the presence of sin, and be brought into God's holy presence, glorying in God. The attitude of the redeemed is triumphant, joyful, happy, boastful in God. This will be the attitude of all believers in the future when their salvation is complete. That he is here talking about the future complete stage of salvation is clear from his contrast with the mention of “now” in Romans 5:11—we now have reconciliation, but in the future we are guaranteed complete salvation.

“Reconciliation” is a key idea in the discussion. The term describes the union in peace of individuals who were formerly hostile. It is not only a change of attitude, but a change of position as well. All enmity and antagonism is gone because we have been changed, we have been reconciled to God.<sup>3</sup> So we have in Romans 5:1 and Romans 5:11 the key ideas of peace with God through justification (Romans 5:1) and reconciliation (Romans 5:11). They are inseparable doctrines. Justification touches our sinful nature and changes our position, our standing before God; reconciliation touches our deepest attitude toward God—it is the intimate side of the relationship.

III. Life in Christ, or Union With and Ultimate Conformation to the Righteous One (Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39) A. The Reign of Sin and the Reign of Grace (Romans 5:12-21)

We now come to a long section of the book about life in Christ, running from Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39. The study can break this section up into its smaller parts and focus on each one of them; but in this survey of the message of the book I shall take the material in larger sections (but breaking down the material into those smaller sections).

The doctrine of justification by faith is vast in its dimensions. It is not bound by national or racial interests. It concerns the entire human race. Paul divides all of humanity into two groups, two creations. A remarkable parallel but an absolute contrast characterizes these groups. Each has its own federal head, cohesive principle and ultimate destiny—the lost and the saved, those who are not in Christ and those who are. In the human race the descendants of Adam die in sin; in the new creation, those who are born into the family of the second Adam, live. The main idea that Paul is trying to get across in these verses is that there is a likeness between the first Adam and the Last. Sin has affected the whole race because of the first Adam; so the act of the Last Adam has formed a great group who are related to him by faith. The “Therefore” of Romans 5:12 is more than a loose connection; it looks back to the whole section of Romans 1:18-32, Romans 2:1-29, Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-11, or salvation through Christ Jesus. Because we have this salvation through one man, Paul will argue, there exists this likeness or comparison between the two Adams. Elsewhere he says, “For as all died in Adam, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

### 1. Death through the First Adam

Paul announces that sin “entered” the world through one man. He never tells us how sin originated. But his verb “entered” implies that sin existed before Adam. It did not begin with Adam; it merely entered the world of the human race. This sin then passed on or through the whole race (spreading out, diffusing), because “all sinned.”

What does Paul mean when he declares “all sinned.” There are three major views on this. (1) Pelagians refer this to personal sin (a view that Denney takes also), but this is not likely for several reasons. First, it is contrary to fact, because, for example, if infants do not reach the age of accountability, why then should they die? Second, Romans 5:14 would be unnecessary—they die because of Adam’s sin—Romans 5:14 would contradict the view. Third, time and time again (five times in the passage) condemnation and death are due to the one sin of the one man. A second view of “all sinned” is to interpret it to mean that all are corrupt. This would be mediate imputation; or, as Murray would say of original sin, the sin which Adam sinned and infected us. But there are difficulties with this view.<sup>4</sup> First, Paul keeps saying that it is because of one man. He does not indicate that he means a corrupt nature. Second, to suffer death because we are sinful does not fit the analogy that is expressed here; it would have to then reason that we are righteous because we have been given the righteousness of Christ.

It seems to me that the stronger view is the Reformed view of federal headship. Adam’s act implicated the whole human race. It is the sin of Adam that is responsible for death in the race; so it is the obedience of Christ that brings life to those related to him. First, in Romans 5:12 death passed upon all because all sinned. Second, in Romans 5:13 death is on all because of the sin of one. So there is a singularity as well as a plurality. One acts for the all, but the all sin; and they sin because of the one.

Augustine’s view is more precise than Federal Headship. We were seminally (semen=seed) in Adam, physically, when he sinned. So his act was our act. The analogy for this is Hebrews 7:9-10; but he does qualify this with “so to speak.” He felt the argument based on that alone was really weak. He based the argument on a psalm. We might say that we sinned in Adam because we were in his loins; but we cannot say the antithesis of Christ—we are not righteous because we

were in Christ when he died. So this probably forces the wording too much.

Some might protest that it is not fair that they should die because of the sin of Adam. It should be pointed out at the outset that what Adam has done does not have to affect anyone's eternal lot—just believe in Jesus Christ and there is no condemnation. The act of Adam is not the final determinant of our destiny. Paul is merely telling us how sin arose in the human race, and because it happened at the beginning, it is universal—all sinned. It is like saying the first man was contaminated with radiation poisoning, and that remains with all his descendants.<sup>5</sup> Fair or not, it is the reality of life that the human race has been contaminated with sin, and death is the result of sin. Only Christ has provided the way out of sin and death; apart from that, one must experience sin and death whether it is a pleasant idea or not.

Today we hear a lot of this, that life is not fair, that it is not fair that we were born this way or that, with this nature or that, and so God should accept us with our preferences and acts because it is not our fault. God's answer to that is that we all share a fallen nature—we were born with the desire to sin and rebel against God—and so we must be born again. People do what they want, and it is dishonest and self-centered to claim that since they were born that way God should accept them that way. No. We all must be born again into the family of God, or we will die in our sins. We all are born with traits and characteristics, and at times inherited diseases—you cannot ignore the fact that we share the nature of the ancestors, and that goes back to Adam. From the very began the race is contaminated, lives in rebellion by nature, and dies as a result. Blaming Adam, or parents, or human nature, will accomplish nothing. The new birth is designed to change our nature, and our destiny.

Paul further explains that Adam's sin was there before the Law came in. Since there was no Law, there was no reckoning of the sin except for the fact that death was the evidence. Why did death reign? Because of Adam. Paul explains that in this Adam is a type, an example, an illustration of a corresponding reality. One sinful act affected the whole race; and this is a parallel to the Last Adam, for his one obedient act has affected a great number—the redeemed, over whom the death Adam began has no power.

2. Life through the Last Adam The rest of Romans 5:1-21 will focus on this obedience of Christ. Jesus' righteousness is in contrast to Adam's disobedience. His obedience unto death brought justification and life to believers. Grace now reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21). As Adam's sin was imputed to humanity and issued in death, so Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers and issues into their eternal life. The parallels between Christ and Adam are numerous in the writings of the New Testament. To Paul Christ is the beginning of the new creation, for everything that Adam wrought through sin, the curse and death, Christ reverses by becoming the curse and tasting death for everyone. The Law revealed the depths of sin and showed just how righteous one had to be to fellowship with the LORD. But grace increased all the more, for what the Law demanded the LORD provided through sacrificial atonement. The Law, Paul will say in Galatians, was to bring us to Christ. Or, to put it another way, now that Christ has come we can see that God intended the Law to awaken our need for forgiveness through his grace. But the Law also prophesied through types and symbols that atonement would be provided for people so that the Law would not condemn them.

B. The New Relationship in Life (Romans 6:1-14)

Romans 6:1 and Romans 6:15 form structural markers in this chapter: “What shall we say, then?” and “What then, shall we sin... ?” The first question (Romans 6:1) is linked to the argument of Romans 5:1-21. In Romans 5:21-22 Paul affirmed that the Law came alongside, and that where sin increased grace superabounded. The Law had a secondary force for Israel—it came in that sin might abound (meaning it exposed more sin), but grace increased all the more. So the basis of the question in verse 1 (“Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound?”) is the superabounding of gracious provisions. But the answer was already there in Romans 5:21—“through righteousness.” Grace reigns through righteousness, not through abundance of sin. Often we stress that God is a God who forgives; but we do not stress the means of that forgiveness. We imply that God is a little soft, that he is not true to the standards, or if we approach him just right he will forgive—all this manipulates and minimizes God. But grace reigns through righteousness. We have the right to stand before God; his holiness is not impugned by our presence. But does this open up antinomianism (living against the Law)? God forbid is Paul’s answer.

It is worth noting that if you are in ministry and your teaching or preaching does not produce or provoke the same question as is in 6:1, then you are not preaching the Gospel accurately. If people respond to you, as Paul imagines his audience will ask this question, then they have understood what grace means.

But, having said that, you will also have to deal with the question as Paul did. There is a threefold answer: (1) Paul makes a direct dismissal of the idea as a blasphemous thought. Many such questions can only be answered in this way. If the question is against what we know to be true, it is wrong and therefore needs no reason why. (2) Paul adds a statement of the believer’s death to sin (Romans 6:2). And (3) Paul proves that we are in the risen Christ by identification with him, and therefore separated from the dead life. Thus, true faith that responds to grace leads to righteousness and not greater sin. If a person says, “I want to be a Christian,” but refuses to get rid of sin or change a sinful nature, and tries to reason that God’s grace will cover whatever is done, that person has not understood the grace of God. The grace of God is God’s provision of taking care of sin in Christ, so that its effects will not continue in the life of the believer, and so that sin will no longer reign in the human heart. A true believer will come to the point of saying “The way I have been living is wrong, and I want to change.” So up to this point Paul has been discussing justification by faith. Now he has begun a consideration of the believer’s sanctification. Here he is concerned with how a justified saint can live to God’s glory. Jesus came into the world not only to deliver people from the guilt and the penalty of sin, but also to bring them victory over the daily, hourly power of sin.

1. The believer was identified with Christ in death.

Notice the cumulative effect: “dead to sin” (Romans 6:2), “baptized into his death” (Romans 6:3), “buried with him by baptism into death” (Romans 6:4), “planted with him in the likeness of his death” (Romans 6:5), and “our old man is crucified with him” (Romans 6:6).

What does Paul mean when he talks about being baptized in the likeness of his death. What kind of baptism is this? The word “baptism” is a difficult one to define in all its nuances. The background of the word refers to the ritual with water whereby someone is immersed (in the first century by self-immersion in a ritual bath with an authority figure witnessing it [but not touching the person]), either as a purification ritual, or an initiation rite. But it can be used in the Bible to mean

identification with something, such as judgment (a baptism by fire), or regeneration (a baptism by the Holy Spirit). So what kind of baptism does Paul mean here?

(1) One view is that it could be water baptism. In support of this we have the common use of the word baptism, as well as the truths that the rite sets forth, death, burial, and resurrection. Moreover, Romans 6:3 sounds as if not all the readers had been baptized (“as many as are”), whereas all believers have been baptized by the Spirit (according to 1 Corinthians 12:13). And so according to Romans 6:5 we have been united with him in the likeness of his death. His death was physical and representative; our death in Christ is spiritual and judicial. There is a likeness, but both are real.

(2) The other view is that it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Paul has in mind. Water is in the picture when we talk of baptism; but water is the physical representation of the spiritual reality. For example, when John baptized Jesus, it was an actual act using water. But that act inaugurated Jesus’ ministry which was to lead to the suffering at the cross. John’s baptism prepared the way for the death of Christ. So when people respond to the preaching of the Gospel and want to be baptized, the water baptism is a testimony of the spiritual reality, that is, Spirit baptism. If they have come to faith in Christ, they have already been “united with” Christ (baptized) by the Spirit; the ritual now becomes the sign (as circumcision was in the Old Covenant with Abraham). The point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is clear: all believers have been baptized by the Spirit into one body, the Church.<sup>6</sup> There could be no regeneration (new birth) without the Holy Spirit. So the idea of the term “baptism” is that of “identification with” Christ.

There is a mystical union between the believer and his Lord. If anyone is “in Christ” by faith, that person has “died” in Christ. When God the Father beholds the cross of Calvary, he sees the Savior dying for our sins; but he also sees the believer dying in Christ unto sin. Our sins were placed on Christ; but we were in him in an identifying union. His death for sin was our death to sin. Our burial with him is a spiritual fact which demonstrates the reality of our death to sin (see Galatians 2:20). This language is hard for many to understand, but it has to be grasped as spiritual language to describe what saving faith means. If I truly believe in Christ (not just believe things about him), then I am identifying myself, my life, my destiny with him. When I accept Christ as my Savior, then I am receiving by faith the salvation that he purchased for me on the cross. And if that faith is saving faith, I am so identified with Christ, I am so committed to Christ, that it will change my life to be like his. And the basis for the change is in my identification by faith with his death on the cross. So Paul can say it is as if we died on the cross, and were buried, and rose to a new life—if we have the kind of faith that places our whole life in him.

Perhaps an illustration of this will help. In the Old Testament the Israelite brought an animal to sacrifice on his behalf. He placed his hand on the head as the throat was slit, and the animal would die at his hands and crumple lifeless to the ground. By laying his hands on the animal, the worshiper was identifying with the animal to be slain; and when the animal died, the believer knew that that should be his blood spilled, and that should be his body on the ground. But God in his grace allowed a substitute, an animal for the sinner. For all spiritual purposes, he died with and in that animal. That truth would have a profound impact on the way the believer lived in the future, knowing that only by God’s grace could he walk away from judgment of the burning altar. So too the believer today knows that faith in Christ is that kind of identification. The Christian faith is not a

nice little philosophy of life, or some moral teachings to live by; it is salvation through the death of Christ—a salvation that not only delivers us from the judgment of God, but also changes the way we live today. How can we cling to a sinful life-style when we have so identified with Christ who was slain on our behalf for that life-style that God declared sinful. To express how it should change us, Paul speaks symbolically about our dying with Christ.

2. The believer was identified with Christ in resurrection. A parallel passage to these verses (Romans 6:4 b; Romans 6:5 b; and Romans 6:8 b) is Colossians 3:1, “If you then are risen with Christ ... .” By identifying with Christ in faith the believer not only died to sin but has been raised to a new life. Here again we seem to have a positional truth that if believed could be influential; but it is much more than that. With regeneration a divine operation takes place that brings enormous changes. With faith in Jesus Christ the believer receives the Holy Spirit, that is, a new life in Christ. So the idea of being raised with Christ focuses on a divine provision that enables the believer to live on a higher plane, to walk in the newness of life. Ultimately, death and sin can have no power. Paul carries his symbolic wording then to the resurrection—Christ did not just die, he rose again and lives forever; and we who died in Christ by faith, now have risen to a new life, the spiritual life, which is eternal. We cannot go back to the old ways if we have risen to a new life.

3. The believer must live by faith.

How are we to realize this change in our life? By faith. Paul calls for the believer to reckon these truths to be fact. To live by faith means that believers must count their identification with the Lord to be true and to act upon that reality. That is the way genuine faith works (Abraham believed in the LORD, and so he acted on what God had promised and left for the promised land).

Temptation will knock. Sin has by no means been eradicated; it is a constant threat. But the Spirit will give the enablement to overcome the old nature and the old practices. But the believer must act like a resurrected child of God. So we have here a call for faith. This is consistent in Paul's theology: we have been justified by faith, and so we also shall be sanctified through faith. A saint can commit sin; but a saint cannot live in sin, not without the conviction that comes from the Spirit. Believers are to reckon<sup>7</sup> that they died in Christ and therefore will live in obedience to Him. If we really want the power it is available; it is Christ working through us. But it has to be accepted by faith. But there is a positive side to this act of faith. Not only do we reckon ourselves dead to sin and therefore not yield to living as slaves to sin, but also we must yield ourselves to God, as instruments of righteousness. We must commit our bodily members up to the Lord as instruments of righteousness. We must keep our lives yielded if we want daily victory, for this is the secret of spiritual victory. So there is an initial dedication or yielding to God (as Romans 12:1-2 will remind us), then a daily discipline, a daily vigilance, to live as a servant of righteousness under grace and not become a slave of sin. Spiritual identification with Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit will be the means of doing this—if we take it by faith and live as justified believers. The crucifixion of the old nature leads to the yielded person; just as salvation leads to works of faith.

C. The New Principle in Life (Romans 6:15-23) The new principle is servitude to righteousness. Once we were servants of sin simply doing what our flesh, our human nature, called for (Romans 6:16, Romans 6:20)—and our wages were death (Romans 6:23). Then Christ freed us from the tyranny of sin (Romans 6:18, Romans 6:22) and we were emancipated. We are a new creation, born again, and with the Spirit have a new nature; we are now servants of God (Romans 6:22).

This is our new position. A gift, eternal life, has replaced the wages of sin. We must realize our liberty and enter into the glorious possibilities it affords. We may not always be successful—that is why we have an advocate!—but the evidence of saving faith is the willingness and the desire and the conviction to live differently, and the gradual progress towards righteousness.

Paul begins this section by raising a second question in the minds of some—are we free to sin? The first question in the chapter (Romans 6:1) was “Shall we continue to sin?” Here it is simply “Shall we sin?” The question arises out of our position under grace, not salvation by grace. The form of the verb used looks to an isolated sin: “Shall we sin ... ?” So, it is not possible to continue in sin, but is it possible to engage in sin now and then without condemnation? Paul’s answer to this is along the same lines as the previous question. First, God forbid! It is unthinkable that someone living under grace would plan such a thing and hope to justify it. Second, we have become slaves to righteousness. Paul then appeals to laws of moral living. If a man sins he becomes the slave to sin, for sin is enslaving. Not only does sin control the person, it leads to death and destruction (and our understanding of all kinds of addictions makes us painfully aware of this). But now that we have become believers in Jesus Christ, we become obedient to do works of righteousness; and the reward is holiness and eternal life. But if we are to be servants of righteousness, we will have to learn what the master wants us to do, for the old nature is still present letting us know what it desires us to do (more of this later).

It seems strange to cap this argument off with what seems to be a Gospel text: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The way we quote this verse suggests that the verse does not seem to belong here, but back in the section on justification and salvation. However, a closer look at its meaning will show why it is here. The term translated “wages” is *opsonia*; it is a military word for soldiers’ daily rations. Roman soldiers lived largely on the booty taken in captured cities as well as a small wage. They subsisted on *salarium* (salt) and *opsonia* (fish), but made their money from booty. These rations were given out each and every day. What Paul is saying is that a little bit of death, a little bit of separation from God, is measured out to you when you sin. The more that you sin, the more you open yourself to sin, and the farther you get from God spiritually. The second sin is easier—that is the way enslavement works. It pays day by day with anxieties, troubles; a little bit of death is paid when you sin. At the time of sin there is a definite feeling of difference and separation from God, of guilty fears that come in. The true believer will be convicted of such spiritual alienation, knowing that sin leads to destruction. The principle of faith brings eternal life. This gift has replaced the grim wages of sin. As we yield ourselves to be servants of God and slaves of righteousness, we will realize our liberty in Christ, and experience the healthy, enduring life that grace inspires. It is the outworking of the spiritual, and eternal life. I shall come back to this procedure when we look closely at Romans 12:1-21, for that is where it is laid out—dedication, yielding, being transformed, renewing. But at this point Paul is simply introducing the theme that identification with Christ by faith sets us free from enslavement to sin because we have a new principle of life within, thanks in chief measure to the presence of the Holy Spirit. But sin goes the other way entirely, gradually enslaving people and separating them from life.

Things to Consider

1. Can you think of earthly examples, personal or otherwise, of reconciliation? How exactly was the reconciliation accomplished that has established our peace with God. You may wish to read again Isaiah 53:4-6.
2. On what basis do we have peace with God? On what basis do we have access to His grace? On what basis do we have confident hope of glory? On what basis do we enjoy the love of God? On what basis have we been given the Holy Spirit? So then, on what does our salvation hang?
3. What does it mean that sin entered the world through one man? Give some thought to the practical implications of this—the effects of sin such as sickness and death, the propensity to sin through a fallen nature, the alienation of the race from God. How did that come about through the fall of Adam and Eve? Or, more specifically, how is the sin nature passed on? And if someone claims to be born with a certain nature or propensity to live in violation of God's laws, then is that a legitimate option instead of righteousness?
4. What prevents a believer from living loose and free in sin throughout his or her life? What very specifically is bound up in being identified with first the death and then the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
5. Since we are justified by faith, we are also being sanctified by faith. How does faith work in ordering our lives correctly to be servants of God? That is, what do we believe, and how does it work itself out in our decisions day by day?

There is a textual problem on the verbal form here; the choice is between the indicative (“we have peace”) and the subjunctive (“let us have peace”). There is a good deal of support for the reading with the subjunctive. The exhortation in that sense would then be to live in the reality of life that Christ has obtained for us through his death on the cross. The Bible certainly teaches that we have peace with God through his blood, and so a subjective mood reading here would not contradict that, only call for its implementation. But because that is the clear teaching of the Bible, most translations have retained “we have peace with God.” The fact that Paul had to declare this truth would suggest that many in the church had not fully appreciated it or implemented it in their lives any way. The Bible often uses the word “boast” in a good sense, that is, boasting in the LORD, which is equal to praise. Boasting in oneself, or bragging, is a different matter.

Although it is popular to sing about or describe God as reconciled, Paul's use of the word indicates that it is we, the sinners, who have been reconciled to God. He needed no change. As long as people remember that, they will keep this doctrine clear in their minds. This is not to say that the doctrine of original sin is in question; the issue is what Paul meant in this passage.

You can see that if one denies the historicity of Adam, or of the account of the Fall, then there is great difficulty with most doctrines being presented in this book.

Common usage of the expression “baptism of the Spirit” does not fit the way Paul uses the expression. Every true believer has already been baptized by the Spirit. However, at some subsequent time they may yield their lives in a renewed commitment, they may be filled with the Spirit, they may learn what it means to walk by the Spirit, and they might find their spiritual gifts—all of which could be experienced with changes in worship, power in prayer, and possibly supernatural signs and wonders. Whatever those changes are called, they are not the baptism of

the Spirit. In the Book of Acts, a transition book in many ways, supernatural experiences accompanied the giving of the Spirit to new groups. But once the Church is established, the epistles explain what the norm will be. This word “reckon” has also been used for God’s reckoning us as righteousness. Because we believed in him, he treats us as if we were righteous. Thus, if we reckon these truths to be true, then we must live in that understanding.

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4 This is not to say that the doctrine of original sin is in question; the issue is what Paul meant in this passage.

5 You can see that if one denies the historicity of Adam, or of the account of the Fall, then there is great difficulty with most doctrines being presented in this book.

6 Common usage of the expression “baptism of the Spirit” does not fit the way Paul uses the expression. Every true believer has already been baptized by the Spirit. However, at some subsequent time they may yield their lives in a renewed commitment, they may be filled with the Spirit, they may learn what it means to walk by the Spirit, and they might find their spiritual gifts--all of which could be experienced with changes in worship, power in prayer, and possibly supernatural signs and wonders. Whatever those changes are called, they are not the baptism of the Spirit. In the Book of Acts, a transition book in many ways, supernatural experiences accompanied the giving of the Spirit to new groups. But once the Church is established, the epistles explain what the norm will be.

7 This word “reckon” has also been used for God’s reckoning us as righteousness. Because we believed in him, he treats us as if we were righteous. Thus, if we reckon these truths to be true, then we must live in that understanding.

## 03.06. The New Freedom in Life

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### The New Freedom in Life (Romans 7:1-25) The Fifth Bible Class

(Romans 7:1-25) III. Life in Christ (cont.) (Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39) D. The New Freedom in Life (Romans 7:1-25) The crux of the matter therefore is our new position in Christ Jesus our Lord. Position invariably determines practice. Our position in our Savior enables us to experience daily victory over sin through constantly yielding to the Holy Spirit for obedience to God's will. But the spiritual life will be a struggle, as Romans 7:1-25 clearly teaches.

1. An Illustration from Marriage (Romans 7:1-6) The first paragraph of the chapter reiterates by illustration the statement "You are not under Law but under grace." It actually begins, "Or" (if you question the statement, "you are not under Law"). In the illustration Paul talks about a married woman who is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If he dies, she is free to marry someone else without the Law condemning her.

It is possible to take this little illustration to be saying that the woman represents Christians who leave the Law and follow Christ when the Law is done away. That is possible, but not probable. More likely Paul is underscoring his teaching that the husband who dies represents the old "man" (as it has come to be called), the old sinful nature, as looked at under the Law (see Romans 6:6 where the old man was crucified and is to be reckoned dead). The old nature is related to Adam. The wife represents our inner being that survives the changes, for at salvation there is a dramatic change that makes us new creations. But we are still the same persons. We were converted, we were regenerated; but the old person has not been eradicated, not til glory—survives the changes that take place at salvation. And according to Galatians 2:20, Paul reasons that if we no longer live, but Christ lives in us, then there must be a survival of the old nature to warrant such a teaching. His point is that there is such a change that I now reckon that I no longer live. Paul will go on to explain in Galatians that there is a struggle between the flesh (our nature) and the Spirit. It will take lifetime of growth to develop habits of victory over our inclinations.

There is a good deal of false teaching today that our nature represents the way that God made us, and therefore the Church should condone and bless it. This can be used to cover sexual variations or simple personality quirks. No—salvation means we are born again, we get a new nature, and that new nature will change the way we live. The application is then found in Romans 7:4-6. "So then," Paul says, it is as if we were once married to sin, producing the fruit of death. But Christ died for our sins! The prerequisite to a change of marital status is invariably death (Romans 7:2). So his death ended our marriage. That is, in Christ we died to the Law and now belong to another, one who was resurrected—the Lord Jesus. The language is, of course, figurative, since we did not actually die—but a way of life, a nature, a pattern of sin, came to an end, or at least was supposed to have come to an end, or begun to come to an end. Something had to change. Here is the reiteration of the theme: we have been crucified in Christ, that we might have new life in him, in order to bring forth fruit. This new union results in fruit (righteous acts produced by the new nature)

unto God. So the believer must realize this new relationship in Christ and implement it by faith to bring glory to the Lord. Paul affirms at the end of the section that we have been released from the Law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit.

## 2. The Law of God (Romans 7:7-12)

If the believer has died to sin, and if the believer has died to the Law, one might think that the Law and sin are in the same category, or that the Law is sin. But Paul in no way is saying this. He confirms in Romans 7:12 that the Law is holy, just and good. Mirroring as it does the nature and will of God, the Law is to be highly esteemed. What the Law revealed was the will of God; the regulations for Israel to implement the Law have been concluded in Christ, but the revelation is eternal.

One of the main purposes of the Law is that it reveals sin. The commandment “You shall not covet” not only reveals the sad fact that people covet, but it also draws out of our nature the desire to covet. The old principle that ‘concentrating on the prohibitions excites interest in them’ is sadly true. That is the point of Romans 7:8—sin seized the opportunity to produce covetous desires. Sin nature did this; the Law never caused anyone to sin. The Law simply revealed sin and made people realize they were sinners who deserved nothing but death. So while the Law is holy, just and good, sin deceives us and turns what was also a guide for righteousness into a messenger of death. It is the Law that brings the recognition and conviction of sin. But a rebellious person can use it for occasion to sin; that is how corrupt and corrupting the human nature is. How else can we explain that while Moses was on the mountain receiving the rest of the Law, the people were down below violating the first commandment by building a golden calf, and designating it as the god who brought them out of Egypt. There is a human nature that seizes every opportunity to rebel against God’s Law, and rationalize it in some way. The Law reveals that this is sin.

## 3. The Struggle with Sin (Romans 7:13-25)

There are a couple of questions that must be addressed in studying the rest of Romans 7:1-25. First, is Paul drawing on his own experiences, or is he speaking autobiographically for the sake of teaching? They seem to be his experiences, but they are representative of all other people as well. This is a shared struggle.

Second, does the material deal with a saved or an unsaved person? In other words, is the struggle what he had before conversion, or is it part of the Christian life? The Greek Fathers said it referred to the unsaved person; but that view invited Pelagianism.<sup>1</sup> Augustine contended it referred to the Christian life. Here are several arguments in support of that view:

1. The general flow of the argument of Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39 supports this view. Justification, sanctification, glorification, are all truths of the saved person.

2. To take this as a description of unregenerate people would involve contradictions both here and in parallel passages. There is no sufficient evidence of a divided self in Paul before conversion. According to Php 3:4-9, Paul says that he was blameless in his unsaved condition; and in Acts 24:10-16, lived in all good conscience. But in Romans 7:1-25 he is running contrary to God. So when one dies to the old nature, then a struggle ensues.

3. The exegesis of Romans 7:1-25 supports this view. There is a change of tenses: Romans 7:1-12 the past tense was used (the salvation experience); but in Romans 7:13-25 everything is in the present tense. This is the ensuing present experience.

4. The language fits a believer. The unbeliever could not so diagnose his condition as the writer of these verses. He hates sin (Romans 7:15), delights in the Law (Romans 7:22), and looks for deliverance to Christ alone through grace (Romans 7:25).

5. Romans 7:18 is harmonious with salvation. It suggests that there is a part of him that is good, other than the flesh. It is the mind that must serve God.

6. Romans 7:25 forms the fitting conclusion, a summary statement, in which he appropriates the struggle to the present time. This section of Romans 7:1-25 then is a picture of the capacities and liabilities of the believer apart from the enablement of the Spirit of God. If one is seeking to obey the Lord's will without the enablement by the Spirit, it will be a frustrating struggle. Note these statistics: the emphatic pronoun "I" is used 16 times in Romans 7:1-25, the term "Law" is used 20 times, and the only reference to the Holy Spirit is in Romans 7:6 and that is questionable. But in Romans 8:1-39 the Holy Spirit is mentioned 20 times, and the "Law" only 4 times.

Paul's depiction of himself is in stark contrast to what he has been saying about the Law. The Law is a reflection of the character of God—it is holy, it is spiritual. But in this section Paul declares, "I am unspiritual." "This is what I am in myself," he is saying. But beyond that he moves to an even more degrading idea: not only is he "fleshly" (human, carnal, natural), he has been sold as a slave to sin. This slavery extends to every part of his life; if it appears that he is obedient to the dictates of the flesh, it is almost mechanical and not volitional. It takes some doing to undo a lifetime of wrong habits. As a result he seems forced to carry out things that he does not want to do (instinct), and what he really would like to do never materializes (he has no entrenched habit with it yet). Paul is not trying to escape responsibility; rather, he is putting his finger on the real culprit—indwelling sin. With this master clinging to control, no matter how strongly Paul wants to do good, he finds himself "checkmated" as it were, often failing when he wants to do what is right. This discussion in Paul might indeed be influenced by the Jewish teaching that people have two impulses, the good inclination and the evil. The Jewish teachers' solution was a devoted, diligent study of the Law. But Paul's view differs radically. He has claimed that the Law cannot counteract the power of sin. So Paul must look elsewhere.

"Who will rescue me?" is his cry. There is deliverance, of course, provided by God through Jesus Christ. This question and conclusion to the chapter prepare the reader for the grand exposition of the deliverance through Christ and the Spirit in Romans 8:1-39.

There is always a struggle, but there is always a measure of victory. It is never possible to get out of Romans 7:1-25 experiences entirely, even though some who teach a victorious Christian life doctrine contend for that. But there should be a growing measure of deliverance. Romans 7:1-25 may be a present aspect of practical salvation, a necessary part of the Christian experience, but it is not the complete experience. No believer need remain in the discouraging atmosphere of defeat when the free, fragrant and wholesome air of Romans 8:1-39 is beckoning to victory. But it will take spiritual maturity to move from the struggle to the victory.

Paul will return to the theme of renewing the mind as the basis for spiritual victory in the latter part of the book.

#### Things to Consider

1. There are several notions about sanctification that people hold: the struggle of the soul is essentially a struggle against certain sins; that human nature is essentially good; that sanctification is a process of obeying the commandments; that if one determines to do right he will be successful. What do you think of these notions on the basis of Romans 7:1-25?

2. Try to imagine how an Old Testament believer would have looked at the Law. Can you think of passages of Scripture that would show how it was used, both for revealing righteousness and sin as well as regulating worship and life? Do you think the devout believers thought it was a burden?

3. What clues do we find in the Old Testament that the revelation of God in the Law of Moses was incomplete for the program of redemption?

4. In your knowledge of the teaching of the apostles, how many purposes were there for the giving of the Law?

1 This is the name of the heresy that grew up in the fourth and fifth centuries that taught that people by their free choice could initiate salvation by their good deeds that they did by the good nature that God had given them. Pelagius was not too interested in the doctrine of original sin; subsequent teachers in this tradition denied it.

## 03.07. The New Power in Life

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### The New Power in Life (Romans 8:1-39) Sixth Bible Class

(Romans 8:1-39) III. Life in Christ (cont.) (Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39) E. The New Power in Life (Romans 8:1-17) In Romans 6:1-23 Paul emphasized that because we have a union with Jesus Christ we should therefore walk in the newness of life; in Romans 7:1-25 he stressed that by death and resurrection we have a relationship with the risen Christ, and therefore we should bring forth fruit to God. Then, after a parenthetical discussion in which some related questions were answered, in Romans 8:1-39 Paul deals with the power of the Spirit that is available to enable us to meet these two requirements. Romans 8:1-39, next to the Upper Room Discourse, is foremost in Scripture on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

#### 1. The basis of the spiritual life (Romans 8:1-4).

Summary: The child of God has a new standing, a position “in Christ Jesus.” Because of the Savior’s incarnation (“in the likeness of sinful flesh”) and atoning death on the cross (“and for sin” [Romans 8:3]), the believer has been saved and has entered a new position in Christ. Now, in Christ, and by the Spirit, the believer can expect victory over the assaults of evil. The passage begins with “Therefore.” In all probability the reference goes back to Romans 7:6. In Romans 7:1-6 Paul traced the analogy of marriage to show death to the Law and marriage to Christ. Romans 7:7-25 are an excursus, probing whether the Law was sinful or good. Even though it was good, it has become the messenger of death because it pointed out sin. So then Romans 8:1 picks up the discussion prior to that.<sup>1</sup>

Paul announces in Romans 8:1, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The term “condemnation” in Paul means ultimate condemnation for sin, and not merely defeat in the spiritual life. This is why the reference must go back beyond the discussion of the spiritual struggle. The point, then, is salvific. If people are “in Christ,” that is, true believers, identified with Christ by faith, there is no condemnation for them. God cannot condemn and will not condemn those who are “in Christ,” because He condemned Christ on their behalf. The reason for our freedom from condemnation is expressed in Romans 8:2—“the law of the Spirit of life” set us free. This is not a reference to the Law, but to the new principle which operates with the fixedness of a law (a fixed principle). By coming to faith in Christ, we have received the Holy Spirit; and that Spirit produces life, whereas the Law produced death. So we have been set free—it has been accomplished—we do not have to strive to get freedom, but rather stand in the freedom that has been given to us. It is like getting on an elevator—you do not have to push your way upward. In Romans 8:3 he elaborates that it was impossible for the Law to do this because it was weak. It was weak because of that with which it had to deal—sinfulness and the punishment for sin. The anchor of the Law was strong, but could not hold in the mud bottom of the human heart. What did set us free was God’s sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (some theologians say in sinful flesh, but that is bad theology) to be a sin offering. Thus, He condemned sin in sinful man. The purpose of this act was that the righteous requirements of the Law be fully met in us (Romans

8:4). This verse is the balance, otherwise some might overly stress the doing away of the Law (the verse guards against anti-nomianism [Greek *nomos* is “law”]). For what the Law revealed, “the righteousness of God,” is the standard to be met. To say we are no longer under the Law is true, but that is not a license to avoid the righteousness that the Law revealed. But what Paul is saying is that the only way to meet the requirements of the Law is to be in Christ by faith (therefore there is no condemnation because our sins are paid for) and to be enabled by the Holy Spirit (to produce the righteousness that God required). Those who are in Christ do not continue to live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit. They might try for a while, but the Spirit will begin to deal with them and convict them. Note also in the verse that the idea of “might be fully met” is passive—someone does it in us. The power for the Christian walk is the Holy Spirit—even though it is still our walk. So Paul begins the chapter with this restatement of the positional truth that Christ has set us free from condemnation and empowered us by the Spirit to walk in the newness of life.

2. The victory of the spiritual life (Romans 8:5-17) a. The mind controlled by the Spirit. Romans 8:5-8 provide a contrast between the sinful mind and the mind controlled by the Spirit of God. Paul’s words here are descriptive and not hortatory (not an exhortation to do this); that is, being “in the flesh” is not a possibility for the Christians—they are “in the Spirit.” By having the Spirit of God in our lives, we can see that life and peace result; for those who live in the flesh, that is, sinful minds, death results because they are hostile to God’s laws.

Paul is simply showing the influence of the Holy Spirit on our minds—our choices and desires. Some folks do not even realize the Spirit is at work in their lives—they think they need some spectacular experience, but most of the Spirit’s work is not that way. Thus, while we might struggle with sin and guilt versus righteousness and a clear conscience, the Spirit of God is moving inexorably toward peace and life. The results may be incomplete, but they are nonetheless the fruit of the Spirit. On the other hand, without the Spirit’s mindset, found only through union with Christ, people can only order their lives in a way that is hostile to God and that will incur His wrath. No neutrality is possible. The Greek proposition *kata* here represents the standard, “according to the standard of”—flesh or Spirit. To walk “after” the flesh would mean to respond throughout life to those forces of human nature apart from God. To walk “after” the Spirit means to live in accordance with the guidance, dictates and desires of the Spirit. The old illustration of dog training makes the contrast clear: if you are walking a dog down a path with bones on it, or other dogs around, something in the dog will draw it away to the bones or to the other dogs, but a stern No from the master will make it through—as long as the dog listens and looks up to follow the master. If the dog has never been trained to live according to this other directive, it will be, well, a dog, and chase after the others. It needs training in the new discipline to curb its nature, its natural bent. The Spirit says “No” to sin, and calls for us to look up and live. People who refuse to live by this new discipline often complain that their nature is this way, or that way, and they are therefore not responsible for their sin. But that is spiritual blindness. They need to learn to walk in the Spirit (I am talking here about professing believers). b. The Spirit of God lives within. In the next few verses Paul reminds his readers that if they are in Christ then the Holy Spirit lives within them (Romans 8:9-11). Here the Spirit is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, showing he carries out the purpose of God by producing the fruit of Christ’s redemptive work. The body has been put to death in Christ, but the Holy Spirit within brings this new life.<sup>2</sup> The presence of the Spirit is the evidence of justification, proof of the salvation that has come through Jesus Christ; but the

presence of the Spirit is also the pledge of that final phase of salvation through resurrection to life (Romans 8:11). The life that God will give in that future day is beyond the power of any to destroy—it is the very life of God, blessedly spiritual and indestructibly eternal. c. The Spirit enables mortification. Here now we have the exhortation of Paul (Romans 8:12-13) along the same lines as is found in Romans 6:11-14 to put to death the misdeeds of the body. What is different here, however, is the inclusion of the Spirit. No one can deal effectively with sinful nature by mere determination; the Holy Spirit is needed, and He is the Spirit of power.

Romans 8:12 is critical in this section. We have an obligation to live by the Spirit and not by sinful nature. The verse shows that we still have this nature; it has not been eradicated. The solicitations of the flesh are constant; therefore we have a duty not to live according to them, but to put them to death. If the believer is so preoccupied with putting on the Lord Jesus, of doing His will, there will be no provision made for the flesh. d. The Spirit's attestation. In Romans 8:14-17 we read how the Holy Spirit confirms for the believers their position as children of God based on adoption into the heavenly family. The placing of this here after the call to mortify the flesh is basic, for to do that successfully we must be convinced that we have been claimed by God and equipped with infinite resources. The relationship first is portrayed in shepherding terms: those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. Galatians 3:24 presented the Law as leading people to Christ; here the leading is now turned over to the Spirit, who guides into the truth (John 16:13) and righteousness.

Paul then goes into some detail to show that this is not an enslavement to fear at all; rather, it is an adoption, because we have received the "Spirit of adoption" or literally the Spirit who makes us sons (not slaves). By this Spirit, then, believers can cry "Abba"—Father. The cry refers to calling on the LORD in prayer, following the teaching of Jesus to use the term "Our Father." The term "adoption" works much like the term "justification" in these writings. They are both declarative and forensic. Adoption, like justification, bestows an objective standing; it is a pronouncement that is not repeated. It has permanent validity. Paul is probably drawing upon Roman law of adoption both here and in Galatians 4:5. So the believers are called both "sons" and "children" without any appreciable distinctions, other than that sons refers to legal standing and children to family relationship.

Often Christians will doubt their salvation because their sanctification has proceeded so slowly and lamely. The Spirit does not base His testimony on the progress of growth, but on the fact of position—He leads people to call upon God as Father, to look away from ourselves to the One who established the relationship. The final truth about adoption is that of inheritance (Romans 8:17). In current law even a slave who was adopted could inherit. So Paul follows the course of thinking—a slave becomes a child and then an heir. And not just heirs, joint-heirs with Christ. We are indeed called to share in His sufferings, which we shall do if we are indeed in Christ; but that is only a prelude to partaking with Him of the coming glory. How absolutely marvelous is the gracious provision of God for us in Christ Jesus. So Paul has stressed the marvelous provision of the Holy Spirit for our spiritual victory in this life and our guarantee of the life to come. This great assurance through His presence not only enables success, but inspires us to yield to His power as we seek to walk in righteousness. Thus, the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to make us just like Jesus Christ.

F. The New Hope in Life (Romans 8:18-39) With the introduction of the aspect of sharing in the suffering of Christ, the apostle now turns his attention to the glorious provisions for the future. He will first deal with the assured hope of the future glory (Romans 8:18-25), then the confidence that one has a strong advocate in prayer (Romans 8:26-27), then the certainty that all is well because it is in the Father's will and plan (Romans 8:28-34), and finally the confidence that nothing can separate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35-39).

#### 1. The Assured Hope of Glory (Romans 8:16-25)

Compared to the glorious future that lies ahead for us who believe, the sufferings of this life are light indeed. This theme Paul has written about in 2 Corinthians 4:17. Scripture does not detail much of what that future glory will be like, but it guarantees that it will be.

Paul enlarges the discussion to the whole of creation, which he personifies to be groaning for the great day of redemption. Until that time there is only frustration, a perfect term for the effects of the curse, because nothing has been able to fulfill its capabilities or achieve perfection under sin. So the creation longs to share the glorious freedom of the children of God, a freedom that liberates them also from the bondage of decay. According to Romans 8:22, the suffering of creation is both a result and a prophecy; a result of the curse of sin, but a prophecy of a new age that is coming (hence the idea of birth). Christ Himself spoke of the renewing of the world as a rebirth (Matthew 19:28).

Paul then parallels the creation and the saints in two ways: they both groan and they both wait eagerly for the new era. And, in answer to the idea of the transforming of the earth, Paul looks forward to the "redemption of our bodies." Only the people of God have the "first fruits" of the Spirit, the seal or pledge or down payment toward that complete renewal. In 1 Corinthians 15:44 Paul describes that finished product of redemption as a spiritual body. The future resurrection will be the full harvest. Our bodies will be something like that of the glorified Christ (Php 3:20-21). So what Paul is dealing with here is the anticipation of glorification, the final process of salvation when adoption and redemption and sanctification will be complete.

Here, then, is the emphasis on hope, especially since we are still in these bodies and facing suffering and death. The hope does not call into question our salvation; rather, Paul affirms that in this hope we were saved. The point is that since an element of our redemption is held in reserve—the redemption of the body—we have a legitimate exercise of hope. If hardships and sufferings come, then patient endurance will be the aspect of hope that we have in the faith. But the pilgrimage is inspired by the sure hope of glory.

2. The Confidence of a Strong Advocate in Prayer (Romans 8:26-27) This is the final work of the Holy Spirit mentioned in this chapter—intercession. The section is introduced with "in the same way" which seems to link the theme with the hope just discussed. This also will bring great comfort in times of distress.

Paul's mention of "weakness" or "infirmity" probably has a broad reference to the many aspects of human weakness that he has been discussing in previous chapters. So when it comes to prayer, he affirms that we do not even know what we should pray (that is, the content of the prayers). Do we know the real needs of our own hearts? of others? And do we know the will of God in these matters? But in contrast to this frustration is the joyful news that "the Spirit helps us." The only

other place where this New Testament word occurs is when Martha wanted her sister to help her (Luke 10:40). The implication of the word help is that we still will be doing our part—praying; this needs to be stated since everything else in these verses will be talking about the Spirit. But as we pray, in the background and often unknown to us, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. The groaning of the Spirit might seem to us to be unintelligible prayers; but God is no stranger to the intent of the Spirit, especially since the groanings are in complete harmony with the divine will. By these groanings the Lord hears what we ourselves could not have told Him, so that He will accept what He Himself has to offer.<sup>3</sup> This passage is not to be confused with glossolalia (tongues), for it includes the Spirit's intercession through groaning on behalf of all Christians, not just a few with a special gift. Some folks argue that true prayer needs a special language that cannot be understood, your "in the Spirit" language.<sup>4</sup> That is a teaching that is without foundation; and it certainly does not come from this passage. Tongues are not mentioned in conjunction with intercession, especially this heavenly intercession which is beyond our understanding.

### 3. The Certainty of the Father's Plan (Romans 8:28-34)

These verses provide great comfort for the saints as they face the difficulties and challenges of this life. The referent of "all things" is probably in Paul's mind those things that are adverse but are turned around for good by the sovereign operation of God. The idea of "good" is left general, but must be taken to mean in conformity to the Son. The beneficiaries are those who love God and are called according to His (electing) purpose. When we say, "all things work together for good ...," we must remember that the key in here is "together." Often we are faced with an adverse isolated event, and we cannot see how it works for good; it has to be seen in related to all that God is doing in our lives. In the final analysis, it will be good. When Joseph was in the pit crying out for help, it did not seem good. But later, when he was in power and could look back to see how God worked in his life, then he could say, "you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." This calling is then explained in terms of foreknowledge and predestination. "Foreknowledge" does not mean advance awareness or knowledge, but refers to God's choice, his electing decision. This is clear in 1 Peter 1:20. But God's calling is not haphazard, or cold or formal; rather, it is filled with the warmth of God's love, as the Hebrew word for "know" makes clear. The emphasis on God's calling precludes any possibility of human merit as entering the decision (cf. Ephesians 1:4). We are called according to purpose, not foreknowledge; foreknowledge must be included in the purpose. The idea of predestination goes way beyond choosing one for salvation. The background is adoption, which was introduced earlier. But now the point of the choice is conformity to His Son. The two ways in which we are conformed to the likeness of the Son are first through sufferings, through which we are gradually made like Jesus Christ, and second, through the resurrection by which we shall be conformed to the risen Lord. That will be the culmination of the process of sanctification, the completion of the Spirit's work. The process of God's working out His purpose for us is laid out in Romans 8:30 : predestined—called—justified—glorified. They are all written in the past tense to stress the certainty of fulfillment, because He who has begun a good work will complete it. The use of tense is borrowed from Hebrew prophecy, which often writes in the past tense—it is as good as done because in the mind of God it has been done. The verse may be troubling at first to people who are not strong in their knowledge of God, but who still think everything should be in their control (they will learn that that is not sufficient). But the verse reveals how glorious and majestic God is, and how our destiny is in His hands, from beginning to end. In Christ Jesus we stand; but

we stand because God has a purpose for us, and that purpose will carry us through to glorification.

Paul's conclusion of this discussion (Romans 8:31-34) is that if God is for us, who can be against us? God has not made empty promises. He has not started something He is unable to finish. He is fully aware of our sins and our failures. He has acted, and what He has done in Christ and through the Spirit constitutes all the proof we need that the glorification will be ours one day. This is the point of Romans 8:32—it cost God dearly to act. He did not spare His own Son. The background is Genesis 22:1-24, where Abraham did not spare his son, but sacrificed him to God—in the form of a substitute that was provided. But in the fullness of God's plan, Jesus Christ, God's Son, was the substitute; He had to endure the cross to take away the sins of the world. Abraham knew that the LORD would provide when the sacrifice was made; and so Paul draws on that theme of Genesis 22:1-24 to show that if God did not spare His only Son, then how shall He not freely give us all things—the LORD will provide. The same gracious spirit follows throughout all God's dealings with us (see 2 Peter 1:3). No one can bring charges against the elect. Satan is very busy accusing the saints in heaven (compare the drama in Zechariah 3:1-10), pointing out the discrepancy between their professions and their lives (Revelation 12:10). But he gets nowhere in his self-righteous efforts. Since all sin is against God, only God can bring charges. And God has already paid for those sins in Christ Jesus. And no one will condemn. Christ Jesus is the only one who can condemn—but He died and secured the removal of sin and guilt, He arose from the dead to give life to those who trust in Him, He is exalted to heaven where He is our advocate, and He intercedes for us at the throne of grace. So there is indeed no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

#### 4. The Confidence of the Love of God (Romans 8:35-39)

Finally, Paul raises the question of any conceivable contradiction between Christ's love for us and our suffering. His point is that suffering cannot separate us from the love of God. Separation through suffering is no more thinkable than the idea that the Father ceased loving the Son through the agony on the cross. It all has a purpose; our suffering is a part of our identification with Christ. The use of Psalms 44:1-26 in this passage reminds the reader that suffering has always been the lot of the righteous. In Psalms 44:1-26, what we call a national lament, the nation is pouring out its complaint to God—they are losing a war, being slaughtered all over the hills, and they do not know why, because they have not abandoned the faith or been unfaithful. Paul does not just quote a verse from the psalm, but rather weaves the whole argument of the psalm into this discussion. There are four main motifs in that psalm that he has picked up here in Romans 8:1-39: (1) there is intense suffering and groaning, waiting for divine deliverance (the whole psalm is a lament); (2) they are troubled by the suffering because no prophet has laid any charge against them; (3) they cry out to God in frustration, "Wake up, O LORD"; but (4) they are convinced of the love of God. These motifs appear in Romans 8:1-39 as the groaning in suffering, the frustration of not knowing how to pray, the clear assurance that no charge can be laid against us, and the final confidence that suffering does not separate us from the love of God. So Paul closes this glorious chapter with a note of triumph—we are more than conquerors, or more specifically, "We win the supreme victory through Him who loved us." Basing it on Christ's love for us ("he loved us") in no way limits it to the past event, for that love is an everlasting love. Death cannot separate us from that love; neither can life and all that it brings. Not even demons, who would delight in coming between Christ and His beloved, can make the break. Nor powers—the hostile spiritual forces that are

allowed to carry on spiritual warfare, but under the restraining power of the Spirit who is greater (see Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 6:12; and Job 1:1-22; Job 2:1-13). Not even time, or height or depth—possibly these form an allusion to Roman fatalism in the astral religions. Nothing at all, nothing imaginable, can separate us from the love that has redeemed us.

#### Things to Consider

1. Think for a while about the statement that there is no condemnation now for those who believe in Christ. Join the beginning of the chapter where the statement is made, and the end of the chapter where it is explained that no one can condemn us, to get the full picture. What effect should that have on our guilty fears that always rise up to haunt us?
2. What are some very practical ways for us to be sure that our minds are being controlled by the Holy Spirit? Can this work without a knowledge of the Scripture?
3. Think back through this chapter and see how many ministries of the Holy Spirit you can find. You will note that this chapter does not give the spectacular works, the signs and wonders; but the miraculous and supernatural works listed here are those upon which our spiritual lives depend every day.
4. The chapter is filled with expressions of confidence that we may have of our position in Christ. Can you list the major doctrines mentioned and discussed in this chapter that guarantee our salvation through to glory?
5. While people, especially new Christians, are often troubled by the mention of predestination, what comfort does it bring to know that God Almighty lovingly has planned for our lives and prepared for our glorification?
6. On the basis of this chapter, or of Romans so far, what thoughts come to your mind about the love of God? People often leave that concept very general; but what specifically does the love of God mean to you, now and forever?

1 Another view is that the reference in Romans 8:1 is to all of Romans 7:13-25. Paul would then be saying, Consequently, there is no defeat necessary from indwelling sin. But this view has the difficulty of redefining "condemnation" to mean "defeat."

2 The NIV translation of Romans 8:10 has "your spirit is alive because of righteousness." A number of commentators would take this also as a reference to the Spirit.

3 Barth, A Shorter Commentary on Romans, p. 102.

4 The fallout of such a teaching is to create guilt and confusion on the part of those who do not have their "Spirit" language, even though they have prayed all their lives and have seen the Lord work in many ways.

## 03.08. Vindication or God's Righteousness in His Relationship with Israel

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Vindication or God's Righteousness in His Relationship with Israel (Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21) The Seventh Bible Class (Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21) IV. Vindication or God's Righteousness in His Relationship with Israel The Gentiles have found salvation through grace, but the Jews seem to have been overlooked since the death of Jesus. A new elect people are rising up throughout the earth, called the Church, but where are the Jews? Oh there are many Jewish people coming to faith and becoming members of this mystical body of Christ; but the Jewish people as a whole are not—they reject Jesus as the Messiah and, if religious, follow their traditions. To many readers of theology there seems to be a dilemma, and they can only see an either-or: either the Gospel is true and the promises to Israel nullified, or the gospel is false and the promises are yet to be fulfilled. Paul will show that it is not a case of either or, but of both and. Paul will show in these chapters that the Jews have misread the Old Testament and therefore rejected Jesus. But a close reading of the prophets reveals that there always was a distinction made between the nation of Israel as a whole and the believing Jews (a remnant). So this section is an attempt to explain God's dealings with Jews as a vindication of righteousness. Paul does it by a clear exposition of the Scriptures. He will show that Israel's rejection is related to the spiritual pride of the Jews (Romans 9:1-33, Romans 10:1-21), that Israel's rejection is not complete because some are being saved (Romans 11:1-36), and that Israel's rejection is not final because it will be reversed before the coming of the Lord (the end of Romans 11:1-36).

A. The Consideration of Israel's Rejection (Romans 9:1-29) 1. The Concern for Israel (Romans 9:1-5)

It is a great concern of the apostle Paul that Israel as a nation is now unrelated to God and His Messiah. His anxiety and sorrow for them leads him to a hypothetical wish—if theologically possible—that he be cursed in their place. It is a potential (unthinkable wish) formula; but it communicates his anguish over their unbelief. This modern idea that the Jews have a covenant with God and therefore do not have to be evangelized to believe in Jesus as the Messiah is an idea that Paul would completely reject. If Jesus the Messiah is indeed God manifested in the flesh, then this is the God of the Old Testament. How could Israel be saved and reject their LORD?

Paul lists eight features that set the nation of Israel apart from all other nations. As a nation the Hebrews were uniquely privileged: they had been adopted as God's own people; to them was revealed the Shekinah<sup>1</sup> glory that streamed into the tabernacle; with them God entered into solemn covenant; they were the recipients of the Law; to them belonged the service of God in the Sanctuary; they had the promises and the patriarchs; but most of all, Christ<sup>2</sup> Himself was born a Jew. What priceless treasures were given to Israel. The translation of Romans 9:5 poses a real theological problem. The KJV says, "from whom came the Messiah in the flesh, who is over all God, blessed forever." The NIV translates the verse "and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." The passage rendered this way says clearly

that Jesus is God. But that plain rendering has troubled some, and so there are other renderings that simply turn the expression into a reference to the blessing for God. There are four renderings possible for the grammar: (1) place the comma after “flesh” and refer it all to Christ; (2) make a full stop after “flesh” with a separate sentence starting, “He who is God”; (3) leave the punctuation as is but render it, “He who is over all is God blessed”; and (4) put a comma after “flesh” and a full stop after “all” to read “who is over all. God be blessed.”

Exegesis and not grammar alone makes the reference to Christ probable (and the NIV translation preferable). If Jesus is not God, what other way could the Messiah have come but by the flesh? That makes little sense. There are several considerations in the passage that lead to the support of the NIV rendering—and to the passage being a clear affirmation of the deity of Christ. First, there is a reference to human nature in the first part, so you would expect something different in the last part (recall the way Paul did this in Romans 1:3-4). We expect an antithesis, and that would be “who is over all God.” Second, the transitional words “who is” probably refers to the noun preceding it, Christ. This is the most natural way to read the line. Third, if “blessed” is to go with God the Father, then the term should come first. That would be the normal word order: Blessed is God. Fourth, the context suggests a lament and not a praise to God. Israel has failed to believe in Messiah in spite of all the privileges she had. The greatest blessing is this climax—a Messiah who is God over all. Finally, salvation comes through the Messiah; and physical descent from Israel is not sufficient for salvation. Rather, it is that the Messiah is divine. According to Paul, Israel should have known all this; it was in the Old Testament Scriptures.

## 2. Israel’s Identification (Romans 9:6-13)

Some might raise the question why Israel failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah since they were the elect nation. Is not this a failure on God’s part?—they might reason. But Paul is going to make a distinction between the natural descendants (=seed) of Jacob and the spiritual descendants. God did not fail—the promises were unconditional; but the people failed, and without faith could not have a share in the promises.

He begins in Romans 9:6 by affirming that it is not such a thing as the Word of God having fallen out. Rather, the problem was with the people—“not all of Israel are Israel,” meaning, not everyone who claimed to be an Israelite was truly a believer and therefore part of Israel, the people of God. In fact, because divine election operates then there was in Israel both the elect and the non-elect. Paul’s expression “from Israel” refers to the nation as a whole; his reference to “Israel” means the chosen element, those who are called. All may be children of Abraham, but not all are children of God. God chose a remnant of them, those who would be the recipients of the promise: “In Isaac shall your seed be called.” The point is that back of belief there is a divine calling (cf. Luke 19:9—also a son of Abraham—called), even though many Christians do not like to here this. They want it all to be their doing. But that is not what Paul says in this chapter. So here Paul distinguishes between the “children of the promise” and the “natural children” within the nation of Israel. Just being born into a Hebrew family did not mean that they were believers.

Paul refers to the way that the promise was stated, and it is a word of grace. Two illustrations work here. First, Abraham had two wives, and that is why God had to specify “in Isaac.” But then Paul carries the law of limitation to the second illustration. Rebecca was the mother of twins by one man—Isaac. And so Scripture says that “the elder will serve the younger.” How could this be?

Romans 9:11 clarifies that it is by God's election, for God's purpose. The two boys were not even born yet; they had not sinned yet; but their destiny had been determined in relation to God's program. Paul then closes out this discussion with a citation from Malachi: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." "Love" means to choose spontaneously and with affection; "hate" means the opposite, to reject.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis in the oracle and in Malachi as well is on the election of nations and not individuals. The stress is on the resultant acts of the lines of Jacob and Esau. But it is impossible to choose a nation without choosing individuals (the same is true of judging). So the text must be speaking of individual election as well. Paul knew full well that you could not think of the descendants without thinking of the heads. He knew that in Genesis 25:23 both ancestors and descendants were included. So he is beginning to build the case that divine election was at work, even within the family of Israelites. Israel should have known from her own history that not everyone born in the family of Abraham was part of the spiritual seed. These oracles make that clear. So while Romans 9:1-33 deals primarily with national entities, individuals are also in view.

3. The Choice of Israel (Romans 9:14-29) The key to this discussion on the election of Israel is given at the very beginning: there is no unrighteousness with God. Paul anticipates the objections of his fellow Jews (Romans 9:14 and Romans 9:19) that deal with the nature of God. There are two sides of the same issue: Is God righteous in his sovereign choice? In Romans 9:14 Paul deals with it from the Godward side; after Romans 9:19 he looks at it from the human side. His answers are taken from Scripture because those who might object do accept the Scriptures.

Paul's first answer to the question about God's justice is the emphatic "May it never be." His second answer to that question then is from the Scripture to show God's answer to Moses. There is no unrighteousness with God because he is dealing with sinners; his election of some is based on mercy and compassion. It has nothing to do with mankind's desire or effort. The first quote of Scripture was to Moses, and that shows God's mercy; the second quote was about Pharaoh, and that shows God's severity. It is, according to Paul, God's right to harden some in their unbelief (as C. S. Lewis says, if people will not say to God, "Thy will be done," God will say to them, "thy will be done").. God did not force Pharaoh to do anything apart from his will; he was a proud, brutal, hardened sinner, and so God would confirm that by hardening him in his ways for the purpose of judgment on him in the deliverance of Israel. This was part of God's retributive justice. But divine election, on the other hand, shows mercy. The natural man (our human nature) rebels against the idea of the sovereignty of God. If God makes the choice, people often respond with cries of injustice. We may not be able to reconcile in our own thinking the relation between election and free will; both are taught in Scripture. But election cannot be minimized or done away with. We may say that we came to faith at such and such a time; but we also must say that God called us, or elected us. If people refuse to believe, they cannot say they were forced to it—they did as they wished; but theologically, we must also say that they were not elect. How to harmonize these two truths is beyond human ability. But then the person and works of God are beyond our understanding. But God is righteous in his dealings. If he chooses to save some, it is because of his mercy and compassion. When he extends mercy, he is right; when he rejects, he is right. The Jews of Paul's day had thought God could not reject them because they were Abraham's seed; and God could not have accepted the Gentiles, because they were not of Abraham's seed. Paul shows that they have understood the matter incorrectly, on both accounts. The second argument begins in Romans 9:19 : How can God blame anyone, then; we are only doing what he willed us to

do? Paul does not really bother with a serious answer to this question. The question indicates a forgetfulness of the position of mankind with the Creator. He is talking here of one who defies God, not one with doubts and questions. Paul repels the answer—the charge of divine injustice shows ignorance of God. God does not have to answer charges from any of his creatures. Warped conceptions of God are at the heart of idolatry anyway, as with Pharaoh, or any other pagans. Thus, Paul is making it clear that a knowledge of the attributes of God is essential for understanding the works of God. “Who are you who replies against God?” God is the sovereign Lord of creation! As S. A. Nagel writes, You cannot put one little star in motion, You cannot shape one single forest leaf, Nor fling a mountain up, nor sink an ocean, Presumptuous pygmy, large with unbelief!

You cannot bring one dawn of regal splendor, Nor bid the day to shadowy twilight fall, Nor send the pale moon forth with radiance tender; And dare you doubt the One who has done it all? The thinking of such a charge against God is that if God had not intervened with election, taking some and leaving others hardened in their unbelief, then all people would have an equal chance. That is false. If God did not elect, none would be saved. For there is none that seeks after God. People are not lost because they are hardened, they are hardened because they are lost, and they are lost because they are sinners.

Paul has shown that God is free to act in the mystery and majesty of his sovereignty. Now, in Romans 9:22, Paul proceeds to show that God deals in patience and mercy even with the vessels of wrath, those people who are fitted for destruction. God could have dealt with them in immediate judgment, but he chose not to. He chose to give them every opportunity to reveal any inclination for obedience. So, Paul would be saying, what becomes of your complaint about injustice now? In Romans 9:23-24 Paul shows a contrast between those vessels of wrath with the vessels of mercy. God shows patience toward both; but the vessels of mercy he prepares for glory. So throughout the passage Paul has been arguing that divine election has been at work to save some. All have sinned and deserve the wrath of God. But God in mercy and compassion chooses some to be spared. No one can lay any charge against God, for he is both sovereign and righteous. And no one can say that they did not have a chance, for people always do what they want to do. The message that comes through all the way in Paul’s writings is that you can become part of the elect by believing in Jesus Christ. But if you do not want to do that, why should you object to those who do? And if you do not want salvation, then why are you criticizing the idea of divine election? And if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, and you discover that God has chosen you, why should that trouble you? You believed in God, you made your choice; and now you find out that God was behind it all, calling you to himself. That should fill you with comfort, knowing that your salvation is not totally dependant on you.

There are many ways that this has worked out in the history of Israel. Godet offers one application that the vessels of wrath are the Jewish people of the time, the nation to be destroyed in 70 A.D. Jesus announced the destruction but was longsuffering, weeping over the city. After the judgment fell, a remnant believed in Christ and were saved. These would be vessels of mercy rescued from being vessels of warth. On the human side, they believed; on the divine side, they were chosen.

Paul closes out this section with a brief discussion of God’s choice of people to be saved according to Scripture prophecies (Romans 9:25-29). The first citation comes from Hosea 2:23

and refers in the first place to the nation of Israel. God had rejected his people for their unbelief and they went into exile, but another generation did believe and God restored them to the land. Here the readers should have been reminded that Israelites—the elect nation—were rejected for unbelief. They may have claimed to be among the chosen people, but without faith they could not be saved. The second passage comes from Hosea 1:10. It refers to those who respond to the truth and obey the word of the Lord. Again, here is evidence that all Israel was condemned, but some who were not called “my people” would be called the Sons of the Living God.

Then he cites Isaiah 10:22-23 and Romans 1:9, to announce that only a remnant would be saved, for unless the Lord had been merciful, the whole nation of Israel would have been like Sodom—totally destroyed. God never did save the bulk of Israel; it was always a remnant by grace. As you read the history of Israel in the Old Testament, being the natural descendants of Abraham availed Israel little; most of them were hardened in unbelief and refused to believe the Lord, became idolaters and were judged. But there was always a remnant of true believers, the true seed of Abraham by faith as well as by birth.

B. The Explanation of Israel’s Rejection (Romans 9:30-33, Romans 10:1-21) 1. Israel’s Unbelief (Romans 9:30-33, Romans 10:1-4).

Israel (meaning collectively, for the most part, in general, but not every Israelite) rejected Jesus as their Messiah and failed to find true righteousness because of their legalism. Their privileges proved to be their stumblingstone. Their legalism (Romans 9:30-33) is a paradox with the Gentiles who have obtained righteousness. The Jews failure was twofold: they stumbled in seeking righteousness by the works of the Law (Romans 9:30-33) and they refused God’s righteousness when it was offered to them (Romans 10:1-4). But the Gentiles found it by faith. Paul quotes Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16 together here concerning the “rock,” a symbol of the Messiah; this rock is a stone that causes people to stumble, but it is also a stone that brings salvation to others. In the midst of a passage about judgment for sin, God’s word of grace was extended. The legalist stumbled over it; the truly repentant found grace. In the first few verses of Romans 10:1-21 Paul establishes the point that the Jewish people (most of the leaders and the people) refused God’s righteousness. Their great zeal for the Law worked against them. This pains him. Paul alludes to Isaiah 15:5 where the heart of the prophet was pained for the judgment on Moab; Paul follows this succession of prophets in Romans 10:1. But the Jews sought to establish their own righteousness and could not do it. The only way to be righteous enough to merit salvation is to be as righteous as Jesus, the Son of God. If that is not achieved, and it cannot be, then one has to be “in Christ” by faith. He is the “end” of the Law. This word telos means either goal or end. In the sense of “goal” it means that Christ is the fulfillment of the Law, as in Galatians 3:24. In the sense of “end” it signifies that Christ is the termination of the law as the binding system for believers. Jesus Christ alone satisfied all the demands of the Law and therefore has done it; but the Law also pointed to him as the one to fulfill its demands.<sup>4</sup> So faith in Christ alone brings the righteousness to believers.

2. Israel’s Standing (Romans 10:5-12) The present standing of Israel is the same as the Gentiles—“there is no difference between Jew and Gentile,” all are lost, and all must call upon the name of the Lord for salvation.

Paul now addresses the issue of righteousness that comes by faith. He uses Moses’ Law to prove this—showing it was always in the Law. He refers to Deuteronomy 30:8-14. The method employed

here is a Jewish midrash (analogical application); he weaves in verses from the Law and explains them in a spiritually applicable way.<sup>5</sup> Paul is not claiming a fulfillment of Deuteronomy; rather, he is simply saying that faith as the principle of eternal life is found in the Law. He is not saying that Deuteronomy was about justification by faith; rather, he is saying that they did not have to go to find the oracle from God, because the word of faith was in their hearts. “This commandment” means the commandment to Israel to keep the Law and perform righteousness. Paul is saying that “this commandment” results from the word that is in the heart—faith. Paul then takes the phrases from Deuteronomy and applies them to Christ: who shall ascend to bring Christ down—he has already come; who shall descend to bring him up—he has already risen.<sup>6</sup> The language of Moses then can be related to what Christ did. The analogy is this: Moses was saying it is easy, don’t work for it, don’t go on a mythocal quest for it, it begins in your heart by faith; Paul is saying, Don’t look for it in that way, or try to gain it by your works, for Christ has already come and accomplished it. So the principle of faith was always behind the command to do righteousness.

Paul now makes his major application. The commandment to believe now has the full content to it because Jesus has come. So the word is “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Here is the content of the word of faith—such confession is the outward expression of the belief in the truth. Paul does not necessarily mean that this be a public meeting; but there must be some response to the truth in prayer or praise. When he says that the confession is “Jesus is Lord” he means that Jesus is the Yahweh God of the Old Testament. This does not simply mean make him Lord or master in every area of your life—that takes forever, but that would be what one would try to do if one believed Jesus is God. But Paul means at conversion one must acknowledge His divine person and His supernatural works. The second part of the confession is the resurrection. Jesus as Lord would be incomplete in the ancient context—it is incomplete. You must believe he is a Lord who had a particular historical occasion. Unlike pagan deities, He stands within and without history. He is God, but He came into this world and conquered sin and death to demonstrate His sovereign power. And his conquest of sin and death, and his sovereignty over all life, was declared by his resurrection. To deny the resurrection is to reduce Jesus to being just another teacher who made great claims and promises.

Then, citing Joel, Paul announces that for both Jew and Gentile, rich and poor alike, whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. To call upon Him means to believe in Him, to proclaim faith in him, to acknowledge who he is and what he has done, and to appropriate that for oneself by faith. And this is open to “whoever” calls. Once again, the whole issue of election and free will is beyond our understanding. We live in the world; we act according to our will and our desire; we see only the phenomena—what appears and what we understand. When anyone hears the Gospel and responds by faith, calling on the Lord, that person is saved. But Paul is clear to state the reality as well—that person was elected, chosen by God.

### 3. Salvation for Jews and Gentiles: Hear and Believe (Romans 10:14-21)

Paul shows that there must be messengers of the Gospel who have credentials from God. Preachers have to be sent with the word that people must believe, but they have to be called by God to do so. He supports his point with a citation of Isaiah 52:7, a passage which precedes the marvelous passage of Isaiah 53:1-12. And then he cites the beginning of Isaiah 53:1-12, “Lord,

who has believed our message?” He uses this passage to show from Isaiah that they did not all believe, even though the preacher came from God with the message. He cites this point because it is true, but also because it does not nullify the validity of “by-faith-righteousness.” This fact harmonizes with the whole argument of this section of Romans—many Jews did not believe and therefore died in their sins, even though Israel was the chosen people. It was not God who was at fault; it was their unbelief—the Old Testament is filled with their stories. The grace is that some of them believed. The messenger simply delivers the word of the Lord—and faith then comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. It was not enough to hear the word of God. It had to be acted upon. And it was not just any report, but it was the prophecy of the salvation of God, to be fulfilled and accomplished by the death and resurrection of the Messiah for the sins of the people.

Paul, then, through a series of questions and quotations, makes the point that Israel did hear the word, and did understand, but refused to believe. God’s word went throughout the world. They also knew from the prophets that the Gospel was going to go to the ends of the earth, and that God would provoke Israel to jealousy by turning to Gentiles. Isaiah had predicted this. So now the Gentiles were finding Christ as Savior. What excuse could the Jews give, for they had and knew the Scriptures that predicted this would happen. (Recall that when the wise men asked where the Messiah was to be born, the religious leaders knew exactly where, and what passage said also—but they would not go the 5 miles to see for themselves). The final quotation makes Israel’s unbelief all the more astounding. The text shows that God continued to hold out the offer of salvation; their refusal is all the more reprehensible in the light of God’s mercy and patience. They persisted in rebellion and rejection; and now with the fulfillment in Christ Jesus, they continue to reject the truth of the Gospel. So Paul’s argument in these chapters is clear. He wished to show that in spite of their privileges, most Israelites did not believe. So first he had to show that just because people were part of the family of Abraham did not mean they were saved. From the divine side, it is obvious that God in his election chose some and left others in their hardened condition. Anyone who knew the Law would agree to that. So throughout Israel’s experience there were many who were national Israelites but not of the spiritual seed of Abraham. The fact that God saved some is due to His grace; the fact that He did not destroy everyone immediately is due to His patience (recall the sin of the golden calf in Exodus 32:1-35 where they all came close to judgment). If people had wished to be part of the saved elect, they had every opportunity to believe in the LORD for righteousness. So no one could accuse God of unrighteousness, for people got what they desired and deserved. In the final analysis, Israel was rejected because they did not believe. But looking at it further from the human side it is clear that Israel misunderstood their own Scriptures, and rather than believe in the Lord they tried to earn their righteousness through zeal for the Law. This was not possible. No one could keep the Law and be righteous enough to merit eternal life. Only Christ was able to fulfill the requirements of the Law, and so only Christ can provide righteousness. The Law of Moses itself made it clear that faith was the starting point of obedience to righteousness. But they stumbled over that and refused to believe. Consequently, today there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—all must come to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation or they have no share in the world to come. The irony is that the Gentiles have responded by faith in the Word of the Lord, whereas Israel has resisted, even though the Scriptures themselves predicted that this would happen. But God has been patient with Israel, even though they stiffened in rebellion and unbelief.

## Things to Consider

1. How would you arrange what scholars call the “order of salvation”? Take these terms: faith, election, regeneration, justification, redemption, and salvation. What is the theological order of these events?
2. How does the Bible handle the two sides of the issue, election and free will? Can you discover verses or passages where both seem to be cooperating? You might start with Acts 2:23.
3. Why does divine election not alter the fact of the righteousness of God?
4. What specifically goes into calling on the name of the LORD for salvation?
5. Why is resurrection so necessary to the profession of saving faith?
6. For a little more involved study of these two chapters, how would you assess Paul’s use of the Old Testament. Trace back through the passages he cites to see how he interprets them and applies them in the development of his argument.

1 The word “Shekainah” is a Hebrew/Aramaic word (depending on how it is spelled) which means simply “dwelling.” It refers to the glory of the LORD that dwelt in the Sanctuary. Sometimes the word “Shekainah” is used to refer to God himself, as we might use the word heaven.

2 Recall that the Greek work christos is the translation of the Hebrew word mashiah (pronounced mah-she-ack ), “messiah.” They both mean “anointed one,” i.e., the king.

3 There is no personal animosity in the “hating Esau.” It is the Old Testament language for shunning the line not chosen. God’s will was to choose the line from Jacob. Anything not in the will of God is to be rejected as such--as in hating father and mother. The language sounds excessive to us; but to the Hebrews it was for clear demarcation. And, people in the line of Esau, as well as in the line of Jacob, could come to faith--they all had to come to faith to be saved.

4 The Law is still part of Scripture and profitable for instruction in righteousness; but the details of the Law now have to be interpreted and applied in the light of the fulfillment of Christ.

5 A midrash is an analogical application from Scripture, a homily. The writer quotes from a passage, and rather than explain its literal meaning, makes a spiritual lesson from its analogy.

6 In ancient religions finding the secret of eternal life was often presented as a pilgrimage to the netherworld, or to the realm of the gods, which was impossible. Moses was saying that they did not have to do that--they had divine revelation and faith.

## 03.09. The Consolation of Israel's Rejection

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The Consolation of Israel's Rejection (Romans 11:1-36) Eighth Bible Class (Romans 11:1-36) IV. Vindication (cont.) C. The Consolation of Israel's Rejection (Romans 11:1-36)

Romans 11:1-36 will turn its attention to the present and future purposes of God with regard to Israel. Paul's argument can be traced in five steps: a discussion of the remnant that is today finding salvation (Romans 11:1-6), but an acknowledgement that the majority are blinded to the truth (Romans 11:7-10), followed by a reason for the setting aside of national Israel (Romans 11:11-21), and a reminder of the promised restoration of God's salvation program to Israel (Romans 11:22-32), all of which is bound up in the mystery of the wisdom of God (Romans 11:33-36). There is no doubt that Paul is discussing national Israel.

### 1. The Remnant of Israel Finding Salvation (Romans 11:1-6)

Paul again begins his discussion with a question: "Did God reject His people whom He foreknew?" According to the New Testament, Israel was apparently replaced (Matthew 21:43) by a "nation" (ethnos and not genan) that would bear fruit. Christ's words were mostly critical of the current first century generation of Jews who had not produced fruit. The reference to "another nation" is a reference to the present form of the kingdom, the Church, a nation called out of the nations (1 Peter 2:9-10). But Israel still had the oracles—their promises and their advantages were not nullified because the Lord turned to the Gentiles to bear fruit. Paul will ask, "Did Israel fall irrevocably?" (Romans 11:11)—Not at all! was his answer. This was another chapter in God's dealings with Israel: God made promises to Israel, and although the majority of Israelites time and time again had sinned and been sent from the land, the promises remained. So in the chapter Paul will point out that the rejection of Israel is not complete (there is a remnant of believers) and not final (all Israel shall be saved). His discussion will be essentially in two major parts, both begun with "I ask then" (Romans 11:1 and Romans 11:11). So Paul's first question, "Did God cast them out?" (Romans 11:1) relates to Romans 10:21, the nation hardened in unbelief. It might appear from that discussion that they rebelled and God cast them out. (By the way, the church fathers in the early centuries saw in that quotation from Isaiah 65:2 a prophecy of the cross visibly represented).

Paul's typical response is a direct rejection—"God forbid!" He presents himself as an example—he is a Jew, and he is a believer in Jesus, part of the remnant, part of the present form of the kingdom, the nation bearing fruit. And this is not strange, because God has not finally cast of His people. His explanation is that God foreknew them. If this means "to know beforehand" that Israel would believe, then there is no problem in asking "Has God cast them away?" But if it means "chosen," then there is a more significant matter. Does past election guarantee the future, with sin in between? The idea of foreknowledge means essentially "to enter into intimate relationship beforehand." Thus, Paul knows that God has a future goal based on love for the people of Israel—some future generation. In order to show that God has not cast off His people Paul can show that there has been a remnant of believers in every age, even when national Israel was

thrown off or exiled or was in sin. He makes the analogy with Elijah.<sup>1</sup> At that time apostasy was general, but not universal. Elijah thought he alone was left faithful; but God had reserved for himself several thousand who had not bowed to Baal.

Paul's conclusion is that today there is a remnant chosen by grace. This is not "the" remnant of prophecy that will be especially prominent in the latter days. It is an element within the Church that is Jewish by nationality. Concerning this Galatians 6:16 is important. There Paul uses the expression "peace on them and the Israel of God." Some want to translate this "even the Israel of God," to make the Church and Israel one and the same entity. So the meaning of the conjunction "and" (kai) in this line is critical; it is used very rarely for "even" (Ellicott says never). Galatians were Gentiles troubled by Jews. Paul was saying that there should be peace on the Gentile Christians who walk this way, as well as on true Jews who believed in Jesus and walk according to grace. They are the "Israel of God"—Jewish converts, not Judaized Gentiles. Paul here in Romans likewise is talking about a true remnant of Jews, true believers, followers of the Christian faith (or completed Jews since the Messiah was their Messiah). The Church is made up of Gentiles and Jews, and in the first century there was a good deal of tension about how this was to work—the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-41 being one sample of the tension. So the word "Israel" in Galatians would mean "Israel," as obvious as that might sound, and not Gentiles now known as "Israel." This fits the normal meaning of "Israel," the normal meaning of "and," and the situation in the first century Church. Those who have decided that all the promises to Israel have been and will be fulfilled in the Church attempt to make "Israel" here mean the Church, the "true" Israel. But that seems awfully forced. So Paul is saying there is a remnant who are saved by grace and not by works, for as always, everyone is saved by grace and not by works. The principles of law and grace are contrasting and conflicting. The remnant is by grace according to election—it is a work of God. Thus, God has not cast off His people—Paul could clearly witness to that, as well as thousands upon thousands of early believers in Jesus who were Jewish.

2. The Majority Blinded to the Truth (Romans 11:7-10). The logical question to follow is "What, then? What Israel so earnestly sought it did not obtain, but the elect did." The elect of God, whom we recognize as the true believers, have received righteousness. The rest have only attained blindness—they have no spiritual understanding and have not come to the faith.

These other Israelites were hardened. The metaphor is drawn from the word for a petrified stone—a heart that has become callous. They do not see, they do not accept. Romans 11:25 will say that Israel was "hardened in part"—people like Paul and Timothy were not hardened. The majority of the Jews were hardened in unbelief. Some will say, "Oh God did not do that." But verse 8 says that God did do it. God's laws are operative: when people do not respond to the Word of God, they will be hardened to it (as C. S. Lewis said, if people will not say to God, "Thy will be done," God will say to them sometime, "Thy will be done"). One cannot hear the Gospel without some effect. It never has the same effect twice. You never hear the truth the same way, for truth never simply passes by. It is serious to hear the Word and not respond by faith. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 will explain that while the Law (the Bible) is read in the synagogue service, a veil lies on the hearts of the people and they are blind to the truth of God's revelation as it is directing them to the Messiah, the sacrificial atonement, and the gift of eternal life. They can understand a good deal about the text they hear, but they miss the main point of revelation. Only by God's grace does the Spirit break through and bring liberty; and at that moment when they turn

to Jesus the Messiah by faith, the veil is removed so that they can behold his glory and be changed into that glory. But because they are blind, it has to be a work of God to break through and inspire faith. Indeed, salvation is a work of God, for all of us, Jew or Gentile, were dead in trespasses and sins until the Spirit quickened us, made us alive. It was at that moment that we believed that the Spirit was actually working in us to regenerate us. And Paul knows that many Jews like himself believed in Christ when the Spirit opened their hearts—but many, many did not believe.

### 3. The Reason for Setting Aside National Israel (Romans 11:11-21)

National or ethnic Israel's rejection is not final, only temporary. Paul has shown already that it is not complete, for not all Jews rejected Jesus. In fact, down through the history of the Church, or perhaps we may say down through the first phase of the New Covenant, many Jewish people have served as great preachers, theologians, missionaries, or the like in the cause of Christ. But now Paul considers the majority who have stumbled, those who have not believed in Christ.

He reflects on the ultimate purpose of Israel's fall in the grand plan of God, and the ultimate purpose is twofold, both the salvation of the Gentiles and the future restoration of the Jews. God has used the failure of Israel to bring salvation to the Gentiles. But Paul affirms that Israel's stumbling was not beyond recovery. National Israel failed to believe, and so God rejected them to turn to the Gentiles. But Paul explains that if the rejection of Israel brought such blessing to people throughout the world, what may we expect at the restoration? This question indicates something great is going to happen, something that is the opposite of their rejection of the Savior. The words "fullness" (Romans 11:12) and "acceptance" (Romans 11:15) point to the future restoration of Israel to the promises of God. There is coming a day when those Jews who are alive will turn in faith to follow Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. Do you see the cycle? The failure of Israel to believe led to the salvation of the Gentiles—most of us, which God intended to use to provoke the Jews to jealousy, so that they might be restored by faith in Him. (Unfortunately, the Church has done very little to make Jewish people jealous, to make them want the Savior. In fact, many times the Gospel as been presented as a triumphalism—you had it and lost it, we now have it! And Jesus was not always clearly presented as Jewish—their Messiah). One of the reasons that the Church has given Israel very little to be jealous about is because ever since the reformation (at least) most biblical scholars have missed or ignored the promises to Israel and the hope of their restoration. Instead, a Christian theology of replacement has taken hold, so much so that in commentaries about the Israelites in the Old Testament the word "Church" is used to describe those who believed, as in "the Old Testament Church." That can be a little confusing. But it is clear in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, that the Gentiles who come to faith in the LORD would be the means of restoring Israel through their salvation. The Jews, down inside, are deeply concerned about the crucifixion and the Catholic charge (and absolution of the charge) of deicide. When Christ is presented correctly and compassionately, the witness has proved to be the most effective.

Paul's reasoning is that the rejection of Israel ("their" in Romans 11:12 is used three times; it refers to Israel collectively, as a whole nation<sup>2</sup>) brought reconciliation to the world, that is, when Israel rebelled God turned to the Gentiles (as He had prophesied He would in the Old Testament—see for example Malachi 1:11) to make Israel jealous; so then in the future the restoration of Israel as a

believing people will be “life from the dead”—an even greater miracle in God’s working of salvation in the world (Romans 11:15). Many simply interpret this to be the doctrine of resurrection. But it is a figure of speech in this context, a spiritual coming alive or quickening, stating what it will be like for great nations to come to spiritual life. Nations, vast numbers of people, that are now in opposition to Christ will believe when Israel is restored (see Isaiah 60:1-6; Acts 15:1-41).

Romans 11:16 is difficult. Paul says “If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.” From usage and from the immediate context the figures of first fruit and root seem to refer to Israel, consecrated to God for divine purposes. The whole lump is to be consecrated. The present, early converts are the firstfruits; there is more to come. The root seems to be Abraham, or at least the patriarchs and their covenant. If the root is the Abrahamic covenantal blessings, then that is the basis for expectation. We who are Gentiles have no such covenant, but the basis for our blessing (=salvation) is the Israelite heritage. We are “among them” or “fellow partakers” of the Abrahamic blessing; we partake of Jewish blessings. We stand on the basis of the promises to Abraham, grafted in as in the place of the natural branches. In Romans 11:17-21 the apostle offers some stern warnings based on this teaching about the tree and the branches. Christians who are Gentiles should not boast because they have been grafted in whereas Israel failed. Their (our) salvation was a work of divine grace that resulted from the failure of Israel. If we do not produce fruit, that is, practical righteousness and obedience, then we too could be removed from the place of blessing as was ancient Israel (and this is the warning of John to the seven churches in Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22, that if they did not repent and do what they were supposed to do, God would remove the lampstand from them). So Paul is warning his readers to learn from Israel’s mistake; fear the Lord and live righteously if you want to have the sense of security of salvation. Paul has spoken a good deal in this epistle about grace and faith and election; but he has never presented it as an “easy believism” without evidence of a changed life. The evidence of divine election is perseverance in righteousness—a person who comes to faith and lives a changed life and produces righteousness will be recognized as part of the elect of God.

#### 4. The Promised Restoration of Israel (Romans 11:22-32)

Paul warns his readers that the security they have in God’s kindness is conditioned upon their perseverance—the evidence of saving faith. If the Gentiles who have been grafted in do not persevere, they could be cut off like Israel was. And if Jewish people come to faith in Christ Jesus, they can be grafted back into the program—be partakers of their New Covenant. In fact, Paul affirms, God is eager to graft the natural branches back in to the tree.

According to Romans 11:25, Paul affirms that Israel has experienced this hardening in unbelief in part “until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”<sup>3</sup> This is a mystery according to Paul, that is, a divine secret that must be revealed, a hidden truth. The hardness and the blindness of the nation was in part—not every Israelite refused to believe. And the hardness of Jews in their rejection of Jesus was temporary—“until” the fullness of the Gentiles. The idea Paul has is in this expression “their fullness”; it means the full complement, the full number, or the whole body of Gentiles who are to be saved will have been saved. The expression is a soteriological description, meaning the full, completed number.

Then, Paul affirms, when that has happened, then “all Israel shall be saved.”<sup>4</sup> Here Paul is concerned with the restoration of national Israel to their covenant program with God. He has already shown that it is probable because they are the natural branches. And he has shown it is possible because of God’s kindness. Now he will show that it was prophesied by Isaiah 59:20-21, and Isaiah 27:1-29. “All Israel” refers to the nation of Israel as a whole, the Jewish people who are alive at the time when the number of the Gentiles is completed. The context has been leading up to this. In Romans 11:12 he had referred to the unbelief of the Israelite people as “their fullness” in contrast to “their trespass”; in Romans 11:22-23 he spoke of Israel as being unfaithful, but possibly grafted back in; and “they” and “their” in Romans 11:30-32 refers to Israel in the light of the discussion. So now he looks to the future plan for “all Israel.” The use of the word “all” in Scripture does not often mean every individual. But “all Israel” means the whole nation, Jews as a whole.<sup>5</sup> The nation as a whole was unfaithful (Daniel 9:11), but not every single individual (see 1 Kings 12:1 and 2 Chronicles 12:1). Only God knows when a nation can be called apostate, when the majority is in rebellion and only a remnant holds to the true faith. When we say “all Israel rejected Christ” we mean its leadership and its people as a whole, but not every Jew who was there. So we use that idea in the same sense here for their salvation. When it says they “shall be saved” it means according to the citation from Isaiah that they will be brought back into God’s blessing by the forgiveness and cleansing of sin. Paul, based on Isaiah, sees that in the future there will be a vast conversion of Jewish people to the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus the Messiah. This will occur at the end of the age, prior to or simultaneous with the coming of the Messiah. To say that by “all Israel” Paul now means the Church, that is, when the Gentiles are all saved that will mean that “all Israel” will be saved and fulfill Isaiah’s prediction, simply will not do. It would completely change the flow of the argument in the passage and alter the meaning of “Israel” here in a way that the context will not support.

Besides, any detailed study of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, among others, will reveal that God will indeed redeem Israel at the end of the age. Those Jews who will be alive at that time, or at his coming, will turn to him, looking on him they have pierced and acknowledging that all they like sheep had gone astray.<sup>6</sup> But until then the evangelistic appeal must go out, for they do not know if they will be alive at the end of the age or not. So Paul’s heart’s desire is that they might be saved. In Romans 11:28-32 Paul offers in summary his philosophy of history. The sentences are written very carefully: two antithetical clauses with explanations, followed by another pair of antithetical ideas and their explanation. “Mercy,” a key term in Romans, is used four times in here. The first antithetical pair concerns the Jews as enemies or beloved—enemies as far as the Gospel is concerned, but beloved because of the patriarchs. The explanation is that the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.<sup>7</sup> The promises are secure because they are based on God’s fidelity to His word. What is the “calling” that is irrevocable? It is the calling of Israel as a nation to be the witness to the nations, the means of blessing for all the families of the world. Because God does not change in His choice of election, Malachi says, Israel was not consumed (Malachi 3:16). Paul is relating divine immutability to Israel’s future. God’s plan will be fulfilled, with people who will believe in Christ. The stress in this section is on what God is going to do. God will initiate their salvation: “I will pour out on them my Spirit ... and they shall look on Him whom they have pierced.”

God's covenant promises are eternal and unconditional; but individual participation in them requires faith. There is a future for Israel in God's plan for the kingdom; but only those who come to faith in Jesus Christ will share in them. Now a few believe; at the end of the age great numbers. The second pair of antithetical clauses is in Romans 11:30-31. At one time the Gentiles, who were not the elect people, were disobedient, but they have received mercy now as a result of Israel's disobedience. But on the other hand, Israel's disobedience will also lead to her obtaining mercy when they realize what God has done for the Gentiles. Here are the two purposes of Israel's fall reiterated—Gentile salvation and Jewish restoration. The explanation of all this: "for God has bound all men over to disobedience (Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31) so that He may have mercy on them all." So Paul breaks down the stages of history into periods of disobedience. The point of it all is the display of God's mercy. So Paul sees that in God's plan of the ages there will come a time when Israel will be converted, restored to their mission, and enter into all the blessings promised in the Old Testament. And, that conversion of Israel will lead to a world-wide conversion of other Gentiles. Truly, the end of the age has some glorious prophecies to be realized.

5. The Wisdom of God (Romans 11:33-36) The reason for the way that God has chosen to call the Jews to service, then reject them and turn to the Gentiles, and then to restore them again through the dealings with the Gentiles and for the greater blessing of the world—all of this is locked up in the riches of the wisdom of God. Paul cites Old Testament passages to show that God's ways are past searching out; He has never needed the counsel of any one, for His plan is perfect. This section is pure praise and no argument at all. Yet it may be the greatest argument of all. If you and I do not understand God's dealings with nations and peoples, it is not because there is not a good and sufficient reason. The difficulty is with our inability to understand the wisdom of God. By weaving ideas from the Old Testament together, Paul affirms several points about God's wisdom:

(1) No one knows the mind of the Lord [Paul has tried to give a glimpse of the way the mind of the Lord works];

(2) No one can advise the Lord—God never asks for advice from His creatures; Jesus never asked for advice when He was here on earth; and (3) No one has given anything to God that would put Him in an awkward position of owing anyone anything.

"Because from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen!" "From Him" means that God is the all sufficient cause and source of everything. "Through Him" means that God is the mighty sustainer and Worker. "Unto Him" means that God must call every creature to account to Him. All glory is indeed due to Him.

#### Things to Consider

1. Think down through Church History about Jewish and Christian relationships! How would you describe them? But on the other hand, think of significant Jewish Christians and their value to the faith.

2. Can you think back through the Bible about "judicial blindness"? Start with the call of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-13. And note the immediate and mediate causes throughout Scripture (cf. also 2 Corinthians 4:1-6).

3. Think back through the prophetic messages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. How much of that material has to do with the future of Israel in God's plans?

4. If you have time to delve into some Rabbinic background, note that it is a major belief of Judaism that "all Israel will be saved." On what basis does Judaism teach this? How does Paul's teaching differ?

5. How would you understand the "wisdom of God"? Perhaps you might like to read through God's speech to Job out of the wind at the end of the book of Job to get a fresh appreciation of His plans—you know, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the world, when all the angels shouted for joy ... ?" What should our response be to His wisdom?

1 For Paul, the Old Testament has a living, abiding voice: "What says the Scripture?" The words of Scripture are divine words with abiding force for today.

2 These are indications of the promised blessings based on the relationship to all Israel. In the development of the promises, beginning as early as Genesis 9:24-27 and then Genesis 12:1-3, Israel was a tool for blessing the nations. When they fell into general sin, they as the tool ceased to be functional, and they were exiled.

3 By the way, this can only work if election is involved. God knows how many Gentiles will come in, and who is the last to come in--then comes the restoration of the program to Israel.

4 Some commentators try to take this to refer to Gentiles, meaning "the Israel of God" will be saved. But that defies the plain meaning of the text, the point of the prophecy in Isaiah, and makes very little sense in the argument.

5 Some folks criticize the interpretation of "all" as being general and not perfectly literal; but our key to interpretation is the usage in the Bible--and "all" means the vast majority of a group in so many cases--such as "all Jerusalem" went out to see him. Likewise, biblical usage of the word "Israel" leads to the natural conclusion that it is ethnic Israel--especially in this chapter where it is contrasted with Gentiles.

6 The purpose of Israel's restoration at the end of the age includes so much material that it is impossible to include it here. That would take a thorough study of the kingdom of God, and the function of believers in the world to come, or in the eternal state.

7 The Greek term means "not to be regretted." The idea is an after care, an after thought, to change the mind. The point is that God's promises and calling have an ultimate purpose. There is no change in His decisions.

## 03.10. Application in the Assembly

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Application in the Assembly (Romans 12:1-21) Ninth Bible Class (Romans 12:1-21) V. Application or God's Righteousness at Work (Romans 12:1-21, Romans 13:1-14, Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13)

We now come to the last major section of the book, the application of the doctrine set forth in Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39; Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21; Romans 11:1-36. This is the standard form of Paul's writings, doctrine first and then practice—or application. The first part of the application deals with the living out of the Christian life in the assembly of believers, Romans 12:1-21.

A. Application in the Assembly (Romans 12:1-21) 1. Spiritual Growth (Romans 12:1-2) In the Book of Romans as well as in his other writings, the apostle Paul gives a number of instructions for living the spiritual life by the power of the Spirit (the provision of the Spirit introduced here in Romans 8:1-39)—be filled with the Spirit, mortify the flesh, yield your members, walk in the Spirit, and many more. Nowhere in his writings is the basic process of doing all this more clearly laid out than in Romans 12:1-2. The first verse sets down the principle of one's relationship to God. In vain one tries to live triumphantly in the midst of secondary relationships unless this primary relationship is established. It is a relationship that begins with the language of dedication—it describes a foundational commitment to the Lord and not a regular spiritual activity. Through this dedication, Paul will explain, the believer is in a position to know the will of God (Romans 12:2).

"I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God." Both the "therefore" and the "mercies of God" refer us to chapters 1-11. In view of the great plan of redemption unveiled in Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39; Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21; Romans 11:1-36, Paul exhorts believers to dedication. The urging is a powerful exhortation; the verb (*parakaleo*) is used for exhortations and commands, even though the New Testament exhortations do not have the sanctions that one finds in the Old Testament. We are not under Law; nevertheless, there are instructions and exhortations that must be followed if we are to live successfully (as Christians) in this world. (Of course, there often is a great difference between what is considered success in the world and what is success with God—they may overlap, but they may conflict).

How is this initial dedication to be done? We are to present our bodies as "living sacrifices." The term "sacrifice" belongs to the realm of the dead; the term "living" counters the point. The idea is drawn from the Israelite dedication offering of Leviticus 2:1-16: the sacrifice is one of complete surrender of our bodies, our lives, our possessions, and our abilities as a perpetual dedicatory offering to God. As a sacrifice we are dead to the way of this world; as a living sacrifice we are alive to the way of Christ. We are not our own; we have been bought with a price and we belong to him.

It is interesting that the term for sacrifice used here is never used to translate an offering in the Hebrew Old Testament. But it is used of the priest's service in "standing before the LORD." Thus, the sacrifice to be offered is not a bloody sacrifice, so the choice of words fits better with the dedication of Leviticus 2:1-16. The verb form used is an aorist (point action); in light of the present tenses that follow, there must be a contrast intended—Paul could have used a present tense here too ("present yourselves continually") but he did not. So his idea is probably that there should be one definite presentation (like "I do" in a marriage—an event and commitment made at a point in time but with continuing implications). There are times to renew such a dedication, but not to repeat it. It follows the atoning sacrifices in Leviticus, and so in the Church the dedication offering—ourselves to God—follows our acceptance and appreciation for his atonement. Because he has redeemed us, what can we give to God as an expression of our eternal gratitude? Our bodies!—as living sacrifices. The verb means "to present"—not the passive idea of surrender, or even of yield, in this verse. You present it—as you would a gift to a friend. The dedication gift you offer to God is "your body" (not just "yourselves"). The body is the outward form and expression of the inner person; it includes all your talents, abilities, desires, and aspirations—all of it and more are to be given to God. And Paul says that this is our reasonable service. This is a good translation, although some texts go with "this is your spiritual worship." It is rational. Physical and spiritual service involves the whole body. Human beings are rational (as opposed to animal sacrifice, where the animal is an irrational victim), and so the human dedicating himself or herself is a reasonable thing to do. The pattern of this (and the fulfillment of Leviticus 2:1-16 because it was the liturgy to be used with that dedication offering) is Psalms 40:1-17, which was then fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament (see Hebrews 10:1-39). It begins with the acknowledgment: "a body you have prepared for me." God has made us fit for his service. The talents, abilities, and characteristics we have he gave us. It continues with desire: "here I come to do your will." If God made us for his service, then our service is to do his will. There is a plan to follow that has been revealed; and he has prepared us for it. The person who is redeemed and filled with gratitude will desire to please God. But God desires us to say it, to him, in the presence of others. And it this dedication necessarily involves direction: "in the volume [scroll] of the book it is prescribed for me." Dedication without direction is delusion. It has to be directed to do God's will if it is to be pleasing to him. Every Israelite who dedicated himself or herself to the LORD would use this liturgy. And we too must acknowledge or confess similar things when we make our commitment.

Now Jesus fulfilled this passage in a far greater way. God the Father did prepare a body for his Son, and that body was conceived by the Spirit in the womb of Mary. Jesus did desire to do the will of his Father, more than we every will. He was completely obedient. And, Scripture not only prescribed how as a righteous man he should live, but it spoke of him in prophetic oracles—and these he was to fulfill. Jesus' dedication and obedience thus fulfills Psalms 40:1-17 (and Leviticus 2:1-16), and provides us the model for dedication. Like Christ Jesus we are to commit our lives to do God's will as it is prescribed for us in his word.

One further point that is worth mentioning briefly. The Israelite dedication service of Leviticus 2:1-16 involved burning a handful of the gift that was brought on the altar as a memorial. The Hebrew idea of the verb "to remember" or its noun "memorial" involves the proper outworking of what is remembered—it is more than memory; it is acting on what is remembered (like the thief on the cross, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom"). That memorial at the altar

reminded God to fulfill what he had promised through the sacrifices of the covenant, but it also reminded the people to fulfill their covenant obligations as the redeemed people. Thus, in the New Covenant Jesus told us to observe Holy Communion “in memory of him.” Every time we have communion, it is an act of faith by which we confirm that we have entered into covenant with God and are awaiting the fulfillment of the promises, and, it is an act of commitment whereby we reaffirm our obligations to serve him as his redeemed people. So the starting point of spiritual living is this serious dedication to the Lord (I say serious because there are frivolous dedications out of emotional responses and the people making them do not know what it all means). This dedication may come almost immediately when someone comes to faith in Christ; but more often, it comes with the beginning of spiritual growth, as one begins to understand what Romans 1:1-32; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39; Romans 9:1-33; Romans 10:1-21; Romans 11:1-36 is all about. When believers learn more about Christ, salvation, the covenant responsibilities, the body of Christ, and the mission of the Church in the world, then they are ready to make a heartfelt commitment.

Romans 12:2 deals with our relationship to the world. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” By his choice of words, Paul is saying not to take as a mode of living the present, fleeting, fashions of the world, its dominating motives and moods. Here is true biblical separation—the first half of the doctrine of sanctification (“set apart from the world”). Separation from the world is not to be reduced to a few legalistic things; it is wisdom to live untarnished in a world system that is dominated by selfishness, greed, pleasure, and indifference to the needs of others—all of which are directly the opposite of the Christian life. It is that attitude of the world which dominates a person that constitutes worldliness. If what dominates my thinking and manifests itself in all my life is the way the world lives—to the exclusion of God—then I am conformed to the world. If I live, love, and choose as the world does, then I am worldly, and that way of living cannot harmonize with the dedication and sanctification of the spiritual life.

Christians in our country come close to being caught up in the world system. Little things begin to change our way of thinking. For example, people crave a blessing (this is big now), meaning success, wealth, security. But they have forgotten that they must first be a blessing in the world for God to bless them, and God may not bless them with material things. Or, people pray earnestly for illnesses and diseases to be removed, or instead of praying they think they can command them to leave; and it is perfectly understandable that people should want to be free from the pain and suffering. But they have forgotten that when they suffer they are to count it all joy, because it gives them an opportunity to use that suffering for the glory of God, as a witness to the world. They need to add to their prayers that God will change them spiritually and use them. Or, people are told if they give money it is a seed that is planted and God will pay it back and more, that is, the giving is a financial investment that will pay dividends. But they have forgotten that giving to God is simply giving to him what belongs to him, and the giving that pleases him the most is sacrificial giving—that is not a sure business deal. These trends and many more today show that many in the Church have bought into the world’s system of this country, and it is hindering the Church from being a true witness for the Lord and a compassionate help of people in great need. The counterpoint to this negative side (not being conformed to the world) is the positive: “be transformed” (this is the other side of sanctification, the positive side—set apart to God). Here is the inner change (see Php 3:21 and 2 Corinthians 3:18), in contrast to the outer conformity to the

world. Sanctification is not just being separated from the world (with a list of worldly things that one should not do); it is a positive transformation by which we become more and more like Jesus Christ.

Notice how it is accomplished: “by the renewing of your mind.” We need to recall what Paul had said earlier about the spiritual mind as opposed to the carnal or fleshly mind. One renews the mind by yielding it (and all our members) to the Holy Spirit and studying the Word of God day by day. Then one gains the mind of Christ—the life begins to change from glory to glory as we reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord revealed in Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:18). Too many Christians rely on personal experiences to get them through the week, perhaps an uplifting service, or a supernatural feeling. They do not study the Word. They are like cars with dead batteries, and any time they are to be useful they have to be jump-started. No. They must be in the Bible constantly so that they can grow. Too many Christians have forgotten that God redeemed the mind as well as the heart; they are to wear the helmet of salvation and renew their minds with the Word. So the essentials of spiritual growth are: Dedication, Separation (from the world and to God), and Transformation by the Renewing of the Mind.

Once this begins to develop, we will be able to test and approve what the will of God is. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” So the rest of these chapters will lay out the application of the spiritual life in a variety of settings and situations.

Kenneth S. Wuest summarizes this verse this way: “And stop assuming an outward expression that does not come from within you and is not representative of what you are in your inner being, but is patterned after this age; but change your outward expression to one that comes from within and is representative of your inner being, by the renewing of your mind, resulting in your putting to the test what is the will of God, the good and well-pleasing, and complete will, and having found that it meets specifications, placing your approval upon it.” We are not to be actors, conforming to this present world system, but to be genuine, because the Spirit of truth is working within us.

## 2. The Gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12:3-8)

Based on his apostolic ministry (“the grace given to me”) Paul warns us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. There is a danger of our thinking too much of our gifts and callings; instead, we have to see ourselves in relation to other believers as part of a body. This relationship is explained several times in Paul’s letters as the spiritual gifts. Here he describes them in relationship to faith: “God has divided a measure of faith to each one.” This passage is the first place where Paul introduces the Church in terms of a body, as he does in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31. The body is the unity; so each member of the body must function as part of the body. Finally, in Romans 12:6, Paul calls them “gifts” (charismata), differing according to the grace that is given to each of us. A spiritual gift is the special ability that God has given to each of us to use in ministering in and to the body. Or, to put it another way, a spiritual gift is the special use God makes of an individual in certain capacities. Several observations come to mind from the general teaching in Scripture: (1) The spiritual gifts are not offices; they are functions. (2) They are not natural talents (although we sometimes call those gifts), even though they might overlap with natural talents—but they might not. It is all how God uses the person. (3) The spiritual gifts overlap with some biblical exhortations. For example, all Christians are to give, but some have the gift of faith (that is, God uses them more abundantly in these capacities than others). (4) Some spiritual

gifts can be cultivated, and others cannot. There are gifts that you can try to see if God will use you in that way; but others where God simply has to break through supernaturally. (5) Some gifts are readily misconstrued, like “miracles” and “healings” (Christians love to describe things as miracles, almost anything that happens unexpectedly); but some of the phenomena here probably comes under the gift of faith because they are answers to prayer. (6) Not everyone has the same gifts. It is wrong to expect people to have certain gifts when they do not have them. (7) Spirituality is not measured by the possession of certain gifts. In fact, sometimes a serious case of pride comes in and destroys the gift, making the person with the powerful gift very unspiritual. And (8) there are far more gifts than the spectacular sign gifts that seem to get so much attention. People seem to think only of the sign gifts and wonders, the tongues, the prophecies, the healing. But what about the gifts of helps, administration, showing compassion, giving? When you discuss spiritual gifts, be sure to have Paul’s list at hand.

There is no place for pride here. The term for the spiritual gifts comes from the same word for “grace.” It is a free gift, a grace. Each member of the body of Christ has at least one spiritual gift, at least one function to perform. Those called to leadership roles in the believing community must have the spiritual gifts that go for those roles—pastor/teacher, faith, administration, and the like. The most practical advice about the spiritual gifts is this: just get on with your spiritual life, growing in the Lord, and becoming involved in the various aspects of the ministry of the Church that are interesting to you. As you get involved, and as you develop a balanced Christian life, God will begin to use you in certain ways, and draw your heart to certain functions. These will probably focus on your gifts. Then talk about them with spiritual leaders who may be able to discern them and direct you in their development.

Paul lists several gifts here, although in other places he prioritizes them. One is “prophesying” which is a very complicated term. It must be understood in relation to the prophets in the Bible (although we must not confuse the office with the gift). It deals with exhortation, rebuke, and encouragement from the Word of the Lord. Biblical exposition seems to be its clearest manifestation now that the canon is closed, for anything said in a prophecy must harmonize with the revealed Word of God. This was a test of the prophets in Israel (see Deuteronomy 13:1-18 and Deuteronomy 18:1-22). Sometimes the spiritual gift of exhortation or comfort is confused with this one. But Paul says that if this gift works, do it in proportion to your faith. There is some dispute what this means; but the consensus suggests that it is to be related to spiritual growth. Paul never allows the novice or the new-born Christian to teach, be an elder, or to exercise authority over the congregation.

“Serving” is listed as the next spiritual gift—not one of the popular ones when people start seeking their gifts. Here is active service, the practical ministry. You do not need this gift to do it! We are all called to be servants—so serve. Jesus taught that ministry was self-sacrificing service in love. We have already noted that “servant of the LORD” is the highest title and task we can have. We can never be more than a servant. But there are people in the Church who have a special gift for this, that is, God by his grace has used them in this capacity most effectively—they just do it without worrying about it, without complaining, without comparing what others are doing. The gift of “teaching” is at the heart of the pastoral ministry. The priests and Levites in Israel were the official teachers. They were to explain the Law to the people, be the source of knowledge (Deuteronomy 33:1-29 and Malachi 2:1-17). In the early Church the saints came together for several purposes,

one of which was continuing in the apostolic teaching (Acts 2:1-47). This gift makes the Scriptures clear, understandable, and applicable. Again, all Christians are called to be teachers (Hebrews 5:1-14); but God makes special use of some people in this area, and they are said to have the gift of teacher. A lot of people claim to have this gift, but do not; they have to be carefully dealt with or they could lead the Church astray. They might be very gifted teachers—as the world counts the ability; but if God does not bless them in the teaching of his word, they do not have the spiritual gift.

“Encouraging” is a gift. This is the ministry of comforting those who need comfort. Paul was a teacher; Barnabas was the exhorter and comforter (“son of consolation” is the meaning of the name). See how special this is according to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

Here too the Bible makes it clear that we are to comfort and exhort one another. All of us. But God will make special use of some.

“Giving,” or sharing earthly possessions, is another gift. God gives some people the gift of making money and sharing it generously in an unostentatious way. One wonders about the spirituality of the great displays of giving we see so much of in modern fund raising. Giving is a gift of the Spirit; it does not manifest itself with the blowing of trumpets. Those who have the gift give and give again without any real desire for praise, perhaps not even thinking they are doing anything more than others. And everyone is required to give.

“Leadership.” It is interesting to me to see that there is so much concern in this area today. Often when seminaries survey their graduates, they get criticized for not developing in the graduates better leadership skills. That may be a partially valid criticism. It may also be that some of them simply do not have the gift. The movement of the Church requires this spiritual gift; if pastors do not have it, they have to do the best they can, hoping people in the body have it. Everything is to be done decently and in order in the Church. The smooth running of it all requires administration (not authoritative domination—leading).

“Showing mercy” is a spiritual gift. Visiting the sick, counseling the weary, exhorting the weak in the faith—many manifestations of this gift. We are all called to do it; but God uses some most effectively in these capacities. Some people who try to do this and not only do not have the gift but have not learned how to do it should be discouraged from doing it—they cast a spell of gloom over the needy. Find another avenue of service for them. This is not the whole list (see Ephesians 4:1-32 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 for supplements). But the point that must come across here in the way they all function is this by Griffith Thomas: “Three great thoughts are emphasized, or at least suggested, in these words: Unity, Diversity, and Harmony.”

3. Love (Romans 12:9-16) The relationship of the Christian to other believers must be characterized by love. This love is to be genuine; it is not to be with hypocrisy. And as part of the outworking of love, Christians must hate evil and stick to what is good.

There are many spiritual gifts; but the most important principle is that they function in love—not in rivalry, or envy, or divisiveness. Love. After all, “the fruit of the Spirit is love ... .” How can one claim his or her function is a gift of the Spirit when there is no manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit? In Corinthians Paul likewise joins the discussion of the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-31) with the discussion of love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13). Nothing phoney or pretentious can be present if the

Spirit is producing the gift. Of course, if it is a natural talent that is well developed, it can be done with pride and with a competitive spirit. But Christian love takes the form of genuinely caring for other people and seeking their highest good—something that the Spirit produces in us. This point is expanded more in Romans 12:10. We are to have family affection one to another, or as Farrar puts it, “Love the brethren in the faith as though they were brethren in the blood.” But where the teaching gets most difficult is when Paul explains plainly that we are to honor one another above ourselves. Genuinely give others their right weight of authority, importance, and service. We unfortunately spend most of our time clamoring for attention and praise—the highest seats in the synagogue. We have to learn how to be genuinely glad when God blesses and uses others—even more so than he uses us. That is Christian love.

Then follows quite a loaded list of instructions: keep your spiritual fervor in zeal, be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, share with those in need, and practice hospitality (Romans 12:11-13). Isn't it amazing how out of the Pauline instructions we each tend to pick the ones we want to obey. What must be noted here is the principle that love for one another is costly; it is not usually convenient or easy. Moreover, rather than worry about which gifts you have and who is going to recognize and praise you for them, Paul is simply saying here to get on with your spiritual life and service. To stress the sharing of the faith in the body Paul focuses our attention on human emotions, running the gamut from rejoicing to weeping (Romans 12:14-16). It is so easy to be professional in Christianity, to safeguard ourselves from too much involvement. That is not living in harmony and love. Part of our problem is pride; we like to have the advantage, to appear more spiritual than others, to speak down to those who mourn, to “disciple” someone else we think inferior to ourselves. These are nothing more than naked power plays, trying to seize authority. Pride and conceit must go; associate with those of lower position. Recall Php 2:1-30 here: Have this same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God ... . And Proverbs 26:12 is worth recalling as well: “Do you see a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

4. Relationship with Unbelievers (Romans 12:17-21) The basic principle is to do what is right and try to leave at peace with everyone. To make this work, Paul says we will have to shun the idea of “getting even” or “taking revenge.” That does not build any kind of relationship; it only brings animosity. If we play the role of God and judge and avenge others, we have overstepped our bounds. Leave that to God. Paul is not saying that we should not stand up for our convictions; but we should not engage in such fleshly tactics as seeking to repay evil with revenge. Leave judgment to God.

Here Paul is drawing upon the Proverbs to show that we should treat even our enemies with great kindness. The image of “burning coals” from Proverbs 25:21-22 probably refers to the pangs of conscience, which is more easily triggered with kindness than with angry hostility.

Throughout Scripture God brings good out of evil. Likewise we who belong to him must seek ways to overcome evil with good—not with more evil.

## 03.11. Application in the Society

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Application in the Society (Romans 13:1-14) Tenth Bible Class (Romans 13:1-14) V. Application (cont.) (Romans 12:1-21, Romans 13:1-14, Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13) A. Application in the Society (Romans 12:1-14) 1. Relation to Government (Romans 13:1-7) The believer moves in several spheres, and all of them demand responsible actions. Believers are in Christ, and relate to the body of Christ. They are in families and have responsibilities there. But they also move in the civic sphere, and have responsibilities within the state. So Paul commands that everyone of us submit to government authorities, “for there is no authority except that which God has established.” Remember, Paul is writing to people living under the Romans! No matter what form of government exists, we are in the human race, and our obligations to society are divine obligations. Here Paul is even broader than the Church: he is not limiting his comments to every believer, or to the Church, but to every soul. The verb is the well-known word for “submission”—a word people today do not like. The same word is used elsewhere for submission to one another in the Church and in the home (see also 1 Peter 2:13). There is a divine order ordained by God in all aspects of life. It is a functioning order, and not a statement about quality of persons or situations.

There are two main reasons for this exhortation. First, God has ordained such authority for the state. Daniel 2:1-49 is very strong in this issue—God sets up kings and governments. Even Jesus would tell his “rulers” that they would have no authority and no power unless it was given from above. And second, governments are intended for the reward of good and punishment of evil. This is generally true of governments, that on the whole they encourage good and discourage evil—although they can become wicked and oppressive (and so can employers, and husbands, and church leaders). Society has to run on this principle, so that everyone in the state lives by a conscience to try to do what is right. So Paul’s exhortation in Romans 13:5 is explained that if you live obediently under the law of the land you can expect to escape punishment, and you will have a clear conscience.

Taxes provides Paul with a final exhortation. Give to them whatever you owe them. Simple and straightforward. But he expands this to add that if you owe honor and respect, give that too. There are liturgical connotations here: the diligence and care you give to paying the government what you own them should not exceed the diligence and care of your spiritual service. (Of course the government often has the motivation of causing fear of prosecution to make sure you pay your taxes). The same correlation is offered in Jesus’ reply to the question about taxes: Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s (what has his image on it), but give to God what is God’s. What is God’s? Whatever has His image—you yourself. So he is saying give your money to Caesar but give your life to God.

2. Relation to a Neighbor (Romans 13:8-14) The principle of love is now applied to life in society (Romans 13:8-10). Here Paul summarizes the second half of the commandments (as Jesus did): love your neighbor as yourself. 1 Love is the essence of the covenant law, the motivation and the effect. To describe it this way is to speak of caring service and assistance for others. That should

be the only debt owed.

Please note what is happening here. Paul is quoting the commandments. But he is not putting the Christian believer back under the Law as the binding constitution of the Church. Rather, he is saying that the Christian law of love fulfills what the Law was trying to accomplish. This makes sense, because this love is part of the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit accomplishes in us the love and goodness and righteousness that the Law required.

Paul's appeal is based on the urgency of the time (Romans 13:11-14). Our salvation is ever drawing nearer, so we must redeem the time. This section is almost like an alarm clock that goes off for believers who have gone to sleep in the world. John wrote that whoever has the blessed hope in him purifies himself (1 John 3:3). Paul's point is that the believer will not remain forever in this world; time is advancing towards that "dawn" of redemption for which creation groans. So the believer should not be caught up in the works of the night, the things of darkness.

Note the implication that this is a spiritual struggle, a warfare: "put on the armor of light." For this we need to correlate Ephesians 6:12-18.

Note what is put together here as works of darkness—orgies, drunkenness, debauchery—these most Christians would say they really have no part in. But he adds dissension and jealousy—mainstays of most Christian groups, unfortunately. He is not merely speaking of a literal wild night-life; the "night" he speaks about is the sinful nature in a fallen world—the world system driven by greed and corruption. We must always be on guard against that.

Romans 13:14 is the sum of the matter: "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." It is once again the mind that is central to the victory. The image of clothing is similar to Ephesians 6:1-24 with the armor of Christ, and Colossians 3:10-16. We are by faith and obedience to appropriate Christ for our daily lives, and give no priority to self-gratification—either for fleshly desires or pride or jealousy or strife. If we live to please and to serve Christ, our focus will be turned away from the self.

#### Things to Consider

1. Review the steps in spiritual growth laid out in Romans 12:1-2? How would you relate them to these other instructions in society and with neighbors?
2. What spiritual gifts do you have? How do you know? Do spiritual leaders agree with this? Now how does the Law of love work through these gifts?
3. Make an honest appraisal of your spiritual relationships. How much Christian love do you actually manifest in your relationships? Or, to put it another way, what was being a Christian cost you—in time, effort, convenience?
4. Do you think the kind of government would make any difference to Paul's discussion of government? What do you think Paul would say about living in a democracy?
5. Think about the way the Bible uses the imagery of clothing, whether nakedness, dirty clothes, clothed in white, banquet clothes, armor, of clothing with Christ. Can you trace any patterns in these motifs?

## 03.12. Application to Doubtful Things

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Application to Doubtful Things (Romans 12:1-21, Romans 13:1-14, Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13) Eleventh Bible Class (Romans 12:1-21, Romans 13:1-14, Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13) V. Application (cont.) (Romans 12:1-21, Romans 13:1-14, Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13) B. Application to Doubtful Things (Romans 14:1-23, Romans 15:1-13)

It is not difficult to run across two extreme positions in Christianity. One position is intensely legalistic and structured, and if you do not agree with them in such positions, you are not spiritual. The other position makes almost no separation from the world, their lives being almost carbon copies of the world, because they feel free in the Lord and unrestricted. Both of these positions are flawed because of their attitudes, their treatment of the other side, and the way that they employ their convictions. Somewhere between these poles the believer is to live. These, and other related issues are the subject of this chapter. Paul will divide the discussion up between those whose faith is strong and those whose faith is weak.

### 1. Christians must be generous and charitable in their assessments of others (Romans 14:1-4)

Paul begins the chapter by telling us to accept those who are young or inexperienced in the faith without passing judgment. Who is “weak” in the faith? This does not mean the one who is weak in the great doctrines of the faith, who may be teaching heresy—Paul has lots to say about that one. Nor does this refer to a Christian who has been a believer for, say, twenty-five years, but refuses to grow—all he does is criticize anything different. It is hard to cause someone to stumble if he or she isn’t moving. No, Paul is talking about believers who are growing but are weak in applying the faith to all the areas of doubtful things—things the Bible does not specifically address. The chapter is about conduct, not doctrine.

Paul’s first illustration is about eating meat. This has to be interpreted in the light of the early Church, especially in Jewish and Gentile relationships (see Acts 15:1-41). Mature Christians know that they can eat anything they wish, because Jesus made all things clean (Mark 7:19) and Peter was given the specific lesson on this in his vision in Joppa (Acts 10:9-16). From that sign they knew the Gospel was going to the Gentiles, and Gentiles did not have to become Jews first and then be converted. But many Jewish people who grew up under the dietary laws of the Law of Moses could not quickly make the transition to eat pork or to purchase meat that may have come from a pagan temple. The instructed and maturing believer knows that the dietary laws do not apply—we are not under Law. In time the new believer will realize the teaching and perhaps be able to make the break—or, some may simply have a problem with this throughout their lives because of a long tradition in it. But Paul says the instructed and mature believer must not look down on the other who has problems with this. And, the person who cannot eat must not be critical of the one who does. They have to think of this as a family—there are some things the children have to learn before they have the freedom of adults. Or in the imagery of slavery from the Roman world, the other person is accepted by God—a slave of God (as Romans has argued)—and you cannot judge another person’s slave. It is presumption and spiritual pride to judge another

Christian in such areas. God will deal with each person where change is necessary, for God is able to make him stand. This is a hard lesson to learn because of human nature. Some think they are mature and they look down on others; and some who are struggling with things become very critical of others whom they think are worldly. If both people are walking with the Lord, in the Word, and conscientiously trying to grow as a body, these attitudes cannot be there.

## 2. Christians must make their choices by faith (Romans 14:5-8).

Paul now introduces the principle of faith. He uses the example now of holy days. The mature Christian considers all days alike. Certain days may be set aside for various purposes, but according to Paul's teachings in Colossians and elsewhere, one day is not more holy than another as in the Jewish calendar. Or, to put it another way, if it is wrong to do something on one of these "holy days" it is wrong to do it any day. But some might consider some days more holy, and they need those structures to order their spiritual conduct and life. There are dozens of examples. One person may have grown up in a strict home where nothing could be done on Sunday. But after he or she grew in their own convictions, that was not such a binding restriction, although they still might not do certain things on Sunday because there are other Christians out there who would be bothered by it. Or, some people need the period of Lent for their amendment of life. If it is helpful for spiritual growth, fine. But if someone gives something up for lent, that has to be explained properly. If one needed to give it up in Christian piety, perhaps it should have been given up earlier—why wait till lent? There is much more to all of this, of course, but these are the kinds of issues Paul is addressing in this passage. The main point is that we are not all the same in our outlook on spiritual growth—how it is to be developed and what our convictions are; and if we start judging and criticizing others for the way they see it, or considering ourselves more spiritual, then that is wrong. Remember, we are talking here about doubtful things. This teaching of acceptance would not apply for someone teaching what is clearly false doctrine, or someone living in what the Bible clearly says is sin.

Paul's principle for doubtful things is this: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." It is a matter of personal convictions based on faith. You dare not do something if you have serious doubts about it—that is not walking by faith. So you are to think through your practice, be sure that you are doing it in the full conviction that right now in your spiritual life that is what you should be doing, and do it for the Lord (not because others think you should). Believers are to be examining everything they do, and they are to be sure that what they do they can do with a clear conscience. If there is hesitation or uncertainty or doubts, then it may be wrong to do it. Questionable things are wrong if they are indeed questionable.

Here again Paul is applying the teaching of the book. We are not under Law, but under grace. What is on the table is not important; it is what is in the heart that makes the difference. It is always a matter of walking by faith. We cannot live our lives apart from Jesus Christ; so that is our main concern as we decide if what we are doing is by faith. Can I do this for the Lord? Can I give him thanks for it? Will it honor and glorify him?

## 3. All Christians must answer to the Lord (Romans 14:9-12)

It is, after all, Christ who died for our sins. If I do things that I believe are wrong, I am not responding to the Lord in the proper way. That would include sinning against my conscience, or

judging others. The bottom line is that each one of us is accountable before God. Each of us must one day stand before the Lord where our deeds—not the guilt of our sins—will be examined. This is usually referred to in Paul as the “judgment seat (bema seat) of Christ” where rewards are given out for faithfulness, an examination that differs greatly from the Great Judgment. 2 So in view of the fact that each one of us is accountable to the Lord and not to one another, then we should forbear judging one another. Learn to accept one another. I must reiterate here, however, that Paul is talking about doubtful things. If a brother is teaching heresy, or living in sin, or overtaken in a fault, then our responsibilities are different.

4. Christians are to be governed by the law of love (Romans 14:13-18). Our main concern is not to put a stumblingblock in some one’s way. If I have freedom in Christ, I cannot use that freedom if it will offend and make a young Christian do something against his conscience. I may in love have to relinquish my rights. The analogy of a parent and a child works well here. Sometimes when a parent is training a child, that parent cannot do things in front of the child that the child cannot do. It will be too confusing, and perhaps dangerous. So rather than hurt another Christian who is trying to grow, we must be willing to refrain from things that offend. After all, Christ was willing to die for the weak—he did not think equality with God was something to be grasped or held on to, but he relinquished the use of the privileges of deity for our sake (Php 2:1-30). On the other hand, Paul says, do not allow what you consider good to be evil spoken of. Your Christian liberty is a wonderful privilege for maturity in the faith; but if by exercising it people will call it worldliness or evil, you have to be concerned about that. We always should have other believers in mind when we choose our applications. The goal of all our activities is the good of the Kingdom of God—righteousness, peace, and joy.

5. Christians must make peace and mutual edification their main goal (Romans 14:9-23) This is a rather extended section with several major points being made. But the common theme running through it is the peace, unity and mutual edification within the body of Christ. Anything that destroys peace, unity and mutual edification has to be addressed. In Romans 14:19 Paul makes this point, reiterating the warning not to cause others to fall. “Let us make every effort” is certainly a call for diligence in these things. Indifference to the spiritual growth of others is unacceptable. We must press toward the goal of spiritual values—righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit—for these build up and do not destroy the body. If you have personal convictions that differ from others, keep them to yourself unless asked, or unless the issue comes up. Whatever you do, do it by faith, because to do it with doubting is sin, and your conscience will condemn you in that. The believer must be able to look back on his or her activities without any qualms of conscience. Vincent writes, “Christian practice ought to be out of the sphere of morbid introspection.” Or as Paul says it, “Blessed is the one whose conscience approves that which he approved before the act was performed.” So the believer is saved by faith; and the believer walks by faith. Any conduct or any act (in the area of personal living and choices) which is not the outflow of faith becomes sin for the believer. Now Paul had earlier said (Romans 8:1) that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; but here he seems to say the one who sins is condemned. Obviously he is not contradicting himself. The condemnation spoken of here is from the conscience that condemns for sin; earlier the condemnation referred to final judgment of sinners. When a believer sins and does not confess several things happen—conviction, guilt feelings, separation in fellowship with Christ, usefulness to God at risk, prayers not answered, chastening likely—just to

name some of the major things. They are still in the family of God, but their joy, fellowship, and service is hindered by unconfessed sin. So in the area of doubtful things Christians must be sure to walk by faith.

What Paul is concerned with here, I remind you, is a body of true believers in Jesus Christ who are struggling with matters of conduct. He also had to deal with the presence of Judaizers in some of the Christian groups, people who opposed the truth and tried to teach new converts false doctrine (sort of trying to straighten out what Paul was trying to say). Paul was not at all interested in bonding in peace and unity with them.

6. Christians ought to show consideration for the feelings and prejudices of weaker believers (Romans 15:1-3). So beginning in Romans 15:1-33 he tells us not just to please ourselves but to bear with those who are weak. Romans 15:1-33 give another discussion of the weaker brother. Since our chief concern is with the good of others, we are not to be pleased with their detriment or loss. When they are hurting, troubled, confused, we dare not gloat in our self-sufficiency—even if they should have been more mature by now! Paul supports this point with a citation from the messianic Psalms 69:1-36 to say that Christ did not seek to please himself; he served others and bore their burdens.

7. Christians of all backgrounds must grow together in unity (Romans 15:4-13). The samples Paul has been using really do come from the difficulty of uniting Jew and Gentile in Christ in the first century, as indeed much of the argument of Romans has addressed. But the principles they teach are applicable in any period and any culture. Now, in the rest of the chapter he will cite Scriptures for our edification that show the unity of the faith. The use of the verse in Romans 15:3 from Psalms 69:9 prompted Paul to stress a point that might be missed—the Old Testament Scripture is certainly applicable for us today. The Old Covenant and the Law of Moses may not be operable as the ordering structure of the Church; but what the Law revealed—the righteousness of God—is timeless truth. Some have made the helpful distinction that the Law was both revelatory and regulatory (not different passages, but each law regulated and revealed); the regulatory aspect is not binding because it usually regulated how Israel was to carry out the principle, but the revelatory, the revealed truth or principle behind the regulation, is timeless because it reveals the will of God. One of the main problems of modern Christianity is its ignorance of the Old Testament, whether by misuse or by simple avoidance. But once the Old Testament is studied in this way, one can see how the principles can also apply to us today. The Old Testament gives us encouragement and teaches endurance. Therefore Paul prays that the God who gives encouragement and endurance grant us the spirit of unity (Romans 15:5-6), so that with one heart and one mouth we may glorify God. Here is an important point: the praise should express the unity of the faith. Of, to put it another way, in glorifying God all the little walls that separate will fall down—if praise is biblical praise and not entertainment or show. A farmer in Iowa was once asked if all the fences didn't mar the landscape. He agreed that they did, but also said that when the corn grew high they couldn't see the fences. The differences between believers should be hidden by fruitful lives filled with praise.

Romans 15:7 gives some pretty basic advice: accept one another as Christ accepted you, and work patiently with one another as Christ works with you. This will change our attitudes to other people. Here are individuals for whom Jesus died—just as He did for me; and here are individuals

that our Lord graciously accepts and develops. I am no better than they, and certainly do not have an inside track on divine favor. Here is the spirit of unity. And there can be no superiority over Jew and Gentile issues, as the early Church had to learn. Paul's reasoning is that the Son of God became a Jew to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, in order that the Gentiles ("all the families of the earth") might glorify God for his mercy. In support of this Paul strings together a series of passages from the Old Testament that show God's plans to include the Gentiles in the praise of God. His first passage is from Psalms 18:49 where praise to God comes among the Gentiles. He then uses Deuteronomy 32:43, Moses' song with the panoramic view of God's eternal program. Then he works in the shortest psalm, Psalms 117:1-2, which is a call for Jew and Gentile to praise the Lord. And then he adds Isaiah 11:10 to show that even though the Messiah will spring from Jesse, he will rule over the nations. It was clearly God's plan that Gentiles should come to faith in the Messiah.

Paul stops to offer a benediction, for the main themes of his epistle end here. "The God of Hope" is a new and marvelous title for the Lord. The hope comes through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:2), and it will fill the believer with joy and peace. Only God can take people who are lost in sin and spiritually dead, save them by His grace, sanctify them by His Spirit, put them into service within the body of believers, and fill them with joy and peace. From beginning to end it is a work of grace by the power of the Spirit. It is up to us to respond by faith every step of the way, for faith accepts the word and the work of the Lord and transforms it into reality.

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